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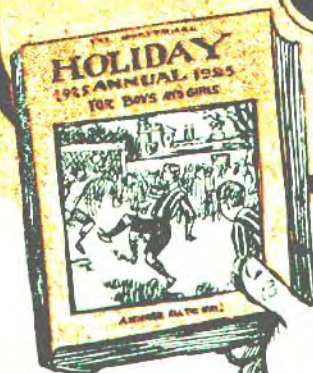
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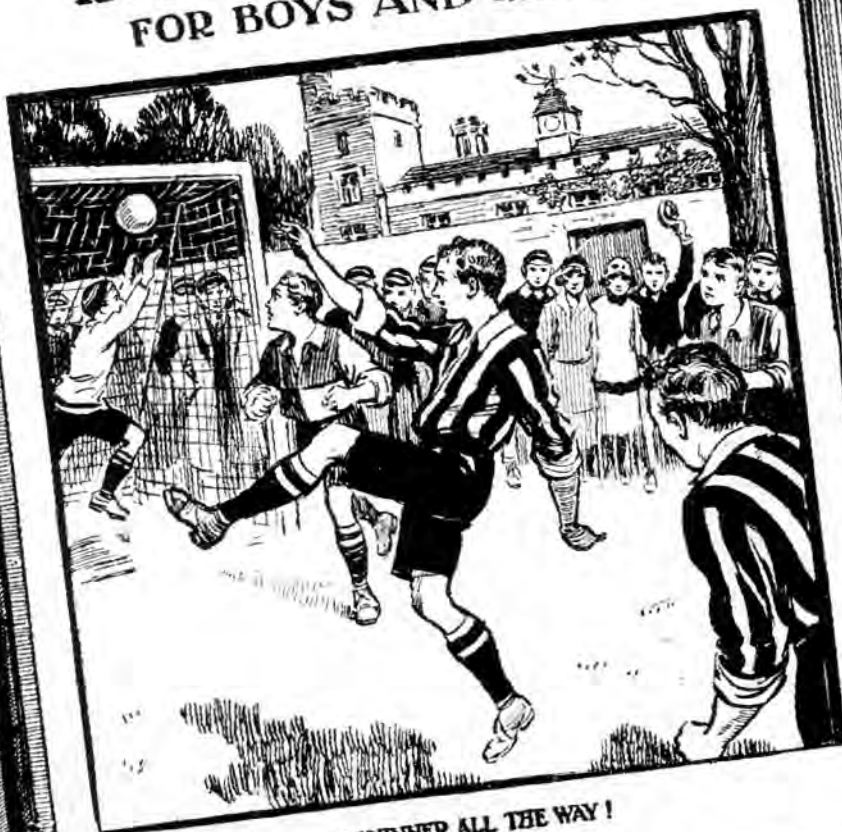
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Somewhere in the dim recesses of the desert, Ali ben Yusef, who was kidnapped from Greyfriars, is a prisoner in the hands of Mustapha ben Mohammed, the usurper sheik. Harry Wharton & Co. are determined to accompany Major Cherry in his quest to save the young Arab, but the old soldier has his own ideas about that dangerous task, and insists upon the Greyfriars Chums remaining at Biskra.



A magnificent new
extra-long complete
story of Harry
Wharton and Co.
in Africa.

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. On the Mediterranean!

"HOT!" said Bob Cherry. He mopped his brow, pushing back his straw hat. His face, always ruddy, was like unto a newly-boiled beetroot. "Hot isn't the word," said Harry Wharton, fanning himself with a French newspaper. "Baking!" "Frizzling!" said Nugent, with a grin.

Johnny Bull, being a fellow of few words, granted to express his assent. But on the dusky face of Hurree Jan-set Ram Singh there was a smile of beatific contentment.

The solar heat blazing down on the steamer was grateful and comforting to the dusky junior from India. It reminded him of his native climate.

Hurree Singh leaned back in his deck-chair, with the sun-blaze on his dusky face, turning it to shining bronze.

"The enjoyment is great," he remarked.

"You don't find it chilly, Inky?" grinned Bob Cherry, still mopping his crimson brow.

And the Greyfriars juniors chuckled. All the chums of the Remove were looking forward keenly to their holiday in Africa. But Hurree Singh was the only member of the party who was likely really to enjoy the climate.

"It will be hotter than this in Africa!" remarked Nugent.

"Oh, my hat!"

"This is only a foretaste of the giddy wrath to come!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Still, it's a change from Greyfriars."

"It is—and no mistake!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Bunter! Melting, old fat top?" asked Bob Cherry cheerily.

Billy Bunter really looked as if he were on the point of melting. An immense Panama hat shaded his fat face from the sun. But his fat face streamed with perspiration, and his little, round eyes had a boiled look behind his big spectacles.

Bunter came rolling along the deck towards the Famous Five, who occupied a group of deck-chairs. He picked his way among piled baggage, and the feet of passengers who were sprawling on the hot deck. The "Transports Maritimes" steamer was crowded. Besides the other passengers, there was a detachment of conscripts on board, going out to their military duties in the arid wastes of Algeria. On all sides there was a buzz of hurried French, mingled with talk in other tongues—Italian, Greek, Arabic. Most of the Mediterranean races seemed to be represented on the steamer from Marseilles. "I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "it's hot!"

"Go on!" murmured Nugent. "Horrid hot," said Bunter, blinking reproachfully at the Famous Five. "I never thought it would be like this."

Really, Bunter seemed to think that Harry Wharton & Co. were somehow responsible for that state of affairs.

"Like to turn back?" inquired Bob Cherry humorously. "I dare say the skipper would turn back to Marseilles if you asked him. Try it on, anyway."

"It's beastly," said Bunter. "Why people go abroad for holidays beats me. Blackpool is better than this."

"Much better," agreed Bob.

"Well, it's hot everywhere in September," remarked Harry Wharton. "I dare say it's hot in Blackpool, Bunter."

"Not like this, though," groaned Bunter. "It's really too thick. And this dashed steamer pitches like anything."

"Steamers do pitch," agreed Bob.

"Can't be helped, old bean."

"And the smell from the engines is simply ghastly," went on Bunter.

"Simply reeking, you know."

"They must have forgotten to sprinkle them with eau-de-Cologne," said Bob gravely. "We ought to complain about this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Grin and bear it, you duffer."

granted Johnny Bull. "What's the good of grouting?"

"That's all very well, Bull. But I'm accustomed to having a holiday in comfort," said Bunter warmly. "If I'd known what it would be like, you wouldn't have got me here, I can tell you."

Whereat the chums of Greyfriars grinned.

"Too late now," said Bob. "You're booked, Bunter. You wouldn't chuck it while you had a chance; and now you're booked. By the time we get to Africa you will have melted. But every cloud has a silver lining, old fellow. When you've finished melting, we'll sell what's left of you to a tallow merchant."

"You silly ass," howled Bunter.

"That ought to set us up in pocket-money," went on Bob thoughtfully. "Anybody know the price of tallow in Algeria, by the ton?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fat junior of Greyfriars blinked wistfully at the Co. No doubt it was very hot, and the steamer certainly did roll, and the smell of the engines was not by any means reminiscent of attic-roses. But the cheery Co. seemed to be keeping up their cheery spirits all the same. And they really failed to see why they should worry about Bunter's little discomforts, when they did not worry about their own.

Bunter's view was quite different.

The discomforts of others he could bear with great fortitude. But discomfort to his own fat person loomed large and important to his podgy mind.

Near by was a group of unhappy conscripts, each with his little bundle, and a troubled, thoughtful face, most of them looking back towards the fair land of France which they had left—in some cases for ever. Their hearts and their thoughts were in the humble little homes from which they had been plucked. To them Africa loomed dimly as a strange and cruel land, which was to devour them like a huge, ravenous monster.

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The French military law called them, and they went, to spend years of their youth in the burning desert, some of them, perhaps, to spend their life-blood there. But from all that troubled group there came less "grousing" than from William George Bunter.

Billy Bunter did not even notice them. He was too full of his own grievances to give a thought to the troubles of others.

"You can cackle," he growled. "But I tell you what. My opinion is that I've been diddled."

"Dear man!" said Bob.

"This isn't the holiday I was expecting," said Bunter, "and I've a jolly good mind not to keep on to Biskra with you, but to take the next steamer back when we get to port—there!"

Bunter uttered that crushing threat with a lofty blink. Really, he seemed to expect that the Greyfriars fellows would be withered on the spot.

But they did not seem withered.

"You mean that?" asked Johnny Bull eagerly.

"I do!"

"Bravo, Bunter!"

"Why, you beast—"

"We'll give you a send-off, if you keep to that," said Frank Nugent heartily.

"We'll get you a first-class ticket—"

"Yes, rather!"

"And we'll all come down to the boat and see you off—with pleasure!"

"The pleasurefulness will be terrific."

"Is it a go, Bunter?" asked Wharton, laughing.

Billy Bunter surveyed the cheery group, his very spectacles gleaming with indignation.

"Beasts!" was his reply.

And with that crushing rejoinder William George Bunter rolled away, seeking a shady spot for repose. And soon afterwards a deep, resonant snore mingled with the throbbing of the engines.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Looks for Trouble!

MARSEILLES had faded behind into the blue sea.

The juniors had watched the noisy city with its busy ship-ping disappear—the church of Notre Dame, perched on its great rock of white limestone—the chateau d'If, the romantic prison of Monte Cristo. The steamer throbbed on through the Gulf of Lyons, under a blazing sun in a cloudless sky. There was a voyage of thirty hours before them, after Marseilles was left behind, and then—Africa!

Major Cherry paced the deck, oblivious of the heat—the sun-blaze of the Mediterranean was little to the old soldier of India and Mesopotamia. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh fairly basked in the blaze. It was long since his native sun of Bhanpur had burned on the nabob's dusky face; and every league southward added to the Indian junior's happy contentment. Billy Bunter snored in a shady corner. Nugent dropped into a doze, with a newspaper over his face, and Johnny Bull wandered away in search of a lemon-squash. Wharton yawned and rose from his deck-chair.

"Let's have a look round the steamer, Bob," he suggested.

Bob Cherry nodded. Even in the semi-tropical heat of the Mediterranean, Bob was full of energy, and found it difficult to keep still.

"Let's," he assented.

The juniors sauntered along the deck. There was plenty to interest them on the

packet-boat from Marseilles to Philippeville.

The group of French conscripts, talking in low tones among themselves, or sitting silent and moody, gave little heed to their surroundings. There were two or three dozen Arab passengers, most of them grave and silent. There were English and American tourists—French commercial travellers, Greek and Italian merchants, two or three Egyptians, and a family of Kabyles—Africans almost as white as the Europeans. The juniors heard many strange tongues as they sauntered along the blistered decks.

"I wonder—" said Bob.

Wharton glanced at him.

"I was thinking of that Arab scoundrel, Bou Saoud," said Bob. "I wonder if he is on this boat, by any chance."

Wharton glanced over the varied crowd. The same thought was in his own mind.

"Likely enough," he said. "We should not be likely to spot him in a crowd like this."

"We shall be at Biskra in a few days now," said Bob. "The Hazeldenes are there before this—I shall be glad to see Marjorie again."

"Same here."

"The pater thinks he's going to leave us in Biskra, doing the sights, while he goes into the desert to hunt for old Ali," said Bob, with a faint grin. "But—"

"But he isn't," said Harry.

"No. We've got to wangle it somehow to go along with him," said Bob. "We're going to be in at the death. Besides, I want to keep an eye on the pater. It's too jolly risky for him to go on his own."

Harry Wharton laughed.

According to the programme mapped out by Major Cherry, the Greyfriars juniors were to accompany him as far as Biskra, the holiday resort on the border of the great Sahara. There they would meet Hazel of the Remove, and his sister Marjorie. And there they were to remain while the major undertook the search for Ali ben Yusef, the Arab schoolboy of Greyfriars, who had been kidnapped by Bou Saoud.

Somewhere in the dim recesses of the desert Ali was a prisoner in the hands of Mustapha ben Mohammed, the usurper sheik, the father of Bou Saoud, the Spahi.

The rescue of Ali was the object of the major's journey to the south. And that journey had already proved full of peril.

From England the footsteps of the Greyfriars party had been dogged by Bou Saoud, and twice the villainous Spahi had attempted the life of the major, and failed.

That he was still following the party, and that he would reach the African desert when they arrived there, was fairly certain.

The major's plans were mapped out; but the Famous Five were by no means in full agreement with them. They had no mind to remain in Biskra while the major went into the desert. But the major's word was law; and he was not a man whose commands could be disregarded. So, as Bob put it, it had to be "wangled" somehow. Somehow or other, the Famous Five were going to take part in the hunt for Ali ben Yusef, and his rescue from the hands of the desert sheik.

As they sauntered over the crowded steamer, the two juniors scanned their fellow-passengers, wondering whether Bou Saoud was among them.

If he was there, he was doubtless in some disguise. Certainly they saw no one who resembled the handsome, black-guardly Spahi.

They paused in the shadow of a swinging boat, to look out over the sea towards the mountains of Corsica on the port side.

A black African sat in the shade there, with his eyes half-closed. His half-closed eyes rested on the two juniors, but they did not observe him specially.

There were a dozen or more negroes on the boat, among the other passengers.

"Well, if that rotter Bou Saoud is on board, we haven't spotted him," said Bob Cherry.

"Most likely he would have a cabin, and would keep in it," said Harry. "If he showed himself, he could be collared. He is wanted by the police in England, and could be put under arrest."

The black African's half-closed eyes opened a little wider, with a peculiar glint in them. Had the juniors observed him more closely, they might have noted that his features were well cut and regular, little like those of a negro, though his complexion was black as the ace of spades.

"Or he would be disguised somehow," said Bob. "He rigged up a black beard when he followed us across the Channel from Folkestone. He might be one of those frowsy-looking Greeks yonder, and we shouldn't be any the wiser."

"Likely enough," assented Harry.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat top! What's the trouble now? Have you asked the skipper to turn back, and has he refused?" grinned Bob Cherry, as the Owl of Greyfriars came up.

"Oh, really, Cherry!" Bunter grunted and perspired. "I say, what about grub? I'm jolly hungry!"

"'Twas ever thus!" grinned Bob.

"Look here—I say— Oh, my hat! What's that?" ejaculated Bunter, as he sprawled over the extended legs of the black man sitting in the shade of the boat.

"Look out, you ass!" exclaimed Harry.

"Ow!"

The short-sighted Owl of the Remove did not look out in time. He sprawled over the black man's legs and sat on the deck with a bump.

He sat there and spluttered.

"You silly black chump! What do you mean by sticking your silly legs in my way?" howled Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter, you ass—"

The black man sprang to his feet. For a moment his look was so fierce and savage that Wharton and Bob Cherry stood ready to collar him, as he glared at Bunter. But the man controlled his rage, and turned and stalked away.

"You silly owl!" said Bob. "What do you want to call a man names for, instead of apologising for tumbling over him?"

"Yah!" Bunter snorted. "Catch me apologising to a dashed nigger! I've a jolly good mind to go after him and kick him!"

Billy Bunter glared after the offending black man. For a moment he had been scared, as the black man glared at him; but the man's prompt retreat reassured him. Bunter was as brave as a lion in the presence of a retreating enemy.

"Look here, you fat duffer—"

"I'm jolly well going to kick the cheeky cad!"

"Bunter, you ass—"

Bunter did not heed.

He had a lofty contempt for "niggers," and he considered himself fully entitled to kick a nigger—if the nigger would let him. And this particular nigger seemed so keen on avoiding trouble that Bunter had no doubts about being able to kick him if he liked. He was hot, he was hungry, he was

irritable and peevish, and in that frame of mind there was solace—to Bunter—in being somebody. The only question was, whether it would be safe to kick, and it seemed safe in this case. So Billy Bunter jumped up and rushed after the black man.

"Bunter!" roared Bob.

"Yah!"

"Bunter, you ass!" yelled Wharton.

"Rats! Stop, you confounded nigger!" shouted Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bunter—"

"Stop it!"

Utterly unheeding, Bunter reached the black man and kicked. The black man spun round at the same moment. Bunter's kick missed, and a heavy black hand shot out and smote Bunter.

Crash!

The Owl of the Remove rolled on the sunny deck. There was a laugh from a crowd of passengers, who had stared round in surprise at the scene.

Bunter rolled and roared.

"Ow! Help! Yooop! Oh, my hat! Back me up, you fellows! Keep him off! Ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry rushed to pick up the Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter, spluttering and gasping, was jerked to his feet.

"Ow! Keep him off!" he yelled.

"You silly ass!" gasped Bob. "He's gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The black man had already disappeared below.

"Ow! He's gone, the rotten funk!" gasped Bunter, recovering his courage once more. "I'll jolly well go after him, and—"

"You jolly well won't!" growled Bob Cherry. "You zilly chump, stop playing the goat!"

"Do you think I'm going to be punched by a dashed nigger, a blessed black man?" snorted Bunter.

"I think you're going to be punched by a white man, if you don't shut up!" said Bob. "Like that!"

"Yaroooo!"

"And like that!"

"Whoop! Keep off, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now let's go and look for some grub," said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "And if you kick up a stinky again, Bunter, we'll jolly well bump you."

"Yah!"

But the prospect of "grub" consoled Bunter, and he allowed himself to be led away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Rough Weather!

THE Mediterranean was like a sheet of glass under the burning sunset. Hardly a breath of air seemed to stir on the sea, and the steamer was insufferably hot. Even Hurree Jamset Ram Singh admitted that it was warm. But Billy Bunter almost forgot the heat as he proceeded to do justice to a feast of the gods. It was stuffy in the room, and the heat and the stuffiness and the scent of many foods made the other fellows anxious to get back on deck as quickly as possible. Not so Bunter. He was enjoying his first comfortable hour since the party had set foot on the steamer of the Transports Maritimes.

A steward came along and closed a porthole near the juniors' table, shutting off what ventilation there was. Billy Bunter looked up with a growl.

"The silly ass! Doesn't he think it's warm enough?" he exclaimed. "Here,

my man! Garçon! Homme! Look here! Voyez vous?"

The man glanced round.

"Monsieur?"

"Open that dashed porthole, do you hear?"

"Comment?"

"Who's the common, you cheeky bouncer?" exclaimed Bunter indignantly.

"Ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Comment means that he doesn't catch on, fatty."

"Oh, rot! Look here, homme—garçon—"

"Plait-il?" said the man inquiringly.

"Open that window!"

"Plait-il?"

"What does he mean by play till?" snorted Bunter. "Play till when, and at what? Is he potty?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Monsieur desire quelque chose?" asked the puzzled steward.

"Ouvrez!" said Bunter, breaking into French. "Ouvrez cela, fathead!"

The man shook his head.

"Pas possible."

"Why—pourquoi?"

"L'ouragan—"

"My hat! Does he mean an outang-outang, or what?" asked Bunter, in perplexity. "There's no outang-outang here that I can see."

"You ass, he means a storm!"

"How can he mean a storm when it's as calm as Hampstead Ponds?" growled Bunter. "Talk sense!"

The steward, unheeding Bunter further, went along closing the portholes.

There was a rapid chatter of French and Italian and Greek at the other tables. Evidently a storm was expected, which was surprising enough to the Greyfriars juniors. From the portholes the sea looked like glass, and scarce a breath of wind was stirring. Only in the east towards the Corsican mountains a black cloud loomed up in the blue sky—blue that was paling to a steely grey.

"Storms come on very suddenly in these waters, I believe," remarked Nugent.

"Rot!" said Bunter.

"Anyhow, they know their business better than you do, old bean," said Frank. "Give your chin a rest."

"Rats!"

Bunter sniffed and continued his dinner. The major had already gone back to the upper deck.

"Better go easy on the grub, Bunter," said Wharton. "If rough weather is coming on you don't want to be seasick."

Sniff! from Bunter.

