

WHAT! NOT HEARD OF BILLY BUNTER!!!

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The Magnet 2^d

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Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply. Letters should be addressed: The Editor, THE MAGNET LIBRARY, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

JOLLY MYSTERIOUS!

FOR reasons I shall not attempt to dive into we are always given to understand that the unknown is something magnificent. That may be. But the "Unknown" who sends me two richly decorated pages about the MAGNET is something even better. His artistic communication is a plea for the "Greyfriars Herald," and there is a query, all wrapped up in this decorative epistle, about the artist who is now drawing the MAGNET characters. I will put my chum's mind at rest. The artist in question is not Lawrence East, but Leonard Shields. But to return to this letter. It is an extraordinary affair, reminiscent of the days when monks were the only people to wield the pen, and any amount of care has been taken in its execution. No ordinary "D" sets off the opening words of "Dear Mr. Editor"—it is a big affair with curls and flourishes like a railway map. A huge query mark traced in blue ink above the *nom de plume* of "Unknown" gives that touch of mystery to the opening pages which was the effect my correspondent strived after. But there's no mystery attached to the message beneath that query mark, for it reads: "The MAGNET is ripping!" Well, my unknown chum, I am grateful for your views, but don't you think we could hit it off better if next time you wrote you included your name and address?

WHEN I'M 92!

"I hope I shall be reading the MAGNET when I'm ninety-two," says F. Hampson, of Lanes. I hope so, too, my chum, for your letter of enthusiasm is distinctly encouraging, and you appear to have adopted our set of characters at Greyfriars for keeps. Splendid fellow! Your suggestion of splitting Greyfriars into two rival houses is a good one in its way, but I don't think it would be advisable to put it into practice. This split rivalry, so to speak, can be found, as you say yourself, in the "Gem." We don't want the two papers to be identical, do we? Still, the suggestion shows that you are a thinker as well as an enthusiast, and I thank you for it.

NINE MEN'S MORRIS!

Here is a game that everyone will welcome. Nine Men's Morris was originally an outdoor game, but, owing no doubt to the inclemency of our English climate, it became an indoor game, played on a carved oak board with men carved of the same material. These sets were expensive, and therefore "Shakespeare's game" did not receive the popularity it deserved. But "Answers" has now made it possible for everyone to be able to play. An attractive board and men have been prepared, and are now on sale at any newsagent or toyshop for eighteenpence!

Next Monday's Programme:

"COKER ON THE WAR-PATH!"

This is the first story in a brilliant new series from the pen of Frank Richards. All of you like Coker, differ that he is, for his heart is of gold. Mind you read this yarn!

"THE MYSTERY OF FLYING V RANCH!"

In next week's bumper number readers will find the opening chapters of an amazing new detective and Wild West adventure yarn—of which I made mention in last week's Chat—featuring Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant. It is full of lively incident, and will hold your attention bang from the start. Tell your pals about this new yarn, chums, and persuade them to start in with the first instalment. Next week, then!

"OFF FOR THE HOLIDAYS!"

This is another "shocker" from the pen of Dicky Nugent, and it puts another feather in his youthful cap. Don't miss this story, chums! Cheerio!

YOUR EDITOR.

A GOOD TURN FOR THE DAY!—When Harry Wharton & Co. set out for an afternoon's scouting they little dream that it is destined to end in their performing an invaluable service to H.M. Government. Yet it does, and Greyfriars, in consequence, is covered with glory!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS.**

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars, and Frank Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe.

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bunter Wants to Learn!**

"SHUN!"
That loud-voiced command which awoke the echoes in the quad at Greyfriars caused Mr. Henry Quelch, master of the Remove, to jump. And, as this was the third time that seemingly meaningless word had rung out with unpleasant volume, and also the third time that such a learned and august personage as Mr. Quelch had jumped, there was possibly some justification for the frown of annoyance that settled on the Remove master's brow.

"As you were—'shun!"

Mr. Quelch was used to the particular force of that last word of command now. Instead of jumping he frowned the more. Really it was too bad. The master of the Fourth had promised himself a quiet and pleasant afternoon with the works of Thucydides, as a rest from trying to instil wisdom into his Form. But it was impossible to be in harmony with Thucydides with that awful row going on beneath his study window.

"Number!"

"Wun-ner!"

"Two-o-oo!"

"Threeee!"

"Fo-ah!"

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch, rising to his feet and crossing to the window. "Has everyone taken leave of his senses? Never have I heard such mutilation of the English language!"

Bang!

That was the sound of Mr. Quelch's study window being raised, which perhaps gave some inkling of the annoyance he felt.

"B-bless my soul!"

The frown of annoyance on the learned brow of the Remove master vanished as his eyes beheld the scenes of activity in the quad below. Ten yards away from his window were about forty boys, dressed in scout attire. Even the unusual sight of forty juniors in shorts,

khaki shirts, flaming red scarves, and Stetson hats did not deceive Mr. Quelch as to their identity. He picked out at once the stalwart figure of Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, who stood three paces or so in advance of the two ranks of the juniors, from whom it appeared the offending words of command issued.

"As you were!" roared Wharton. "Look lively there, Snoop! We haven't all day to number. Patrol—number!"

The response to that vigorous order brought back the frown to Mr. Quelch's brow, for the Removites fairly let themselves go in their enthusiasm. Bob Cherry, who, apparently, was number one in the front rank, told the world so, in a manner of speaking, for his stentorian tones rumbled round the quad long after the scout next to him had chimed in with his number. And as both ranks were "numbering" independently of each other the din was, as Hurree Singh expressed it, "terrific!"

Mr. Quelch put his fingers to his ears, and waited for the noise to cease. Quiet reigned once the scouts at the end of the front and rear ranks had numbered. The Remove master took a deep breath and was preparing to remonstrate with these youthful disturbers of the peace when Wharton got going again, so to speak.

"Not good enough!" he rapped out. "You chuns must snap the number! Don't dwell on it all day. We'll try it again——"

But that was more than Mr. Quelch could stand. He leaned out of the window, almost falling out of it in his anxiety to prevent a further outbreak of "numbering."

"Stop!"

Wharton faced about and looked up at the study window as that well-known voice greeted his ears, and the Eagle patrol gazed at their respected Form master as one man.

"Stop!" reiterated Mr. Quelch.

"Wharton! What does this mean? What is all this unseemly noise about?"

"Hem! We're scouting this afternoon, sir," replied Wharton. "You see——"

"I see a number of young scamps doing their best to make as much noise as possible!" broke in the master of the Remove dryly. "Do you mean to inform me seriously that this abuse of the English language is scouting?" he added.

"I—I——" began Wharton.

Mr. Quelch made an imperious gesture. He had the floor, so to speak, and was determined to have his say, perhaps with the idea of consoling himself for the precious minutes wasted with Thucydides.

"What is this game you're playing?" he demanded. "I distinctly heard Cherry say 'wun-ner' when he knows perfectly well that the word 'one' has but one syllable!"

"You see, sir——"

"I also heard Nugent stress the word 'three' as if it were a word with an undetermined number of vowels, when any boy in the Second Form is taught to remember that it possesses one."

"But, sir——"

"And you, Wharton," went on Mr. Quelch, "ought to know better than to tell these boys to 'snap the number.' Is that your idea of scouting?"

Harry Wharton crimsoned, and some of the Removites grinned. Really, there was no arguing with Mr. Quelch in this mood.

The Remove master, having drawn a deep breath, continued.

"And if you must—er—scout this afternoon, Wharton, I should be glad if you would take your troop away from my study window. The noise you have been making is unbearable."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Wharton. "We'll move off now. I'll call the roll once we get outside the gates."

Mr. Quelch blew his nose violently

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and banged the window shut. Meantime, order having been enforced amongst the giggling Remove scouts in stage whispers, Harry Wharton's Eagle patrol filed out of the gates in the approved military fashion.

The Remove master heard the footsteps die away and then he returned to his cosy armchair and his beloved Thucydides. But Mr. Quelch seemed fated to be interrupted that afternoon, for barely had he opened the page where he had left off when a respectful knock came at his door.

"Bother!" muttered the master of the Remove under his breath. Then, in distinctly uninviting tones, he added:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and a fat face, adorned with a pair of big spectacles, peered in.

"Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "What do you want?"

Billy Bunter rolled in to the study and smiled benignly upon his Form master. The Owl of the Remove was garbed in the same attire as the rest of the Removites, and the picture he presented was truly an astonishing one. The shorts he wore seemed fated to split at any moment, and the khaki shirt enfolded his fat and unwieldy carcass like a glove. The red scarf tied round his neck threatened to choke him at any moment, whilst the haversack slung over his shoulders looked more like a deflated balloon than anything else.

At a long glance it was apparent to the world that Bunter was a scout, but the first impression seemed to indicate that some strange freak had escaped from a circus or a lunatic asylum.

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"What on earth are you doing in those ridiculous clothes?" he snapped. "Take them off at once!"

The master of the Remove did not mean that latter phrase to be taken literally, naturally, but Billy Bunter blinked apprehensively for all that.

"You see, sir—" he began. "I—I—that is to say, you—"

"Kindly speak plain English if you are capable of so doing," said Mr. Quelch irritably. "You are wasting my time. Why have you come to me?"

"Well, sir," resumed Bunter. "You told me this morning that I was—ahem—very backward with m-my History, sir—"

The master of the Remove was rather taken aback.

"And as I'm rather keen to bag the History prize this year," went on Bunter, "I wondered whether—ahem—you'd be so kind as to set me a History task for this afternoon!"

"Oh!"

It was out now, but Bunter might have been telling Mr. Quelch that he possessed the eighth wonder of the world, so astonishing to the Remove master was this self-expressed desire to forgo an afternoon's holiday for the purpose of swotting English history.

"Bless my soul!"

Bunter had never been willing to learn in the hours specially set aside by the school authorities for such a purpose, and yet here he was requesting to be given a task on a half holiday. No wonder Mr. Quelch was astonished, for he had almost given up in despair the idea of impressing upon Bunter that he was at Greyfriars to learn.

Billy Bunter grinned complacently.

"Hem! Yours is a very laudable ambition, my boy," said Mr. Quelch kindly, when he had recovered his composure. "A very laudable ambition. But you have a long way to go!"

"I know that, sir," said Bunter

meekly. "But I'm willing to learn. And—and you've often remarked that you would be willing to give extra toot to a chap who was fool enough—I mean keen enough—to swot in his spare time."

"And so I am," replied Mr. Quelch, albeit with a wistful glance at his Thucydides. An afternoon of coaching Bunter in English History was something of an ordeal compared with the literary sweets to be culled from his beloved Thucydides.

But, as it happened, Billy Bunter had no intention of being "caged" up with the master of the Remove for a whole afternoon while he talked, as Bunter reflected rather ungenerously, a "lot of silly twaddle." Not for all the History prizes in the world would the fat Owl of the Remove have braved that.

He hastened to enlighten Mr. Quelch on that point.

"Perhaps, sir, if you marked a passage in the lesson book which you think I'm—ahem!—particularly slow to grasp, that would help me to make a start this afternoon. I could mug it up in the study and then come to you some other day and—"

Mr. Quelch jumped at the opportunity. Really, it was the simplest job in the world to mark a passage in English History over which Bunter was particularly dense—that was a task Mr. Quelch could do with his eyes shut so to speak, there not being a single passage in English History that Billy Bunter did comprehend to his Form master's satisfaction.

Not for one moment did Mr. Quelch connect Bunter's strange attire with that peculiar request for "extra toot," otherwise the cane now lying on the desk would have been whistling about Bunter's fat person. Not for one moment did he imagine that Bunter was merely using him as a tool to escape a fatiguing afternoon with the Remove scouts.

Yet such was the reason for the wily Bunter's presence in Mr. Quelch's study.

The fat junior blinked triumphantly over his spectacles. Once he had the exercise in the lesson book marked for his study and perusal, his next place of call would be the tuckshop.

But Mr. Quelch, however, did not know of the pleasant thoughts that roamed leisurely through Bunter's fat brain. He reached for the English History book and a pencil and marked off the first four pages as suitable text for Bunter to learn by heart. Then he handed the book to Bunter.

"There, my boy," he said graciously. "Just concentrate upon the four pages I have marked. Memorise the dates and facts and we'll go over them together some other time."

"Thank you, sir!" mumbled Bunter. "You're very kind."

"Not at all," smiled Mr. Quelch. "I'm always pleased to encourage a backward boy who is disposed to improve himself. I must say, Bunter, that I'm highly gratified to hear of this desire on your part to learn. Keep it up, my boy."

"Yes, sir," said Bunter, promising himself to do so just as long as it took him to cross the study floor. "Thank you, sir!"

And Bunter, the book under his arm, rolled out of the study, leaving Mr. Quelch to resume his reading of Thucydides. Perhaps, had the master of the Remove possessed the unique faculty of being able to see through a stout oak door his kindness towards Billy Bunter would have undergone a violent

change, for that fat youth, once outside the study, turned and extended his fingers in front of his nose as a measure of appreciation for the interest Mr. Quelch had taken in him. Fortunately for Bunter, however, the master of the Remove did not possess such penetrating vision.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Dodging the Column I

"BUNTER!" Harry Wharton yelled the name with considerable vigour. The Eagle patrol was ranged along the school wall outside the gates and their leader was calling the roll. Every name had been answered except that of Bunter. Even Skinner & Co., slackers as they were, had attended the general parade of the Remove scouts, doubtless on account of the hefty boot Bob Cherry had energetically placed behind each one of them when objections had been voiced against their turning out.

The scout movement at Greyfriars was being taken very seriously now, and by ballot amongst the Removites it had been decided to make it compulsory for every member of the Form to turn out for manoeuvres one day a month. Even Lord Mauleverer, who was generally too tired to do anything but slumber on the comfortable sofa in his study, had summoned sufficient energy to turn out that afternoon.

And yet Bunter had absented himself from parade.

"Bunter!" yelled Harry Wharton, for the second time.

But answer came there none.

"He's dodged the column," grinned Bob Cherry.

"The fat freak," granted Johnny Bull. "He was on parade just before old Quelch popped his giddy head out of the window, because I brought him along by his ear."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the ranks," commanded Wharton. "Cherry and Nugent fall out and search for Bunter."

Cherry and Nugent saluted and hastened off. The rest of the scouts looked impatient. The afternoon's programme was too good to be mucked up by hanging about for such a fat freak as Bunter, they considered. But Wharton was a stickler for discipline. Bunter had been ordered on parade, and the parade would wait for him.

Frank Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe, had arranged to "skirmish" with the Remove scouts that sunny autumn afternoon, and these manoeuvres between the rival scouts were usually full of incident. Thus the impatience of the Remove troop to be off grew as the minutes elapsed without either sign of Bunter or Cherry and Nugent.

Bob and Frank, as a matter of fact, had searched the whole of the School House in their efforts to locate the missing Owl. And as it was only to be expected, they did not dream of looking for him in Mr. Quelch's study.

"Where on earth has the silly frog got to?" grumbled Bob Cherry.

"Blessed if I know," said Nugent. "I'll burst him when I do see him!"

The tuckshop was tried and drawn blank; even the box-room was searched. But there was no sign of Bunter.

"Oh, let's chuck it!" said Bob Cherry. "We can't waste all the blessed afternoon hunting for Bunter."

Nugent nodded.

The chums turned and descended



"Front rank—left turn!" commanded Wharton. "As each scout passes the prisoner he will administer a stroke with his staff! Quick march! Right wheel!" "Yah!" roared Bunter. "I—Yaroooooh!" Numbers one and two in the front rank had reached their objective. Their staffs came down on Bunter's tight nether garments with resounding thwacks, and the yells that followed could have been heard a mile off. (See Chapter 2.)

the staircase to the Remove passage again, and just at that moment Billy Bunter emerged from Mr. Quelch's study.

"There he is!" hissed Bob Cherry. "My hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "What's he been doing in Quelch's study?"

"Ask me another," chuckled Bob. "But look what he's doing now!"

Bob was referring to the exceedingly rude gesture Bunter was making with his extended fingers at the door of the Remove master's study.

"The cheeky rotter!" exclaimed Nugent.

Bob Cherry caught his chum by the arm.

"Let's pop into the study," he whispered. "We can't make a scene outside Quelch's door."

"Not after what happened in the quad," agreed Nugent. "We'll wait for Bunter to come along."

The two juniors withdrew into Study No. 1 and waited. Soon footsteps echoed along the passage. Then came a fat chuckle in Bunter's familiar voice.

"Beasts!" he muttered aloud. "I've done 'em! Catch me fagging about the woods on a day like this. I bet they never thought of looking for me in Quelch's study. He, he, he!"

Bunter rolled on down the passage musing thus, unaware that Bob Cherry and Nugent were silently following him. He halted at the window seat by the School House porch and slipped the English History book in the locker.

And, at that moment, Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent pounced upon him and gripped him by a fat ear-piece.

"Whooooop!" "Now then, old lard barrel!" grinned Bob Cherry. "So you thought you'd done us, did you?"

"Yaroooooh!" howled Bunter. "I thought you rotters had gone! Leggo my ears, you beasts! Wow!"

"Yank him along!" said Nugent. "We'll give him six with a staff when we join the others!"

"Yow! I say, you fellows, I'm not scouting this afternoon—"

"Your little mistake, my pippin. You are!" said Bob Cherry pleasantly.

"But—leggo, my ear, you beast—I'm swotting!" howled Bunter.

"You're what?"

Bunter blinked at his captors indignantly.

"It's a fact, Cherry. I've been to Quelch and asked him to give me extra toot!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Now I hope you'll have the decency to release me," continued Bunter warmly. "You know what a dab I am at History—"

"We do! We do!"

"I've told Quelch that I'm going to bag the History prize this term!"

"You didn't tell him that you were going to bag a record licking for dodging the column, did you?" said Bob Cherry. "That would have been nearer the truth."

"Really, Cherry, I hope you can take a fellow's word," said the Owl of the

Remove peevishly. "You wouldn't stand in the way of a fellow bagging a decent prize at History, would you?"

"Not if he were telling the truth," replied Bob Cherry. "But you can't stuff me with a yarn like that, even if you managed to pull the wool over Quelch's eyes! Come on!"

And Bob gave a playful twist to Bunter's ear.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Have another?" suggested Nugent.

"Whooooop! Leggo, you rotters! I'll tell Quelch! I tell you I'm swotting this afternoon! Quelch gave me a book with an exercise marked up—Groooough! Leggo!"

"And you've just pitched it into the locker!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Not good enough! You're wanted on parade! And you're coming on parade!"

And Billy Bunter had no choice in the matter after that. With a tight grip on each ear, Cherry and Nugent hustled the fat junior along at a rare pace. Whether he wanted to go or not, the fat Owl of the Remove had no further say in the matter beyond a number of unfinished ejaculations, such as:

"Yoooooop! I tell you—Wow! Leggo, you rotters! Groooough! Oh crikey!"

And in a gasping, spluttering heap of indignation, Billy Bunter was brought before his patrol leader.

Wharton listened grimly to what Bob Cherry had to say, and when he had THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 980.

finished the patrol leader of the Eagles fixed a military eye upon the shivering Owl.

"You know what sentence you're liable to for absenting yourself without leave?" he said sternly.

"Death!" chuckled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the ranks!"

"Really, Wharton," exclaimed Bunter, "why can't you let a fellow swot if he wants to? I can't afford to spend an afternoon chasing about the woods like a silly kid!"

"Enough!" ejaculated the patrol leader of the Eagles. "Bunter, for absenting yourself without leave, and trying to evade the issue—"

"Oh, my hat!" chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Good word that!"

"The goodness of the esteemed and ludicrous word is terrific!" purred Hurree Singh.

"Trying to evade the issue," continued Harry Wharton gravely, "by telling a lot of whoppers, you are court-martialled, and the sentence is—"

"He hasn't been tried yet!" hooted Skinner. "You can't sentence a chap before you court-martial him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are sentenced to receive a stroke with the staff from every member of the front rank of the Eagle Patrol!" concluded Wharton.

"Oh, my hat!"

Billy Bunter blinked round him apprehensively. But there was no escape.

"Really, Wharton—"

"Front rank—left turn!" commanded Wharton, hiding a grin. "As each scout passes the prisoner, he will administer a stroke with his staff!"

"What-ho!"

"The front rank's good turn for the day!" chuckled Skinner.

"I say, Wharton," hooted Bunter, "I'm jolly well not going to stand this! I—"

"Front rank—quick march! Right wheel!"

"Yah!" roared Bunter. "I—Yarooooooh!"

No. 1 in the front rank had reached his objective. His staff came down on Bunter's tight nether garments with a resounding whack, and the yell that followed it could have been heard a mile off.

Whack!

"Wow! Yow!"

As each scout passed there was a fresh whack and a fearful howl. By the time the sentence had been carried out Bunter was wishing that he hadn't dodged the column.

"I'll keep an eye on you this afternoon!" said Wharton, as Bunter was hustled back into his place. "Hold your head up!"

Bunter held his head up, what time groans and moans escaped his lips.

"Form fours!" came Wharton's command in ringing tones.

The Eagles jumped to obey.

"Right! Quick march!"

And, with a swinging stride, the Eagle Patrol marched along the lane in column of fours, their "flashes" of bright scarlet fluttering bravely in the breeze.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Manœuvres!

"LATE, begad!"

De Courcy of Highcliffe uttered the remark, and sank wearily on a little hummock in the clearing.

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His chum, Frank Courtenay, captain of the Fourth at Highcliffe, grinned at the Caterpillar unsympathetically. Frank had had a difficult job to persuade the Caterpillar that an afternoon's scouting was better than a nap on the study sofa. But even the easy march from Highcliffe to the clearing in Friardale Wood proved too much for De Courcy.

"You're such a deuced energetic chap, Franky," he remarked languidly, as he mopped his perspiring brow. "And here we are, all dressed up and nowhere to go, so to speak!"

"Oh, Wharton and his scouts won't be long!" said Courtenay. "I expect something has delayed them."

"Then I hope somethin' delays them all the afternoon, begad!"

The Highcliffe scouts grinned.

"We'll make up for lost time when they do arrive," said Courtenay.

"We've arranged a strong programme for this afternoon, you know. We're going to choose a camp, post our sentries, and all that, and Wharton's crowd will attack us."

"Oh, begad!" groaned De Courcy. "That sounds an awful fag, Franky, old man!"

"It will do you good!"

The Caterpillar grimaced. He had his doubts about that.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry's stentorian voice rang out as the leading four of the Eagle Patrol entered the clearing.

"There's another fearfully energetic fellow!" murmured the Caterpillar, scrambling to his feet. "Oh dear! What a life!"

The Wolf Patrol of the Highcliffe scouts fell into line as their friendly enemies marched up.

"Patrol—shun!" roared Courtenay.

"Patrol—halt!" commanded Wharton.

The two patrols stood stiffly to attention as their respective leaders saluted each other; then came the command to "Stand at ease!"

Thereafter the two patrol leaders discussed their plan of campaign, Courtenay promising to select a camp within twenty minutes of the start of manœuvres, Wharton agreeing to try to capture it.

"We'll give you a run for your money," said Courtenay. "And it's understood that the first to spot an enemy and name him constitutes a capture."

"Agreed!"

The patrol leaders saluted and turned to their troops. Five minutes later they were on the march. Wharton led his men to the north, whilst Courtenay drew off to the South.

When the Remove scouts had traversed about a couple of hundred yards Wharton called them to a halt.

"Smithy," he called out, "you will take four men and reconnoitre the ground ahead as soon as the twenty minutes agreed upon has elapsed. But be careful you're not spotted by the enemy, for if you're seen you become a prisoner. You understand?"

"Leave it to me!" grinned the Bounder.

The remainder of the patrol was split up into three storming sections. Johnny Bull was to command the main body, Peter Todd the left wing, and Wharton the right wing.

The patrol leader of the Eagles looked at his watch, and then snapped it shut.

"Time's up!" he remarked laconically. "Off you go, Smithy!"

The Bounder took his four scouts and moved off stealthily. In less than five

minutes he was back with the main body, who were advancing at a leisurely pace.

"Enemy encampment a quarter of a mile ahead, near the Priory ruins," he reported.

Wharton looked thoughtful.

"That gives me an idea," he remarked. "If Courtenay's lot are choosing that place, it leaves us a chance to take them by surprise in the rear." He turned to Johnny Bull. "You keep on with the main body, Johnny, and I'll take four chaps and work round behind the enemy. An owl's hoot will tell you that we've succeeded in making our detour unobserved; four blasts of the whistle will tell you to advance and storm the position."

"Right-ho, captin!" grinned Johnny Bull.

Wharton beckoned to Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh, as three of the men he required. Then his glance fell upon Bunter. The patrol leader of the Eagles knew that the fat Owl would soon make himself scarce when the business began in real earnest, and Wharton had promised to give extra special attention to Billy Bunter.

"Bunter," he called out, "you will join my party!"

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter.

But he rolled out from the ranks and ranged himself alongside the chosen three, for all that. The memory of his record licking on the general parade still rankled.

"Single file!" commanded Wharton, placing himself at the head of his men. "Quick march!"

With scout poles at the "trail," the five scouts swung out of sight, Billy Bunter plodding along after the stalwart captain of the Remove, and followed by Bob Cherry. And every time Bunter lagged he received a sharp prod in the rear from the tip of Bob's staff.

"Wow!" groaned the fat junior after five minutes' marching at a steady pace. "I'm done! I can't go on any farther, you beasts!"

"Think again!" said Bob Cherry, bringing the scout pole into play again.

"Whooooop!"

"That better, old fat man?" chuckled Bob.

"Wow! Beast!"

And Bunter, perspiration streaming down his podgy features, plodded on.

"Quiet now!" hissed Wharton, whose line of route had been something in the nature of a half-circle. "Not a word! We've passed Courtenay's camp. Now we'll make for that hillock over there."

He indicated a grassy elevation about forty yards ahead, from which undoubtedly a close watch could be set on the enemy camp. Then, wriggling like snakes through the thick undergrowth that abounded in this part of the wood, the Eagles made for their objective.

"Good!" muttered Wharton, when the hillock was reached. "Jolly smart work that!"

"Grooooooh!" groaned Bunter, sinking into a recumbent position. "I'm dying!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Bob Cherry and Nugent unfeelingly; and Hurree Singh remarked that the "dyingfulness" of the esteemed and ludicrous Bunter was the proper caper.

Wharton pointed out the enemy encampment with his scout pole.

"They evidently don't expect any movement from this direction," he muttered to his chums. "No sign of a scout coming this way."

"S-sh!"

Bob Cherry hissed the warning and

dragged his chums down flat on their stomachs.

A moment later, peering over the crest of the small plateau, the Eagles spotted the peaked crown of an enemy hat moving like a shadow amongst the thick ferns below.

"Shall I nab him?" whispered Bob. Wharton nodded.

Silently Bob rose to his feet and departed. From their coign of vantage Wharton and the others watched him make a circuitous advance to the unsuspecting outpost of the Wolf Patrol. Almost on top of him crept Bob, and then came the challenge.

"You're spotted, De Courcy!" said Bob. "Count yourself my prisoner!"

The Caterpillar jumped.

"Oh, begad! You gave me quite a turn, dear boy!"

"You're out of the scrap now!" grinned Bob.

De Courcy grinned.

"You always were an obligin' chappie, you know!" he remarked, stifling a yawn. "I was simply dyin' for a snooze. I shall be able to crawl under that giddy tree and have forty winks with an untroubled conscience."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"You awful slacker!" he said.

The Caterpillar yawned.

"I know. Nature made me tired. And this crawling about is awfully fatiguing, you know."

And, with a languid smile, the Caterpillar dragged his weary footsteps to the shade of a spreading oak and sank down beneath it. In less than two minutes he was fast asleep.

"Well, he's the giddy limit!" chuckled Bob, as he made his way back to Wharton and the others. "If all the Wolves are like that we shall have an easy time!"

"Good man!" said Wharton, as Bob rejoined the party. "You trailed him rippingly!"

"We ought to give Johnny the signal now," remarked Nugent.

Wharton nodded.

"I'll give him a hoot now," he said.

The Eagle Patrol leader rose to his feet and prepared to give the required hoot; but it never passed his lips, for at that moment his attention was drawn to a fast-moving object in the sky to the right of him.

His chums followed his gaze.

"Great Scott!" muttered Bob Cherry. "That aeroplane's moving some!"

"It is. It are!" agreed Nugent, shading his eyes with the brim of his Stetson. "Jove! It's coming down!"

"You're right!" exclaimed Wharton. "There's something wrong! Did you see that flame shoot out from the engine?"

The Eagles looked serious. They knew little of flying, but common sense told them that something was wrong when they saw another flash of flame leap out from the engine.

"That chap's in trouble!" said Nugent. "He's going to land."

The aeroplane was dropping at an alarming rate now.

Interest in the attack on the Wolves' camp was forgotten for the nonce as the Eagles eyed the descent of the plane fixedly. The pilot was evidently making a "forced landing," for he was encircling a small clearing, and his machine was "side-slipping" in dizzy fashion.

"Can he land in that space?" asked Bob Cherry anxiously.

"Just, I should say," remarked Wharton thoughtfully. "That's why he's doing that side-slipping business, so that he won't overshoot the mark."

"Come on!" said Nugent. "Let's trot over. He may want a hand——"

But the juniors were already starting for the clearing; even Billy Bunter was concerned, and he ambled in the wake of Harry Wharton & Co., forgetful of his fatigue.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Shanghaied!

THE scouts threaded their way through the trees with a rush. And just as they broke into the clearing the machine—a large De Havilland air liner—touched ground.

"Oh!"

The wheels of the undercarriage hit the short, crisp turf and bounded up again. For a moment it looked as if the plane would dive nose-foremost into the ground, but the pilot steadied it. The wheels touched earth again, the tail settled down, and, like some huge bird, the plane came to a graceful standstill.



"Bravo!" whooped Bob Cherry.

"Some landing!" exclaimed Nugent. "Another ten yards and the plane would have been into the hedge."

"A near thing!" agreed Wharton.

The Eagles bounded forward, Bunter a bad last.

"Bravo!" roared Bob Cherry.

The pilot of the plane was putting up his goggles, but as the sound of Bob's voice reached him he did an extraordinary thing. His right hand sought something in the cockpit of the plane. Next moment Harry Wharton & Co. found themselves looking into the shining barrel of a revolver.

"Oh, my hat!"

The exclamation had barely passed Bob Cherry's lips when the revolver disappeared, and the pilot of the plane jumped from his seat.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered individual, and what parts of his features his helmet left uncovered showed him to be swarthy.

Wharton & Co. moved forward, their curiosity fully aroused.

The pilot looked about him furtively; and then, seeming to be reassured on one point, he beckoned the juniors to him.

"Have you seen anyone about here?" he asked Wharton, and there was a decidedly foreign flavour to his voice.

"No one but yourself," said Wharton.

"That is good!"

The pilot smiled upon the five astonished juniors.

"Doubtless you saw what was in my hand when you boys startled me just now," he said easily. "I did not mean to frighten you."

"We saw a revolver," admitted Wharton. "But you did not frighten us."

"Ah, no!" returned the man, eyeing the juniors sharply. "But one cannot be too careful when on Government business."

"Oh!"

If the pilot was on Government business it was quite likely that the importance of it demanded that he should be armed. Though why he should level his revolver at a crowd of schoolboy scouts passed Wharton & Co.'s comprehension. But the pilot hastened to explain matters.

"I was forced to land," he said. "Indeed, I am thankful to have done so without losing my life."

"There was something wrong with your engine, sir?"

"There was indeed. There's a leakage in the petrol pipe," said the pilot. "At any moment I expected to be on fire."

"Phew! What a lucky escape."

The pilot smiled then winced, and his left hand caressed a dark stain high up on the leather sleeves of his jacket covering his right arm. Wharton & Co. saw the movement, saw the ominous stain, and felt sorry for the fellow.

"You're hurt," said Wharton anxiously. "Can we do anything for you? We're scouts, you know."

"It is nothing," said the pilot. "I damaged my arm on one of the controls. It is bleeding a little, but it is nothing."

Wharton & Co. were astonished by that remark. They knew little of aeroplane controls, but it struck them as being decidedly queer that the pilot should damage his arm on them sufficient to draw blood. But they said nothing.

Again the pilot's eyes searched the clearing. Really, it looked as if the man expected someone to appear at any moment. He caught the suspicious looks in the faces of the scouts and hastened to explain.

"As I remarked before, I am on Government work," he said easily. "Very important work. I like not this forced landing, for I may be attacked at any moment."

"Oh!"

Wharton could now understand why the man glanced about him so furtively, as if he expected to be attacked at any moment.

"This plane carries Government property to the extent of two million pounds," continued the pilot. "And other people know it. If——"

He did not finish the sentence, but Wharton & Co. filled in the blank, as it were. There were plenty of crooks who would make a desperate bid to possess such a sum they knew; but that Friar-dale should shelter them occasioned them some surprise.