"I'm never seasick. I'm a better sailor than you chaps. Besides, rough weather isn't coming on."

"You've had enough for six or seven already," urged Johnny Roll. "Leave off when you've had enough for nine or ten, anyhow."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Hullo, hallo, hallo! There's that dark johnny!" murmured Bob Cherry, as a black man, passing the doorway of the salle-a-manger, glanced in, pausing for a moment or two.



Bunter slid from the table and collapsed on the floor, gurgling. A plate fell on his head and cracked in pieces round him, unheeded. The steamer rocked and swayed, and the fat junior lay extended with his head under the table, his face on the floor, and longed to die. "Grooooooough!" he moaned. (See Chapter 3.)

Wharton looked at the man carelessly. It was the black African, over whose legs Bunter had tumbled on deck. The light was full on his face, and it struck Wharton that there was something familiar in the man's features—in the aquiline curve of the rather prominent nose, very unlike a negro's; something familiar, too, in the glint in the black, penetrating eyes. The man was staring towards the table where the juniors sat. But he did not enter the room. After a moment or two he passed on and disappeared.

"Seem to have seen that Johnny before somewhere," Bob Cherry remarked, ruminating.

"I was just thinking so," said Harry. "His features are more like a white man's than a black's."

"Cheeky rotter!" said Bunter. "If he comes in here I'll jolly well kick him out!"

"Fathead!"

"Pass that pigeon-pie, Nugent!"

Nugent grinned, and passed the pigeon-pie. Bunter had already been right through the "table d'hôte" menu, and had ordered several dishes "à la carte." Where there was room, even in his extensive circumference, for the pigeon-pie was a mystery to his comrades. But the Owl of the Remove

found room. The pigeon-pie disappeared at a great rate.

"That's a good pie," said Bunter.

"I'll have another."

"Another! Great Scott!"

"And then some of that ice pudding and—"

"Phew!"

"And then I think a few biscuits and a bunch of bananas will do for me," said Bunter. "I can't eat much in this hot weather."

"We'd better leave him to it," said Bob Cherry, laughing. "If it comes on to blow, Bunter, you'll repent of that pigeon-pie."

"Rot!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went on deck, leaving Bunter to continue his feast. The Owl of the Remove devoted his attention to the second pigeon-pie, and it followed the first. Then the iced pudding claimed his attention, and it was so nice that Bunter disposed of a second large helping, and then a third.

By that time even Bunter began to think it was time to go slow. A bunch of bananas kept him busy for nearly five minutes—and then a plate of sugary biscuits went down still more slowly.

But there was still room for coffee; and after a glance round to make sure that the major was not in sight, Bunter ordered a cigarette to go with the coffee.

Most of the diners smoked after their dinner; and Bunter did not see why he shouldn't put on a cigarette, too. He hoped it would make the other passengers observe that he was a man of the world, and not a mere schoolboy like the other fellows.

A large cup of café-au-lait filled up all the vacant space that was left inside Bunter. He leaned back in his chair and puffed slowly at the cigarette.

More and more slowly he puffed.

Finally he laid the cigarette, half smoked, on his plate. He realised that it would be too risky to finish it. As was generally the case when opportunity offered, Billy Bunter had dined not wisely but too well. He was fervently glad that the sea was smooth as glass. What would have happened to him had the ship begun to roll he dared not think of. He sat very still.

And then suddenly there was a scurrying of feet on the deck, and a loud shouting. A heavy roll of thunder broke the silence, and a sudden blast of wind shook the steamer. All the passengers in the salle-dé-manger were on their feet in a moment, and there was a clatter of shifting crockery. The steamer reeled and plunged and rocked on the disturbed waters.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He clutched at his chair, and held on, his eyes glassy, his face turning white and then a pale green, tinged with yellow.

Sudden gloom had blotted out the blaze of the sunset. The sea, so calm a few minutes before, was roaring and boiling. The steamer rocked and plunged and rattled from stem to stern.

"Oh dear! Groooh!"

Bunter fell forward on the table. Outside, Nature seemed to be in convulsions, raging. But the convulsions of Nature were nothing compared to the convulsions inside William George Bunter. The pigeon-pie was taking its revenge now.

Bunter slid from the table and collapsed on the floor, gurgling. A plate slid off the table and cracked on Bunter's head, and fell in pieces around him, unheeded. The steamer rocked and swayed and plunged; and while it rocked Billy Bunter lay extended, with his head under the table, his face on the floor, and longed to die.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Unseen Enemy!

"Oh crumbs! What a giddy change!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Terrific!" panted the nabob.

The Famous Five were on deck, drenched to the skin through their light summer clothes by the tearing spray. They had to hold on to keep themselves from being swept away by the fierce wind.

The change was startling, from the glassy calm of a short while before. The steamer was pitching and tossing now in what seemed like a boiling cauldron of waters. The juniors had heard of the sudden tempests of the Mediterranean; this was their first experience of one, and it was startling.

"Hold on, my boys!" Major Cherry's deep voice was heard through the wind. "No danger—and it won't last long! But hold on!"

"What ho!" said Bob.

The engines still throbbed on; the Marseilles steamer ploughed on through the boiling sea, drenched with spray and breaking waves. Most of the passengers had huddled below, but a good many

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Result of "Alonso Todd" Competition on page 22!

were still on deck, facing the wind and the spindrift. But in the thick gloom that blotted out the sunset it was difficult to see—night seemed to have closed in like a dark curtain on the waters. Through the dimness the white crests of leaping waves gleamed. Faces white and black and brown appeared and disappeared in the gloom. An Arab staggered past the juniors, his drenched burnous tangling about them till he dragged it free; a panama hat flew by on the wind and disappeared over the rail. In tense excitement the juniors stood, holding on, on the heaving deck of the steamer, ploughing on and on through wild wind and thundering billow.

A red fez, torn from some head by the wind, whizzed by Wharton's face, grazing him. The next moment he had a glimpse of a black man who passed him like a shadow in the gloom. He remembered that the black African whom Bunter had quarrelled with had worn a red fez. It was that African who had flitted near him like a ghost and vanished again. He caught another glimpse of the black man, holding on to a skylight with both hands as a powerful gust of wind caught him. Then he vanished again. But even in the gloom Wharton had noticed one curious thing—the black man's hair, blown out in the wind, was not woolly as a negro's would naturally have been.

But Wharton had no leisure to give thought to the black African. The beating of the wind almost dazed the juniors, and more than once it seemed to them that they would be torn from their hold and sent rolling along the pitching deck.

"By gad!"

It was a sudden exclamation in the major's deep voice—in startled, angry tones.

"You scoundrel!"

Something rolled past Wharton in the darkness—something that swayed and struggled and panted as it rolled on the sloping deck. He caught his breath. Two men, locked in a close grip, struggling fiercely, had rolled by on the slant of the deck, disappearing from his sight in a second.

But one of them was Major Cherry.

Wharton panted.

"Bou Saoud!"

He had not seen the major's assailant, only he knew that he must be the Spahi.

Wharton let go his hold, and rushed after the struggling pair. In a second he had lost his footing, and was stumbling and tumbling wildly. He came with a crash against the rail, and held on for his life, panting, gasping, and staring about him, seeking to penetrate the gloom.

What had happened to the major?

Bou Saoud, the spy, was on board; in the storm he had seized his opportunity. Wharton knew that now. What had happened to Major Cherry?

Wharton dragged himself to his feet, holding on to the rail. The fierce wind seemed to pluck at him like a giant's hand, the darkness blinded him.

A flash of lightning tore apart the blackness of the clouds, and for an instant the heaving deck of the steamer was illuminated. In that instant Wharton caught sight of the major—free of his assailant now; of the shadowy assailant he could see nothing. The major reeled on the heaving deck, and came stumbling down the slant towards the rail as the vessel pitched. Blackness blotted out the scene again; but Wharton felt the major beside him in the darkness, holding on to the rail.

"Major Cherry—"

"Is that you, Wharton?"

"Yes! Are you hurt?" panted Harry.



The sudden stream of soda-water caught the African full in his black face, fairly swamping him. He staggered and yelled as Bunter played the soda-stream on him, splashing him right and left. "Chuck it, you duffer!" gasped Johnny Bull. "He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry faintly. (See Chapter 6.)

"No." The major's voice was hard and strained. "Only a scratch, I think. Did you see him?"

"No; but it was Bou Saoud—"

"It must have been, though I did not see him. He came on me suddenly in the dark, like a tiger." Major Cherry breathed hard and deep. "We fell together, and I got in one blow. I suppose that is why his knife missed—"

The howl of the wind drowned his voice.

Wharton shuddered.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

After the Feast, the Reckoning!

"SHORT and sharp!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

The storm had died away almost as suddenly as it had risen.

The sea still heaved, with a long oily swell, and the Marseilles steamer pitched uncomfortably. But the wind was gone, the waves were falling, and overhead a sky of sapphire was spangled with stars. The treacherous Mediterranean smiled once more.

"Jolly glad it's over," said Johnny Bull. "I'm wet through! Better go down and get a change."

"The changefulness of the clobber is the proper caper," assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob gave a sudden chuckle.

"What about Bunter? Anybody seen Bunter?"

"My hat! Bunter must have been through it, after that giddy feed," grinned Nugent. "Poor old Bunter."

"You're looking rather sickly, Wharton, old man. Not mal-de-mer?" asked Bob.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Bou Saoud is on the ship," he said in a low voice.

"You've seen him?"

"No, but—"

Bob gave his father an anxious look. The sleeve of the major's coat was ripped open from the stroke of a knife. There was a dull crimson stain on the cut sleeve.

"Father!" exclaimed Bob.

"Don't worry, my boy," said the major composedly. "His knife missed and only cut my sleeve and grazed my arm. It is only a scratch. No harm done."

"Oh father!"

"I am going to speak to the captain and the steamer will be searched for Bou Saoud," said Major Cherry. "He will be put in irons as soon as he is found, and we shall be clear of him."

"Thank goodness for that," muttered Bob.

Bob's ruddy face had become quite pale. In the darkness he had seen nothing, and he had been unaware, till now, of the terrible peril the major had so narrowly escaped.

"You had better go down and change and look after Bunter," added the major. "You will probably find him ill."

"You—you're sure you're not hurt, father?"

"Quite."

The major dismissed the matter with that. His life had been too full of perils for his narrow escape to have any effect on his iron nerves.

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"Let's look for Bunter," said Harry, as the major turned away.

The juniors descended to the sallemanger, where they had left Billy Bunter before the tempest. The room was in great confusion, and the stewards were busy in setting it to rights. Billy Bunter was found extended on the floor, face downwards, groaning occasionally. He seemed in the deepest depths of woe.

"Bunter, old man!" said Harry.

Groan!

"Have you been sick?"

Groan!

"Feeling bad?" asked Nugent.

Groan!

"The sickfulness of the esteemed greedy Bunter is terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh compassionately.

Groan!

"Buck up, old man," said Harry. "It's over now. Let's help you to your bunk."

Groan!

William George Bunter seemed too far gone to do anything but emit feeble groans.

The chums of the Remove picked him up, and the hapless fat junior hung on them as helplessly as a sack. His fat face was white as chalk, his eyes blinked wearily.

"Ow! I say, you fellows," moaned Bunter, "it—it wasn't the pigeon-pie that—"

"What?"

"I—I think it was the bananas—"

"Oh!"

"Or it might have been the pudding," moaned Bunter.

"Come on, old man," said Harry.

It was not easy for even the famous Five to negotiate Bunter's dead weight, and the Owl of the Remove did not stir so much as a fat finger to help himself. But they got him to his sleeping-berth at last, and rolled him heavily into it.

"D-d-d-don't leave me, you fellows," mumbled Bunter. "I—I think I'm going to die."

"Rot, old bean!"

"I forgive you, Wharton."

"What?"

"You've always been a beast, but I forgive you," said Bunter faintly. "Same with you others. I'll try to forgive you, Bob."

"Oh, you'll try, will you?" said Bob, with a glare at the fat junior.

"Yes. You were an utter beast to bring me here, and you know it. It's all your fault! It would serve you right if I haunted you, I—I'm expiring, you know."

"You silly owl," growled Bob. "You're sea-sick, as you jolly well deserved to be after stuffing as you did. What the thump did you expect?"

Groan!

"Oh, pull yourself together," said Johnny Bull. "If you think that row is pleasant to listen to, Bunter, you're making a mistake."

Groan!

"Well, I'm fed up, for one," said Johnny, and he departed.

Bunter blinked feebly at the juniors.

"That's right!" he said bitterly. "Go away and leave me to die in solitude! Beasts!"

"Fathead!" said Bob, and he followed Johnny Bull.

"The chiefdom of the esteemed Bunter is not probable," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "There is no such luckfulness."

"You black beast!"

Hurree Singh grinned and followed Bob. Nugent went with him. Bunter was not the kind of invalid that fellows were keen to look after. Wharton hesitated. He did not want to remain in

the stuffy little berth and listen to Bunter's dismal groans; but he decided not to leave the Owl of the Remove alone. So he sat on the corner of a cabin trunk to keep him company.

The steamer was rolling uncomfortably on the heavy swell of the sea, and for a long time it rolled to an accompaniment of feeble groans from William George Bunter. Bunter was still groaning when it was time to turn in for the night. The berth above Bunter's was Wharton's, and the captain of the Remove turned into it.

He was dropping off to sleep when Bunter's voice was heard from below. The fat junior was not groaning now.

"I say, Wharton."

Wharton started out of his first slumber.

"Eh! What? Is that you, Bunter?"

"Yes. I'm feeling better, old chap."

"Glad to hear it, though I wish you hadn't woke me up to tell me," growled the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Good-night!"

"Good-night, old chap! But, I say—"

"Well, what is it now?"

"I'm hungry."

"What?" roared Wharton.

"Hungry!"

"Have you woke me up to tell me you're hungry, you fat dummy?"

"Yes, old chap! I—I think I might recover if I had a good square meal now. Will you go and get it for me?"

"Fathead!"

"I can't get up myself, Wharton. I'm comfortably now—I mean, I'm frightfully weak. Helpless, in fact. Will you go and find the steward, and tell him to bring me something decent, and plenty of it? Mind you mention plenty of it."

"Go and eat coke!"

Wharton closed his eyes again.

"I say, old chap—"

"Shurrup!"

"But I'm hungry!"

"Another word," said the captain of the Remove, in concentrated tones, "and I'll reach down with my pillow and give you the thumping of your life, Bunter. Shut up!"

"Beast!"

Wharton dropped off to sleep again. It was quite a long time before Billy Bunter made up his mind to leave his bunk and go forth in quest of provender himself. He was torn between greediness and laziness; but finally greediness conquered, and he rolled out of his berth. He reached up and caught hold of Wharton and shook him. Unfortunately, in the darkness, it was Wharton's nose that he caught hold of. Wharton awoke with a startled howl.

"What—"

"It's me!"

"By Jove, I—I—I'll—"

"I'm going out to find some supper, Wharton. I shall have to tip the steward, I expect. Lend me a hundred francs!"

Wharton sat up, and gave another howl as he bumped his head. Then he reached out and annexed Bunter's ear.

"Whoooooop!"

"There, you fat villain—"

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

Bunter jerked his fat ear away and departed, without waiting for the hundred francs. Wharton slept again, and he was still asleep when Bunter came back. The fat junior rolled into his berth, apparently having found the steward obliging, and having negotiated a substantial supper. Wharton, fast asleep in the upper berth, dreamed that he was listening to deep grunting, and he awoke at last, and found that the

groans were real. They proceeded from the lower berth. He leaned over,

"Bunter!"

Groan!

"Look here, you fat idiot, if you're really hungry—"

Groan!

"Bunter, you dummy—"

"I'm not hungry," came a faint voice from Bunter's berth. "Ow! I've had supper! Ow! I don't know what's the matter! Wow! It couldn't have been the chicken. The chicken was all right—"

"What?"

"It couldn't have been the pudding; it was a jolly good pudding. It may have been the macaroni."

Wharton breathed hard.

"You fat villain! You've been stuffing again!"

Groan!

"And you're sea-sick again—"

Groan!

"Serve you jolly well right!" growled Wharton.

Groan!

He drew the sheet about his ears to shut out the noise, and slept again. And William George Bunter, suffering from the roll of the ship, or the cold chicken, or the pudding, or the macaroni, or all together, groaned dismally till morning.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Makes a Discovery!

MAJOR CHERRY'S bronzed face was knitted grimly the next day. He was puzzled and angry. The attack made on him during the storm had not shaken his nerve in the least; but it had made him bitterly determined to come to conclusions with the Spahi. Bou Saoud was on the steamer; that seemed certain now. From the steamer, in mid-Mediterranean, there was no escape for the murderous Arab. It seemed, therefore, that a search of the vessel could not fail to bring him to light, and that he would finish the voyage in irons, to be handed over to the French police at Philippeville, in Algeria.

But Bou Saoud was not to be found.

The captain of the Transports Mari-times steamer was keen enough to discover the attempted assassin. The crew were called over, and the passengers scanned. Among the two or three dozen Arab passengers on board, Bou Saoud certainly was not to be found. If he was there in some disguise, his disguise seemed to defy penetration.

As the day wore on, and the African coast loomed into sight, the major's brow grew grimmer and grimmer. The captain had done all that he could, and did not conceal his opinion that the major was mistaken, and that an unknown Arab was not hidden on the ship at all. His opinion was that the attack had been made by one of the more lawless of the passengers—some Arab or Kabyle—with the intention of robbery. But which man it was remained undiscoverable.

Even the major began to doubt whether Bou Saoud was, after all, on the steamer. It was possible that the attack had been made by some other agent of Mustapha ben Mohammed. One of the Arab passengers might very well be in the pay of the desert sheik.

"I'm jolly glad we don't pass a second night on this steamer," Bob Cherry remarked to his chums, as they stood watching the African coast rising out of the sea to the south. "It's rather too

close quarters to be comfortable, with a murderous villain like Bou Saoud on board."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Either he is on board, or another rascal of the same kidney," he said. "Anyhow, we get off the boat this evening."

The steamer was entering the wide Gulf of Stora, in which lay the Algerian seaport of Philippeville. All trace of the storm had long vanished. The steamer's prow cut through the sea like glass. The sun, sinking towards the west, glowed like a ball of fire in the unclouded blue. With keen and eager eyes the juniors watched Africa rise on their view. They caught glimpses of white walls and palm-trees as they drew nearer to the port.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Sick again, old bean?"

"I say, I shall be jolly glad to get ashore, you fellows," said Billy Bunter. "I haven't really been sea-sick, of course. I'm too good a sailor for that, but I don't like this dashed old steamer. I say, there's that beastly nigger again."

The black African was at a little distance, looking shoreward. Harry Wharton glanced at him, and again the man's aquiline features struck him as familiar. A startling thought came into his mind. The black man had passed him on the deck during the storm, only a minute or two before the attack on the major. Was it possible that this man was the hireling of Mustapha ben Mohammed—that it was he who had attacked Major Cherry? It was possible—it was likely enough—but there was no telling.

Bunter blinked at the man with strong disfavour. He had not forgotten the incident of the previous day.

The black man did not seem to be looking at them, yet it struck Wharton that he was observing them in a stealthy kind of way. The man stood and stared towards Philippeville, over the shining waters of the Gulf of Stora. The town was coming more prominently into sight now, and there was a buzz of passengers

on the steamer preparing for disembarkation.

"I say, you fellows, it's hot," said Bunter.

"Not really?" said Bob, wiping his brow.

"Which of you chaps is going to fetch me a lemon-quash?" asked Bunter.

"The whichfulness is terrific."

"Blessed if I ever came across such a selfish set," said Bunter peevishly. "I say, you buzz down and get some lime-juice and a soda syphon, Nugent. It's no end refreshing!"

"Catch me!" said Frank.

"You go and call a steward, Wharton, and tell him to bring them along, will you?"

"Can't you call a steward yourself, you fat slacker?"