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"I must get this leak repaired," resumed the pilot, examining the rent in the petrol pipe of the engine. "What can I do? What can I do?"

His eyes searched the sky overhead, then roamed round the clearing again and back to the engine.

"What can I do?"

"We'll rush off and fetch a mechanic from the village," volunteered Wharton. "Perhaps he could fix it up for you."

The pilot scowled savagely.

"There is no time," he muttered—"no time! I must take the air within five minutes. Perhaps you will be good enough to help me turn the machine round?"

"Certainly!"

Willingly did the juniors chorus that assent. Obeying the man's instructions, they hung on to the wing extremities and the tail of the plane between them, whilst the pilot raced the engine.

In a few moments the position of the air liner was reversed—with a clear run of sixty odd yards for the "taxi" out which is necessary before a plane can rise into the air.

"Thank you, my boys!" said the pilot. Then, half to himself: "No time! I must get off again!"

"But you can't, with a hole like that in the petrol pipe!" protested Wharton.

The pilot turned on him with a dramatic gesture.

"There is no such word as can't when one is on Government business."

"But the plane will catch fire——" began Wharton, who could not help admiring the man's pluck and his conscientiousness.

"I must take my chance," came the reply. "It is fatal for me to linger here."

Wharton & Co. could not quite see eye to eye with that remark, but the man gave them no time to ponder over it.

"I must bind something round the leakage," he muttered half to himself. "A piece of waterproof sheeting would do."

"If that's all you want I can help you there!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Saved!"

The enthusiasm that sprang into the word made the juniors look at the pilot sharply; but he merely smiled.

"You are a good scout," he said to Wharton. "I shall not forget. The waterproof—quick!"

He almost snatched the proffered ground-sheet from Wharton's hands before that junior had time to unroll it from his pack.

Next minute the man was working feverishly. He tore the ground-sheet in half, and folded one piece into four. This he placed over the rent in the petrol pipe.

Meantime, Bunter, who was less interested in what the pilot was doing than with the interior of the machine, had, in his usual inquisitive fashion, opened the door of the cabin. Next minute he had disappeared inside the machine.

Wharton & Co. watched the pilot working feverishly for a moment or two, and then, growing tired of that, they asked permission to have a look round.

The pilot, without pausing in his labours, grunted some reply that seemed to imply consent, and the Greyfriars scouts followed Bunter into the spacious cabin.

It was fitted with swivel armchairs, into one of which the Owl of the Remove had already sunk. And Wharton & Co. followed his example.

"Some bus!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. **THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 980.**

running his eye over the elaborate fittings. "Jove! I wouldn't mind a trip in this!"

"Neither would I if the petrol were O.K.," grinned Nugent. "That chap's taking a risk in patching up a leakage like that."

Wharton nodded.

"Wouldn't like to be in his shoes," he remarked thoughtfully.

"I say, you fellows," piped Billy Bunter, who had spotted a number of iron-bound packing-cases in the tail end of the cabin. "Do you think there's any grub in these boxes?"

"Fathead!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Government planes don't lay in stores for a siege."

"I bet there's something worth having in those boxes, anyway," said Bunter.

And in that Billy Bunter was right.

The chums of the Remove chatted on, forgetful of the attack on Courtenay's camp, forgetful of everything in their eagerness to see everything the big plane contained.

Meanwhile, the pilot of the plane was putting the finishing touches to the leak in the petrol pipe. He had wrapped the folded ground-sheet round the pipe, and was binding it into position with lengths of copper wire. Perspiration was streaming down his face, and the dark stain on his right arm was spreading. Several ejaculations in a foreign tongue escaped his thin lips as he worked, and ever and anon his rather shifty eyes would search the surrounding trees.

"Good!" he exclaimed as he wound the last piece of wire in position. "That will suffice for the journey. It was lucky these confounded boys were on the spot. But I must get rid of them before they become suspicious!"

Wharton & Co. would have been a trifle astonished had they overheard that remark; but the cabin was a fair distance from the engine.

The pilot wiped his hand on a piece of cotton-waste, and stepped towards the door of the cabin.

"Young gentlemen," he said, "I must ask you to step out. My time is valuable. I——"

Crack!

The loud report of a pistol-shot close at hand made Harry Wharton & Co. jump. Next moment the door of the cabin was slammed home.

"What the dickens!" ejaculated Wharton, jumping to his feet.

Crack!

Another shot rang out—the juniors heard it screech over the fuselage of the plane. Then, to their further surprise, the engine burst into motion with a roar, and the plane trembled and shook to its reverberations.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Wharton, as the noise of the engine increased, almost drowning his words.

"We're moving!" roared Bob Cherry suddenly.

There was no mistaking that. The plane was already moving over the ground, gathering speed at every second. Peering from the windows of the cabin, the imprisoned juniors saw the trees whiz by, then they felt themselves being forced into the bottom of the cabin as the pilot performed a dangerous climbing turn. Earth and sky seemed inextricably mixed to the dumbfounded juniors, and they felt a sickening sensation in the pit of their stomachs.

"Wow!" groaned Bunter.

The earth and sky straightened out.

When the juniors had recovered sufficiently to peer out of the cabin windows, they saw that they were about three hundred feet above the earth.

"The police!" panted Wharton.

He pointed down to the ground where the plane had stood a few moments earlier. There, with revolvers gleaming in the sunlight, stood three men—two of them in ordinary civilian attire, the other in the familiar police uniform.

"That's Inspector Grimes!" roared Nugent.

Crack, crack, crack!

Above the roar of the engine came three sharp reports as the men on the ground emptied their revolvers at the plane.

But the shots apparently did little damage, for the plane forged on at a terrific speed, its nose pointed above the horizon—climbing in record fashion.

"Well, this is a go, and no mistake!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"There's something jolly fishy about it all!" said Nugent. "Why should this chap be running away from the police?"

"The fishfulness of the ostended and ridiculous flight is terrific," said Inky. "We are departfully leaving the earth behind."

There was a howl from Bunter. That fat youth was in a state of mortal terror. He had never been up in an aeroplane before, and the experience and the excitement of it had unnerved him.

"I want to go down!" he howled. "Tell that rotten pilot to stop the plane. Wow!"

"The only way you'll get down, as far as I can see," said Bob Cherry, "is to jump overboard."

"Groooogh! I feel awful!"

The Owl of the Remove certainly looked "awful." Already the motion of the plane was creating disturbances in Bunter's stomach, and his face wore a greenish hue that gave promise of more violent eruptions to come.

"This is crooked business," said Wharton, who had been turning over in his mind the alarming sequence of events. "I'm going to have a word or two with that blessed pilot."

He clutched the handrail of the plane, and made for the spot where a short ladder connected the cabin with the pilot's cockpit higher up. Wharton picked his way through the maze of interlacing wires on either side of the narrow staircase, and stood behind the pilot at last.

The force of the wind at first nearly bowled the Greyfriars junior over as he stood up in that open space, but he grew accustomed to it. Then he tapped the pilot on the shoulder.

The man did not even look round. His eyes were fixed on the sky ahead, and his face was drawn and strained.

"I say!" bawled Wharton, trying to make his voice carry above the whistling of the wind and the roar of the engine. "What's this mean? The police——"

The man looked up at last.

"Speak up!" he roared.

"You've got to land!" bellowed Wharton.

The pilot shook his head.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

Wharton felt his anger rising.

"I tell you you've got to land!" he repeated. "We're schoolboys. We can't be taken on a forced flight like this."

The pilot shrugged his shoulders.

"You should not have meddled with me!" he said. "I never asked you to step into the cabin. I had no time to wait for you to get out. My life was at stake. I had no other alternative but to take you up with me."

Wharton's eyes blazed.



From their clogn of vantage Wharton and the rest of the Eagle troop watched Bob Cherry make a circuitous advance to the unsuspecting outpost of the Wolf patrol. "You're spotted, De Courcy!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Count yourself my prisoner!" The Caterpillar jumped. "Oh, begad! You gave me quite a turn, dear boy!" "You're out of the scrap now!" said Bob. (See Chapter 3.)

"But the machine isn't even safe!" he retorted hotly. "At any moment the leak in the pipe might start again. What then?"

The man shrugged his shoulders again. "It is a gamble!" he smiled. "If we catch fire, it will be all up with us!"

"You callous rotter!" exclaimed Wharton. "We're not standing that. I tell you we must land. Do you hear?"

The pilot nodded.

"We shall land," he answered calmly—"when we get to Russia!"

"Russia?"

"I said so!"

Wharton started. The prospect of a flight to Russia appalled him, especially in a plane that was liable to catch fire at any moment.

"You're jolly well not taking us to Russia!" he snorted. "You're landing us before you leave the coast!"

"Impossible!" was the laconic reply.

Carrying on a conversation in such circumstances was difficult and most unsatisfactory.

Full of his strange news, Wharton retraced his footsteps. He told his chums what the outcome of his short conversation with the pilot was, and there were loud exclamations of dismay when it was understood that the next stopping-place was Russia.

"Wow!" groaned Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to be taken to Russia!"

That was the general view of the shanghaied juniors, but really there seemed little else to expect except something worse in the shape of fire. And they were helpless to do anything.

"This is a go, and no mistake," grunted Bob Cherry. "If it weren't for that rotten petrol pipe I would be enjoying this flight, but I'm jolly well not going to be carted off among the Bolsheviks."

The juniors nodded. Something had to be done. But what? What could

five inexperienced schoolboys do to make the pilot descend?

Wharton glanced moodily at the dials of the instruments placed in the cabin, doubtless for the convenience of travellers when the plane was carrying them to and fro. The altimetre-needle showed that the machine was now six thousand feet above sea level.

"Six thousand feet!" whistled Wharton. "And we're still climbing!"

"Ye gods!" muttered Bob Cherry.

With the exception of Billy Bunter, the Greyfriars juniors felt no fear at being so far away from mother earth. Despite the seriousness of their position, not one of them could resist the temptation to look out of the window and drink in the wonderful panorama below.

Roads with which the juniors were familiar showed up like a number of faded yellow ribbons. Friardale Wood assumed the size of a bowler hat, whilst Greyfriars could be picked out with ease—its impressive pile, surmounted by the tower, looked like a model village one sees in the toyshops. Even the Highcliffe scouts' camp could be discerned, moving specks of colour being all, however, that could be identified of the active juniors there.

The shanghaied Greyfriars juniors wondered whether their absence had been noted on the ground below. Johnny Bull, they reflected, would be waiting for the signal to attack.

And it wasn't likely that he would connect the delayed signal with the aeroplane that was circling above him.

"Seven thousand feet!" ejaculated Nugent, reading the height from the instrument. "And we're still circling round the same spot."

"Phew!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" suddenly boomed Bob Cherry. "We're heading for the Channel!"

It was true. The pilot, while he had been gaining height, had evidently been

trying to locate his position, for the plane performed a steep bank to the right, as a result of which Bunter collapsed in a roaring heap on the floor of the cabin.

"Yaroooh! We're crashing! Save me! Help! Fire! Murder! Oh, crikey!"

The juniors could hardly refrain from grinning as Bunter floundered and gasped on the floor.

"Buck up, Bunter!" said Wharton kindly, as he helped the terrified Owl to his chair. "We'll get out of this somehow. Keep your pecker up!"

"Wow!" howled Bunter. "This is awful! And I'm hungry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Despite the seriousness of the occasion, Bunter had not forgotten that he was hungry.

Bob Cherry drew a packet of chocolate from his haversack.

"Here you are, old fat man!" he grinned. "This will keep you quiet for a bit."

Bunter seized the chocolate with considerable eagerness, and for the next few moments his blind terror gave place to a lively interest in the chocolate. Meantime the chums of the Remove did a bit of scouting in the spacious cabin.

It was Bob Cherry who made the discovery that there was a Verrey light pistol aboard, and he pounced on it with a whoop of triumph.

"I know what this thing is," he remarked joyfully. "Flying chaps use these to signal to people on the ground. There's a whole heap of cartridges here."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Wharton. "We can at least attract attention by firing some of the cartridges."

It was a cheering discovery, and it bucked up the spirits of the shanghaied

"Can't we do something to let Wharton know that we've read his signal?"

There was silence for a few moments. Then De Courcy spoke up.

"We could form a human word of reply by ranging ourselves on the roadway. I understand that roads show up very clearly to airmen."

Johnny Bull thumped the Caterpillar on the back.

"That's a topping wheeze!" he exclaimed. "We can't do much to help poor old Wharton and the others, but it may cheer them up a bit to know that their message has been read."

Peter Todd nodded. "We could form the word 'READ'—that would tell Wharton we know he's in the plane."

"Get busy, then," snapped Johnny Bull, "or the plane will be too far away!"

The scouts raced for the roadway, selecting a cross-roads—which gave greater space to carry out their plan. Under the direction of Peter Todd, the scouts, by lying down, formed the word "READ"—a task that took them about five minutes. It was a gigantic "word" when Peter had finished, for over sixty of the scouts helped to build it, those juniors not required taking good care to keep under cover.

"Splendid!" said Peter Todd. "I bet they'll see it all right."

And evidently the shanghaied juniors did; for as the plane surged inland again—doubtless to gain more height before attempting a Channel crossing—a salvo of mixed Verrey lights dropped from the machine in a cascade, apparently as fast as the trigger could be pulled.

"Hurrah!" roared the scouts.

Then the formation broke up, each scout gazing into the heavens as if he would send the scouts aloft a message of encouragement.

And thus precious minutes went by.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Sporting Chance!

"THAT'S the idea!"

Bob Cherry nodded his head in approval as Harry Wharton fired an assortment of green and red Verrey lights after the troop of scouts below had formed the word "READ."

"Cute dodge of somebody's to do that," remarked Harry Wharton, as he loosed off the last cartridge. "Evidently our message S.O.S. was understood, for the word those chaps have just built is a contraction of the signalling phrase 'Message read.' It was a good job the plane turned inland again, otherwise we should have been too far away to have spotted the message."

"Well, it's something to know that Johnny and the others are aware that we're up aloft," said Nugent. "But can they do anything to help us?"

"They might inform the police," said Wharton thoughtfully. "Although I don't know what good that would do."

"But why should they inform the police," said Nugent. "Those chaps below are not to know that we've been carried off against our will."

"That's so," answered Wharton thoughtfully. "But don't forget my S.O.S. That surely would tell them something was wrong."

Nugent nodded. "There was something in what his chum had said."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly.

"We're heading out to sea again!"

It was true. Once more the pilot had changed his course.

Silence, save for the moans of Billy Bunter, who was in the throes of air-sickness, and the roaring of the engines, reigned in the cabin of the air liner. A peep through the cabin window revealed the long line of coast washed by the sea, over which the plane was now passing. And, as is sometimes the case with planes flying over the sea, several air-pockets were encountered.

Bump!

The noise echoed throughout the big fuselage of the plane as it sank into an air-pocket. To the juniors it was an unnerving experience, for the machine seemed to drop a clean hundred feet, pulling up with that sickening bump, as the wings settled again on an air surface with more resistance.

"That was horrible," panted Bob Cherry. "My heart nearly came into my mouth."

"Groooooogh!" groaned Bunter. "I'm dying!"

Harry Wharton & Co's sufferings were forgotten as they gazed at the hapless Owl.



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"Buck up, Bunter," said Wharton, trying to make the fat junior as comfortable as possible with a rug and a pillow. "You'll soon be better."

Groan!

The four juniors exchanged glances. Bunter undoubtedly was ill—very ill!

"We shall have to do something," muttered Wharton. "Or Bunter will go out of his mind."

The chums nodded and glanced anxiously at their fat companion. The responsibility of his present plight lay with them, they considered.

Wharton's lips set grimly, and he picked up the Verrey light pistol.

"I'm going to interview that pilot merchant with the businesslike end of this," he announced.

Hurree Singh and Cherry and Nugent started.

"But—" began Inky.

"I'm going to bluff him!" snapped Wharton.

He turned on his heel and made his way gingerly along the small gangway that ran between the seats of the cabin. Then he negotiated the steps leading

to the pilot's cockpit. His chums followed him.

Wharton touched the pilot on the shoulder.

The man looked round and snarled. "You again!" he hissed. "Why don't you stay in the cabin? Do you want to send us all to perdition?"

Wharton's eyes gleamed, and his hand containing the pistol came up on a level with the pilot's head.

"I'm going to shoot you unless you turn and land immediately!"

The pilot laughed hoarsely.

"Then what happens to the plane?"

"I don't mean shoot to kill," said Wharton grimly. "I shall wing you! You'll be anxious and able to land us after you've felt a taste of one bullet, I'll warrant. You're fond enough of your own skin to do the job properly."

Again the scoundrel laughed.

"You can't bluff me with that kid's talk," he said. "I'm losing pints of blood as it is. If you take the trouble to wing me as you call it, I shall be useless to handle this bus."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say," said the pilot. "There's a bullet in my right arm now. I—"

"You rotter!" roared Wharton. "You told us that you'd damaged it with one of the controls."

"I may have told you that," said the pilot calmly, "but I don't necessarily expect you to believe it."

Wharton looked at the man's arm and saw that he was indeed speaking the truth. Wharton's chums looked, too, as they crowded behind him and shuddered as they perceived the ever-growing patch of crimson that was slowly but surely forcing its way through the leathern sleeve of the man's jacket.

"You see I am speaking the truth this time," said the pilot. "If you wing me I'm as good as a dead man."

There was truth in what the fellow said, and Wharton realised it. Added to which, his bluff about winging the scoundrel would have ended in smoke, as it were, for the pistol was empty; the last Verrey light cartridge had been fired!

"You're a cool scoundrel!" snapped Wharton, through his teeth. "There's a pal of ours in the cabin lying ill—dangerously ill, for all we know. He looks awful!"

"I'm sorry!" said the pilot, with a mirthless laugh. "But I can do nothing. I'm a desperate man!" he added, with glinting eyes. "This plane carries two million of Government money in bar gold. I'm not going to risk losing that now that I have dared so far."

"Two million in gold!" echoed Wharton, his amazement overcoming his rage.

The scoundrel nodded.

"I pride myself on having done something noteworthy—something worth while," he said. "This plane landed at Croydon Aerodrome two hours ago, the petrol-tank was filled anew, the cargo was about to be unloaded, when I saw the chance I had been waiting for for weeks and weeks."

"You mean you've stolen this machine—"

"The machine!" scoffed the scoundrel calmly. "That is nothing! You may have that! Anyone may have it! I have, if you like to put it that way, stolen the two million of bar gold!"

"You scoundrel!" burst out Wharton.

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"Then your tale of Government service was a tissue of lies? It means that I have assisted a thief to escape with his plunder. That petrol pipe—and—"

"Was shot through by a groundsmen at the aerodrome," said the pilot calmly. "He likewise shot through my arm. A good marksman—very. And that leak in the petrol pipe would have been my undoing but for your timely offer of the waterproof sheeting. If that stands the racket my job is as good as done."

Wharton & Co. listened breathlessly to the man's story. The very daring of it took their breath away. Now the shooting scene in the clearing, the evident haste of this bogus "Government servant" to repair the damaged pipe, their own plight all became clear.

"You scoundrel!" repeated Wharton. "And you think you're going to Russia?"

"I did so a few moments back," remarked the man coolly. "But I see we are being pursued!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

The juniors scanned the horizon. Behind them could be seen a number of black specks that became larger and larger as the seconds ticked by.

"Those are scouts," said the pilot calmly. "If they catch up with us we are done."

He spoke in a very matter-of-fact tone, although the juniors were not slow to fathom what he meant.

"You think they will open fire on this plane?" asked Wharton.

"I am certain of it," was the reply. "Help!"

That yelp of terror nearly made the pilot lose control. Harry Wharton & Co. turned and beheld Bunter.

The fat junior was a pitiable object. In fact, he looked ghastly. Evidently he had summoned enough strength to follow the juniors forward. Equally evident he had overheard the alarming news that pursuing planes were on the trail and that shooting was to be expected in consequence.

"Help!" he yelled, clutching at the wire stays, in his efforts to keep his feet. "I'm dying! Grooough! I'm not going to be shot at!"

Wharton did his best to calm the fat junior, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Bunter was terrified out of his fat wits.

"You see what you've done," said Wharton to the pilot. "If you've got a spark of humanity in you, you'll land us, and take your chance of getting away again with your rotten booty."

"It's a chance I'm not putting into the scale with two million of gold within my reach," answered the daring rogue. "I'm sorry, but there it is. You must take your chance with me!"

"I'm not staying on this plane," howled Bunter. "I'll jump overboard!"

"If you want to do that," said the pilot, "you can strap the parachute on first. I should think it would stand your weight," he added, giving Bunter a glance over his shoulder.

"Do you mean to say that there are parachutes aboard?" asked Bob Cherry eagerly.

The pilot shook his head.

"Only one," he made answer. "But that will be sufficient for your fat friend—that is if he's got enough nerve to take the leap!"

"Oh, you scoundrel!" snapped Wharton.

Words failed him, and he ground his teeth in helpless rage. His chums,

looking over the tail of the plane, saw the scouts coming up hand-over-fist. In a few moments, unless a miracle happened, they would be within shooting range.

Billy Bunter was nearly mad with fear. He gave one look at the black specks overhauling the passenger plane, then he bolted for the cabin.

Wharton & Co. streamed after him, the former having elicited the information that the parachute was in the cabin locker, ready for use.

"Where is it?" shrieked Bunter, who by this time was in hysterics. "Give me the parachute!"

Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. There was only one parachute. But if the worst came to the worst, it would be comforting to know that Bunter had a sporting chance of reaching safety.

"Give it to him," muttered Bob.

The locker was opened, and Wharton drew out a queer-looking tangle of silk and straps, which he identified as a parachute. In the locker was a card of instructions. These latter were carefully read, and carried out as the belt was fastened round Bunter's chest and under his arms. With the apparatus was a knife, complete with sheath, the purpose of which, so the instructions ran, was to sever the straps of the parachute when the parachutist reached earth.

Bunter eyed the contraption fearfully. "Yow! Will that lot of rubbish take me safely to earth?" he asked.

"Of course it will!" replied Bob Cherry cheerfully, although in his heart of hearts he doubted it.

Then, being more or less assured that his fat skin was safe, the shanghaied juniors saw a peep of the old familiar Bunter.

"Of course, I'm not afraid of staying here!" gasped Bunter. "But I think it's up to one of us to get help from below, you know."

"Oh!"

The chums could scarcely repress a smile. This was so like Bunter.

"It wants a lot of courage to take a leap into space," continued Bunter, little knowing at the time just how much courage the deed did require.

"It does," agreed the juniors solemnly, much preferring to see Bunter in this mood than to listen to his hysterical calls for help.

"And I'm the chap to take risks," said Bunter. "And—Yooop!"

His sentence was never completed. Another attack of air-sickness visited him, and for the next five minutes the fat Owl was hanging limply over the cabin window, knowing not whether he was on his head or his feet, whether he was in the sky or on the earth, and caring still less.

"Well, Bunter's fixed up!" said Wharton as cheerily as he could.

There was a lengthy silence.

The juniors were thinking of Greyfriars and Johnny Bull and the other fellows. Would they ever see those grey old walls again? Would they ever see the sturdy, thick-set figure of Johnny Bull—

And in the midst of these sentimental reflections came the hoarse voice of the pilot.

"Hi! You boys! They're catching us!"

Wharton & Co. looked at one another, and made their way out to the pilot's cockpit.

And what they saw was enough to make any schoolboy sick with despair.

Approximately three hundred yards away was the nearest pursuing machine,

its outline being presented against the clouds in a jet-black silhouette.

Suddenly above the roar of the engine came the crackle of a machine-gun; but, fortunately for the juniors standing in that exposed area, none of the bullets reached the machine.

The pilot set his teeth and opened out his engine to its maximum speed. That it could climb surprisingly well for a heavy plane was quickly observed, for it seemed to leave the small scout wallowing hundreds of feet below in the matter of a few seconds.

Wharton felt a bead of perspiration break out on his brow.

The danger was near. It had passed them by once. But would they be so fortunate again?

The chums retraced their footsteps. In the cabin they eyed each other with meaning glances. Harry Wharton was the first to speak.

"If they open fire again we shall be goners!" he muttered thickly. "We'd better shake—in case!"

The chums shook hands, a proceeding that sent Bunter into a fit of violent terror.

"Don't leave me!" he implored. "Help!"

"You'll be all right, old chap," said Wharton kindly. "You have the parachute, remember."

"Yow!"

Even the thought of the parachute failed to cheer the miserable Owl. But all the same for that, he rolled unsteadily to the big door of the cabin.

Again above the roar of the engine came the crackle of machine-gun fire. This time bullets spattered all over the plane. Wharton & Co. heard them distinctly, and their faces paled.

Crrrrrack!

"Help! I'm killed!"

A fearful yell escaped Billy Bunter, for a bullet penetrated the fuselage about a couple of inches from his head and sent a shower of small splinters over his terrified face.

The plane gave a violent lurch. Wharton & Co. thought that the pilot had been hit, not knowing that he had simply banked the plane at a steep angle. But the lurch was disastrous in its effect, for Bunter was sent scuttling across the cabin like a top, then he rolled back again as the machine righted. But his roll brought him sharp against the door of the cabin.

"Look out!" yelled Wharton.

The door of the cabin opened—whether a bullet had pierced the lock, or whether it was the result of Bunter's weight thrown against it was impossible to say at that moment. But it opened. The terrified Owl made a frantic clutch to save himself from falling out; his fingers bit deep into the woodwork, but he clutched too late.

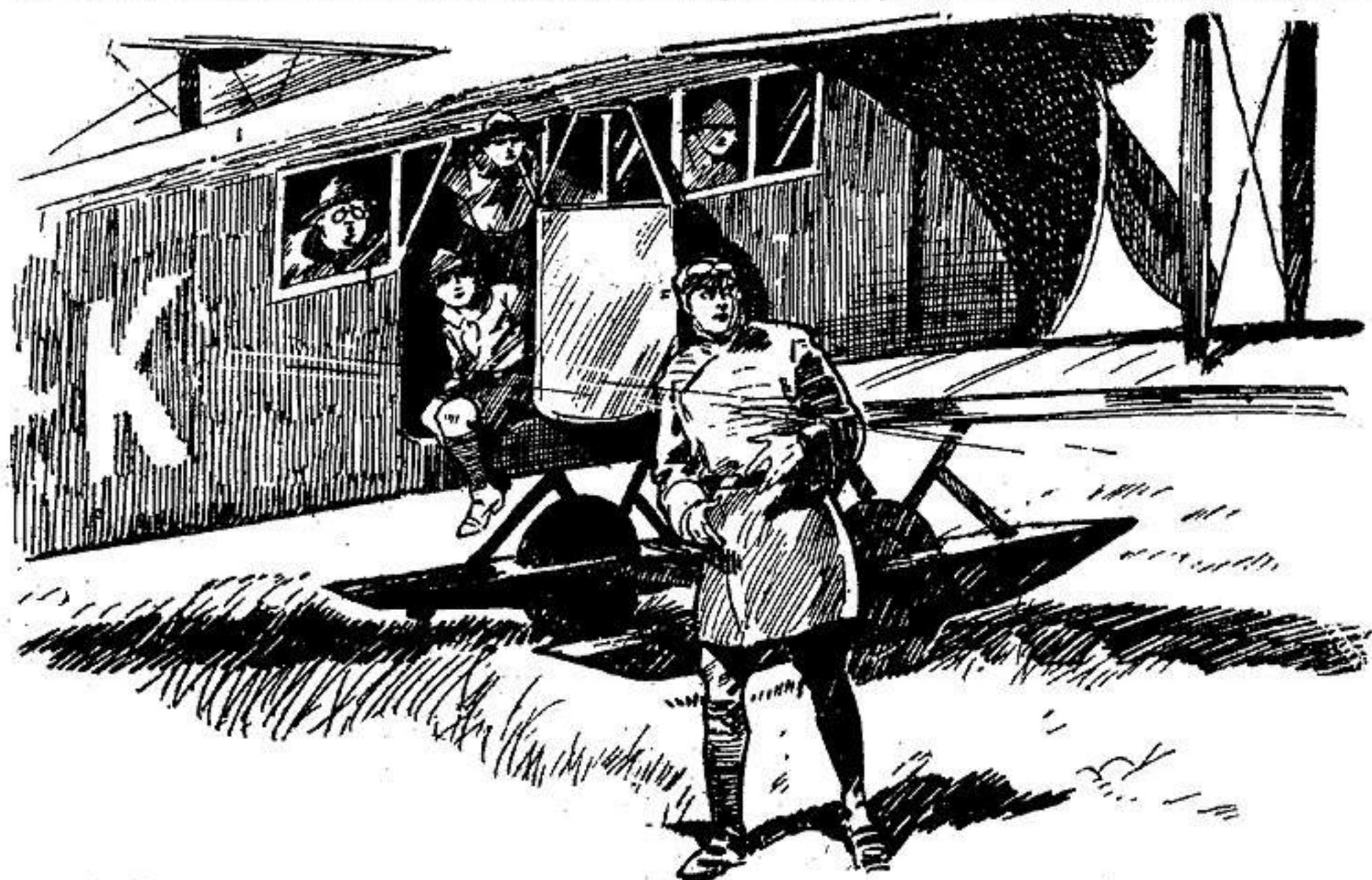
Before he knew what was happening the fat junior, in a semi-conscious state, was dropping into space—realising, strangely as it may seem, just how much courage it really required to be a parachutist.

"Good heavens!" gasped Wharton.

"The parachute hasn't opened—"

Four faces peered out through the smashed door—faces lined with anxiety for the fate of William George Bunter.

But there was no cause for alarm just then. The parachute opened slowly; the headlong plunge into space was checked. Bunter held a sporting chance of reaching safety!



Having put the finishing touches to the leak in the petrol pipe the pilot beckoned to Harry Wharton & Co. "Young gentlemen," he said, "I must ask you to step out now. My time is valuable. I—" Crack! The loud report of a pistol-shot close at hand made the Greyfriars juniors jump and the pilot turn round in sudden alarm. "What the dickens!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. (See Chapter 4.)

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Parachute Descent!

"**A**RE you sure of what you say?" Inspector Grimes, of the Courtfield police, looked at Johnny Bull and the Caterpillar as if he hardly believed his eyes.

The two juniors, full of their strange tidings, had raced with all speed to the Courtfield police-station.

"We know for a fact that our chums are in that aeroplane!" said Johnny bluntly. "And it's time somebody did something!"

"But I myself saw the aeroplane," expostulated the inspector. "And I certainly didn't see any sign of five schoolboys aboard it."

"We've proved that our chums are aboard, sir!" insisted Johnny Bull. "They've signalled us, and we've signalled back."

"Great Jupiter!"

The inspector was looking very worried indeed. He had been kept on the "go" all the afternoon—at least, ever since headquarters had wired him to say that a desperado, named Razinoff, had made off with two million of the Government's gold in a stolen aeroplane, and that the scoundrel, heading in the direction of Courtfield, was to be stopped at all costs.

Triumph had come within the inspector's grasp almost. He had seen the aeroplane make its forced landing, being himself then about five miles away. Without loss of time he and two plain-clothes men, fully armed, had raced to the scene, only to see the coveted prize slip between their fingers. Certainly the inspector had never given a thought to a parcel of schoolboys being mixed up in the affair.

"Good heavens!" he panted. "I must wireless the scout machines not to open fire!"

Johnny Bull and the Caterpillar jumped.

"Not to open fire!" muttered Johnny Bull. "Do you mean to say—"

"I mean that a squadron of fast-flying scouts have been detailed to stop this confounded robber at all costs—even if they have to shoot him down!" said the inspector.

The faces of the juniors blanched.

"For Heaven's sake, stop them opening fire!" implored Johnny Bull. "Wharton—"

But the inspector was scribbling something on a note-pad which he hurriedly gave to the sergeant. Then he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"How your friends came to be mixed up in this affair I don't profess to know," he growled. "It beats me! But for them the capture of this man was a certainty. But we can't shoot at a parcel of interfering schoolboys even if there is a couple of million pounds aboard the plane."

"I should think not," snorted Johnny Bull. "Blow the millions of pounds!"

The inspector intimated that the interview was over, and Johnny Bull and the Caterpillar withdrew.

They rushed back to the cross-roads where the two troops of scouts were waiting for them. Quickly they told the news.

"The plane's been headed off," said Frank Courtenay. "It was crossing the Channel when a crowd of small machines came up from nowhere, it seemed. We saw it turn inland, and then it began to climb."

"Whereabouts is it now?" asked Johnny Bull anxiously.

"Somewhere up above the clouds," said Courtenay.

Crrrrrack!

The juniors' faces paled. They knew

that dreaded sound. The scouts were opening fire!

Crrrrrack!

There it was again.

Then suddenly something dropped out from behind a cloud. At the height it was then, no one amongst the anxious group below recognised Billy Bunter.