"I'm sitting down!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"You've squatted in my deck-chair!" growled Johnny Bull. "I'll be glad if you'll get out of it."

"If you're going to be selfish, Bull—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"If there's one thing I can't stand it's self-hness," said Bunter. "You fellows really might try to follow my example a little. A fellow's never worse off for thinking of others a little."

"Oh, my hat!"

"There's a steward," said Bob. "You can give him your order, Bunter."

"I've run out of change."

Bob called to the steward. A tray was brought up, with a bottle of lime-juice, a soda-syphon, and glasses on it. Bunter took up the syphon, and blinked round him. The black African was standing quite within range of the syphon, and Bunter's eyes gleamed at him through his big spectacles. That black man had had the unexampled cheek to floor Bunter the day before, instead of taking Bunter's kick patiently, as he ought to have done, in the fat Owl's opinion. Now it was Bunter's turn.

Fizzzzzz!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look out, you fat duffer!" roared Bob Cherry, as he caught a spraying of soda-water.

"Ho, ho, he!"

"Bunter—"

"Look out—"

There was a yell from the African. The sudden stream of soda caught him full in his black face, fairly swamping him. He staggered and yelled, and Bunter played the soda-stream on him as he staggered, splashing him right and left.

"You duffer! Chuck it!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Ho, ho, he!"

"Look out—"

The black man dashed the stinging soda-water from his eyes, and glared round like a wild animal. His savage glance fell on Bunter, with the almost empty syphon in his hands, and he made a spring towards the fat junior.

"I say, you fellows, back me up!" yelled Bunter.

"You dun me—"

"You fathead—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, almost transfixed as he caught sight of the black African's face. "Look at him! What the thump—"

The black African's face was no longer wholly black.

Where he had rubbed the soda-water away with his sleeve a patch of light brown showed amid the black—his complexion had shifted. The amazed juniors stared at him, realising as they looked at him that he was not a negro at all; and a sudden light flashed on Wharton's mind. He knew now where he had seen those aquiline features before!

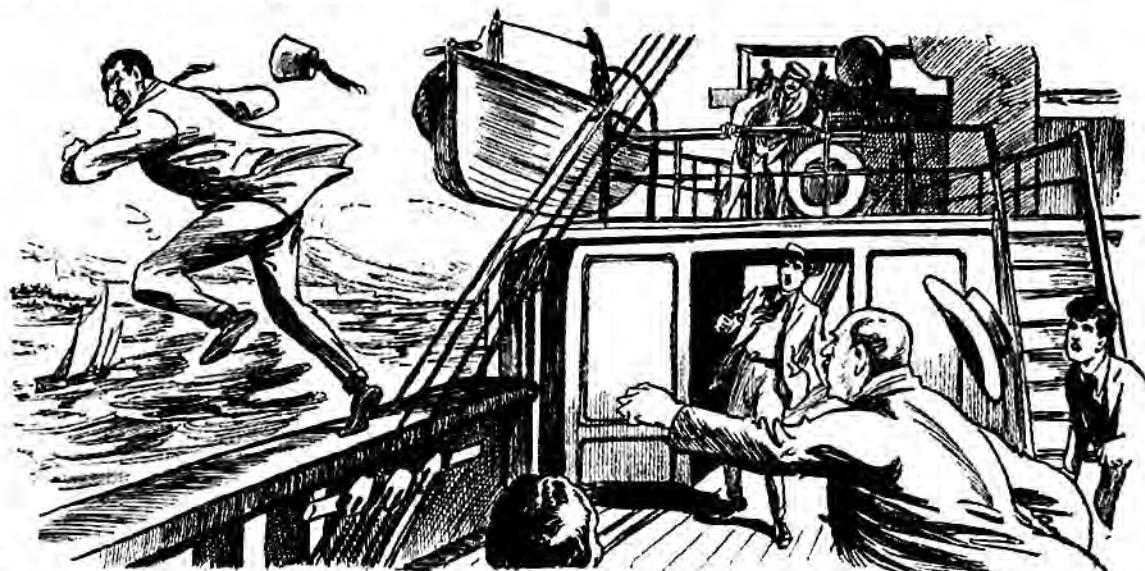
"Bou Saoud!" he shouted.

"My hat!"

"The—the Arab!" stuttered Nugent.

"Bou Saoud, the Spahi!" roared Wharton. "I know him now! Collar him!"

The disguised Spahi was springing at Bunter, but he stopped suddenly as his name was spoken. He sprang back, glaring savagely at the Greyfriars juniors.



Before the major's outstretched hand could reach him, Bou Saoud had leaped over the rail into the sea. Down into the blue waters he went like an arrow, and the sea closed over his head. "My hat, he'll be drowned!" muttered Bob Cherry. Wharton shook his head. "He wouldn't have risked it if he were not a good swimmer," he answered. "Look for him!" The juniors rushed to the rail and looked into the curling waves. But Bou Saoud was not seen again. (See Chapter 6.)

"Father!" roared Bob Cherry. "We've found him!"

"Bou Saoud!" yelled Johnny Bull. Major Cherry was already striding to the spot. The disguised Arab backed away, showing his white teeth in a snarl.

"It's Bou Saoud!" panted Wharton. "He was got up as a negro— It's the man, Major Cherry!"

The major did not stop to answer; he strode to the Spahi, his bronze face grim. Bou Saoud—for there was no doubt now that the supposed black African was the Spahi—leaped on the steamer's rail.

Before the major's outstretched hand could reach him, he had leaped into the sea.

Down into the blue waters went the disguised Arab like an arrow, and the sea closed over his head.

The steamer swept on. "My hat! He'll be drowned!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Wharton shook his head. "He wouldn't have risked it if he were not a good swimmer," he answered. "Look for him."

The juniors rushed to the rail, with a crowd of other passengers. A hundred eyes watched the curling waves for the Arab's head to reappear.

But Bou Saoud was not seen again.

There were fishing craft out on the gulf, manned by half-clad Arabs or negroes, and a Maltese felucca was gliding by. If the Spahi came to the surface he was screened from view by some of the craft dotting the blue waters. From the deck he was not seen again, and the steamer glided on to her berth in the harbour of Philippeville. Bou Saoud, the Spahi, had vanished—and whether he was alive or dead only the future could tell.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Standing Room for One Fly!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were glad enough to find themselves on terra firma once more—especially Billy Bunter. At the Grand Hotel de Philippeville, that evening, the Owl of the Remove enjoyed a tremendous feed, with no fear of unpleasant consequences to follow. The next morning the Greyfriars party had a walk round Philippeville, and found it like a French provincial town with a strange admixture of Africa.

"We're really in Africa at last!" said Bob Cherry; and it was an exciting thought to the Greyfriars juniors.

"I say, you fellows, I suppose we're going on our camels now," said Billy Bunter dubiously. "I've heard that camels are beastly savage, and they bite sometimes."

Harry Wharton laughed. "We're going on by train, fathead," he said. "The railway runs all the way to Biskra."

"Oh, good!" said Bunter, in great relief. "Can you get lunch-baskets put on the train in this country?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter, you fellows. Look after the grub, and other things will look after themselves pretty well," said Bunter sagely. "You can't be too careful about grub. That's important."

"There's some Roman ruins here," remarked Nugent.

"Oh, blow the Roman ruins!" said Bunter. "Is there a tuck-shop of any kind?"

Notwithstanding Bunter, the Greyfriars party looked at the Roman ruins. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 865.

and visited the museum, where there were plenty of Roman antiquities to be seen. Bunter was not interested in the relics of that ancient, mighty people whose dominion had extended from Britain to Egypt and the desert. All the Roman coins in the museum he would willingly have exchanged for one currency note, to be expended at Mrs. Mumble's tuckshop at Greyfriars.

But the party did not linger in Philippeville. The same day the train was bearing them southward to Constantine.

With eager eyes the Greyfriars juniors watched from the carriage windows.

Billy Bunter settled himself down in a corner seat, put a newspaper over his fat face to keep off the flies, and snored. A new continent was nothing to Bunter. He had had an immense lunch, and it was hot, and he was sleepy. So he slept the sleep of the just, while the train rumbled on into the interior. But the Famous Five lost nothing of their new and strange surroundings.

Little grey hills, with sparse scrub growing here and there; sometimes a palm-tree standing proudly against the blue sky. Herds of goats guarded by bare-legged Arab boys. Once, swinging along an arid, dusty road near the line, came a company of French infantry, dusty and perspiring, and for some time a stirring strain of military music was heard as the train rattled on.

Far behind the rattling train the sea and the coast were out of sight. Barron-looking mountains were ahead—the great mountains of the Tell that barred off the desert. Beyond those mountains, as the juniors knew, lay the wastes of the Sahara.

Vegetation grew scantier, the air grew hotter, drier, and particles of sand fluttered in the railway carriages.

Billy Bunter grunted uneasily in his sleep.

His newspaper had slipped aside, and several flies settled on his fat face. Bob Cherry good-naturedly reached over and brushed them off, and Bunter's eyes opened.

"Beast!"

"Eh?"

"Can't you let a fellow snooze? Wharrer you waking me up for?" demanded Bunter indignantly.

"You silly ass, I was brushing the flies off your silly chivvy," said Bob.

"Well, let 'em alone."

Bunter closed his eyes.

In a few seconds he was asleep again.

"Nice chap," murmured Bob. "So touchingly grateful when a fellow does him a little service."

A flower-seller came along the corridor of the train. Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh stepped out of the carriage, and came back with a palm-leaf.

"Good wheeze!" yawned Bob. "You can fan me if you like."

The dusky junior grinned.

"It is for the esteemed Bunter," he said.

Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh sat down opposite Bunter. With the palm-leaf he proceeded to tickle Bunter's fat little nose as he slept.

The juniors looked on, grinning.

Bunter stirred in his sleep, and mumbled and grumbled. His eyes opened at last, and Hurree Singh instantly whisked the palm-leaf out of sight.

"I say, you fellows, there's a lot of flies about!" mumbled Bunter. "Can you see one on my nose?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Where's that dashed newspaper?"

"It's fallen under the seat."

"Get it for me."

"Dear man, can't you get it yourself?"

"Beast!"

Bunter closed his eyes and dozed again. As soon as his deep snore was heard, Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh let the palm-leaf droop over his nose again, tickling it gently.

"Bother that fly!" howled Bunter, opening his eyes. "Look here, you fellows, you might keep the flies off a chap when he's taking a nap. Don't be selfish."

"I don't see any flies on you, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"There's a beast that keeps on settling on my nose!" Bunter rubbed his nose. "Blow it!"

He dozed again.

The palm-leaf resumed its occupation. Billy Bunter slept uneasily, and awoke again, and clutched at his nose. The palm-leaf whisked away at once.

"Oh, crumbs! That beastly fly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you silly duffers cackling at?" howled Bunter. "Where's that dashed fly? I'm going to smash it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Beasts!"

The Owl of the Remove sat and glowered at his comrades for some time, while the low hills rushed past the train. But he sank into slumber again at last. "Go it, Inky," grinned Bob Cherry.

The palm-leaf tickled Bunter's fat little nose once more. Once more it whisked out of sight as Bunter's round eyes opened behind his big spectacles.

"That beastly fly!" gasped Bunter. "It keeps on settling on my nose. I'll jolly well catch it next time."

He leaned back in his seat, and rested one hand above his head on the soiled white covering of the carriage. Then he closed his eyes, but he did not snore.

He was waiting for that fly to settle on his nose again.

It was an ambush!

The Famous Five suppressed their chuckles with difficulty as they watched him.

Stealthily, Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh pushed forward the palm-leaf again, and allowed the tip of it to tickle the Owl's fat little nose.

Smack!

Down came Bunter's fat hand on the supposed fly!

"Ow!"

The palm-leaf was jerked away in time. Had there been a fly on Bunter's nose, certainly that smack would have finished its career for ever. As it was, it nearly finished Bunter's nose. In his keenness to squash the fly, Bunter had rather overlooked the fact that it was his own nose he was smacking.

"Yaroooh! Oh! Ow!" howled Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?"

"Ow! My nose! Yow!" wailed Bunter.

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

"Yow! I've hurt my nose! Yow!"

"Never mind—the giddy fly's gone," chuckled Bob Cherry, as the grinning nabob allowed the palm-leaf to float away from the carriage window.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter did not sleep again. He sat and rubbed his nose and glowered. His nose glowed as red as the sunset, and there seemed to be a pain in it.

The train clattered to a halt. The major's bronzed face looked into the carriage from the corridor.

"Constantine! Turn out!"

And the Greyfriars juniors turned cheerily out.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Honest Ibrahim!

"CONSTANTINE?" grunted Billy Bunter.

"That's it," said Harry.

"Who is he?"

"What?"

"Who the thump is Constantine?" demanded Billy Bunter peevishly. "I didn't know we were meeting anybody here. One of those frowsy-looking Greeks, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," growled Bunter. "Look here, I want some grub. I don't want to meet any dashed Greeks. Blow Constantine, whoever he is!"

"You silly ass!" howled Bob. "Constantine is the name of this giddy town."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Silly name for a town. It's the name of a giddy Roman emperor. Well, where's the hotel? I suppose there's an hotel—and grub."

The platform at Constantine was crowded—fruit-sellers, guides, porters in ditty turbans, draggled Arabs from the desert, lounging soldiers—a jostling swarm of dusky humanity. The Greyfriars party walked cheerily along, Bunter indulging in his usual grumble, thinking of the all-important question of "grub," and heedless of his new and strange surroundings. All the party were tired with hours in the train; but the Famous Five were not too tired to look about them with interest.

"You want guide?"

"Thank you, no!" said the major.

The party had to run the gamut of numberless guides, some of them very bright and smart, some of them extremely frowsy. Apparently nearly every idler in Constantine was more or less of a guide.

The guides were shaken off, and the party emerged from the station. Two or three followed them out, vociferously recommending hotels. The major, an old traveller, did not heed. He glanced round and signed to the omnibus of the Hotel de Nemours, where the party were to put up for the night.

Arab porters put the baggage on board, and the Greyfriars party entered the vehicle. As it rolled away a young Arab jumped on. He had a face the colour of a coffee-bean, large, handsome black eyes, and he wore a scarlet fez and a dirty jacket braided with gold, and short trousers of a brilliant hue. His colour scheme was decidedly striking to the eye, and still more striking was his beaming smile and his effusive manner. He salaamed three or four times to the travellers in the hotel bus, and grinned incessantly with a gleam of dazzling teeth.

"Ibrahim!" he said. "Me Ibrahim! Very honest guide! Speak English!"

The major smiled.

"We do not want a guide," he said.

"I have written words of travellers saying me good honest guide. I show you!"

"Don't trouble!"

"For the great gentleman it is no trouble! You look!"

From a capacious pocket in the brilliant blue trousers Ibrahim produced a batch of dirty papers.

These, apparently, were his testimonials from previous travellers who had been fortunate enough to obtain his services.

"Me no read!" he said. "Speak English very fine—read him, no! Much French—small English! You read um!"

The major waved him back. He had neither time nor inclination to be bothered by Master Ibrahim.



Smack! Down came Bunter's fat hand on the supposed fly. "Ow!" The palm-leaf was jerked away in time. Had there been a fly on Bunter's nose certainly that smack would have ended its career. In his keenness to squash the fly, Bunter had overlooked the fact that it was his own nose he was smacking. "Yaroooooh! Ow! Wow!" he howled. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. (See Chapter 7.)

The Greyfriars party, as it happened, were the only guests for the Hotel Nemours, and they had the bus to themselves. Ibrahim insinuated himself farther into the vehicle, with an ingratiating grin. Evidently he was determined upon custom.

"You read um!" he urged. "You read, and then you never take any guide only honest Ibrahim."

Major Cherry stared straight before him without answering. He had wasted enough words on Ibrahim.

"All the English ask for Honest Ibrahim!" urged the guide. "Him cheap and good. Great gentleman deign to read."

The great gentleman did not deign to take the slightest notice of the honest youth. But the juniors were smiling now, amused by the fellow's persistence, and their smiles encouraged Ibrahim. He transferred his attention to the younger members of the party.

"Fine young gentlemen read um!" he implored.

Bob Cherry kindly took the sheaf of well-thumbed papers to look at it. He really had not the heart to disappoint Honest Ibrahim.

"You read um!" said the honest one anxiously. "I ask always the English to give me written words to show. You read um and see what English tourist think of Ibrahim!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

Ibrahim's testimonials from the English travellers whom he had served were rather startling. Certainly, if the honest

man had been able to read English, he would never have shown those testimonials to prospective customers. The first paper ran:

"I hereby testify that I have employed Ibrahim as a guide, and found him the most dishonest scoundrel in Africa."

"Signed, J. WILLIAMS."

"You like um, yes?" asked Abraham, eyeing Bob. Perhaps he was accustomed to seeing English travellers smile when they read his testimonials.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"What's the joke?" asked Harry.

"Ha, ha! Look!"

The second testimonial was as good as the first. The juniors all read it together, with many chuckles.

"I warn anyone who employs this scoundrel Ibrahim to look after his money and his purse. The rascal will steal anything he can lay his hands on."

"H. JONES."

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

Honest Ibrahim smiled expansively.

"You read um?" he said. "You learn what noble English think about Honest Ibrahim. Yes?"

The third paper was on a par with the first two. The juniors began to enjoy the perusal.

"So far as I know, Ibrahim has never committed murder, but my opinion is THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 865.

that he has done everything else. He is a liar and a cheat and a thief and every damned variety of a hoodlum. I guess he wants hanging.

"HIRAM HOPPER."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The major glanced round.
"You seem to have something good there, my boys!" he remarked.
"Fine—good—yes," said Ibrahim.
"Splendid testimonials of noble English and Americans. Yes!"
"Oh, look!" gasped Bob.

He passed Ibrahim's testimonials to the major. Major Cherry's bronzed face broke into a grin as he looked at them. The hotel omnibus echoed with merriment. Honest Ibrahim's expansive smile grew more expansive and confiding.

"Now you read, you want Honest Ibrahim!" he said. "I show you some sights—native quarter—Roman bridge!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Grand mosque—cathedral—wonderful ravine de la Rhumel—all things I show you. I charge you little—nothing—five hundred francs—"

"My hat! Do you call that little?" exclaimed Bob.

"With great gentlemen—true nobility—I charge trifles—three hundred francs."

"Make it ten centimes!" suggested Bob.

The major handed the valuable testimonials back to Ibrahim.

"Give him a franc, Bob, and let him go," he said.

"It's worth that!" chuckled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Ibrahim stowed his testimonials away again in the voluminous blue trousers.

"Now you want guide—"

"No," said Bob, laughing. "Here's a franc."

The dusky hand closed on the franc.

"Merci bien! I come to the hotel with great gentleman—"

"You needn't trouble."

"After you are so good, and read um testimonials, Ibrahim live only to serve you!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Honest Ibrahim remained on the bus till it reached the Hotel Nemours. There he was left, but when the travellers sat down to dinner they caught sight of his dusky, smiling face peering in at a window.

And when, in the cool of the evening, they left the hotel for a stroll round Constantine, Honest Ibrahim started up from somewhere, and joined them with a grin and a salaam.

"Now you want guide—"

"No, thanks!"

"I have waited!" said Ibrahim, with dignity. "I charge you nothing. The honour to serve you is enough."

"Cut off!" said Bob, laughing.

"You shall see native quarter—dance of the Ouled Nail—"

"Buzz!"

The juniors strolled away, leaving Honest Ibrahim staring mournfully after them. But as they sauntered along the Boulevard de l'Ouest, the dusky, grinning face suddenly appeared again.

"Noble gentleman want see Hotel de Ville, yes," said Ibrahim. "I show you—yes—Ibrahim know all. This way!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "He means business! After all, you may as well let him trot along, and give him a franc or two!"

"Oh, all serene!" assented Harry.