In fact, Billy Bunter hardly knew himself just then. That wild leap into space had left him half unconscious. He had dropped like a stone for about a hundred feet, turning and squirming in the harness of the parachute like a cork bobbing. Somehow or other one of his feet had become entangled with a strap that joined the huge expanse of silk, but Bunter cared little about that. He was dropping to his death, he knew that; and he closed his eyes.

All the breath seemed to have been squeezed out of his body. To him it seemed that giant hands were plucking at his throat, throttling him. His head was swimming, his eyes were filling with water, and then—

That mad downward plunge was checked. Countering, to a great extent, the tendency to hit mother earth at a speed of about a hundred miles a minute was the upward lift as the parachute opened and filled with air.

"Grooooooh!"

The relief to Bunter was a sheer joy, and he gasped out his appreciation accordingly.

But as the descent continued terror seized hold of him once more. He had no idea of what speed he was doing, but the earth was growing larger and larger to his watering eyes every second.

He felt such a helpless inanimate speck against the forces of Nature that he shivered. Would he land in safety?

(Continued on page 17.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 980.

"ROT right in, old bean!"

It was Dr. Birchmell, the dignified and venerable headmaster of St. Sam's, who called out that cheery invitation. But the Head's cheery manner melted at once, and became quite friendly, when he saw who his visitor was.

It was big, berty Burleigh, the skipper of St. Sam's, who swung into the Head's study with his manly gate and his smitick stride.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Burleigh.

"I did," said the Head coldly.

"Well—er—here I am, sir?"

"So I perceive," said the Head freezingly.

"You—don't wish to speak to me, sir?"

"I do," said the Head coldly.

Burleigh shivered a little. He usually got a warm greeting from the Head; but the doctor was now as cold as an iceberg which has been kept in a refrigerator.

"Wonder what's biting him?" muttered Burleigh. "I see no sign of a rat or a mosquito!"

"Take a chair, Burleigh," said the Head frostily.

"Where to, sir?" asked the St. Sam's skipper innocently.

"The Head frowned.

"When I say, 'Take a chair,' I mean, 'Adopt a sitting posture.' In other



The skipper of St. Sam's made a very handsome figure as he reclined in the chair, with his knee hunched up till they gored his chest.

words, 'Squally-woo,' as they say in France.

Burleigh squatted. The skipper of St. Sam's made a very handsome figure as he reclined in the chair, with his knee hunched up till they gored his chest.

He was wearing his cricket flannels, for he had just been playing hockey.

"The Head glared at Burleigh through his pangs—day."

"Burleigh," he said, in freezing accents, "I have just witnessed a most deplorable exhibition on the part of yourself and ten others. Doubtless you would call it a hockey match; I prefer to call it a fiasco. If you knew the first thing about hockey, Burleigh, you would have wiped up the ground with St. Bill's—put it across 'em good and proper, to use a classic expression. Instead of which, you allowed yourself to be beaten by—er—what was the score? Your opponents scored so rapidly that I lost count!"

Burleigh flushed a deadly pale.

"Thirty-five to nil was the score against us, sir," he said, hanging his handsome head. "But we don't pretend to be experts at hockey. Soccer is the school game. If we played St. Bill's at soccer, why, there would be a total eclipse of St. Bill's! But hockey—well, The Mower Library.—No. 980.

THE HEAD PLAYS HOCKEY

Another Side-splitting Story by DICKY NUGENT



Black eyes, broken noses, and cracked heads are common when Dr. Birchmell's Head of St. Sam's starts to play hockey; and the ground looks more like a battlefield than a playing field when the final whistle blows.

It's never been taken up seriously at his legs. "This is a jolly comfortable school, sir."

"Then it is high time that it was!" said the Head, with a cold snap. "I want to see St. Sam's lead the way in everything, from soccer to snov-bellenny, from lacrosse to leap-frog. I tell you, Burleigh, I was disgusted to see St. Bill's put it across you this afternoon. As the headmaster of this historic foundation, I hung my head for very shame, as you are doing now. There will have to be a big improvement, Burleigh. If you lose your next match, I shall expel the entire hockey coven!"

"Oh, crumps!" gasped Burleigh, a flush of intense pallor darkening his handsome features.

"A performance such as I witnessed this afternoon," went on the Head biting, "is a disgrace to St. Sam's! It lowers the tone and prestige of the school. It makes us the laughing-stock of the inferior schools, like Eton and Harrow."

Burleigh jumped to his feet, his handsome head held haughtily high.

"If it's a question of the honor of the school being at stake, sir," he cried, "I yield to no one in my love for St. Sam's! Its interests are my interests. Its joys are my joys; its sorrows are my sorrows. Its walls are my walls—"

"You're wrong," interrupted the Head coldly. "They belong to the Governors of the school."

"I was speaking figuratively, sir," said Burleigh, resuming his seat.

The Head yawned.

"Cut out the sentimental stuff, Burleigh, and let's get on with the washing! Who is your next hockey match against?"

"Puddlecombe Athletic, sir."

"Are you at home?"

"Quite, sir," said Burleigh, stretching

his legs. "This is a jolly comfortable armchair!"

"Fathead! I mean, are you playing Puddlecombe at home?"

"Yes, sir. Bullly-off at two o'clock sharp, on Saturday."

The Head stroked his long beard in reflection.

"I shall be there," he said, after a pause. "See if you can find me a jersey and a pair of shorts, Burleigh. I propose to skipper the St. Sam's side, and lead them fearlessly into the fray!"

Burleigh nearly fell out of his chair, so great was his astonishment.

"Are—are you sane, sir?" he gasped. "Eggscept for periodical detentions at Hanwell, I have been sane all my life."

"But—but you're too old to play hockey, sir!"

"Bosh! Likewise, tosh! A man is as old as he feels. I have seen it said in the newspapers that a man is too old at ninety. Why, I was skipping around like a two-year-old at that age! And I like to lead St. Sam's to victory on Saturday."

"My hat!"

The Head rose to his feet. He had thawed a little now, and there was less of the iceberg in his manner, as he laid his hand kindly on Burleigh's shoulder.

"Where you made your biggest mistake this afternoon, Burleigh," he said, "was that you were not sufficiently ruff and vigorous in your play. Hockey, my dear boy, is not a game for mollycoddles and milksoops. It is, rather, a game for upstanding, full-blooded, two-listed men! When I am playing on Saturday, and an opponent tackles me, I shall not raise my hat to him, and say,

"You did!" growled Burleigh, struggling to his feet. "You struck me as being the most dangerous man I have ever handled a golf-club! You've punctured my fortid, and given me a shower-bath of ink! They ought never to have let you out of Hanwell!"

The Head frowned fiercely.

"For this impertinence, Burleigh," he said, "you are dropped from the hockey eleven!"

"A good job, too!" growled Burleigh. "I wouldn't play in any team under your kapinty, anyway!"

And he swung angrily out of the Head's study, mopping ink from his face as he went.

II.

"ONCE more unto the breach, dear friends! Charge, Chester—on! Half a leeg, half a leeg, half a leeg, onward!"

It was the headmaster of St. Sam's, who uttered this rousing battle-cry. The Head knew his Shakespeare as thoroughly as he knew how to play hockey.

Puffed out with pomposity and importance, Dr. Birchmell led the St. Sam's team on to the field. He was attired in a jersey which fitted him like a sack, a pair of shorts as tight as tights, and a pair of rubber-soled shoes.

Around the ropes stood a cheering crowd, which included Burleigh of the Sixth.

Although dropped from the hockey eleven, Burleigh loved his school too dearly to show any sign of sulks. He wanted to see St. Sam's put it across Puddlecombe Athletic, but he had his doubts. With a doddering old grey-beard like the Head leading the attack the outlook was none too rosy for St. Sam's.

The Head shook hands cordially with the Puddlecombe skipper, and tossed a coin into the air.

"Heads! I win, takes you lose!" he said.

It was tales, so Puddlecombe lost the toss.

"We'll play against the tide," said the Head, for the ground was soaked with recent rain. "It is many years since I played hockey. How do we start?"

"By bullying, of course!" said the Puddlecombe skipper.

"Ah," said the Head, with a feendish grin, "I shall do my share of that!"

They bullied off, and the Puddlecombe skipper dashed away with the ball. But he didn't get far. The Head, swinging round, stretched out his hockey-stick, and hooked his opponent by the neck of his jersey. Then he slung him to one side.

"Pow!" roared the Puddlecombe skipper.

And Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, who was referee, blew his whistle with a thunderous roar.

"Sorry, sir," he panted, as he came running up. "But those things aren't done!"

The Head detached his hockey-stick from the neck of the Puddlecombe skipper, and frowned savagely at Mr. Lickham.

"How dare you interfere, Lickham!" he thundered. "Get off the field, sir!"

"But—but I'm the referee, sir!" faltered the Form master.

"So am I!" said the Head. "We don't want two people on the job!"

"But—but you can't be player and referee as well!" protested Mr. Lickham. "It isn't aloud! If you will read the rules—"

"I've drawn up my own rules for this game!" said the Head calmly. "Get off the field, Lickham, or I'll take you by the scruff of the neck and frog-march you off—but me if I don't!"

Like a man in a dream, Mr. Lickham tottered slowly from the field.

"Now we'll get on with the slaver!" said the Head briskly. "Where's the ball?"

"The Puddlecombe skipper's sitting on it, sir!" said Bounder of the Sixth. And there was a chuckle.

The Head frowned at the Puddlecombe skipper.

Like a stone from a catapult, the inkpot whizzed through the air, struck Burleigh with a sickening thud, right in the middle of his fortid.

"Sitting on the ball is an infriement under Rule 99," he said sternly. "I will therefore award myself a penalty-hit! Look out in goal!"

The Head poked and prodded the unfortunate Puddlecombe skipper with his hockey-stick until he discovered the ball. Then he took it to within a few feet of the Puddlecombe goal, and let drive at it with all his might.

Whiz!

The ball took the Puddlecombe goalie full in the chest, knocking him backwards into the net.

"Goal!" cried the Head, clapping his own achievement. "That's the stuff to give the troops!"

"O-ow-ow!" wailed the hapless goalie, as he sprawled in the mud.

The Head gazed at him with that content which is said to precede the bite of a tortoise.

"Get up, wretched man!" he said. "What are you making a fuss about? Haven't you learnt to take hard knocks in silence?"

Following with anguish, the goalie tottered to his feet, and the game proceeded.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

The Mower Library.—No. 980.

Do You Know That?

Interesting Tit-Bits for the Footer Fan!

JOHAN SMITH, the Bolton Wanderers' centre-forward, is going to South Africa for six weeks next summer to coach a football team out there.

England have never won the International championship since Robert Crompton last captained the side.

When Seymour, the Newcastle outside-left was a boy, one of his schoolmasters, with a view to encouraging him, rashly offered threepence for every successful shot he made. Seymour showed such accuracy, however, the offer was soon withdrawn!

Cookson, the centre-forward of Chesterfield, who broke the individual-scoring record in the English League last season, had played all through his previous career as a full-back.

E. Watson, the Wolverhampton back, helped to bring down a Zeppelin off the Norfolk coast during the War.

Jack Elkes, the Tottenham Hotspur centre-half, has a unique medal. When he went to Australia with an English team the spectators at one match were called upon to vote as to which English player a special medal should be awarded to. The onlookers voted in favour of Elkes.

The first day Hutton, the Scottish International, played for Blackburn

Rovers after he had been transferred from Aberdeen there were 20,000 more people attended at the ground than for any previous match of the present season at Blackburn.

George Douglas, the outside-right of Bristol Rovers, and once with Oldham Athletic, has taken part in games in Paris, Berlin, Liege, Brussels, Antwerp, Gothenburg, San Sebastian, and Bilbao.

Harold Cope, the new goalkeeper of Blackburn Rovers, is a professional sprinter, so is able to run out at a good speed.

Harold Fleming, who used to play for Swindon and for England in International matches, would never turn out on Christmas Day or Good Friday. There is a clause in the rule of the F. A. under which any professional may refuse to play on these days without incurring any penalty from his club.

Forty years ago, when there were only two half-backs in a football team, the two men used to wear different-coloured jerseys from the rest of the side.

Everton is the only club which has entirely escaped relegation from the First Division. Blackburn Rovers and Aston Villa have never been in the Second Division, but the Rovers were saved by an extension of the League and the Villa by re-election.

There are three footballers still on the active list who have scored over 200 goals each in League games alone—Joe Smith, of Bolton Wanderers, who has scored nearly 250; Charlie Buchan, of the Arsenal; and Horace Barnes, now with Oldham Athletic.

Meredith, Homer, and Boswell were three famous writers. There were three footballers with those names in a recent Blackpool v Wolverhampton Wanderers match.

McInroy, of Sunderland, who kept goal for England in the last International, was once refused a position in a team because twopence was too much to give for him. The club responsible for the incident was that at the village of Highton, near Preston. Several seasons ago he was given a trial, but when the committee met afterwards they decided not to sign him because League forms, which cost twopence, were scarce, and they did not wish to waste any.

Walker, the Villa forward, has six balls which have been used in International matches in which he has taken part. On the other hand Gillespie, who has played for Ireland twenty-one times, has never received one such souvenir.

Lindon, Merthyr Town's player-manager, stands 6 feet, and is 16st. 4lb., and is the heaviest player in football.

Some years ago when Kenneth Campbell and Elisha Scott were both goalkeepers on the staff of the Liverpool club, they played on opposite sides in an International match between Scotland and Ireland.

In five seasons between 1907 and 1912 Albert Iremonger, now of Lincoln City, kept goal in every League match for Notts County, not being once absent. This is the record run.

THE HEAD PLAYS HOCKEY!

(Continued from page 15.)

It wasn't a game, really—it was a massaker.

The Head barged and charged all over the field, doing grato eggsecution with his hockey-stick. Whenever an opponent was rash enuff to get in his way, he either slashed him across the shins, or poked him in the chest, or hit him on the napper. The Head had no idea of sience or polish, or what is known as fine S. He was out for blud, and he made no secret of the fact. Indeed, a good deal of blud was shed on that memmerable afternoon until the hockey field resembled a battlefield, stroon with the wounded boddies of the Puddlecombe players.

The Head helped himself liberally to goals. He scored about one a minnit, on an averidge. It was a simple matter for him to run through and score, for before very long every Puddlecombe player was "horse de combat." The Head charged and plunged over their

rekumbent forms, scoring goals as often as he liked. His beard waved in the breeze; his eyes gleamed with the joy of battle.

"This is 'Ockey, with a capital O!" he cried eggsultantly. "How many goals have I got, Bounder?"

"Forty-nine, sir!" grinned Bounder.

"One more for the hundred!" said the Head, whose "arithmetick was not so good in his second childhood as it had been in his first. "By Jove, what a rout! I must write to the papers about this!"

The Head scored what he fondly imagined to be his hundredth goal; then he pawed, mopping the inspiration from his brow.

"I think we'll pack up now!" he panted. "Under my rules, when a team get a hundred goals, it can declare."

The St. Sam's team, duddled up with larfter, staggered off the field.

The Head, clapping and cheering himself as he came off, felt that he had deserved well of his country. But he had not got very far when the Puddlecombe players, smarting under their injuries and vowing dire vengeance, closed in upon him. There was no mistaking their intensions.

Pannick-stricken, the Head shrieked

for help. His neeze wobbled under him, and he went a garstly purple.

But before help could arrive, the Puddlecombe players eggsacted their vengeance in full. The unforchunitt Head was bumped, bashed, biffed, broozed, beaten, battered, and otherwise malltreated. He had a very paneful five minnits indeed, and he was an ambulance case by the time the Puddlecombe players had finished with him.

When the Head made his next appearanse in publick, he was swathed in bandiges from top to toe. He was, in fact, all bandiges, and no Head. His face was completely hidden from view; but he was just able to make the following announsement in muffled tones:

"My boys, I have come to the concloosion that hockey is a brootal, ruff, and degrading pastime; and I hearby forbid it to be played within these pre-sinks from this day forthwith! All hockey-sticks, jerseys, shorts, and other equipment must be sold at once, and the proceeds handed to me in my study.

"The money will just about pay my doctor's bill!" he added, sotto voce, to Mr. Lickham.

And the Head was never seen on a hockey field again.

THE END.



(Continued from page 13.)

"Wow!"

A terrified glance below revealed the sea. Bunter watched the white specks of foam as a mouse watches a hungry cat, weighing up his chances of escaping those angry billows that now looked so enchantingly peaceful, or alternatively of escaping a horrible death on the rocks that lay below their surface.

"Help!"

Bunter might have saved his breath, for his cry was lost in the swirling of the wind.

Down, down!