Honest Ibrahim, beaming with satisfaction at being engaged at last, trotted along with the juniors. The major had forbidden the juniors to enter the native quarter, where the sights were scarcely suitable for youthful eyes—but Honest

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 865.

Ibrahim showed them the public buildings, and the Roman antiquities, and altogether they considered that he had earned five francs by the time they walked back to the hotel. Major Cherry was smoking his cigar on the veranda when the juniors came in, with Honest Ibrahim, grinning and expansive, in their company.

"Now you can cut off, old bean!" said Bob. "Here's five francs!"

Honest Ibrahim took the five francs, and gazed at it in his brown palm, and then gazed at Bob.

"I charge you little," he said. "Ibrahim very honest and very cheap. I ask you only two hundred francs."

"What?" roared Bob.

"I say, you fellows, let's kick him," said Billy Bunter.

Honest Ibrahim backed away a pace. Perhaps he was not accustomed to being kicked when he presented his little bills.

"Great gentlemen, give me one hundred francs," he said.

"I've given you five francs, you rogue," said Bob indignantly. "We didn't want you at all."

"You give me fifty francs—"

"It's coming down," grinned Johnny Bull. "It will be down to five soon at this rate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fine gentlemen, you give me twenty-five francs," said Ibrahim imploringly.

"I have old father and mother—"

"He'll say next that he has a wife and family to keep," grunted Billy Bunter.

"I shouldn't wonder if he has two or three wives and families, in this country," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Here, you rascal, here's another five francs for you. Now chuck it and clear."

Honest Ibrahim took the second five francs.

"Now you give me twenty, and it is all right," he said.

"I'll give you a kick if you don't clear at once," answered Bob Cherry.

"Mind, I mean that."

"You give me fifteen—"

"That does it," said Bob.

He drew back his right boot. Honest Ibrahim skipped out of reach. He waved dusky hands at the indignant Bob.

"It is all right—fine—oh, yes!" he exclaimed. "You give me nothing—nothing no more. I am satisfy—all satisfy."

"Well, get out, then," growled Bob.

And the Greyfriars juniors went into the hotel. But a moment or two later Honest Ibrahim followed them.

"Fine gentlemen—"

"Oh, my hat! Here's that rogue again!" exclaimed Nugent.

"He wants that kicking after all," said Bob. "He'd better have it, if he won't be happy till he gets it."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Oh, no! Non! Rien! You listen—écoutez!" exclaimed Ibrahim. "It is honour to serve so fine gentlemen. I ask nothing! I ask only that you give me one testimonial."

"Oh, is that it?" said Bob.

"C'est ça—yes, you give me testimonial like others," said Ibrahim, dragging the sheaf of dirty papers out of the blue trousers, and presenting a blank sheet to Bob.

"Lend me your fountain-pen, Harry."

"You can't give that rogue a testimonial, Bob."

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"Yes, I can—like the others."

"Oh! Here you are," said Harry, laughing.

Bob Cherry took the paper, and Wharton's fountain-pen, and proceeded to indite a testimonial to Honest Ibrahim: "I hereby declare that Ibrahim the guide is a thundering rascal, and ought to be put in chokoey."

"Signed, Robert Cherry."

"Merci bien! Many thanks," said Ibrahim, taking the paper, and putting it carefully with the rest.

And he salaamed to the Greyfriars juniors, and walked out with great dignity, happy in the possession of another testimonial to his character.

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EDITORIAL!

By Harry Wharton.

IT scarcely seems a year ago that the 1924 edition of the Greyfriars "Holiday Annual" was published. How quickly the months flash by! "The worst of this 'ere time," as Gosling would say, "is, it keeps on flyin'!"

It has flown so swiftly, in fact, that the "Holiday Annual" for 1925 is about to be placed on the market. It is with this bumper boys' book, famous all the world over, that our Supplement deals this week.

The "Holiday Annual" is no stranger to my great army of readers. Several years have passed since it was first launched, and there is abundant testimony to the fact that it gets better and brighter and more popular each year.

I have been privileged to see a copy of the 1925 "Annual," and I confess that it fairly staggered me. I thought the 1924 volume was so good that it would be impossible to surpass it. And yet the 1925 volume goes one better. It is a triumph of journalism. I guarantee there is not a dull line in its three hundred and sixty pages.

I shall hope to spend many a happy hour with the 1925 "Holiday Annual" as my companion. When the winter evenings come, and the storm howls without, I shall sit in my cosy study before a blazing fire, with the "Annual" resting on my knees, and I shall read of our own adventures at Greyfriars and of Tom Merry & Co.'s exploits at St. Jim's, and of Jimmy Silver & Co.'s escapades at Rookwood. I shall read stories of adventure in distant lands and historical romances, and short, snappy stories of school life. And as I turn over the pages I shall study the magnificent coloured plates and the black-and-white drawings, with which the "Holiday Annual" abounds.

And I am not the only fellow who is looking forward to this fine treat. My chums are in quite a fever of excitement, and they are counting the hours to Monday, September 1st. When that happy day dawns we shall march down to the railway-station in force, and bombard the bookstall manager with requests, or, rather, demands, for the "Holiday Annual." And we shall be accompanied by a big crowd of fellows, for the "Annual" is a hot favourite at Greyfriars. There is nobody who does not secure a copy, from Wingate of the Sixth down to the smallest midget in the First Form.

There's going to be a universal rush for the "Annual" on September 1st from what I can hear about it. And

the sensible sort of fellow has ordered the merry volume in advance, so that he won't be disappointed when the great day dawns.

Here's to the good old "Holiday Annual," and long may it flourish!

HARRY WHARTON.



MY
CHOICE!

By
Dick
Penfold.

SOME fellows are potty on Plato
And all the old classical chaps;
Some revel in Shelley, and Marie
Corelli,

And Homer and Horace—perhaps.
With others, whose tastes are romantic,
"King Solomon's Mines" will agree;
Some fellows on Dumas are frantic—
The "Holiday Annual" for me!

Bill Shakespeare, I know, was a wonder,
His sonnets are simply first-rate:
The wisdom of Milton is ripe as a
Stilton,

The ballads of Byron are great.
Some have a soft spot for old Spenser,
His verses are blithe as can be;
But I've a desire that's intenser—
The "Holiday Annual" for me!

Romances like "Robinson Crusoe"
Will always delight every boy.
I've read about twenty fine stories by
Henty,

And followed his heroes with joy.
But now I've grown tired of old-timers,
I want something modern, you see;
Some up-to-date writers and rhymers—
The "Holiday Annual" for me!

The book that's the best and the
brightest,
The book that's the talk of the day;
The six-shilling treasure that adds to our
pleasure
And drives all depression away.
The volume that dawns with September,
The finest you ever did see,
September the First, just remember—
The "Holiday Annual" for me!

RANDOM RIDDLES!

By Bob Cherry.

WHY is the "Holiday Annual"
like an important appointment?
Because you can't afford to
miss it.

Why is the aforesaid "Annual" like
an aching tooth?
Because you feel jolly relieved when
it "comes out."

What is the difference between the
"Annual" and a good feed for Billy
Bunter?
No difference. They both "fill the
Bill."

When Tubb of the Third goes for a
dip in the sea, what does he take?
His "Holiday 'Annual.'"

Why is the "Annual" like a million-
aire's mansion?
Because it contains three hundred and
sixty "pages."

Why is the "Annual" like a clever
artist?
Because it always makes "a good
draw."

Why is the "Annual" like Dr. Locke?
Because it's "well read."

In what way did Ananias resemble Mr.
Frank Richards?
He had no equal at "telling stories."

How do we know that the "Holiday
Annual" is a cannibal?
Because Billy Bunter's inside it.

Why is the "Annual" like a rabbit-
pie?
Because it is hungrily devoured.

Why is the "Annual" like a compe-
tent domestic servant?
Because it "finds a place" in every
home.

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The Trezzure Hunters!

A Screamingly Funny Story
of a Treasure-Hunt at St. Sam's
By DICKY NUGENT.

"**A TREZZURE-HUNT!**" cried Jack Jolly, the leader of the Fourth Form at St. Sam's. "Oh, how ripping!"

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Merry and Bright.

The chums of the Fourth were standing before the notiss-board, on which the following dramatick announcement appeared, in the skollerly handwriting and precise spelling of the Head:

"NOTISS TO ALL AND SUNDERY!

"A copy of the 'Holiday Annual' for 1925 has been hidden somewhere in the school presinks. The finder will be handsomely rewarded. Masters, and boys, and domesticks, may take part in the search. It is open to all.

TREZZURE-HUNTERS!

GET BIZZY!

"(Signed) I. BIRCHEMALL,
"Headmaster."

Natcherally enuff, this announsement caused quite a sensation at St. Sam's. Within a very short space of time everybody was hot on the scent of the hidden volume. Fellows were hunting high and low for it, and eggsporing every nook and cranny.

Even the masters so far forgot their dignity as to burrow on their hands and neeze, crawling into dark corners in the hope of bringing the "Holiday Annual" to light.

"The puzzle is, where to start serching," said Jack Jolly to his chums. "The Head's bound to have hidden the volume in some out-of-the-way place. Let's try the roof."

"But the Head would never have hidden it there," said Merry. "He can't climb."

"Never mind. We'll leave no turn unstoned, as the saying goes."

So the threechums shinned up on to the roof by means of a waterpipe, and started to eggspore among the old towers and turrets of St. Sam's. They found a good many things that had long been given up for lost, such as tennis-balls, but there was no sign of the "Holiday Annal."

"No go," granted Merry. "I knew it wouldn't be hidden up here. Let's go to the other eggstream and try the coal-seller."

So the juniors clambered down from the roof, and dived down the flight of steps leading to the coal-seller.

But somebody had got there before them. Jack Jolly switched on his electric-torch, and the rays fell full upon the face of Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, who was crawling about on his hands and neeze amongst the coal. Mr. Lickham's face was as black as a nigger

minstrel's, and his clothes were covered with grime.

"What are you boys doing down here?" he demanded.

"We've come to look for berried trezzure, sir," said Jack Jolly.

"That precisely what I'm doing myself," said Mr. Lickham, "and you're not going to queer my pitch. Buzz off!"

"But, sir—"

"Skeddaddle!" roared Mr. Lickham.

There was nothing for it but to beat a retreat. The chums of the Fourth went to look elsewhere for the trezzure. They vizzized the masters' studies and turned them upside-down and inside-out, in the hope of finding the preshus volume; but they drew blank every time.

As they strolled on to the playing-fields Jack Jolly & Co. caught sight of a gentelman in a top-coat and frock-hat, who was wandering two and fro with his hands on his face, and an air of dejection in his pockets.

"Who's that old buffer?" asked Merry.

"Why, that's Sir Bullion Baggs, the millionaire," said Jack Jolly. "He's the pater of young Baggs of the Fourth."

"Well, he don't seem to be very happy, in spite of all his millions," said Bright. "He's wandering about as if he's lost something."

"P'raps he's hunting for the 'Holiday Annual,' same as we are," said Jack Jolly. "Hallo! What's this?"

The leader of the Fourth stopped short, his voice trembling with eggstement.

Lying in the long grass at his feet was a fat wallet. Jack Jolly pounced upon it, and found that it contained sheeves and sheeves of banknotes.

"My only aunt!" he eggscrambled. "What a find! Wonder if it belongs to old Bullion Baggs?"

"Quite likely," said Merry. "Still, the proper thing to do is to hand that wallet in to the Head."

"What about whacking out the notes between us?" suggested Bright, who believed in the motto that findings are keepings.

Jack Jolly frowned.

"That would be downright dishonest," he said. "I agree with Merry that the proper thing to do is to hand this wallet in to the Head."

Bright shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," he said.

So Jack Jolly trotted off to the Head's study with the wallet.

"I found this on the cricket-field, sir," he said.

The Head's eyes glissened, and he skeweezed his hands tightly together, like a miser gioting over his spovles.

"Many thanks, my boy," he said. "There is quite a fortune here. I will find out who it belongs to, and restore it to him. By the way, Jolly, have you found the 'Holiday Annual' yet?"

"No, sir. We've hunted high and low,

and far and wide, but there's no sign of it."

The Head smiled.

"Don't lose hart, my boy," he said kindly. "On with the serch, and may your endevvers be crowned with success!"

"Thank you, sir," said Jack Jolly. And he quitted the Head's study.

Late that evening there was a vizziter for the Head. It was Mr. Lickham.

The master of the Fourth looked utterly fagged out. He had spent the whole day serching for the hidden volume, and he was in a terrible state, having been climbing up chimbleys and grovelling in the coal-sellar, and goodness knows what.

"Dashed if I can find the datted thing!" he said irritably. "Now, tell me, sir, as man to man—where have you hidden it?"

The Head grinned a sly grin.

"Nowhere!" he said.

"What! You mean to say this is all bunkum about the 'Holiday Annual' being berried on the school presinks?"

The Head nodded.

"But—but what's the little game, sir?" asked Mr. Lickham, looking utterly bewildered.

"I will eggspain," said the Head, sinking his voice to a wisper. "Sir Bullion Baggs, the father of one of the boys, came to me this morning in grate distress. He informed me that he had lost his wallet, containing a hundred thousand pounds in notes. He was distracted. He was undone! He said, 'If only I can get my wallet back I will give a reward of a hundred pounds to the person who returns it to me.'"

"My hat!" said Mr. Lickham.

"I therefore set my wits to work," the Head went on, "and organised this trezzure-hunt for an imaginary copy of the 'Holiday Annual.' I knew it would never be found, because there wasn't one to find. But it meant that the school would be turned upside-down, and that some boy would probably find the wallet belonging to Sir Bullion Baggs, and would hand it in to me. This is precisely what happened. Jolly of the Fourth found the wallet, and handed it in. I duly returned it to its owner, who has given me the reward of a hundred pounds."

"Very nice, too," said Mr. Lickham.

"But where do I come in?"

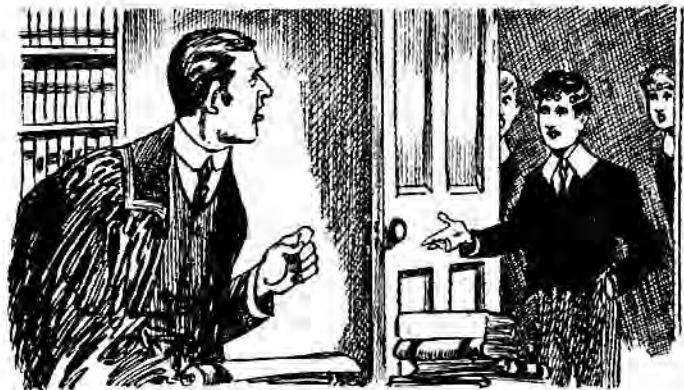
The Head grooped in his pocket, and there was a jingling of coins.

"I suppose I'd better give you this as bush-munny, so that you will keep your mouth shut about this lizzness," he said.

A number of coins changed hands, and Mr. Lickham trotted out of the Head's study in high glee. He was the richer by a shillingsworth of coppers!

THE END.

(Supplement ii.



Too Premature!

An Amusing Short Story
of Greyfriars.

By MARK LINLEY.

"IT'S come!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. The fat junior was simply bursting with excitement. Harry Wharton & Co., who were sunning themselves on the School House steps, waiting for the breakfast-bell to ring, stared curiously at their plump schoolfellow.

"Eh? What's come?" asked Bob Cherry.

"It!" said Bunter impressively. "The 'Holiday Annual'!"

"Rats!" said Wharton. "It isn't on sale till Monday; and it's Saturday today!"

"But it's come!" insisted Bunter. "An early edition of it, I expect. The postman brought it just now, in a parcel."

"Then how do you know it's the 'Holiday Annual,' fathead?" asked Nugent.

"I could tell by the size of it, of course!" said Bunter, with a snort. "It was nine inches by seven-and-a-half, and that's the size of the 'Holiday Annual.' Besides, the parcel had a London postmark."

"Who was it addressed to?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Quelch. The Editor's evidently sent him an advance copy! Beastly shame, I call it, that we should have to wait till Monday, when Quelch can get his copy two days before. Still, there's a chance of borrowing it. I shall go and see Quelch after brekker, and ask him for the loan of it."

"If you do, you'll go out of Quelch's study on your neck," said Wharton. "He's not likely to lend his 'Annual' to a junior."

"Oh, yes, he will—especially as I'm his favourite pupil!" said Billy Bunter confidently. "Won't it be ripping to spend the whole morning reading the topping tales in the 'Annual'?"

The breakfast-bell rang at this juncture, and Billy Bunter bolted at top speed for the dining-hall. Even the "Holiday Annual" had to take a back seat when breakfast was on the tapis.

During the meal, the whisper went round the school that Mr. Quelch had already received a copy of the "Annual" through the post.

The news caused something of a sensation. All Greyfriars was eager to see the "Annual," and quite a lot of people made up their minds to beard Mr. Quelch in his den, as it were, and request the loan of the popular volume.

Mr. Quelch, who sat at the head of the Remove table, failed to notice the many envious glances that were bestowed upon him from all parts of the hall. He hurried through his eggs and bacon, for he had a busy morning in front of him. There were no lessons on Saturdays, and Mr. Quelch hoped to add yet another chapter to his History of Greyfriars.

Supplement iii.]

When the meal was over, the Remove master strode away to his study. The brown paper parcel which had arrived for him lay unopened on the table. Mr. Quelch seated himself at his typewriter, and his fingers were soon racing over the keys.

"If I am not disturbed I shall be able to make excellent progress!" he murmured.

But there was rather a big "if" about that. Only five minutes had elapsed when there was a tap on the door of the study.

"Come in!" rapped out Mr. Quelch impatiently.

The plump form of William George Bunter rolled into the apartment.

"Well, Bunter?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "You have brought your lines, I presume?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Where is the imposition I ordered you to hand in to me by this morning?"

"Ahem! It—it's not quite finished, sir! I've got one more word to write."

"Then go and do so at once!" roared Mr. Quelch.

"But, sir, I—I came to ask if you would be so kind as to—"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter jumped through the doorway as if he had been shot, for the expression on Mr. Quelch's face was truly terrifying. The Owl of the Remove realised that he would have to defer his request for a loan of the "Holiday Annual" till a more favourable opportunity.

Mr. Quelch settled down again to his typing. But he was not destined to be left in peace. There was another tap on the door of his study.

"Come in!" he barked.



Billy Bunter was bumped with great vigour and heartiness on the floor of the Common-room. His howls of anguish might have been heard almost in Friarale.

This time his visitor was Coker of the Fifth.

"Hope I'm not intruding, sir—" began Coker.

"You are!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I won't keep you a second, sir! I just want to ask you a favour. If you'll kindly lend it to me I'll promise to bring it back in good condition."

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"You are talking in riddles, Coker! What do you want me to lend you?"

"The 'Holiday Annual,' sir!"

Mr. Quelch gave Coker a glare.

"I cannot possibly lend you something that I do not possess," he said. "Leave my study at once!"

Coker gave a longing glance at the brown-paper parcel on the table.

"You shall have it back within an hour, sir—" he began.

Mr. Quelch sprang to his feet.

"Begone!" he thundered. "How dare you linger in this study after I have expressly ordered you to go!"

Coker was obliged to beat a hasty retreat, just as Billy Bunter had done. And Mr. Quelch made a further effort to settle down to his work. But it was hopeless.

A constant stream of callers arrived at Mr. Quelch's study. They one and all brought the same request with them. Would Mr. Quelch be good enough to lend them his copy of the "Holiday Annual"? They would see that the precious book was not damaged in any way. They would take it up tenderly, lift it with care, so to speak, and bring it back unstained, unspotted, and untorn.

Fellows in all Forms flocked to Mr. Quelch's study with this request. Wingate and Gwynne of the Fifth, Blundell and Fitzgerald of the Fifth, Temple and Dabney of the Upper Fourth, and a dozen Removites, were among the visitors. Mr. Quelch was not given a moment's peace. And he grew more and more "wrathful" as the morning advanced. Finally, he was compelled, for his own protection, to pin a notice outside the door of his study.