Would that unnerving descent never come to an end? But there was comfort for Bunter when he plucked up enough courage to look below again. The sea was no longer directly beneath him; the wind was carrying the parachute inland.

Away to his left Bunter could see the tall tower of Greyfriars. How he longed to be there, if only to be swotting at English History under the eagle eyes of Mr. Quelch, rather than enduring this horrible nightmare.

Not a thought did he give to the plight of those he had left behind him in the stolen plane—a plight worse than his, did he but know it. Bunter's concern over most things began and ended with himself.

Down, down!

The trees were looming up now, suggesting a fresh terror to the terrified Owl. Supposing he dropped on one?

"Wow! Oh dear!"

Perspiration began to stream down Billy Bunter's fat face. The end was in sight. A clump of trees seemed to rush up to meet him.

Bunter closed his eyes, prepared for the worst.

Thud!

Bunter touched earth, or to be more correct the topmost branches of a spreading oak. Followed a rending and tearing as the parachute spiked itself on the branches, and Bunter found himself slithering through a mass of leaves and boughs before he was brought up, with a gasp.

What had happened to him he hadn't the faintest idea.

"Groooough!"

Bunter opened his eyes, slowly. Then he gasped. His parachute descent had landed him in the heart of a tree, about twelve feet from the ground. The straps of the parachute were wound about the branches, and Bunter was supported in this position face downwards.

"Help! Yaroooooh! Help!"

Bunter yelled with all the force of his lungs now in mortal fear of being left to perish in his uncomfortable position without being able to help himself.

"Help!"

"Hold on! We're coming!"

It was a stentorian shout from the powerful lungs of Johnny Bull, and it was followed by a regular chorus of encouragement.

"Hold on, Bunter!"

"We're coming, old chap!"

"Keep your pecker up, fatty!"

That was Peter Todd's voice.

"Groooough!" gasped Bunter.

"Buck up!"

And that was how the Eagles and the Wolves found him a few moments afterwards, hanging face downwards in the tree, his face fat, crimson, and perspiring, his fat figure shaking like a jelly.

Alarming as that descent through space had been, the juniors gathered below the tree could not suppress their grins. It was the reaction from the anxiety of a few moments before. From grins came broad smiles, then half-stifled chuckles. And from that sprang a chorus of hearty laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter knew then that he had indeed reached earth again!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Anxious Moments!

"I WONDER what's happened, to Bunter?"

Harry Wharton, peering through the broken door of the plane asked that question in a hushed voice. He had seen the parachute supporting the fat junior open right enough, but there were other dangers to be encountered in a parachute descent, and Bunter had been lost to view in the clouds below.

"I expect he's touched ground by now," said Bob Cherry. "The fat old ass would reach earth quicker than most people, you know."

The juniors smiled, but it came and went in a flash. Their own position was truly an alarming one. What was going to happen to them? Another burst of machine-gun fire, and it was a hundred-to-one chance on their pilot being hit.

But, strangely enough, the gunfire had ceased.

Here, up above the clouds that presented, as Bob remarked, a picture like an expanse of snow inviting one to step over the side, so solid did they appear upon the surface, all was quiet and peaceful.

The altimeter showed that the height above sea level was seventeen thousand feet. But where the plane was, not one of the juniors had the faintest idea.

"Might be in my own esteemed and ridiculous country, for all I can see," fully told, remarked Hurree Singh. "But the peacefulness after the ridiculous shootfulness is terrific."

The Co. nodded.

The pursuing planes had been shaken off in that hurtling flight through the clouds. Whether they would locate the bullion-carrying machine again was a question of doubt. Scoundrel as the man Razinoff was, handling the joystick in that exposed cockpit, the juniors could not help but admire his tenacity and pluck. Certainly he handled the plane like a man who had spent most of his time in the air.

And the rattle of the machine-guns had ceased.

That was a blessing. But the chums did not know that it was to Johnny Bull they owed their thanks, perhaps their lives. For his timely warning had been wirelessly to the pursuing planes, the pilots of which now had orders to force the scoundrelly robber down to earth by closing in on him, without endangering the lives of the schoolboys aboard. Without, in fact, firing another shot!

A difficult task which, however,

these scout pilots were prepared to essay once they came within vision of the air liner once more.

The pilot of the liner knew his job, however. He knew that his best plan was to fly round in circles for half an hour or more, it being something in the nature of a certainty that the scouting machines would head out to sea thinking to catch up with him there.

This, as a matter of fact, was exactly what had happened.

The light was beginning to fail now. It had turned five o'clock, and Harry Wharton & Co. began to wonder what the darkness held in store for them.

They were feeling hungry, too.

The plane began to descend.

"Expect the pilot's lost his bearings," said Wharton gloomily.

"Nice prospect for us!" granted Nugent.

"Anything's better than Russia!" grinned Bob Cherry. "I believe you don't get any food there. You have to exist on promises. And I could do with a square meal."

The chums grinned ruefully.

"The aching voidfulness of my ridiculous self is crying aloud for one of Mrs. Mimble's esteemed rabbit-pies," said Hurree Singh, licking his dry lips.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! We've dropped to six thousand feet!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"And we've dropped into a fog as well!"

The juniors peered out of the window.

Below them was nothing to be seen but a dingy, grey mist—undoubtedly a fog, as Frank Nugent had remarked.

"Then what's the mad ass coming down for?" asked Wharton. "If we get into that fog we shall be worse off than ever."

"Let's go and ask him."

The chums went forward and joined the pilot in the cockpit.

He looked at them keenly.

"What are we dropping for?" asked Wharton.

The pilot pointed to the engine, by way of answer.

Even as the chums watched, a livid tongue of flame darted out from the region of the damaged petrol-pipe.

Their faces blanched.

If there was one thing that they feared it was fire—as, indeed, do all who pit their fortunes against the air.

"I'm forced to land!" growled the pilot. "That pipe must be patched up again. Rough luck after dodging those scouts."

But the juniors thought otherwise, as their faces showed. A landing meant the end of their journey to Russia—meant, perhaps, the chance of clapping this daring robber into custody.

Razinoff read their thoughts, and he smiled sardonically.

"When I said land I was speaking generally," he said. "For all I know I may pitch on to the sea when I've messed about in that fog. Alternatively, I may crash into a hill, or a building, or any old thing. Again, there is always the danger of fire before we get near the earth."

There was. The flames from the leaking pipe were more constant now. True, they were small flames, but if they continued the chances of the plane ever reaching ground in one piece were remote.

Harry Wharton & Co. shivered, and their faces fell.

The end of the journey was not in sight yet, they knew.

The plane dropped lower.

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Then it was engulfed in the fog.

Straining ears and eyes, the juniors watched and waited. To Wharton came the familiar sound of the sea, but he hesitated to inform his chums of what he heard.

Lower and lower!

It was the sea!

Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Inky heard it—plainly enough now—heard the idle wash of the waves as they broke over some submerged reef, or rock.

"Can this chap make a landing on water?" asked Nugent.

Wharton reassured him on the spot.

"The machine's fitted with combination wheels and floats," he said. "I noticed that when we were in the clearing."

"Thank heavens!"

The sighing of the sea grew into a roar as the plane dropped lower. Above the dual noise of the engine and the waves came the pilot's voice.

"Hold on! We're going to land!"

The juniors felt the nose of the plane tilt downwards, felt it forced up again; heard and felt the jolt as the floats of the undercarriage met the surface of the sea. Then the plane, buoyant as a boat, skimmed over the darkened waters and came to a standstill.

The propeller stopped.

All was still!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Hero!

"BUCK up, you rotters?"

It was the old Bunter who spoke, as Johnny Bull and the Removites knew.

"Isn't he a nice chap?" remarked De Courcy, with a yawn. "So fearfully-polite, don't you know?"

The scene was the old oak-tree, in whose spreading branches dangled the cumbersome and unwieldy form of William George Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove had recovered his wits. There was nothing to fear now, for the juniors gathered below were doing their best to extricate him from his peculiar position. Thus it was time for Bunter—there being no danger—to show these fellows that a parachute descent was nothing to a fellow of his courage.

But the humour of the situation that had appealed to the juniors at first had gone. Their thoughts were focused in sympathy on those left behind in the plane from which Bunter had made his startling descent, and they were not in the mood to listen to Bunter's twaddle.

"Get a move on, Peter Todd, you beast!" bawled Bunter. "I can't stay here all night!"

"You jolly well will if you don't behave yourself!" answered Peter grimly.

"Yah!"

"I should shake the tree!" suggested Frank Courtenay. "That would be the easiest way of releasing him."

"Whooooop!" howled Bunter. "Don't you do anything of the kind!"

"Well, as you've dropped umpteen thousand feet already and haven't come to any harm," said Peter Todd, "I see no reason why you should come to harm if you dropped the remaining twelve feet."

"Beast!" Bunter apparently saw every reason against that suggestion being carried out.

Johnny Bull and Vernon-Smith were working themselves along the boughs of the tree which principally supported Bunter's weight. As they advanced the boughs, as was natural, bent and quivered under the strain.

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Bunter felt the branch giving, and yelled his alarm.

"Don't shake the branch! Wow!"

"Fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull. "We have to crawl along before we can cut those straps loose."

"But I shall fall if you do that!" roared Bunter indignantly.

"I suppose you will, ass!" grunted Johnny. "But the chaps below will catch you in a blanket."

"Groooough! I'm not falling into any blessed blanket!" roared Bunter. "I might break my neck!"

"That would save us a lot of trouble," said the Bunder unfeelingly.

"Yah! You rotter!"

Bull and Smithy worked their way along the branches inch by inch. Their task was fraught with considerable risk, but Bunter did not mind that. He could be quite heartless to the risks other people ran to save his fat skin so long as he came to no harm himself.

But at last the two rescuers were in position. And they speedily got to work with their pocket-knives.

"Your hands are free!" bawled Johnny Bull. "Hang on to a branch to steady yourself when we've cut the straps."

Bunter made a clutch at a branch and hung on desperately. Meantime, the juniors below ranged themselves round a blanket, waiting for their human burden to drop. One by one the straps of the parachute were slashed through. And as the last one parted Bunter fell forward. He could not support his own weight on the branch for long, and, with a gasping yell, he dropped.

"Heave-ho!" sang out Peter Todd, as the fat Owl crashed downwards.

Thud!

"Whoop!"

The "blanket-bearers" did their task nobly, all but being skittled over as Bunter's huge carcass came hurtling into the blanket.

"Steady!" called out Frank Courtenay.

The juniors steadied, and the blanket was lowered to the ground. Out of it Bunter tumbled in a gasping, spluttering, ungrateful heap.

"Yowp! You rotters! My back's broken! Yow! My spine's fractured in a dozen places! Groooough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the blanket-bearers.

"Beasts! Rotters!" hooted Bunter, sitting up and feeling himself tenderly.

"Isn't he a grateful chappie?" murmured the Caterpillar. "Begad, if it weren't too much fag I'd kick him!"

The fat Owl scrambled to his feet. He looked a picture of wrath, and his scout uniform was considerably the worse for wear.

"Yah!" he shouted, blinking indignantly at his rescuers. "You might have broken my neck!"

"Would have saved a lot of bother if we had," grunted Peter Todd. "Now, my fat pippin, tell us what you've been doing up amongst the giddy clouds. We're anxious to know about Wharton and the others."

Bunter drew a deep breath.

"Oh, I've had a fearful time, you fellows," he began. "The pilot chap who carted us off—"

"One minute," interrupted Peter

Todd. "We know the pilot is a scoundrel, and that he's pinched a Government bus with a Government official's salary on board—"

"Really, 'Toddy—"

"But what we want to know is how you and Wharton & Co. were in the giddy old bus."

Bunter drew himself up to his full height. He was in the limelight now, and was determined to make the most of it.

"Well, you see, it was like this. That pilot chap made a forced landing in the clearing and I rushed to his aid—"

"You mean you ambled after Wharton and the others," said Peter Todd dryly.

"If you doubt a fellow's word—" began Bunter warmly.

"Oh, get on with the washing, old fat man! Can't you see we're anxious?"

"I dashed to the fellow's aid at great risk to myself," went on Bunter. "He told Wharton and those rotters—I mean he told me that his commission was a matter of life and death, and that there was a petrol pipe in—I mean a leak in his petrol pipe."

"Ha, ha, ha!" The juniors could not help laughing, despite their anxiety.

"Really, you fellows!" expostulated the Owl. "I see nothing funny in that. But as I was saying, he had a leak in his petrol pipe. There was no time to get it repaired in the proper fashion, because he feared an attack any moment."

Bunter paused and looked round upon his audience.

"Rushing into the breach," he continued, "I offered to protect him while he made a make-shift repair."

"What breach?" inquired Harold Skinner.

"Really, Skinner," said Bunter loftily, "if you cannot appreciate a figure of speech—I mean speech—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner & Co.

"So you offered to protect him while he made a make-shift repair?" said Peter Todd.

"That's it, Peter, old fellow. I, at once, with my accustomed gallantry, you know, offered to shield him from the cowardly attack of his assailants."

"You just stood in front of him, I suppose?" said Skinner with a grin.

"That's it—I mean certainly not!" said Bunter. "I told Wharton that a patch could be made out of his waterproof ground-sheet, and showed the pilot fellow how to make the repair."

"Yes, yes," said Peter Todd, humouring his fat studymate in his anxiety to learn the truth. "But tell us how you came to be taken up aloft."

Bunter was silent for a moment, but his fat imagination was at work.

"Well, you see, as I'd offered to protect the chap from his assailants, I kept guard in the clearing. The other rotters—Wharton and his crowd, you know—scuttled like a lot of rabbits into the cabin. Sheer funk!"

A titter of laughter ran round the audience, but Bunter did not hear it.

"Then someone started shooting with a revolver," resumed Bunter, "and as I'd promised to look after the pilot chap—"

"You scuttled into the cabin after the others?"

"Yes—I mean no! I walked leisurely to the cabin, and told the pilot to drive to—"

"Bunter Court!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Skinner!" hooted Bunter. "With my commanding eye I kept the pilot's assailants at bay, and walked into the cabin just as easily as—"

ANSWERS
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"You fell out of the tree!"

Skinner & Co. were in convulsions by this time, and the rest of the juniors, anxious as they were to learn the facts, could not help smiling. Bunter and his yarns were well known, and wanted more than the proverbial grain of salt taken with them. Still, something of the truth could be gleaned from his narrative, and so Bunter was given his head.

"I kept the assailants at bay until the engine was running," continued Bunter.

"But, you ass," said Peter, "the assailants were Inspector Grimes and a couple of plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard. You were helping a wanted man to escape!"

"Oh!"

"Where were your commanding eyes not to see old Grimey?"

Bunter was nonplussed for the moment.

"You see, I was busy looking after Wharton & Co.—telling them not to be afraid and all that."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Peter Todd crossly.

"Then, later on, after I had shown Wharton & Co., by my splendid example, that there was nothing to be afraid of, I had a straight talk with the pilot. It turned out that he was a rogue."

"Go on!"

"All my chivalry and gallantry had counted for nought," went on Bunter.

"It'll count for three years' hard labour for obstructing the police in their duty, and helping a criminal to escape, if it gets to a magistrate's ears," said Peter Todd grimly.

"Really, Todd!" blinked Bunter.

"When I discovered that the pilot was a rogue, I ordered him to descend. But he refused, and told me to—"

"Go and eat coke?" suggested Skinner.

"No!" snorted Bunter. "Then came the enemy machines—I mean the pursuing planes. They opened fire. Wharton and the others were in a fearful state. Something had to be done, or we would have been shot down. I volunteered at once to drop overboard in the parachute. I thought that when the pilots of the other planes saw me drop overboard they would realise that there was something wrong."

"Doubtless they did," murmured Frank Courtenay. "They couldn't help seeing you, anyway."

"Really, old chap!" said Bunter peevishly. "It was the only thing to be done. Imagine for yourselves the terrible scene. There were we in the air thousands of feet above the ground. Bullets were piercing the cabin from all directions. I determined to do the decent thing—"

"So you dropped out," chuckled Skinner. "That certainly gave the plane a chance of rising a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wasn't a laughing matter," hooted the fat junior indignantly. "It isn't everyone who would take a leap from a plane at that height. But I was thinking of Wharton and the others. They were lying in the cabin—"

"And you're lying here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you chaps!" said Bunter warmly. "I refuse to tell you any more. Yah!"

But the juniors were not of a mind to listen to Bunter's thrilling narrative any longer. Certain facts had been gleaned from it, the rest was purely a product of Bunter's imagination.

Their faces became grave again as they thought of Wharton and the others. Bunter was safe now, and none the



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worse for his experience. But what of them? Darkness was descending over the countryside, which made the problem of their fate more a matter of concern than ever.