"NOTICE!"

"I will not countenance any further interruptions, on any pretext. Any boy who knocks at my door during the remainder of the morning will be severely dealt with."

"H. H. QUELCH."

That notice was all right, so far as the boys were concerned. But it failed to keep the masters away. Mr. Prout dropped in to ask his colleague for the loan of the "Holiday Annual," and shortly afterwards came Messrs. Hacker and Twigg and Capper.

By this time Mr. Quelch was in a towering rage. He pointed out, with

(Continued on next page.)

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Holiday Annual Day!

We have asked our Contributors how many copies of the "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" they propose to purchase on this great occasion!

GEORGE WINGATE:

I shall buy three copies of the "Holiday Annual"—one to send to my people; one for my minor, Jack, who tells me that he has fallen on stony ground, like the seed in the parable; and one for myself. Bunter of the Remove has requested me to buy him a copy, for which he will be pleased to pay when his postal-order arrives. But Bunter will be a bearded old buffer in a bath-chair before that much-talked-of scrap of paper turns up!

ALONZO TODD:

I shall seek the advice of my worthy and estimable Uncle Benjamin before I decide how many copies of the "Holiday Annual" I shall buy. If funds permitted, I should dearly love to purchase about five thousand, and distribute them amongst the poor, benighted savages of the Golly-Wolly Islands. My cousin Peter tells me that such an act of philanthropy would not be appreciated, as the cannibals in question cannot read! But, if cannibals can devour humans, surely they ought to be able to devour the "Holiday Annual" with equal relish!

LORD MAULEVERER:

I shan't buy a single copy of the "Holiday Annual," begad! I shan't stir from my study. Some fleet-footed fag will have to fly down to the village and effect the purchase for me. Too much fag to take a route-march all the way to the newsagent's—even for the "Holiday Annual."

BILLY BUNTER:

I have written round to all my rich relations, asking them to send me three pounds, so that I can buy ten copies of the "Holiday Annual." In case they wonder why I want ten, I have explained to them that I want one for myself; one for my minor Sammy; one for my sister Bessie; and one for the general use of the staff of "Billy Bunter's Weekly." I shall give one of the volumes to Gosling the porter, so as to keep on the right side of him. Then he'll never report me when I happen to come in late for looking-up. I shall also give Dame Mimble a copy, in the hope of getting a free feed at the tuckshop. I shall also send one to Mr. Quelch anonymously. I shall write on the fly-leaf: "From an Unknown Friend." But Quelch's bound to twig my handwriting. He'll know that I'm the Good Samaritan, and he'll let me off lines and lickings for the rest of the term—perhaps! The remaining three copies I shall keep by me in case of emergency. When I get hard up I can sell them, and have a good feed with the proceeds. There's only one drawback to this wonderful scheme of mine. My titled relations have not

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turned up trumps with the munny! I am living in hopes; but if the postman duzzent bring me a big remittance by to-morrow, I shall die in despair!

H. VERNON-SMITH:

Being in a philanthropic mood, I shall buy a dozen copies of the "Holiday Annual," and convert my study into a sort of lending library!

DICK RUSSELL:

Last year I only bought one copy of the "Holiday Annual." It was constantly being borrowed by my pals, and it now looks as if half a dozen terriers had been worrying it all at once! The covers have disappeared long ago; lots of the pages are missing; and nearly all the stitches have come out. I only keep it for sentiment's sake; it's really only fit for the scrap-heap. This year I shall be wise and buy a couple of copies. One I shall lend out, and the other will be kept safe under lock and key!

WILLIAM GOSLING:

Wot I says is this 'ere—my eyesight's gettin' to get a bit dim-like. After seventy years on this planet you can't expect a man to 'ave the eye of an 'awk. Moreover, I can't get a pair of specs to suit me. Therefore, it ain't no use me buyin' the "Holiday Annual," because I shan't be able to read it. But if some kind-hearted young gent would like to come into my parlour of a winter evenin' an' read out extracts from the "Annual," I shall be deeply obligated, as ever was!

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2

TOO PREMATURE!

(Continued from previous page.)

more vigour than politeness, that his study was not a lending library; and he ordered his visitors about their business.

The Remove master had intended to write three thousand words of history that morning. Instead of which his total output was twenty words!

At last, feeling utterly "fed-up" with the endless interruptions, Mr. Quelch rose to his feet, and jammed his type-writer-cover on the machine. Then he snatched up his bag of golf-clubs, and strode out into the noonday sunshine, with the intention of going on the links and forgetting his troubles.

From the window of Study No. 7 a pair of prying eyes witnessed the Form master's departure.

"Good!" murmured Billy Bunter. "Old Quelch's gone golfing. Here's a glorious chance of borrowing his 'Holiday Annual.'"

The fat junior hurried away to Mr. Quelch's study. On the table lay the brown-paper parcel, still unopened. Billy Bunter picked it up, thrust it under his arm, and quitted the study.

A brilliant brain-wave had occurred to him. He would tell all the fellows that he had succeeded in borrowing the "Annual" from Mr. Quelch; and he would offer to read extracts from it aloud, in the junior Common-room, to all who paid twopence for the privilege.

Swiftly the news was broadcast that Billy Bunter had the "Holiday Annual" in his possession, and was going to give a "twopenny reading."

An eager crowd flocked into the junior Common-room. Billy Bunter stood in the doorway, collecting their twopences as they came in. But he didn't collect so many twopences as he had hoped. Lots of fellows refused to pay, and Bunter was helpless. He could not eject them from the Common-room by force.

Soon the room was packed. All eyes were fixed on the brown-paper parcel which Bunter carried, and clamorous shouts arose.

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Open the parcel, and get to business!"

Billy Bunter faced the crowd.

"Lend me a knife, somebody!" he said.

Dick Russell promptly obliged, and the assembled throng waited breathlessly while Bunter severed the string. He then pulled out the volume that was inside the brown paper, and glanced at the title. A great gasp of dismay escaped him, for the title was not the "Greyfriars Holiday Annual." It was "A Comprehensive Treatise on the Works of Thucydides."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Bunter. "What a sell!"

The fellows were on their feet now. And the title of the book could be plainly seen by all. An angry roar arose, swelling in volume like the thunder of the sea.

"Spoofted!" shouted Micky Desmond. "Faith, an' we've paid twopence apiece to listen to a lot of highbrow tosh! That's not the 'Holiday Annual' at all, at all!"

"I—I say, you fellows—" began Bunter, in feeble tones.

"Bump him!" bellowed Bolsover major.

Many hands were fastened upon the unfortunate Owl of the Remove, and he was bumped with great vigour and heartiness on the floor of the Common-room. And the victim's howls of anguish might have been heard almost in Friardale. Bunter was paying the penalty for having been Too Premature!

[Supplement iv.]



(Continued from page 12.)

likely you won't find him. Ten to one they've killed him already—savage brutes, you know. So why not take it easy?"

Major Cherry did not answer that question. He walked away with his cigar, leaving the juniors to finish their breakfast. Billy Bunter cast an indignant blink after him, and then blinked round at the juniors.

"Well, I like that!" he grumbled. "If those are your pater's manners, Bob Cherry—"

"Got anything to say about my pater?" asked Bob, in a tone like the rumble of distant thunder.

"Oh! Nunno!" said Bunter hastily. "Shut up, then."

Billy Bunter grumbled and shut up. He indemnified himself with a tremendous breakfast, and was a little comforted to learn that he was not expected to walk to the station. With bag and baggage, the Greyfriars party arrived at the Constantine station in good time, and boarded the express for the south.

As they settled down in their seats for the long journey, a smiling, dusky face, with flashing white teeth, grinned at them from the train corridor.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, that honest Johnny again!" said Bob.

Ibrahim grinned and salaamed.

"You go to El Kantara?" he asked.

"We pass through it," said Bob.

"You go on to Biskra?"

"That's it."

"At Biskra you want a guide, and there are no guides honest, excepting Ibrahim. I come with noble gentlemen."

"Hook it," said Bob, laughing.

The major came along the corridor with newspapers under his arm.

He rapped out a word in Arabic, and Ibrahim vanished. The express moved out of Constantine, towards the mighty mountains to the south, and the Greyfriars party concluded that they had seen the last of Honest Ibrahim. On that point, however, they were mistaken. Possibly business in Ibrahim's line was not flourishing in Constantine, or perhaps he judged the party to be worth attaching himself to. When the train stopped at El Guerrah, and fruit-sellers and newspaper-boys came along shouting their wares, Bob Cherry looked out of the window and signed to a fat Arab with a tray of large, luscious oranges. A lithe figure in gold-bruided jacket and bright blue trousers darted across, and darted back with an armful of oranges.

"Oh, my hat! Ibrahim!" ejaculated Bob.

Honest Ibrahim grinned and passed the oranges up through the train window to the juniors.

They could not help laughing. Ibrahim's persistence had its entertaining side.

"Fine good oranges, my fine gentlemen!" said Ibrahim. "You like um. Ayez conformance. Ibrahim do your business."

"Tell the man to come here and be paid!" said Bob.

"You give me fifty francs and I pay him."

"I don't think!" grinned Bob.

"You give me twenty francs and I pay him."

"Cut it out!"

"You not trust Ibrahim?" asked the guide sorrowfully. "All the English and Americans say that Ibrahim the only honest guide in Algeria. All others are rascals. Only Ibrahim he honest. You see my testimonials. You read um."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry tossed a ten-franc note to the orange-seller. The fat Arab salaamed thrice in acknowledgment. The train moved on, and the juniors wondered whether the discouraged Ibrahim had remained at El Guerrah. But Ibrahim was a fellow not easily discouraged. Evidently he had marked out the Greyfriars fellows for his prey. After El Guerrah had been left behind the juniors strolled into the train corridor, looking at the passing scenery from the windows. The line crossed a rocky plateau, dreary with endless salt lakes that glimmered in the hot sun, with here and there a group of dirty tents belonging to Arab herdsmen.

"That's a jolly big lake," remarked Bob Cherry, as the train glided along an embankment by glimmering salt waters. A flamingo rose on the wing and fluttered over the train. "I wonder what that's called, if it's called anything?"

"My fine gentleman, that is Lake Tinsilt," said a soft voice, and the juniors stared round and found Honest Ibrahim at their elbow. He salaamed and grinned, showing his flashing teeth.

"Well, my hat! This fellow is going to haunt us all the way to the desert," said Nugent.

"Very good guide, sar," said Ibrahim.

"Show you all things from the train. Them mountains, they are the Tell—"

"Give us a rest!"

"I say, you fellows, is there a dining-car on this train?" asked Billy Bunter, blinking out of the carriage into the corridor.

Ibrahim salaamed to Bunter.

"In this season, non," he said. "In winter, yes. But you shall trust Ibrahim to do your business."

"Well, I like this!" said Bunter indignantly. "Are we going to starve till we get to Biskra, you fellows?"

"Lunch in the carriage, fathead!" said Bob. "It was packed at the hotel in Constantine."

"I'd rather dine in a dining-car," grumbled Bunter.

"Change into another train at the next stop," suggested Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

The Greyfriars party lunched in the carriage, and after that Billy Bunter settled down to a nap. Major Cherry sat and read his papers, probably thinking over the campaign ahead of him—the struggle that was to come with Sheikh Mustapha ben Mohammed. What was a holiday to the chums of Greyfriars was grim business with the major, and while the juniors were looking at the strange sights about them the old soldier was giving a great deal of thought to the struggle that was to come in the trackless desert beyond Biskra.

At El Kantara there was a stop, and the travellers alighted for tea at the railway restaurant. Ibrahim graded them to it, not that they needed guiding. But by this time Honest Ibrahim was taking it for granted that he was officially attached to the party, and he hovered round them incessantly, performing small services.

After leaving El Kantara the train ran through tunnels, into a magnificent gorge, where the indefatigable Ibrahim pointed out a Roman bridge. The sun was setting beyond the mountains, and a

pleasant coolness descended, pleasant enough after the blazing heat of the day. Harry Wharton & Co. looked incessantly from the windows, entranced by the wild scenery, wilder and wilder as they drew nearer and nearer to the desert.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a giddy caravan!" exclaimed Bob.

A train of camels, with their riders, wound its way along a mountain gorge a short distance from the line.

The juniors looked at them with almost breathless interest. This was real Africa. The gaunt, shambling camels, with their savage-looking attendants, in dirty burrous and turban. A horseman rode with the camel-drivers, a dusky Arab, with handsome, aquiline features. Harry Wharton's eyes fixed on him. The train was puffing up an incline at a low speed, and the caravan wound along the gorge within a biscuit's throw of the line for several minutes.

"That fellow!" muttered Wharton.

Bob uttered an exclamation.

"Bou Saoud!"

That name brought the major out of the carriage into the corridor.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

Harry Wharton pointed.

"It's Bou Saoud, sir. He's riding with the caravan," he said.

"By gad!"

Evidently the Spahi had not sunk under the waters of the Gulf of Stora. Apparently he had not ventured to take the railway to the south, but he had lost no time. He was riding along with a weary air, his chin sunk as if in fatigue or deep thought. The major's eyes gleamed as he looked at him from the train.

"That is the scoundrel!" he said. "He is bound for the tents of his father—Mustapha ben Mohammed—with the news that we are here, and that he has failed to stop us."

The Spahi glanced up at the passing train.

He caught sight of the white men's faces at the windows, and evidently recognised the party. A black look came over his dusky face, and his black eyes glinted with hate. He raised a brown hand and shook his clenched fist at the train. A few moments more, and the great rocks of the gorge swallowed the caravan from sight.

Major Cherry went back to his carriage with a thoughtful brow. He had felt fairly certain that Bou Saoud was still on the track, and now he was sure of it. Mustapha, the desert sheik, would be warned of the major's coming, warned that an attempt was to be made to rescue his prisoner—once the schoolboy Arab of Greyfriars in far-off England.

Honest Ibrahim had looked at the Spahi, too, and now he blinked curiously at the Greyfriars juniors.

"That is Bou Saoud," he said. "My fine gentlemen know him?"

"We know he is a scoundrel," said Bob.

"If he is your enemy, my fine gentleman, you take care not to go into desert," said Ibrahim. "Bou Saoud is well known. He is son of Mustapha ben Mohammed, the desert sheik. He has been officer in the Spahis. He is a terrible enemy. If he is enemy, for your life I give nothing if you shall meet him in the mountains or the desert, my fine gentleman."

"Oh, we can take care of ourselves!" said Bob carelessly.

"Bien! But you do not know the desert," said Ibrahim. "Life is very cheap in the desert." He snapped his brown fingers. "Bou Saoud would not

give that for your life. It is said that he has killed many. There are white bones in the desert where Bou Saoud has passed."

"Nice character," murmured Nugent. "He has served with the French, but he hates the French!" said Ibrahim. "He was turned out of the Spahis. Some day he will be sheik of the Tahar, the tribe of Mustapha ben Mohammed. It is said that he killed the old sheik, Yusuf, in the desert, and buried his son, Ali, in the sands by the oasis. I do not know. But it is said."

Ibrahim spoke in a low voice, as if fearful that the Spahi could hear him. It was evident that the guide regarded Bou Saoud with a very genuine fear.

"That is the hill of the Abmar Khadon," said Ibrahim. "Soon we shall be in Biskra now, my fine gentlemen!"

"That looks like a river," said Bob, staring through the dusk.

"That is the Oued Biskra—the river of Biskra—"

"Nearly in now," said the major, looking out of the carriage. "Better get your bags together. Here, wake up, Bunter!"

"Yaw-aw-aw! I'm hungry!" "I show you to fine grand hotel, my fine gentlemen!" said Ibrahim eagerly. "You shall trust Ibrahim, and he will do your business, yes!"

"Nonsense!" said the major curtly. "I say, you fellows," said Bunter, rubbing his eyes. "I'm jolly hungry! Beastly long journey, what? Rotten train! Bumps like anything! I don't see why we couldn't have done it by car!"

"Never thought of calling at Bunter Court before we left, and asking your pater to lend us the Rolls-Royce!" said Bob Cherry regretfully. "Why didn't you think of it, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry!" "I suppose we shan't see Marjorie this evening," remarked Wharton.

"We'll trot round and call on Hazel in the morning."

"Yes, rather!"

Billy Bunter smirked.

"I say, you fellows, rather a pleasant surprise for Marjorie to see us out here!" he said.

"Well, it won't be much of a surprise, as I wrote to Hazel and told him we were coming," said Bob.

"Did you mention that I was coming?"

"Nummo!"

"That's rather rotten!" said Bunter.

"It would have given Marjorie something to look forward to!"

"What?"

"Still, it will be a joyful surprise to her," said Bunter thoughtfully. "She will be no end bucked when she sees me, after supposing that only you fellows were coming!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And there's one thing we'd better settle now, Bob Cherry!" said Bunter firmly.

"What's that, fatty?"

"I shall take Marjorie about a good deal at Biskra—"

"Will you?" said Bob grimly.

"Yes, she will like it, of course, and I don't mind. I always was a lady's man, you know. I don't want you butting in!"

"Butting in!" repeated Bob.

"That's it! You always had a way at Greyfriars of butting in where Marjorie was concerned," explained Bunter.

"You never could see, somehow, that she preferred my society! Conceit, I suppose!"

"I certainly never could see that," agreed Bob. "Neither could anybody."

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else, I fancy, excepting a fat, podgy, conceited little toad!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Dry up, for goodness' sake, Bunter!" said Harry.

"Yah! I want this thing understood!" said Bunter. "Marjorie will be glad to see me, and I dare say she will stand you fellows, as you'll be with me. But I want no butting in! I dare say you can't help being a bit jealous—I can stand that. Good-looking fellows always have to stand more or less of it—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But it's got to be understood," said Bunter firmly, "that Marjorie's got to be left to me. It's not my fault that she's a bit spooney in my direction—"

"What!" roared Bob.

"A bit spooney— Yarooooooh!" roared Bunter suddenly.

William George Bunter was strewn along the corridor, hardly knowing how he had got there. He was still sitting and roaring when the train stopped in the station, and the Greyfriars party landed—in Biskra at last.

Honest Ibrahim haunted the party along the platform. He poured out a ceaseless stream of English, French, and Arabic, in his eagerness to carry the Greyfriars party off to an hotel, and to receive from the proprietor thereof the handsome "tip" he would have earned by bringing in such a numerous party. But the major seemed deaf, and Ibrahim's stream of mingled languages passed unheeded.

"Cut it out, old brown bean!" said Bob Cherry, at last. "We're not going to a giddy hotel in Biskra at all!"

Ibrahim's dusky face fell.

"Fine gentlemen not going to hotel!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha! No; you see, my father engaged a house for us—a giddy villa—and we're going there," explained Bob, with the idea of putting the anxious guide out of his misery, as it were.

"Honest Ibrahim come with the fine gentlemen—"

"Bosh! Run away and play, old man!"

"To-morrow you will want guide—honest guide; and there is only one honest guide in Algeria!" persisted Ibrahim. "Now I guide you to your beautiful villa, you tell me name of it."

"Villa Mimosa," said Bob. "But—"

"I know him; he is on the road to the desert," said Ibrahim. "Know Biskra very well—know all Algeria and Tunis—know everything. On the desert road there is Villa Mimosa, and next there is Villa des Fleurs, which is last house on the road. Oh, yes! Ibrahim know all!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob. "Harry, isn't the Villa des Fleurs the name of the Hazelden's place here?"

"That's it," said Harry.

"Then we shall be jolly well next door!"

"That's good!"

"Come!" interposed the major.

The Greyfriars party left the station; but Honest Ibrahim, though his services as a guide were obviously not required, followed on. Honest Ibrahim was a stickler.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Sleeping Beauty!

"MARJORIE!"

"Yes, Clara!"

"They ought to be coming soon!"

Marjorie Hazelden smiled.

It was morning—the sunny morning of Biskra. There were shady spots in the

gardens of the Villa des Fleurs, and in one shady spot the two Cliff House girls sat in canvas chairs. Hazeldene, of the Greyfriars Remove, was strolling in the garden, with his hands in his pockets, and his straw hat on the back of his head.

"I shall be glad to see them," went on Miss Clara. "We've seen all the sights of Biskra, Marjorie—all that your father will let us see, at any rate! I'm getting a little fed-up with Biskra!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"And your father won't let us go into the desert," said Clara. "I want to see the desert, and to see the Arabs on their native heath. When Harry and Bob and the rest are here, I shall make them get up an excursion into the desert."

"Perhaps!" assented Marjorie.

"No perhaps about it! I'm going to!" said Miss Clara, in her decided way. "I've never seen a sheik yet—a real live sheik! I want to see a sheik before we go home."

Hazeldene came to a halt before the two girls. He grinned.

"There's a giddy sheik in Biskra," he said. "The man who lets out donkeys calls himself a sheik."

Miss Clara sniffed.

"I mean a desert sheik—a ferocious Arab chief," she answered. "Somebody like Mustapha ben Mohammed, whom they talk about so much in Biskra. He has a camp in the oasis only a dozen miles away, I believe. You've been there, Hazel?"

Hazel nodded.

"Yes; I've seen him," he said. "A savage-looking old Johnny—and his camp is jolly smelly, too! I fancy the tents are full of fleas. Most Arab tents are!"

Miss Clara made a grimace.

It was her first visit to Africa, and she had rather romantic ideas of the desert Arabs—founded largely upon a poem she had learned to recite in earlier years, called "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed." Smelly tents, with fleas in them, did not fit into the romantic picture at all.

Hazel chuckled and strolled away towards the house. Miss Clara leaned back in her chair, and regarded the cloudless blue sky that stretched away over the wide desert she longed to explore.

Behind the girls' chairs was the wall that separated the garden from the adjoining grounds of the Villa Mimosa. It was a low stone wall, topped with a hedge of trees overhanging it in thick shady green.

"My hat!" said Miss Clara suddenly.

"Is that thunder?"

Marjorie sat up and listened.

A low, rumbling sound, like the faint mutterings of distant thunder, came to her ears.

There was not a sign of a cloud on the sky. It was one of the finest mornings of Biskra, where the mornings are almost always fine.

"It isn't thunder," said Marjorie, puzzled. "It comes from the other garden, I think."

"Then what is it?" said Miss Clara.

"Some animal grunting—a camel, perhaps—"

"I know what it sounds like," said Clara Trevlyn, laughing. "Do you remember when Bunter fell asleep at the picnic at Cliff House last term. He snored just like that."

Marjorie laughed.

"I'm jolly well going to see," added Clara.

She rose from her chair, drew it close to the stone wall, and stepped on it. Through the green boughs she looked down into the adjoining garden.

Then there was a low, rippling laugh.

"Oh, my hat! Look here, Marjorie."

"What is it?"

"Somebody you know."

"What!"

"Come and look."

Marjorie stood on her chair beside Clara, and looked over the wall. Then she started and laughed.

In the adjoining garden, under the shade of the trees, several cushions had been laid on the ground. On those cushions was a fat form deep in slumber. A large pair of spectacles caught and reflected the rays of the sun that filtered through the foliage.

"Bunter!" murmured Marjorie.

"Billy Bunter!" smiled Clara. "Then they've come, and they've brought Bunter with them. Why on earth did they bring Bunter? Doesn't he look a bute?"

Billy Bunter, unconscious of two pairs of pretty eyes regarding him, snored on. Bunter had put in a good night's sleep after his journey to Biskra; but Bunter could do with a great deal of sleep. After breakfast he had retired to this shady spot for a further nap. Indeed, next to eating, sleeping was Bunter's great solace.

"I'll wake him up and make him jump," said Clara.

She slipped nimbly over the stone wall, and dropped into the garden of the Villa Mimosa. With soft footsteps she approached the fat junior of Greyfriars. Marjorie watched her, smiling. Clara bent over the fat junior and rapped out:

"Bunter!"

She expected Bunter's eyes to open with a stare of amazement. But Bunter's eyes did not open. He was in deep slumber, and little short of a cannon-shot would have awakened him.

"Oh, my hat!" said Clara. "Shall I shake him, Marjorie?"

"Oh, Clara! No."

Miss Clara's eyes gimmered. She came back quickly to the wall.

"Give me my bag over," she said.

"It's got the crayons in it—you remember, the crayons I bought in the Arcade yesterday. That Arab bounder would sell them to me, and I didn't want them. Now they will come in useful."

"But what—"

"Buck up!" interrupted Clara.

Marjorie passed the little bag over the wall. Clara opened it and picked out a bundle of crayons. Then she bent over William George Bunter again.

"Clara!" whispered Marjorie, in alarm.

"Quiet!"

"But I say—"

"Chuck it!" said Clara.

"Oh dear!" said Marjorie, laughing in spite of herself as Miss Clara set to work.

Billy Bunter snored on. A light touch on his fat face was not likely to awaken him. Indeed, a very rough shaking would have been required to jerk Bunter out of the embrace of Morpheus.

Miss Clara began with a crimson crayon. In a minute or two Billy Bunter's fat little nose was a bright crimson.

Then she placed blue circles round his eyes, and blue spots on his fat cheeks and his podgy chin.

The rest of his fat face was covered with cross-cross work in a brilliant green.

By the time Miss Clara had finished, Billy Bunter's aspect was startling.

He snored on contentedly.

Miss Clara stood up, with her head on one side, surveying her handiwork critically.

"Do you think that will do, Marjorie?"

"Oh, Clara!" gasped Marjorie.

A powerful voice echoed through the garden.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter! Where are you, Bunter?"

Miss Clara gave a jump.



Miss Clara began with a crimson crayon. In a minute or two Billy Bunter's fat little nose was a bright crimson. Then she placed blue circles round his eyes, and blue spots on his fat cheeks and podgy chin. By the time Miss Clara had finished the fat junior's aspect was startling. He snored on contentedly. "Do you think that will do, Marjorie?" "Oh, Clara!" gasped Marjorie, laughing in spite of herself. (See Chapter 10.)

"My hat! That's Bob!"

In a few seconds Miss Clara was over the wall again, and the two girls had disappeared from sight. Billy Bunter snored on, blissfully unconscious of the fact that his podgy countenance now boasted a colour scheme that out-rivalled the celebrated coat of Joseph.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Astonishes the Natives!

"WHERE'S that duffer?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, he wanted to come."

"Bother him!"

"The esteemed and execrable Bunter is always a bother," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But he is in the garden somewhere, and we shall find him."

"Asleep somewhere, most likely," said Harry Wharton. "Hallo, here's Ibrahim. Have you seen Bunter, Ibrahim?"

Honest Ibrahim saluted and grinned. "I find him," he said. "You trust Ibrahim—he do your business, my fine gentlemen."

"Bother him," grunted Johnny Bull again.

Major Cherry had left the Villa Mimosa immediately after breakfast to go to the Maric. And the Faoune Five had decided to call at the next villa that morning and advise Marjorie of their arrival. Bunter, of course, wanted to go with them, and, equally of course, he was not to be found when it was time to start.

The juniors spread through the gardens looking for him. Bob Cherry's powerful voice echoed among the trees.

"Bunter! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter!"

Billy Bunter awoke and yawned. He sat up on the cushions and yawned again. Then he rose to his feet.

"I say, you fellows!" he called out.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is! Time, Bunter, you fat bounder! What do you mean by keeping us waiting like this! Oh, my hat! Great Scott! Bob Cherry stared at the Owl of the Remove and burst into a roar. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"What are you cackling at, you silly ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob.

"You silly chump—"

"Oh, my hat! What have you done that for, you duffer? Are you off your rocker?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"What have I done, you silly dummy?" hooted Bunter. "What do you mean, you chump?"

"Found him, Bob?" asked Wharton, coming up. "Look here, Bunter—Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" Wharton went off into a wild yell as he sighted Bunter's decorated face.

Billy Bunter glared at them in angry amazement. He could not see his own face, naturally, and he was quite unaware that there was anything amiss with it.

"What's this game, you dummies?" he howled. "What are you yelling about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the giddy joke?" asked Frank Nugent, coming up with Hurree

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Janet Ram Singh. "What— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the nabob. "You silly chums!" shrieked Bunter. "What have you been up to, you dunder!" roared Johnny Bull, the last of the Co. to arrive. "Nothing, you ass! What do you mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five rocked with laughter. Bunter, with a bright crimson nose, and blue circling round his eyes, and green crisscrosses all over his face, was a startling sight, and it was too much for them. They yelled till they almost wept.

The Owl of the Remove stared at them in astonishment and growing indignation.

"You silly owls!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you ready to go?" demanded Bunter. "I'm ready, if that's what you want. Can't you stop cackling?"

"You'd better go in and get a wash first!" roared Bob.

"Rot! I've washed already. And I'm not dirty, like you fellows. I don't need such a lot of washing as you do."

"Your face!" gasped Wharton.

"My face?" repeated Bunter. "I dare say you wish you had a face like it, and chance it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did you get it like that?" howled Nugent.

"Like what?" snorted Bunter.

"Like it is! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Bunter crossly. "Look here, I'm ready! Let's get off!"

And Bunter rolled away angrily towards the house. The juniors followed him, still howling with laughter. It was evident that someone had been playing tricks on Bunter while he slept, though they could not guess who the delinquent was. And the Owl of the Remove was still in blissful unconsciousness of what had happened.

Bunter passed Ibrahim on the path, and the honest one fairly jumped at the sight of him.

"Oh, my fine gentleman!" he ejaculated.

"Well, what's the matter with you, you black boulder?" snorted Bunter, glaring at him. "Why, the cheeky

cad's laughing—like those other cads! Look here, you cheeky rotter!"

Honest Ibrahim backed away, dissolved in laughter. Bunter gave him a threatening glare, and tramped on towards the house. In the shady stone arcade before the villa were a couple of Arab servants—and they stared at Bunter with wide-open eyes. Then, to Bunter's astonishment and wrath, they burst into laughter and retreated into the house, still laughing.

"What the thump—the matter with all these silly fools!" exclaimed the Owl of the Remove, in intense exasperation. "I say, you fellows, are you coming? I'm going to start now."

"Ha, ha, ha! You're not going like that!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Like what?" shrieked Bunter.

"Go and get a wash, you fat dummy!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Rubbish! Look here, are you coming? You needn't come, for the matter of that. Marjorie doesn't want to see you; she wants to see me. But if you're going to butt in, come along. I'm not waiting for you."

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton, as the fat junior started for the gate on the road.

"Rats!"

Bunter marched on. The juniors looked at one another in helpless merriment.

"He—he—he's going to pay a morning call—like that!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Shut up!"

"I tell you—"

"Cheese it!"

"Your face—"

"Mind your own business!"

Bunter hurled the gate open and marched out. The juniors followed him, gasping with merriment. Bunter, with his head very erect, and a lofty frown on his fat brow, marched along the dusty road towards the gate of the Villa des Fleurs, which was about fifty yards away.

"He—he—he's going—like that!" moaned Bob Cherry.

"Let him rip!" growled Johnny Bull.

"He won't take a tip—let him get on with it!"

The Famous Five followed Bunter, wiping away their tears. On the dusty road a marabout mounted on a camel

came loping in from the desert. The man stared at Bunter, and struck his camel a sudden blow, and went flying on into Biskra, evidently in a state of great alarm. Obviously he had taken Bunter for a madman—perhaps a dangerous one.

Bunter did not heed, or even notice, the alarmed marabout. He marched on laughingly, regardless.

Under a palm-tree beside the road, a flower-seller had sat down to rest, with his basket of bright flowers before him. Bunter paused as he saw him. The idea occurred to him of taking in a couple of nosegays for presentation to Marjorie and Clara. Bunter felt that this was quite a courtly idea, and bound to show the Cliff House girls how much nicer he was than the other fellows.

So he stopped to address the flower-seller. The man, an unclean Arab in a very dirty burnous, stared up at him, and his black eyes rolled in horror and alarm.

Such a face as Bunter's had certainly never bent over him before. The Arab seemed rooted to the ground.

Bunter picked up two bunches of gaudy flowers.

"How much?" he asked.

"Allah!" gasped the Arab.

"I mean, combien?" growled Bunter.

"Why the thump can't you speak English? Combien?"

The Arab did not answer—he only stared at Bunter in dire dread. Suddenly he leaped up, and, regardless of his basket of flowers, started off down the road, in the blazing sunshine, at a frantic run.

Bunter stared after him in astonishment.

"You potty dunder!" he roared. "I want to buy your flowers. Can't you understand? Well, my hat!"

The alarmed Arab vanished.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Bunter, old man, you'll be run in soon if you go about frightening the natives like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did I frighten him?" howled Bunter.

"Your face—"

"You cheeky rotter!" Bunter glared at the Famous Five. "It's simply sickening that a fellow can't be good-looking without having all this rotten jealousy and silly jokes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm jolly well taking these flowers," said Bunter. "If the potty ass doesn't choose to stay to be paid for them, that's his look-out."

"Put the money in the basket," said Nugent. "He will come back when you've taken your face away."

"Rats!"

Johnny Bull gave a snort.

"Put the money in the basket, or put the flowers back, you fat rotter!" he said. "Or else I'll punch you!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Never mind the giddy nosegays!" said Bob Cherry. "Look here, Bunter, you must really go in and get a wash before you call on the Hazeldenes—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Bunter marched on wrathfully. He reached the gate of the Villa des Fleurs, and gave a crash with the bronze knocker. The gate was opened by an Arab porter.

He stared at Bunter for a moment, rolling black eyes in alarm, and then crashed the gate shut. Bunter jumped back just in time to save his crimson nose.

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There was a clatter of horse's hoofs on the road. A white turban gleamed above the stone wall of the garden. "Look!" shouted Nugent. "Bou Saoud!" The horseman halted in the road and rose in his stirrups. He waved a brown hand to the juniors on the veranda and shouted: "Major Cherry is gone—gone to his death in the desert. You will find him where you find bones picked white by the jackals!" And the Spahi rode on laughing. (See Chapter 12.)

"Why, the—the cheeky beast!" gasped Bunter. "What the thump does he mean by that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter crashed at the bronze knocker again.

"Open this gate, you cheeky Arab rotter!" he roared.

"You go away!" came the porter's quavering voice from within. "Vous allez—you go—or I fetch gun."

Bang, bang, bang went the knocker at the gate. Bunter was utterly exasperated by this time. He had found his morning's experiences amazing and engaging. He banged furiously at the gate.

A voice was heard within—a voice Bunter recognised as that of Mr. Hazeldene, Marjorie's father.

"What is the matter here, Achmet?" A babble of French and Arabic followed.

"Open the gate," said Mr. Hazeldene. The Arab porter reluctantly obeyed.

"Mr. Hazeldene!" gasped Bunter.

"Why—what—"

Mr. Hazeldene stood in the gateway and stared at Bunter. He stared as if he could not believe his eyes.

"Who—who—who are you?" he stammered.

"Don't you know me?" howled Bunter.

"Certainly not. You speak English—are you English?" exclaimed the startled old gentleman. "What do you mean by coming here? Are you mad?"

"Mad?" stammered Bunter. "Wharrer you mean? I'm Bunter—I'm Hazel's pal, Bunter. I—I—I—"

"Bunter! A Greyfriars boy?"

"Yes!" gasped the Owl of the Remove.

"Then what do you mean by coming here in that state?"

"That—that state! What state?" babbled Bunter.

"With your face painted in that ridiculous manner!" exclaimed Mr. Hazeldene sternly. "Is this a silly joke, or what?"

Bunter fairly staggered.

"Pip-pip-pip—" he stammered. "Pip-

pip-painted—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five. They came breathlessly up, and Mr. Hazeldene gave them a kind nod of welcome.

"Wharton—Cherry—what does this mean?" he asked. "What is the matter with Bunter? Is he out of his senses?"

"Not more than usual, sir," said Bob, laughing. "He's been asleep in the garden this morning, and somebody seems to have coloured his chivvy while he was snoozing—"

"What?" howled Bunter.

Two girlish forms appeared in the gateway. Marjorie was smiling—Miss Clara chuckling.

"Dear me! Is that Bunter?" asked Miss Clara. "What a colour you've got, Bunter! Is it the African sun?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the smiling faces, wondering whether he was on his head or his heels. Miss Clara drew a pocket-mirror from her little bag, and held it up before him. Then William George Bunter saw his face.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Mr. Hazeldene burst into a laugh.

"Come in, my boy," he said. "Hazel, come here—take Bunter away and let him wash his face."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Hazel. "Oh, my hat!"

"Come, come, take Bunter in—"

Hazel, still howling with laughter, led the dazed Owl of the Remove away to the house. Harry Wharton & Co. walked in cheerily with Marjorie and Clara.

"But how did that happen to Bunter?" asked Miss Clara, closing one eye at Marjorie.

"Goodness knows," said Bob. "Somebody's been playing tricks on him, for he's how-blessed if I know how—or who—"

"One of you naughty boys?" asked Miss Clara.

"Not guilty," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We found him like that—a regular sleeping beauty—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Possibly someone saw him asleep over the wall," suggested Miss Clara demurely.

"Possibly—"

"You!" ejaculated Bob,

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the clumps of the Remove yelled again.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Left Behind!

"WHERE'S the pater?"

"Gone!"

It was a week later. In the red sunset, a tired but cheery party had ridden up to the Villa des Fleurs, where Marjorie and Clara and Hazel went in, and Harry Wharton & Co. went on to the major's house. It had been a cheery day for the chums of Greyfriars: the party had visited "Vieux Biskra"—the "old town," inhabited by natives in their clay-built huts amid the date-trees of the oasis. It had been a happy excursion, and the juniors and the Cliff House girls had enjoyed it—none the less because Buly Bunter had chosen to remain at home.

Bunter had somehow guessed, or suspected, that Clara was the cause of the highly decorative appearance he had put in, on the occasion when he had astonished the natives. Bunter was offended. He resolved to punish the clumps of Cliff House. He punished them by giving them the "marble eye."

So when the party was made up for Vieux Biskra, Bunter loftily declined to join it. As a matter of fact, he preferred to lounge about, and eat and doze alternately, rather than exert himself in the African heat. And he felt that the excursion would soon fall upon Marjorie and Clara without his fascinating presence. And it would serve them right!

Harry Wharton & Co. found Bunter in the veranda, with a glass of lemon-quash at his elbow, and a stack of sweet little sticky cakes from the shops in the Rue Berthe. Bunter seemed very comfortable and lazy, and certainly very sticky.

Bob Cherry asked at once where his father was. During the week the major had been very busy. The juniors knew

that he was preparing for his expedition into the desert, and that he had obtained some kind of a force from the French military authorities to help him in the task of seeking for Ali ben Yusef.

All the Famous Five were determined that somehow they were not going to be left out.

Every day there was some excursion with Marjorie and Clara; but every morning the juniors found time to practise in the shooting-gallery in the Rue Berthe—getting ready for the campaign, as Bob expressed it.

Probably the major knew of their determination. In fact, he could not have been in any doubt about it.

But nothing was said on the subject, so far. Only when the time came to start, the chums of Greyfriars intended to put it very plain to Major Cherry. And with all his grim sternness, the major was a good-natured man, and they did not really think that he would hold out in the long run. Ali ben Yusef had been their pal at Greyfriars, and they had a right to join in the search for him. As for the danger of facing the savage Arab sheik in the desert, that was nothing to them.

There was a lurking grin on Billy Bunter's face as he answered Bob's question and sipped his lemon-squash.

Apparently, the Owl of the Remove was entertained by something. Bob stared at him.