It was a very anxious group of Eagle Scouts that made their way back to Greyfriars, Courtenay & Co. having parted at the junction of the road to Highcliffe—anxious, that is, with one exception.

Billy Bunter was far from anxious. He considered himself the hero of the hour, and his smiling, complacent features made the Removites yearn to kick him. Not a thought as to the fate of Wharton & Co. troubled him. He was safe—that was the main thing, in Bunter's estimation.

Glowing with pride, he made his report to Dr. Locke. The venerable old Head of Greyfriars was very troubled, and not even the daring parachute descent as related by Bunter himself drew the lines of worry from his face. Now that Bunter was safe, Dr. Locke's anxiety was all for the other four missing juniors; he had little time or inclination to listen to Bunter's tale of

heroism. Doubtless, through fairly close knowledge of that estimable youth, Dr. Locke had also learned to take Bunter's stories with a grain of salt, perhaps with several grains. In any case, he dismissed the fat Removite quickly enough, and was ringing through to Inspector Grimes, in the hope that some information had come his way before Bunter had crossed the study.

Bunter, the hero, felt like the proverbial prophet who was said to be without honour in his own country, for nobody believed him. Which really was a lamentable state of affairs to a fellow who had risked that thrilling parachute descent from umpteen thousand feet.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Resource!

AS the plane came to a standstill the shanghaied Greyfriars juniors peered out of the cabin window, striving to pierce the thickness of the fog that covered the sea like a mantle.

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"Can't see my hand in front of my face, hardly," said Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that a buoy?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Wharton. "If it is it may mean that we're not far from the shore."

"Thinking of swimming it?" asked Nugent quietly.

"Not likely—not on a night like this," muttered Harry. "But I've got an idea."

"Spout it out, O King!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton shook his head. "I'll think it but first, Bob, old man. There's plenty of time."

He led the way to the cockpit, and his chums followed him. The pilot had lost no time. With a pocket torch jammed into the engine he was making a new repair. The piece of waterproof sheeting had been taken off and reversed. This time the daring scoundrel meant to make a real job of it. There seemed little need to hasten matters. He paid but scant attention to the juniors—indeed, he scarcely seemed aware that he carried unwilling passengers at all, so nonchalant was his manner, so leisurely did he carry out his task.

But chancing to look up for a moment he saw the expression on Wharton's face as it came within the ray of the torch. Next he saw the Greyfriars junior stoop in the cockpit and feel for something.

Crack!

The shining revolver that glittered in the crook's hand a moment later sent its message over the heads of the juniors.

"You were looking for this," said Razinoff. "Do you think I'd be fool enough to leave it there for you to monkey with? Get back into the cabin at once or I'll plug the whole lot of you!"

There was a deadly menace in the man's tones that sent a thrill of horror down the spines of the juniors.

Wharton had failed. His "idea" which had meant the possession of the revolver had come to nothing. With the revolver there would have been a chance to turn the tables on this rogue; without it the juniors were helpless.

"Get back!" repeated the pilot. "Or I'll make it your last sight of the sea! Do you think I've come through all this to be beaten by a crowd of schoolboys? Get back, or by heaven—"

He broke off with an oath and flourished the revolver significantly.

Crestfallen, Wharton beckoned to his chums to retrace their steps. No good would come of defying this scoundrel; he held the whip-hand. And his features in that last moment had been diabolical. Wharton knew the scoundrel wouldn't stop at murder to attain his purpose.

"Bear up, Harry," muttered Bob Cherry. "It was a sporting chance. But I've got news for you."

Wharton's face brightened. He caught something of Bob Cherry's optimism.

"What is it?"

"They were in the cabin now, and Bob, making certain that the pilot had not followed them, pointed to the dark shape which he had remarked upon a few minutes earlier.

"That is a buoy," he whispered. "I saw it distinctly when that scoundrel moved his torch. And if I'm not mistaken, it's the Black Rock buoy."

"Phew!"

Wharton let out a whistle of surprise. "Jove, that's good news indeed!" he whispered.

"What about jumping overboard and swimming to it," suggested Nugent.

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"We could hang on there until somebody picked us up."

"I've got a better idea than that," said Wharton suddenly. Then he lowered his voice. "That chap thinks he's got the whip-hand. He hopes to get away with a couple of million of the British Government's money. We'll just show the scoundrel that a 'crowd of schoolboys' can succeed where the police have failed."

"I don't catch on," muttered Bob Cherry.

"The deepfulness of esteemed chum's words is terrific," purred Inky.

Wharton glanced round him, then he drew his chums' heads towards him and spoke a few words.

"Phew!"

There was a stifled ejaculation of surprise from all four as he concluded.

"Harry, you're a giddy marvel!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in a whisper. "We'll do it, if we burst!"

"Get busy, then," said Wharton. "And mind—quiet as possible!"

Swiftly the chums moved to the aft portion of the cabin. Here all the packing-cases were stowed—cases, according to the pilot's story, that contained between them two millions of bar gold!

If the scoundrel, who was now whistling softly as he worked on the leak in the petrol pipe, and generally tuning-up the engine, could have followed the movements of his passengers he would have had the shock of his life.

Splash!

The noise of something falling into the water barely rose above the sound of the scoundrelly pilot's cheerful whistle. Little did he know that the Greyfriars juniors were also working—were, in fact, throwing overboard as fast and as noiselessly as possible the precious packing-cases!

That was a shock Fate had destined he should receive much later in the day—or night, to be precise.

Splash!

"Hustle!" panted Wharton, as the chain of juniors passed up the heavy cases to him as quickly as it was humanly possible.

Splash!

As each case came into his hands Wharton tilted it over the flooring where the broken door of the cabin was and dropped it into the sea. The juniors worked feverishly. The cases were about the size of a Tate sugar-box and were exceedingly heavy. But thoughts of their triumph gave an additional strength to these plucky juniors, and gradually the cargo of bullion diminished. In twenty-five minutes they had shifted three hundred cases—truly a gigantic and Herculean task.

"Only two more!" panted Wharton, streams of perspiration running down his face. "Quick, you chaps!"

It was the last call of encouragement, and encouragement had been needed in this task, for the juniors felt as if their backs would break. Therein Wharton had given a practical demonstration of his powers of leadership. The seemingly impossible had been attempted. The last case passed through Bob Cherry's bruised and raw hands. It passed to Nugent's, was switched to Inky, who smiled a faint and dusky smile at Wharton, as the captain of the Remove tumbled it overboard.

Splash!

"Bang goes the two million!" gasped Bob Cherry, sinking into one of the wicker chairs.

"Bravo, you chaps!" panted Wharton. "We've done him—and only just in time."

He sank into a chair as his chums had done as the sounds of the pilot scrambling into his cockpit reached his ears.

The scoundrel peered into the cabin and flashed his torch on the faces of the fatigued juniors. Luckily for them, the torch was weakening, its dim light showed little of the aft portion of the cabin.

The pilot grinned evilly.

"So you think you're going to sleep here, do you?" he said mockingly. "Your little mistake, my sons. The engine's fine. I've given it a thorough overhaul. But I'm not going to cart you kids about for a joy-ride."

"We're not keen, I assure you!" said Wharton, looking the scoundrel straight in the face.

"You asked me to land," grinned the pilot. "And I've done so. You can take your chance from here. You are somewhere off the Kent coast, that's all I know. Step lively—"

He flourished a revolver threateningly.

"You mean you want us to swim for it?" asked Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "You villain!"

"Swim for it, or sink for it!" chuckled the rogue. "Sharp's the word! Or there'll be a destroyer or something along here next."

The juniors looked to Wharton for orders.

"Come on, you chaps," he said coolly. "The water's pretty icy at this time of the year, but I'd sooner risk the cold water than stay a moment longer with this villain."

The revolver was flourished again, and a nasty glint shot into the eyes of the man who held it.

"None of your lip, you young hound! Out you go! Sharp!"

Wharton nodded to his chums, and simultaneously the four juniors dived. A mocking laugh floated after them.

"Keep together!" called out Wharton as he came to the surface and struck out strongly.

The pilot's laugh rang out again. With his torch he tried to pick out the swimmers, but its feeble ray was scarcely of any assistance.

"Done him!" whispered Wharton, as he struck out alongside Frank Nugent. "This is where we smile."

"I would if it wasn't so dashed cold," said Nugent. "Hallo! Here's the buoy!"

It was a buoy sure enough—the Black Rock buoy. And cold as they were after their immersion, the juniors could hardly refrain from cheering as they grabbed a hold on it wherever they could.

Brrrrrrr!

The sound of the engine breaking into a roar told them that the pilot was not a bit concerned on their account. He was preparing to take off. But scarcely had the penetrating thunder of the giant engine disturbed the silence of the evening than a terrific beam of light began to sweep the sea.

"A searchlight!" muttered Wharton, trying his hardest to stop his teeth from chattering.

"From a warship, perhaps!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Hurrah! Our luck's in!"

"The wishfulness is father to the thoughtfulness," said Inky between chattering teeth.

"And the coldfulness of the esteemed and ridiculous water is terrific," mimicked Nugent, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"There it goes again!"

The searchlight swept the sea again, piercing the shroud of fog as though it were glass. But it did not embrace the floating aeroplane or the boys stranded on the buoy.

"What's a warship doing in these waters?" asked Bob Cherry suddenly.

"Expect news has been wirelessed them that an aeroplane has come down," said Harry, "although I don't know who could have spotted us in this beastly fog."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Nugent, between chattering teeth. "The noise of the engine has been picked up by sound detectors. I believe every make of engine has its own particular 'note.'"

"In which case, anyone with a sound detector, whatever that might be," said Bob Cherry, "would be able to pick up the note of the engine over there. The authorities at Croydon, for instance, would know what the make of the engine was."

"Exactly," exclaimed Wharton. "Hallo! The searchlight's got him!"

The broad beam of the searchlight picked out the aeroplane, showing the shivering juniors the pace of it as it skimmed the waters preparatory to taking the air. Then they saw a perfect climbing turn, and the aeroplane was away over their heads, thrashing its way through the night at a speed that couldn't have been less than a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

The searchlight continued to follow its progress—a task that kept the operator busy, for the plane was stunting in every conceivable way within safety limits to throw that relentless beam off the trail.

And at last the searchlight lost its victim.

"Good-bye!" called out Bob Cherry.

"We've got to give a hail, you chaps," said Wharton, whose limbs were becoming numbed. "Or it will be touch-and-go with us if we have to hang on here until morning. When I count three, yell 'Help!' at the top of your lungs. One—two—three—"

"H-E-L-P!"

"Again!"

"H-E-L-P!"

The juniors waited anxiously. Then, over the water, came a hail:

"Ahoy!"

"A-H-O-Y!" yelled back Wharton & Co.

The searchlight gleamed out again, and within a few seconds it was focused on the buoy, almost blinding the shivering juniors in its intensity.

"Ahoy! Hold on! We're sending a ship's boat to pick you up!"

"Thank heaven!" breathed Wharton. "He felt Frank Nugent move beside him, and intuitively guessed that his strength was failing. Out went Wharton's arm and encircled the shoulders of his chum.

"Hold on, Franky!" he panted. "We're safe now! Look! Here comes the boat!"

.....

More dead than alive, the four Greyfriars schoolboys were brought aboard H.M. Destroyer Vincent, for with their rescue the reaction had set in. What would have been their fate had they been compelled to remain on the buoy all night it was impossible to conjecture.

But once aboard the destroyer, everything was done to pull them round. The commander of the vessel saw to their comfort himself.

"These must be the schoolboys who were forced to accompany that scoundrel Razinoff," he mentioned to his officer of the watch. "Poor beggars! They look done up!"

"It's a pity we didn't know that the kids were not on the aeroplane when the searchlight picked her out, sir," said the lieutenant regretfully. "Or we'd have put a shell into her tail."

The commander nodded.

"Orders were orders, Humphrey," he said, with a smile. "And our orders were not to fire on the plane."

"Exactly, sir."

"The boys are below now, Humphrey," said Commander Sampson. "I have given orders that they should be fed and put to bed. A good sleep will pull them round. I'll interview them in the morning."

"Very good, sir."

The officer of the watch saluted smartly and withdrew, still shaking his head over the amount of prize money that had been lost to the crew of H.M. Destroyer Vincent.

Meantime, Harry Wharton & Co. were being put to bed. One question only concerning their adventure had been put to them, namely, were they the boys from Greyfriars School who had been aboard the stolen plane? The answer being in the affirmative, Wharton & Co. were left to enjoy a well-earned slumber, what time the news of their rescue was

(Continued overleaf.)

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HEROES OF THE AIR!

(Continued from previous page.)

being flashed by wireless to the authorities ashore.

And, needless to say, four-tired and weary heads were soon nestling deep in the comfortable pillows of the officers' berths, wrapped in the arms of Morpheus.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

In Style!

"HALLO! Hallo! Hallo! Where am I?"

Bob Cherry sat up in his bunk and rubbed his eyes. Then he gave a howl as his head came in contact with a beam.

"Ow!"

The noise awoke Nugent, Inky, and Wharton, but they profited by Bob's experience, for he hastened to give them warning.

"Mind your silly heads!" he grinned. "I've just had a dust-up with one of these beams!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a hearty laugh that came from the Greyfriars juniors, for sleep had put new life into them, and their waking spirits were as bright as the early morning sun that streamed in at the cabin porthole.

"We do see life!" chuckled Bob Cherry, stretching himself. "First a trip in a Government aeroplane, then a trip in a destroyer. I wonder what next?"

"Morning, young gentlemen!"

It was the steward. He smiled cheerily at his charges.

"Top of the morning!" chorused the Greyfriars juniors.

"I see you young gentlemen are ready for breakfast," said the steward, with a wink.

"What-ho!" boomed Bob Cherry. "I could eat a horse!"

"Same here!"

"Well, tumble up! It'll be waiting for you in ten minutes' time."

The juniors tumbled out with a will. They found a bath apiece, with water all ready for them. A quick tub in the invigorating sea water, a brisk rub-down, and Wharton & Co. were as fit as fiddles.

Their clothes had been dried and pressed, and well within the prescribed ten minutes, the Co. were inquiring after that breakfast.

The steward proved a good friend.

"Much as you like, sirs," he said. "Just ring the bell if you need anything."

The juniors fell to with a will. In their exhausted state of the previous evening they had been able only to swallow some broth and a sharp edge had been added to their appetites as a consequence.

"This is prime!" said Bob Cherry, between mouthfuls of ham and eggs.

"Hear, hear!"

"The primefulness is terrific, my worthy chums."

"I wonder what our late friend is doing now," chuckled Wharton, when the second helping of ham and eggs had gone the same way as the first.

"Tearing his giddy hair, I'll bet," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Serve him right!"

The steward entered the mess-room. "If you gentlemen have finished, you would oblige the commander by stepping along to see him."

"Lead on Macduff!" sang out Bob Cherry.

Cherry boisterously. "We've got something extra good to tell him."

The steward led the way to Commander Sampson's state-room. A kindly voice bade the juniors enter.

"Good-morning, my lads!"

The four Greyfriars scouts saluted.

"Good-morning, sir!"

The commander beckoned the boys to sit down, and in a genial, understanding spirit asked them to relate their adventures of the previous day.

"Well, my lads, you seem to have your heads screwed on pretty well. Not much harm will come to you, eh?" he chuckled, when Wharton, acting as spokesman, had practically finished his story. "It's a rare pity we didn't know that that scoundrel Razinoff had ordered you overboard, otherwise we'd have sent a shell across his bows, so to speak. Two million of gold is a lot to see slip through your fingers, my lads."

Wharton & Co. exchanged glances, and smiled. Their trump card was yet to be played.

"I have something of importance to tell you in addition to what you have just heard, sir," said Wharton. "But first we would like to know if our school-chum, Bunter—the one who dropped overboard in a parachute—is safe?"

The commander smiled reassuringly.

"Of course, I was forgetting your anxiety on that score. But rest easy, my boys, your friend Bunter is perfectly safe and sound. I believe, according to the wireless report received, he finished his descent in a tree, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Commander Sampson joined in the merriment that piece of news occasioned.

"So all's well that ends well, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Wharton, "especially as the two million of Government money is safe!"

"What?"

The commander started to his feet in his amazement. Had the boy said that the two million was aboard his own ship he could not have been less astonished.

"Say that again!" he said.

"That's my piece of news," returned Wharton with a smile. "When I say safe, it's practically so, for the Black Rock buoy is only four fathoms deep. And the cases are on the ocean bed about twenty yards away from the buoy!"