"Gone?" he repeated, not understanding. "Gone out, do you mean?"

"Gone off!" grinned Bunter.

"What do you mean, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Major Cherry has not left Biskra, I suppose?"

"He, he, he!"

The Famous Five were all looking serious now. They gathered round Bunter, with far from amicable looks.

"Look here, tell us what's happened you fat frog," growled Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he!"

"My esteemed and disgusting Bunter will—"

"He, he, he! You're left!" chuckled Bunter.

"Will you tell me—" roared Bob.

"He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry grasped the fat junior by the shoulder, and jerked him out of the chair. He jammed him against the wall of the house, with a bump that made Bunter gasp. Bob's face was grim.

"Now, you fat dummy—"

"Yaroooo!"

"Where's my father?" shouted Bob.

"Ow! Leggo!"

"By Jove! I—I'll—"

"Ow! Leggo! He's gone! Don't I keep on telling you he's gone!" howled Bunter. "He left a note for you, you beast!"

"Why couldn't you say so before, you fat rascal?"

"Yow-ow! Leggo!"

"Where's the note?"

Bob Cherry released Bunter, glowering at him. The Owl of the Remove proceeded to fumble in his pockets.

"Blessed if I haven't lost it—"

"What!" yelled Bob ferociously.

"I—I mean, here it is!" Bunter found the note very quickly—Bob Cherry was looking quite dangerous. "Here you are, you beast. It—it came open by accident—somehow—"

Bob grabbed the note from the Owl's fat fingers. The Famous Five read it together, their faces growing longer as they read:

"Dear Bob,—It is not likely that I shall see you again for some time. All is ready now, and I am starting, with a body of French cavalry to see me through, so you need have no uneasiness, my boy. I am sorry to have to leave you and your friends behind, but the desert is no place for schoolboys, as I have told you, though you did not seem convinced."

"Oh, my hat!" interjected Bob. The letter continued:

"You will remain at the villa until I return to Biskra. I hope you will have a good time. I learn that Mustapha ben Mohammed has shifted his camp from the Ziban, near Biskra, and gone south into the heart of the desert. This

means that Bou Saoud has reached him and warned him of my pursuit. But wherever he is, we shall follow him; and I hope to bring Ali safe and sound with me when I return."

"Until then, good-bye."

"Your affectionate

"FATHER."

Harry Wharton & Co. blinked at one another. This was the end of their determination not to be left out of the expedition in search of Ali ben Yusef.

"Done!" said Johnny Bull.

"The donefulness is terrific!"

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter. The Owl of the Remove seemed to find something very entertaining in the situation.

"Rotten!" said Harry Wharton. "I suppose your pater wanted to save argument, Bob! I had no end of arguments ready for him."

"Same here," said Bob, with a rueful grin. "I—I wish he'd let us go! He's in danger out there in the desert, and he—" Bob broke off, with a clouded brow.

"Well, we're bound to carry out orders, I suppose," said Harry. "We can get a jolly holiday in Biskra, if you come to that, Bud—"

"We shall get news of him soon, old fellow," said Frank Nugent.

Bob Cherry nodded. But the cloud did not leave his face. From the veranda he stared away across the desert—wide, illimitable, glowing hot in the setting sun. Far away across those sandy tracks his father was riding—riding into wild lands, among wild and savage people—into danger—perhaps to death. He would save Ali, he would return, or—Bob knew that there was an alternative. Mustapha ben Mohammed reigned over the wild Tahar tribe in the desert, amid the sands of the Sahara his word was law; and life was cheap in the desert.

Bob drew a deep breath.

"We'll wait here," he said. "We must! But—" He broke off, staring away across the desert again; but his comrades understood what he was thinking. The Sahara sands had swallowed up the major; but if he did not return there was one who would seek him, even to the death.

There was a clatter of horse's hoofs on the road. A white turban gleamed above the stone wall of the garden where it bordered the desert road. With a clatter and a jingle the horseman halted by the wall.

"Look!" shouted Nugent.

"Bou Saoud!"

The horseman halted in the road, rose in his stirrups, and stared over the wall towards the white villa. His black eyes flashed as they rested on the group of juniors on the veranda. Well they knew the handsome, mocking face of Bou Saoud, the Spahi.

He waved a brown hand to them and shouted:

"He is gone—gone to his death in the desert! You will find him where you find bones picked white by the jackals!"

And the Spahi rode on, laughing. In silence the juniors watched him galloping, till the sandy ridges of the Sahara hid him from sight.

THE END.

(What will happen to Major Cherry? Will he fall a victim to the merciless wrath of the usurper sheik, Mustapha ben Mohammed, or will he win through and restore Ali ben Yusef to his rightful place as Sheikh of the Tahar tribe? These questions are answered in next Monday's grand story—"The Call of the Desert." Don't on any account miss it, chums!)

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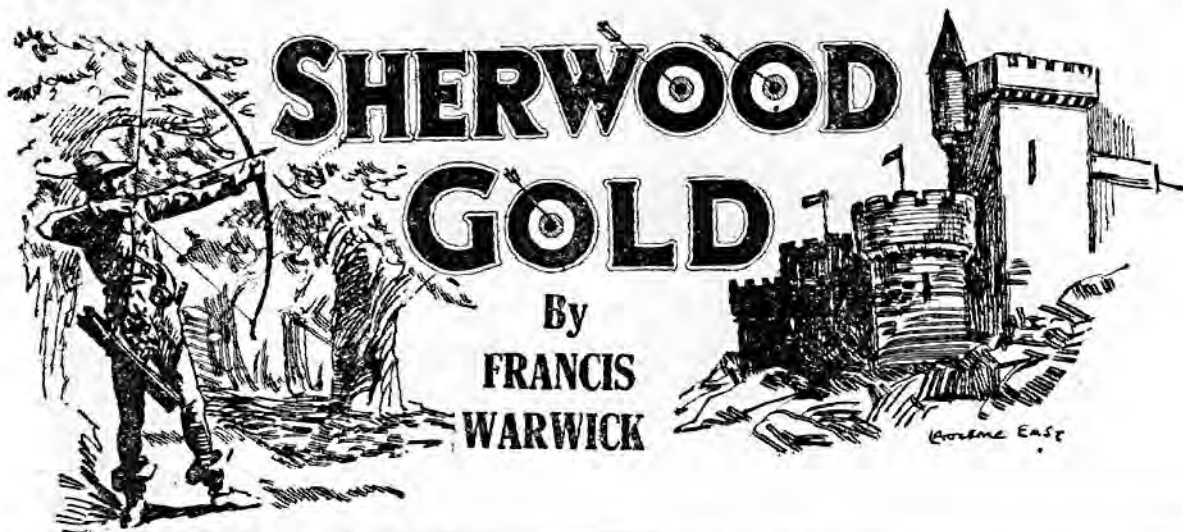
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INTRODUCTION.

TOM HADLEIGH, a youth of sixteen.
LANTERN, a careless adventurer and a wonderful swordsman.
ROBIN HOOD, chief of the band of outlaws who make their home in Sherwood Forest. *Friar Tuck, Little John, Lon Ransel, Alan-a-Dale, etc., members of the band.*
EARL HUGO OF CHARNDENE, known by the people of Nottingham on account of his tyrannies as the *Black Wolf*.
GILBERT DE VAUX, his kinsman.

Tom Hadleigh's real identity is wrapped in mystery. He is the possessor of a broken talisman of polished horn upon which is the inscription "The cave betwixt—a split oak—follow the venter—GOLD." Lon, the jester, declares that the other half of the talisman is held by Earl Hugo, and is convinced that could the two halves be put together the wording thereon would reveal the whereabouts of a wondrous treasure. Robin Hood, Tom, and the outlaws meet with many stirring adventures in their efforts to obtain Hugo's half of the talisman. Tom is captured by the Black Wolf, but he manages to escape, fleeing into the depths of the forest, locked to the lock of his own horse. In this condition he is found by the **BLIND MAN OF TARN**, who liberates him. Then the old blind hermit astonishes Tom with the story of his birth. The blind man swears that Tom is the rightful Earl of Charndene, that the Black Wolf is a usurper. He says that Tom bears a peculiar scar on his chest that will prove his identity. The scar is there sure enough and Tom, drinking in every word from the blind man's lips, suddenly discovers that **DE VAUX** and six men-at-arms have stealthily followed him to the hermit's cave. Tom springs to his feet, picks up his sword and, dashing out into the open, engages De Vaux in combat.

(Now read on.)

The Fall of the Blind Man of Tarn!

WHAT a fight that was! The sweat was streaming from us, our breath came hot and swift! Our blades rang with scarce a pause, and already were we both bleeding from many a scratch and cut, though neither was wounded sore.

Somehow, 'twas all rather like a dream to me. My brain still whirled with the wondrous thing that the blind man had told me, though scarce could I realise yet that in very truth was I Richard the earl! Ay, like some strange dream! And yet the knowledge of it gave me fresh life with which to fight; for how could I die, or let myself fall again into Hugo's hands ere the long, fierce struggle to regain my demesne from the usurper have even commenced?

Suddenly De Vaux whirled his long sword aloft, and brought it singing down above my head. With difficulty I parried the blow, and cut at his thigh. Sharp and shrill rang the steel upon his sword as he warded off the blow—and in a moment his sword had snapped in twain!

A shout broke from me, and back he leapt in panic, dragging from his belt the battle-axe that he carried.

For a moment I paused, loth to take the advantage of him. Then I shook the thought from me impatiently. Why should I waste false pity upon such a man?

Forward I sprang, whirling my sword. But I missed my footing upon the uneven ground, and in another

moment he had sent the sword flying from my grasp with a sweeping blow of his axe.

He was betwixt me and my weapon in an instant. With a shout of exultant triumph, he raised his axe on high and rushed upon me. I dragged my long knife from my belt, and waited grimly.

There was no chance of regaining my sword—already one of the men-at-arms had stepped forth and seized that. 'Twas battle-axe 'gainst poniard, and the advantage was with De Vaux.

His weapon cleaved the air like a glimmer of gold as the sunlight caught the steel. I sprang aside only just in time, striking up at him as I leaped. A cry broke from him as he felt my slender blade rip his hand.

Tossing the hair back from my brow, again I stood poised, awaiting his next onrush. But he stood still, panting, a snarl of rage upon his face, his dark eyes gleaming with hate as he watched me. For a moment I thought he was about to call upon his followers for aid; but his pride overcame the impulse, and cautiously he came towards me again.

Round and round we circled, each hoping for a chance to leap in. He, too, had dragged out a knife, and this he held in his left hand, the axe in his right. His lean, strong frame was like the stealthy form of some hunting animal.

"Surrender yourself, and I will not slay you!" he snarled. Then added, with a snarl: "My Lord Richard!"

I only laughed at that. Suddenly he leaped at me, and so

fierce was his assault that I needs must give ground. Back he drove me, back towards the mouth of the cave where crouched the Blind Man of Tarn!

At last my back was to the rock. How I longed for my good sword, then! But very vain was that hope, and I needs must defend myself as best I might. My poniard was but a sorry weapon 'gainst his battle-axe, but my teeth were tight clenched—I was resolved to sell my life dearly.

Of one thing was I determined. I would never allow myself to be carried prisoner to the Black Wolf!

He struck at me again, and missed. In a flash I saw my chance.

I sprang at him, my left hand closing on the handle of the axe above his own. He stabbed at me with the knife, but I parried the blow. We staggered in a fierce embrace—I heard hoarse shouts from his men, heard their running feet across the glade. Dropping my poniard, I drew back my right arm, and sent my fist crashing 'twixt his eyes.

He gave a queer grunt, falling in a limp heap at my feet. Ay, I had knocked him senseless!

In the blinking of an eye I had his axe in my hand. With my back to the rock, I faced the onrushing rogues with the axe half-raised, and a scornful laugh broke from me to see them halt, uncertain, upon the farther side of the glade.

"Come!" I cried mockingly to the coven brood. "Come and taste of the

same good cheer as your Lord de Vaux!"

They glowered upon me, muttering, as they stood there with their weapons gleaming. 'Twas mighty good to feel that those five men-at-arms feared me so!

But the cross-bowman I could not see. Then, all suddenly, I heard his voice, and on the instant the five knives to the fore drew swift aside, revealing the cross-bowman with his arblast raised, directed full at my heart!

I tried to leap aside, but my foot caught in the armpit of the senseless man at my feet, and I stumbled upon one knee in the mouth of the cave. I heard a gleeful shout from the cross-bowman as he turned his aim upon me in a moment. At any instant I thought to hear the sound of his accursed arblast—a sound that could but herald my death!

Ay, there was no avoiding death now. I thought, as, all exposed like some helpless creature cornered by the hunter, I tried to stoop to my feet. The end had come!

And then, all suddenly, there came a wild, mad cry, echoing strangely into the black recesses of the cave! A grey shadow came leaping 'twixt me and the cross-bowman—even as the deadly bolt flew forth to slay me, directed with unerring aim towards my heart!

Another cry—a horrid, unearthly shriek that curdled the blood within my veins! With up-flung arms, the Blind Man of Tarn dropped to earth with the cross-bow bolt in his heart.

For, by some strange instinct, the old man had realised my peril—had leapt 'twixt me and death! But as he lay

sprawled upon the grass, his face upturned, a strange, deep peace seemed to be upon the blind man's face.

Mad he may have been, in some part. But a mist comes before my eyes when I think of how nobly he died—faithful to the end to the memory of my father whom he had loved so well—the first to die for the white banner of the leopard's head in the grim struggle 'gainst Hugo the usurper!

For some moments horror filled me, so that I could not move. Then I snatched up the axe I had let fall, and with my back to the cave I faced the six hoarse-yelling men racing 'cross the glade towards me!

Robin Hood's Promise!

THERE, in the black mouth of the cave, with Gilbert de Vaux lying senseless at my feet, and the Blind Man of Tarn stretched dead beside him, I raised my great battle-axe to fight for my life.

The cross-bowman realised that 'twas useless to shoot another quarrel, for where I now stood in the cave mouth I could easily have leapt back into shelter. My enemies knew that their only means of overcoming me was by fighting hand-to-hand. So the cross-bowman seized my own sword, which lay nigh him, and came racing with his five villainous companions 'cross the glade towards me.

Their shouts rang out wild and fierce in that greenwood clearing. But a red mist of passion was before my eyes, for these were the men who had slain the old blind man—he who had remained faithful for all these years to my father's banner, that white banner with the

leopard's head upon it which I had vowed should be raised again at Charnedene. But my first act of all should be to avenge the blind man's death.

Out of that angry mist the faces of my foes were ringed before me, dark and evil. Despite the odds, I never feared that I might fall before them. I felt like a giant as I brought the battle-axe of De Vaux hissing down from above my head.

One of those six faces vanished, and I knew that I had slain the vile rogue. I laughed—a laugh harsh and exultant, lighting the white like a madman 'gainst those human wolves who had closed upon me. Wounded I was from my combat with De Vaux, and I found afterwards that they had added to my wounds. But I felt nothing of their steel as I swung my battle-axe, and shouted savagely the battle-cry of the outlaws: "Sherwood! Sherwood!"

Ay, like a giant I felt then, I say, and not one of those six lived to tell the tale. And when at last I leaned upon my axe, and raised a shaking hand to wipe away the mist from before my eyes, I found that but for the senseless baron stretched upon the grass, I was the only living man within that glade.

Panting, I flung back the hair from my eyes, and then, all suddenly, I heard a shout.

The next moment the lean, nut-brown gleeman of the outlaws, Alan-a-Dale, had burst through the trees into the clearing. And upon his heels came Little John and Will Scarlet, and a score of the bowmen!

How I gripped their hands, laughing with joy to feel their strong fingers in mine own!

"By St. Christopher!" cried Little John, gazing around. "But what a fight has here taken place! We heard the shouting and the brave clash of steel—'twas that which brought us hither. I faith, lad, if thou hast overcome all these single-handed—"

I laughed, breathless, and he clapped me upon the shoulder with his great hand, and gave a shout of delight.

"What a fighter he is!" cried he. "And, by the bones of the saints, surely 'tis Gilbert de Vaux himself, Hugo's jackal, that lies there so still!"

"Ay," I told them. "He, at least, is not dead, but senseless. But tell me—how came you to be in this quarter of the forest? How—"

"We have sought you for days!" cried Will Scarlet. "Ever since the night that Lantern came to our camp to tell us of some daring, reckless game that you and he had tried to play upon the Black Wolf and his followers."

"Lantern has been like a mad fellow ever since we found that the scheme had gone amiss," put in Alan-a-Dale. "He blamed himself for it all, and vowed, had you come to harm at Hugo's hands, to hew out the villain's heart, though it meant his own death. He went in disguise to Charnedene, seeking tidings of you, and was discovered, and all but lost his life. But he learnt that you, bound upon your own destrier, had escaped in the forest. We, all split into many parties, have scoured Sherwood for you ever since!"

"'Twould seem that my companionship is greatly sought after!" I laughed. "For bands of Hugo's men, also, have been scouring the forest for me—ay, and one of their bands found me here, as you see."

"A sorry day for them that they did so!" laughed Alan-a-Dale.

Ere leaving the glade we buried the Blind Man of Tarn 'neath a tall beech-tree—a sweet, sunny resting-place for



I sprang at De Vaux, my left hand closing on the handle of the axe above his own. He stabbed at me with the knife, but I parried the blow. Then, dropping my poniard, I drew back my right arm and sent my fist crashing 'twixt his eyes. (See page 23.)

him. I had not told my companions as yet of the wondrous things the old man had told me—that was I keeping till I might tell them all, for I wished Lantern to be among the first to hear my glorious tale.

De Vaux soon recovered his senses. With his wrists lashed behind him, he was led in our midst, a sullen prisoner, when at last we turned—I riding upon Starlight's back—towards the outlaws' camp in the secret depths of Sherwood.

Night fell long ere we came thither, for 'twas a long cry from the blind man's glade. When at last we reached the camp, 'twas to find Lantern and Robin Hood just returned from a day and a night of weary searching. A wild shout arose from all the bowmen there, a wondrous cheer, to see me unharmed, save for the slight wounds I had taken in the combat with De Vaux and his men.

And all that look in Lantern's eyes as he gripped my hand and looked up into my face, laughing.

Soon after that Friar Tuck and the Miller returned to the camp for tidings, and never shall I forget Tuck's great booming voice bellowing his delight as he wrung my hand.

A wondrous night that was! Lon, the hunchback, was very joyous to see me safe, and his merry jesting set our laughter ringing. And then, by the light of the leaping fire that roared in the clearing nigh the central oak, I told them all my tale.

Word for word, as I remembered it, I told them that which the blind man had told me of my babyhood, and of my father. I bared my chest, showing them all the scar where that birthmark had been.

When at last my story was ended, a great silence there was. Then suddenly 'twas broken by the voice of Ramulf of the Plough.

"'Tis true!" he muttered hoarsely. "'Tis true! For I knew your father, my Lord, and now can I see full well that you are son of Edward Athelstane. Your blue eyes are as his eyes, your golden hair is like to his. The carriage of your head, and your great frame and wondrous strength—ay, no one who has seen your gallant father could ever doubt but that you are flesh and blood of the Earls of Charndene!"

He paused; then his muttered words grew loud and clear. He sprang to his feet with flashing eyes, and waved his cap high above his head as he shouted:

"Hail! Hail! Hail to Richard Athelstane the earl!"

They all took up that shout, and the voices of the hundred outlaws thundered out with deafening sound in the clearing as they sprang madly to their feet, and waved their caps, and clashed their swords, and cheered and shouted like men gone mad.

"Hail! Hail! All hail to Richard Athelstane, Earl of Charndene!"

But at last the clamour died away, and all eyes were turned upon me. I stood there in the tense stillness as they waited for me to speak; yet scarce knew I what to say to those gallant outlaws, and a lump had risen in my throat.

Haltingly I thanked them, and then I turned to Robin Hood, where he stood at my side, strong and vigorous, his eyes strangely alight, and his beard touched to copper in the shaking firelight.

"But though I am the earl, though this great demesne is rightfully mine own, nothing can I do without your help, brave outlaws!" I said. "I am powerless to fight for that which is mine, save that the hundred gallant bowmen of Robin Hood will march at my back. And in return, naught have I to offer



All suddenly there came a wild cry. A grey shape came leaping 'twixt me and the cross-bowman—even as the deadly bolt flew forth to slay me. Another cry—a horrid, unearthly shriek that curdled the blood within my veins. With up-flung arms the Blind Man of Tarn dropped to earth, the cross-bow bolt in his heart.

(See page 24.)

them, only that if right prevails, no longer shall the fair demesne of Charndene be an accursed place of oppression and murder. If I prevail o'er the usurper, then shall my lands be peopled with happy men and free men, living in peace and joy 'neath the white banner of my sire."

I ceased speaking, and looked around at the great circle of strong, tanned faces, and the gleaming eyes of the men of Sherwood. And then a mighty shout rang out, fierce and wild, and Robin Hood, his strong teeth gleaming white as he smiled, cried so that all could hear:

"What more could you offer us, my Lord Richard? What more could I and my merry men ask than that? Ay, we will fight 'neath your banner, lad—never doubt us!"

And with that promise ringing in my ears, Robin Hood's hand gripped mine!

Sir Lancelot!

THE next day a strong party of us set out for the spot where I had been captured by Hugo.

I had flung the talisman into the thick undergrowth, and the chances of its being found seemed very slender. But 'twas not safe to trust to chance, for now that I had escaped from the Black Wolf, 'twas very certain that he would scour all that place for the talisman until he found it.

When we reached the spot, though no one was to be seen, the trampled grass and the broken bushes showed very clearly that Hugo had been before us. Many hours his men must have searched,

judging by the signs; whether their search had been successful or otherwise we could not know.

"If Hugo has found this precious talisman, this great treasure is lost to us for ever," muttered Lon, who had accompanied us.

But a wondrous fortune was ours! For scarce had the outlaws formed a long line, which was to move slowly forward across all that place, examining every inch of ground in passing, than there came a bellow from Friar Tuck:

"By all the saints!" roared he. "Here it hangs, my sons, in this hazel above my head! No wonder the Black Wolf's ruffians failed to find it, for such evil spawn keep their eyes ever from heaven! The brambles 'neath it are all broken and trampled where they searched, and all the time it swung o'er their heads! Ho, ho, a merry jest!"

And, reaching up, the brawny Friar lifted the leathern plait that bore my talisman from the twig upon which it had been caught.

'Twas a rare stroke of luck indeed, and very thankfully did I slip it once more around my neck. For though I was no holder with old wives' superstitions, yet must I confess that ill-fortune seemed ever to come to me when I was without that talisman. For when I had left it in the care of Robin Hood to journey to the tournament at Charndene, De Vaux had captured us at the red inn, and dragged us captive before Hugo; and later that night, with Hugo's talisman in my very hands, it had been snatched from me. And upon the second time that I came to be without it, though I had escaped

from Hugo. I had all but died upon the back of my own warhorse."

"Now to make our old friend, Gilbert de Vaux, tell us what was very upon Hugo's talisman, one Guy de Blois, crushed in 'neath his heel?" cried Lantern, as we turned once more toward the outlaws' camp.

"Two some hours ere we reached it; and on the way thither I learnt from Robin Hood of tidings that had come to the camp a few days ago—tidings of the king!"

"All news enough! It seemed that the Lion-Heart's place of confinement had been discovered by the Chancellor, Longchamps, Bishop of Ely; but a ransom of no less than a hundred thousand marks was demanded for his release!"

"'Twas a black hour for England that the Lion-Heart sailed away upon this last cruise!" said Robin Hood sorrowfully.

"Ay, it looks, in truth, as though the Prince's evil schemes will prevail," muttered Lantern. "But let us not despair! Should the Chancellor succeed in raising this vast ransom for his king, be very sure that once his heroic brother sets foot in England, Prince John's followers will fall from him like autumn leaves! Their craven hearts will tremble at the very whisper of the Lion-Heart's name."

"That is so," said Robin Hood—"if the ransom can be raised! But what chance is there of that? For though 'tis said that Longchamps strives desperately to raise this great sum, 'tis likely to be but a vain effort, with the country so impoverished, and Prince John himself and his evil followers working 'gainst the Chancellor."

Robin Hood's words were but too true! We all realised how mighty slender was the chance that the king would e'er set foot on English soil again, and our hearts were heavy when at last we came to the outlaws' camp.

I had all but forgotten Gilbert de Vaux. But back at the camp Robin Hood sent for the Norman, and his guards led him before us.

Mighty savage were De Vaux's eyes as he stood before Robin Hood. The outlaw turned to me.

"He is your prisoner," said he. "Question him as you will."

But De Vaux, when I questioned him, denied all knowledge of the words writ upon Hugo's talisman. I turned to Lon.

"But you saw Hugo show him the talisman?" I asked.

"Ay," said the hunchback. "I remember it right well. Hugo knew not that I was there, and—"

"'Tis true that Earl Hugo showed me the talisman," said De Vaux swiftly, his eyes gleaming darkly upon the jester. "But I am no clerk, but a man of war—I could not read the words writ upon it. I tell you I know not what the words were! Earl Hugo was excited with wine that night, or I doubt not that he would ne'er have shown to me his talisman. He has ne'er shown it to me since then, and he has told me not what words are writ there."

"He lies!" cried Lon; and again De Vaux's eyes flashed savagely.

I, too, believed that De Vaux lied. But what was I to do? The man was in our power, and we might have tortured him to make him speak—in similar case, he himself would have hesitated not a moment! That he was afraid of torture,

I could see, and 'twas but a greater fear of Hugo that kept him silent. But we could not bring ourselves to force his tongue that way.

"There is no other way to make him speak," whispered Robin Hood to me. "And I do not want to keep him here—such a prisoner would be mighty inconvenient!"

And then Lantern sprang to his feet and laughed gaily.

"Trial by combat!" cried he—"there lies the solution! Give this man a sword, and let me meet him in fair fight! If he overcomes me, let him go free; if he is overcome, let him admit that he lies, and let him tell us all he knows!"

There came a murmur of approval from some of the bowmen, and I saw De Vaux's eyes light up at that. For though he knew Lantern's wondrous skill with the sword, yet was he himself a fine swordsman, and he saw that Lantern's face was lined and drawn, the result of his weary search through Sherwood for myself. But then the Norman cried proudly:

"Though I have crossed swords with you in fight, a trial by combat is a matter of another kind—I will undertake it not, save with one of noble blood!"

I expected to see Lantern's face grow dark at these sneering words. But he cried, with a merry laugh:

"Stab me!" says he. "Be not uneasy upon that point! Perchance the blood within my veins runs as nobly as thine, proud Norman! Hast ne'er heard of one, Sir Lancelot Ashdown?"

De Vaux started strangely. But though Lantern spoke to him, his eyes were now turned towards me—those golden, fascinating eyes, dancing like the evening star!

"I, at least, have heard of that gallant knight!" I cried eagerly. "Ay, well do I know that name! For the captain of the men-at-arms at Hadleigh Priory told me tales of many a brave deed and gallant enterprise of knight-errantry, and the name of Sir Lancelot Ashdown, the noblest of the English knights, whose sires fell—as did mine own!—with Harold at Hastings, was oft-times upon his lips!"

"I am he," said Lantern simply. "My sable shield, upon it a stag's head, argent, was once not unknown to the chivalry of Europe. But my enemies brought about my downfall, even as Fulke de Floermeil brought about your father's. They made it so appear that I had done a deed of great dishonour, and outlawed I became, but 'neath the name of Lantern, which is not vastly unlike Lancelot, I became not ill-known to the rebel barons, the followers of Prince John, as an enemy to be feared when'er single combat was the order of the day. For though Robin Hood and his merry men alone knew my true name, I have still fought, as an outlaw, ever for right and the king!"

"And you never told me!" I cried.

"Stab me," laughed he, "but I vow I had all but forgotten, till our old friend De Vaux tickled my memory. And as for the outlaws, they had promised ne'er to tell a soul who I really was."

And with that strange, wondrous knowledge ringing in my brain, I took my place 'twixt Robin Hood and Alana-Dale, as Lantern and De Vaux, with the merry men of Sherwood ringed around, faced each other with naked swords in the dying light of eventide for the greatest fight of Lantern's life!

The Secret of the Gold!

LANTERN was armed with the sword he loved—a straight, slender blade, light as a ribbon. De Vaux had chosen a weapon long and heavy, and never had I seen his face look so cruel and fierce as now.

His lean neck was thrust forward from his black tunic, on which was emblazoned his emblem of the five white roses. Upon his hawk-like face was a look of dreadful hate and malice as he glared at Lantern, and his lips were moving queerly. Upon his brow was the livid scar that I had once put upon it.

As for my comrade, though his eyes were bright and vigilant, his face seemed very pale and fatigued. Deceitful was his face, like that of a sick man, and I remembered what Alana-Dale had told me of Lantern's bare escape from death when he visited the castle of Chardene in disguise in search of me. Had he been well, never would I have doubted his skill for a moment; but now, a sudden tear smote me. What if the little swordsman should not prevail?

But despite his pale, lined face, very slight and boyish did Lantern look as he stood there in the circle of the outlaws, facing De Vaux. His white shirt was thrown open at the chest, showing his tanned neck; his sleeves were rolled back, and he whipped the air lightly with his slender sword as De Vaux approached him.

And then, with a sudden gay laugh from my comrade, their steel clashed fiercely!

Ay, just that one laugh he gave; then his face set grim and firm. But I missed the merry twinkle of his eyes, which most times danced like golden stars when he fought, and my heart was heavy to miss it now.

De Vaux swung his great weapon, and rushed with a savage shout to the attack. Lantern sprang back, and De Vaux followed hot upon him with a sweeping stroke of his blade, which was swiftly parried. Then Lantern darted in, and as he thrust at his antagonist the sword-play was so wondrous swift that I could not follow it.

Those flashing blades leapt with a merry ring, but all the while anxious fears were crowding in my heart. For quick though he was, I could see that 'twas indeed as I had feared ere the combat commenced; Lantern was not displaying quite the same lightning swiftness that had made his name one to be so feared. While De Vaux, upon the other hand, amazed me with the fierceness and skill of his attack—he was fighting now as I had never seen him fight before!

Ever a fine swordsman, the Norman was excelling himself this day! A cry choked in my throat to see Lantern slip upon the grass. There came a shout of evil triumph from De Vaux, and he ran madly in, striving to cut my comrade down. But though he was upon one knee, I saw Lantern's nimble blade dart up at his enemy once, twice, thrice—and with a curse De Vaux was driven back, his chance lost.

The Norman aimed a cut at Lantern that nearly split my comrade's skull; had he leapt aside an instant later than he did, 'twould indeed have ended the struggle there and then. But somehow the little swordsman escaped that hissing blade, and a moment afterward he was attacking De Vaux with a fierce vigour that filled me with amazement.



"Hail! Hail! Hail to Richard Athelstane, the earl!" They all took up the shout, and the voices of the outlaws thundered out with deafening sound in the clearing as they waved their caps and clashed their swords and cheered like men gone mad. (See page 25.)

Cursing horribly, the Norman was driven back relentlessly before the lightning sword-play of Lantern. In the hush, broken only by the song of the swords, and the soft, swift footsteps of the antagonists, the tense excitement of those who watched could be felt in the stillness like a thing tangible.

Robin Hood's face was set grim and firm, his eyes flashing at every good stroke and skilful passage. Upon my left I could hear the breath of Alan-a-Dale coming short and sharp as he leaned forward, mighty eager, a hand upon either knee. From Friar Tuck I heard a deep grunt of approval as Lantern parried a terrible, sweeping blow. And then a wild shout broke from all the outlaws as Lantern sent his foe's weapon twisting from his hand.

Many of them, I think, expected Lantern to take this chance; but I, who knew Lantern better than they, guessed that he would scorn to gain the victory so easily. He waited while De Vaux snatched up his weapon; and then they were striving desperately again.

Many a minute passed, and yet could neither strike the other down! A fight so fierce and long have I never beheld! And then I cried out to see De Vaux's blade pierce my comrade's arm.

Lantern's sword fell to the grass, and I thought that the Norman would leap upon him. But to my amazement De Vaux drew back. He was not so utterly evil as to slay his foe, after his life had been granted him in similar case but a few minutes ago.

"I give you your life, Sir Lancelot," said he haughtily. "I trust that men of noble blood, though the one be outlawed—"

Lantern laughed his gay laugh. "Grammarney, my Lord Gilbert," said he. "'Tis kindly spoken. But I accept my life from no one who bears allegiance to the Black Wolf and Prince John. Guard yourself!"

And stooping, he picked up his sword in his left hand!

There was a murmur of amazement all around at this mad, rash act. Gilbert de Vaux was vastly taken aback. But then his brow darkened, and he gave a sneering laugh. He came forward, but Lantern did not, as I expected, await the other's attack!

With his left hand, Lantern drove his foe before him! 'Twas glorious to watch the sword-play—ne'er had I seen the like!

Those flashing blades, like dancing tongues of fire, bewitched me! I could not have turned my eyes had I so wished. And then suddenly there came a screech of steel. 'Twas all so swift that I could not see all that happened, but the next moment, with a dreadful scream, De Vaux had tossed his arms and let fall his long sword, and crumpled sideways upon the grass!

When 'twas seen that he was dying, we carried him to one of the huts, and there left him with the Friar. 'Twas some time ere Tuck came out to us, a strange look upon his face.

"De Vaux is dead," said he quietly. "But he was striven ere he died. And in his last minutes his conscience awoke, and remorseful he became for all his evil deeds with Hugo; and a strange tale has he told me, for he wished to make amends for helping to wrong you, lad, to rob you of your rights as Earl of Charadene!"

We listened, puzzled and eager, and Tuck went on.

"That talisman which De Blois destroyed was but a sham!" said he. "Whether it had fooled him, or whether he realised the truth and destroyed it but to rouse you, lad, we can never know. But it seems that on the day of the journey at Charadene, Hugo saw your eyes upon the talisman around his neck, saw them gleam through the bars of your visor as they rested on it! 'Twas

that which aroused his suspicions, and caused him to have you followed to the Red Inn. And fearing that an attempt would be made upon the talisman, he changed it for a false one, with false words writ upon it, and charged De Vaux with the custody of the real talisman!"

I drew a deep, wondering breath. "So that was why Hugo did not fight more fiercely to defend it when I took the talisman from him in the north tower!" I cried. "I thought then that he was weak with his wounds; but I should have known he would never have allowed me to take it so easily. And 'twas but a faked thing!"

Tuck nodded. "Ay, Hugo is a cunning rascal! And now De Vaux has given it to me to give to you, lad, bidding you find the gold and do with it what you will!"

And with that the Friar held out something that dangled upon a slender chain of steel—a rough half-circle of polished horn, such as was my own!

As in a dream I took it from him and slipped my own talisman from around my neck.

"They fit!" cried Lantern.

"Ay," I murmured, "they fit!" And a strange light was in my eyes, I'll warrant, as I stared down at those two pieces of the broken talisman that so many men had striven to bring together for so long!

The secret of the gold was in my hands at last! What words was I about to read upon it?

(Even though the secret of Sherwood Gold is in Tom Hadleigh's hands much might happen ere our brave young hero comes into his own as the rightful Earl of Charadene. The concluding chapters of this amazing story will keep my readers' interest at a high pitch. Don't miss the next and final instalment of this serial, boys!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY. No. 255.

YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT!

ON SALE TO-DAY!

THOSE well-known words will pass from mouth to mouth among my many thousands of loyal readers who have been looking forward to the time when the "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" makes its appearance on the market. Well, the DAY is here! Every bookstall in the kingdom will be graced by the 1925 edition of this world-famous book; every boy and girl who have found those popular characters, Harry Wharton & Co., Tom Merry & Co., and Jimmy Silver & Co., as part and parcel of their existence will be eager to secure this wonder "Annual" telling of their further adventures. And those adventures, mark me well, will add fresh laurels to the trio of authors whose works are read in every quarter of the globe. I refer, of course, to Messrs. Richards, Clifford, and Conquest.

360 PAGES OF SOLID VALUE!

That's how we can describe the "Holiday Annual." There's not a dry line in it from beginning to end! Abounding in stories, articles, poems, plays, tricks, coloured plates, and splendid photographs that have been collected and compiled after due consideration of what THE COMPANION PAPERS PUBLIC needs, this year's "Holiday Annual" surpasses anything your Editor has hitherto put before you.

DON'T LEAVE IT TOO LATE!

That's just a piece of friendly advice, chums. There's bound to be a rush at every "agent's" throughout the country. Everyone will be clamouring for the "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" and some, alas! might think it convenient to leave their order until a later date. From what I can gather from the thousands of letters that have poured into this office concerning the new "ANNUAL," there's going to be a record sale. That

being so, some unfortunate people are going to be disappointed. You don't want your local newsgang to greet you with "Sold out, sir!" when you apply for a copy of the "Annual," do you? There's poor consolation in that. Therefore—

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!

Now for a few remarks about next Monday's bumper programme of good things. As usual, there will be an extra-long story of Harry Wharton & Co., telling of their experiences in Biskra, telling, too, of Billy Hunter's misfortunes, for the Oa! of the Remove continually puts his foot into it, and is for ever on the "grouse." Space does not permit of my dealing further with next Monday's grand story, but from the title alone you can gather more than an idea of what is to come. Make no mistake about it, my chums.

"THE CALL OF THE DESERT!"

will rank as the finest story Mr. Frank Richards has ever written, and having said that I will leave it for you to endorse my words. Tell your chums about this amazing series of holiday adventure stories, and persuade them to make the acquaintance of Frank Richards. Watch their faces when they read their first "Magnet"!

"SHERWOOD GOLD!"

(Conclusion.)

It is with regret almost that I pen these words for Mr. Francis Warwick has proved himself a prolific and skilled writer, who specialises in yarns dealing with the "good old days." But all good things must come to an end, and thus next week we see the curtain ringing down on "Sherwood Gold." Tom Hadleigh comes into his own, as is only right and proper; the same may he said of Lantero, the little swordsman who has endeared himself to you all. But there, you will find these things out for yourselves next Monday.

GRAND NEW SERIAL!

Such a headline is most appropriate in the circumstances. And the new serial I

have in mind is written by none other than Hedley Scott, who made such a hit with "A Marked Man!" and "The Yellow Claw." This time Mr. Scott has gone out to record the struggles of four tough young fellows, who have fallen on bad times. Your sympathy, I feel positive, will go out to them when you have finished reading the first instalment of

"FOUR AGAINST THE WORLD!"

That's the title, chums; look out for it the week after next! As an extra tit-bit! may be allowed to mention that Ferrer's Locke, the wizard detective, plays a part in this coming treat.

OUR BIKES!

On page 22 of this issue will be found the name and address of the prizewinner in the "Alonso Todd" Characters Competition. He wins a handsome Royal Enfield bicycle listed at £8. Now, chums, there are plenty more bikes to be won, and it's up to you to "bag 'em." There's nothing difficult about this competition—five minutes' work, and one of those £8 bicycles may be yours. Such a wonderful opportunity does not come very often, and, after all, opportunities should be seized with enthusiasm. I'll say no more except to remind you that the entrance coupon can be found on page 6. Go in and win!

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Complaints have reached me lately from different parts of the country that readers have found difficulty in securing their copy of the "Magnet." That is a complaint possessing one remedy—a very simple remedy. Often have I impressed upon my loyal chums the need for ordering their copy of the "Magnet" in advance. In the circumstances, it will bear repetition, and should be acted upon. Don't forget, my disappointed chums, to

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