"Good gad!" exclaimed the commander joyously. "Are you sure?"

"Well, considering these chaps and I worked like Trojans to chuck the giddy loot overboard while old Razinoff monkeyed with the engine, I should say I am," said Wharton with a twinkle in his eyes.

Commander Sampson's gnarled right hand shot out across the table.

"Shake, boys!" he exclaimed. "The Navy's proud of you!"

Each of the juniors' hands was clasped in that strong grip. Then there was a bustle in the engine-room as the order "About ship!" was given.

Back to the Black Rock buoy went the destroyer at full speed, the crew, learning of their commander's discovery, as crews do, and entering into the spirit of the thing with rare zest.

The Greyfriars chums were the heroes of the hour, and they bore the honours rained upon them with becoming modesty.

Black Rock Buoy was reached in record time, and meanwhile two divers were hastily donning their suits. Five minutes later the divers, under the personal supervision of Commander Sampson, put off in a ship's cutter for the spot where Wharton & Co. judged the cases of bullion to lie.

The Co., of course, were in the cutter, and their excitement was as keen as the rest of that eager boatload from the destroyer.

In less than ten minutes the first diver was lowered into the water. His report came up to those waiting in the cutter a few moments later.

"Location O.K. Cases within a fifteen yard radius."

"Hurrah!" Bob Cherry could restrain himself no longer. He was thinking then not of the glory reflected on himself by that remarkable find, but of the expression on Razinoff's face when the scoundrel landed and discovered that he in turn had been looted. As Bob elegantly expressed it, the expressions on his face would be worth a guinea a box.

Commander Sampson turned a radiant face on the Greyfriars chums.

"You boys have done wonderfully well," he said. "We'll soon have those cases aboard."

"Good egg!" chortled Bob Cherry.

"The goodfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous egg is terrific," purred Hurree Singh. "But the swearfulness of the ridiculous Razinoff will be more terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Commander Sampson joined in that hearty peal of laughter, for Inky's weird and wonderful rendering of the English language was vastly amusing.

But he was soon the brisk sailorman again. In sharp, clear sentences he gave instructions for a buoy to be lowered over the side to mark the exact spot where the bullion lay. The diver was taken on board, and the cutter forged its way back to the destroyer. Once on board, the crew were detailed to build a raft stable enough to take the weight of a crane which would be necessary to lift the bullion cases from the ocean bed, for the destroyer drew too much water to allow of her anchoring over the spot where the bullion lay. The raft was completed in something under half an hour.

"Do you lads want to be in at the death," asked the commander genially, as the raft and tackle was lowered from the davits.

"If we're not in the way," said Wharton, with a quick glance at his chums.

"You won't be in the way, my lads, never fear," replied Commander Sampson. "Come with me!"

Two minutes later the Greyfriars chums were seated in the cutter. A tow had been fixed to the raft and it was drawn through the seas until the marking buoy was reached.

Then the officer in charge of operations detailed the members of his crew to their various posts. The crane was tried out and its long steel cable with the grappling hooks at the end disappeared into the blue depths of the sea.

The two divers, with coils of stout rope about their bodies, descended the rope ladder that hung over the side of the raft.

"Now we sha'n't be long," grinned Bob Cherry.

And Commander Sampson winked expressively.

From their position in the cutter the boys and the skipper of the destroyer watched the cable chain tauten.

"Here comes the first batch of gold!" remarked Wharton.

And he was right.

The signal was given to haul in the cable. Slowly the first load of cases were raised from their watery bed.

"Hurrah!"

A cheer escaped Bob Cherry as the



"Give a hall, you chaps!" cried Wharton, whose limbs were becoming numbed. "When I count three yell 'Help!' at the top of your lungs. One, two, three—" "H-E-L-P!" "Now again!" "H-E-L-P!" The juniors waited anxiously. Then, over the water a searchlight gleamed, and within a few seconds it was focused on the buoy, almost blinding the shivering Greyfriars juniors in its intensity. (See Chapter 10.)

cases, roped together, showed above the surface of the water.

The crane was swung inwards over the raft, and eager hands unfastened the giant grappling hooks and stowed the cases aft. Then the crane swung out again for its next load.

Half of the packing-cases had been recovered before the divers came up for their well-earned spell of fresh air. Two more men took their places. They worked at good speed. Doubtless the thought of the prize money that would be theirs spurred them on, for it was under the hour when a message from one of them told the officer in charge of operations that the last batch of cases had been attached to the cable.

"And that's the lot!" remarked Commander Sampson. "And a very fine morning's work, too, eh, my lads?"

"Rather!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were delighted. The raft was towed back to the destroyer and hoisted on board. Then the precious cases of bullion were stored away in the hold.

Two hours later H.M. Destroyer Vincent was steaming into Pegg Harbour, every member of the crew looking as if he were walking on air.

Along the quay at Pegg a hundred boys or more in Etons could be seen. A cheer went up as the destroyer dropped out her anchor. Another cheer rang out as the ship's pinnace was lowered from her davits with Wharton & Co. aboard.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Wharton!"

"Remove! Remove!"

It was a wonderful home-coming. As Harry Wharton & Co. stepped on the quay they felt the proudest schoolboys in the world. Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch hurried forward to greet them.

"My boys," said Dr. Locke thankfully, "I'm proud of you! Greyfriars is proud of you! Thank heavens you are safe!"

Mr. Quelch—he of the gimlet eye—did nothing to justify that appellation on this occasion. His eyes were shining with a kindly pride and enthusiasm. He shook each junior warmly by the hand.

Then the Co. marched down to the waiting Greyfriars crowd.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Again the cheers rang out. Then the orderly crowd broke loose.

"Chair 'em!" yelled Johnny Bull.

Mr. Quelch winced a bit at the mutilation of the English language, but he recovered himself, and smiled as happily as any schoolboy present. His boys had covered themselves with glory, and it was only to be expected that Mr. Quelch basked in a certain amount of their glory.

In a cheering, laughing throng Harry Wharton & Co. were chaired to the school. Truly a wondrous home-coming.

It was a few days later, and the Remove and a goodly sprinkling of Highcliffe fellows were in the Rag. That spacious apartment was graced by long, white tables upon which every sort of tuck dear to the heart of youth was in evidence.

It was a very special occasion. Only that morning Wharton, Nugent, Cherry,

and Hurrea Singh had received a letter of commendation from the Home Secretary. And a-top of that cheery communication came a letter from the Treasury, which enclosed a cheque for a substantial amount of prize-money for the heroes of the hour.

Really a record feed seemed to be the "proper caper," as Inky expressed it. And a record feed it was, the like of which had never been seen in the Greyfriars Remove.

Everyone was cheery and bright with perhaps one exception. Billy Bunter was happy while he was eating, and he did as much of that as eight fellows at least; but when it came to the toasts and speeches—what time, incidentally, the fat Owl was still eating—he made a protest that he had been left out in the sharing-up of the prize-money.

But no one was inclined to listen to Bunter. The true story of his "daring" leap into space had come to light. Thus, when Billy Bunter, still of an opinion that he ought to have had his whack, asked for it, Bob Cherry kindly obliged him.

Biff!

Whereat Billy Bunter was heard to utter:

"Whoop! Cherry, you rotter! Yow!"

Which showed that Billy Bunter knew not the meaning of the word gratitude.

THE END.

(There will be another splendid long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. in next week's MAGNET, entitled: "Coker On The Warpath!" Mind you read this latest story from the pen of popular Frank Richards.)

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Tommy Regains His Nose!

O'HARA shook his head. "This means prison. Prison is a living death. I would infinitely prefer being shot; I'm not at all afraid of dying. I think I'd prefer it, anyway," he said wearily. "Shoot if you choose. I shall not move from here whatever you do."

"Then I'll keep you here till Carfax comes!" said Tommy Comber frankly.

"Do. You may have to wait a week, Tommy. This is a lonely spot, and it's pretty clear he doesn't know where you are. Shoot, my lad. It's soon done, and that's the quickest road."

"Confound it! I can't shoot you!" said Tommy desperately. "I—"

"No," replied O'Hara, with the ghost of a smile, "I don't see how you can shoot me in cold blood, Tommy—nor any other way. When I first saw you, you were in just the same state that I'm in now. Did I shoot you—or give you up? Do you remember that I sheltered you, fed and doctored you, protected you from your enemies and from my own friends—and trusted you when I turned you loose? Would you be where you are now, all cleared, with a fortune to come, if it hadn't been for me? No. You'd be on the Bellerophon, doing time."

Tommy lowered his gun.

"That's all true," he said rather huskily. "But I can't let you go—I'd be doing Carfax down! He's trusting me now. After Dan he's the best pal I've got—he saved my life, too. I don't say you haven't been decent to me—for your own profit. But you're a chief scoundrel, anyway; you and your gang are no better than murderers. That's what you wanted Comberite for!"

"You think so?" said O'Hara, his eye sparkling for a moment. "But I believe that I was right, and what we were doing would have been better for the world, in the end."

"Then you must be mad!" retorted Tommy. "And I believe all you Red chaps are mad, and don't know it. Look at the miserable giddy mess you've made of your own country! But what you're out for is just yourselves!"

"Possibly. Anyway, I'm beaten and done for—even if I got away alive, which I sha'n't," said O'Hara.

For a few moments they looked at each other in silence. Tommy felt more sorry for O'Hara than he dared let him see.

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"Let's call a truce," said O'Hara. "You can't sit there and cover me with that gun all night."

"Very well," said Tommy suddenly, and stepped to the door.

Just outside the hut was a brimming, muddy ditch. He pitched the duck-gun into the ditch, and the pistol after it.

"That's done!" he said. "We'll have no shooting. But you ain't goin' to get away from me. I can stop you, without a gun."

"I have no doubt you can, and I sha'n't try," said O'Hara. "By the way, you're not looking very pretty yourself, Tommy."

Tommy caught sight of himself, for the first time, in a little cracked mirror that hung on the wall of the hut. The sight of his sallow face and broken nose horrified him.

"By gosh, I owe that to you!" he said angrily. "Have I got to spend the rest of my life with a face like a black Aunt Sally?"

O'Hara smiled.

"It's a pity," he said. "You would be safe with Tom Comber's own face now. Do you think you'd like it?"

"Could you give me my own face back?" gasped Tommy.

"Of course I could. And I'm the only man alive who can do it."

"How—where? Not here? You haven't got the things with you?"

"I've got enough for that. It's not so difficult to give you back your natural face—such as it was—as to disguise you as somebody else. I can do it in half an hour or less."

"Great Scott!" cried Tommy excitedly. "For goodness' sake do it! I'll do anything for you. Look here! I—I can't let you go. I'm a prisoner myself, in charge of Carfax—I've given him my parole. But I'll say anything I can for you, if you're tried. I'll make it easy; it'll be a help."

O'Hara nodded.

"All right, Tommy. A bargain. You say all you can for me. Stand up for me a bit. I need a friend."

O'Hara pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket, scribbled a few lines on it, and tossed it across.

"Get that made up at a chemist's—or do it yourself. Use that for a wash, and it will take the colour out of your hair and your skin. It's a secret. It'll take a week or two, but you'll come lighter till you've got your natural colour."

"That's all right—but my nose!" said

Tommy excitedly. "How am I to get that back?"

"I'll give you your nose back now," said O'Hara, smiling.

There was an iron pot simmering on the fire in the open hearth. He dipped Ike's drinking-mug into it and set it aside, filled with hot water.

"Come over here and lie down; as you did at my house."

"Gosh!" said Tommy, as he stretched himself out on the bed of rushes in the corner of the hut. "I suppose I'm a giddy fool to trust myself in your hands like this. It's as good as asking you to throttle me."

"Don't be an ass, Tommy!" said O'Hara. "I never do anything without a reason. What profit would I get out of throttling you?"

He dipped a cloth in the steaming mug, and laid it, doubled up, hot and wet, across Tommy's nose. He took a little leather case from his pocket, containing some steel instruments and one or two small soft-haired brushes. Then for some time he was busy.

Tommy could not see what was happening to him. He felt little or no pain. Dr. O'Hara's clever fingers were attending to him. His nose, all his face, seemed to have gone warm and soft, like a man's beard lathered for shaving.

"Is it all right?" he asked, in a muffled voice anxiously.

"Shut your mouth and lie still," said O'Hara, "the difficult part is coming now."

He took a little glass phial from his pocket, and emptied a few drops from it on a large silk handkerchief, which was suddenly pressed over Tommy's face. Tommy's brain swam. He felt his nostrils filled with the sweet, sickly odour of chloroform. He struggled, but a hand held him down, his senses left him, and everything went black.

The Final Test!

TOMMY sat up, blinking. He felt stupefied, and his head ached slightly. To his amazement he saw John Carfax standing in the hut, looking at him with a grim smile. "O'Hara's work, I suppose, Tommy?" he said.

"Great Scott! Where is he?" gasped Tommy, struggling to his feet.

"As far as I can learn, he seems to have launched a Marshman's boat out of a creek on the shore, some while ago.

We saw a reefed sail beating out to sea as we came up, and now we can see nothing."

Tommy staggered to the door of the hut and looked out. It was nearly dark. He heard the roar of the gale and the beat of the waves down on the shore.

"He's done me, sir!" gasped Tommy. "I told him I couldn't let him go—seeing you trusted me. He's doped me and beat it, that's what he's done!"

"That's what it looks like. How did he do it?"

Tommy told Carfax all that had happened.

"You'll blame me, sir!" he said unhappily.

Carfax laughed, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Tommy. I've got the others; I don't care so much about O'Hara." He looked out to sea. "He was a brave man to put off in this gale, and I should say he's at the bottom by now. He might just as easily have knocked you on the head as doped you—except that he'd have swung for it if caught. You're a smart lad, but nobody expects you to be quite as smart as Dr. O'Hara, even if you thought you were. It's a queer thing, but I do believe the scoundrel had rather a liking for you, Tommy!"

Tommy found himself unable to speak. He couldn't for the life of him feel sorry that O'Hara had escaped imprisonment. He had had his chance. Just then Dan came into the hut.

"Tommy!" he cried, and then stood staring. "Great Jupiter, what's this?"

"What's what?"

"Why, it's Tom Comber himself, or

next to it! The old original! What have you done to yourself?"

Tommy looked at himself in the cracked mirror and had a shock. It was his old self that was looking at him from the glass. True, his hair was still black and his skin tinted, but the lines on his face were altered back, and Pat Roche's big nose was gone. Instead of it, Tommy saw his own impudent, short, fighting nose; with a bit of a wrinkle across the bridge of it certainly, as if the skin had been stretched; but it looked as if that would smooth away.

Tommy felt an enormous relief. He gave a cry of joy.

"By gum, he kept his word!" he cried. "He finished the job for me before he cleared!"

"Don't blame you a bit for wanting your face back, Tommy—even at the risk of being throttled!" said Carfax, laughing. "I'd have done just the same in your shoes. I'll make it all right for you at headquarters—you did your best. He was a bad man; but there are worse men than O'Hara. But what about this hairy great fellow here, and why is he tied up?"

Two of Carfax's men had just brought Ike the Marshman to the hut door between them, with his hands still bound together. Ike was covered with mud, and looked dazed and sullen, like a trapped beast. Carfax's eyes were twinkling with amusement as he put the question to Tommy, who had said nothing about Ike.

"Him?" said Tommy. "Oh, I've got nothin' against him, sir! He gave a bit of trouble—he don't like strangers. But if you don't want him I should let him go."

"Oh, I don't want to be bothered with him!" laughed Carfax, who understood well enough. "I've enough on my hands. Loose his hands, Jim, and turn him off. It'll be a lesson to him."

"He seems to have some banknotes in his jersey, sir," said one of Carfax's men.

"He hasn't earned 'em," said Tommy, "but he may as well keep 'em, I should think. They'll cure him of the headache. And he's lost his boat."

As they left the hut Tommy stopped and looked towards the roaring sea.

"I wonder if the poor chap can live through that?" he said, under his breath.

"I don't know," said Dan dryly. "But if you ask me, that fellow was never born to be drowned."

They left the island in the launch, travelling up the creeks in the windy darkness till they reached Wakering, where a motor met them and took them to Southend. There, after getting dry clothes and a hot dinner at the hotel, the boys found themselves sitting with Carfax in a first-class carriage on the up-train.

"Gosh, I'm sleepy!" said Tommy, lying back. "Where are we bound, sir?"

"London," said Carfax.

Tommy sat up suddenly.

"Are you sure I'm safe, sir?" he said anxiously. "Can anyone prove now, in a court of law, that I neither killed nor robbed my Uncle Joe that night?"

Again Carfax smiled.

"You remember my coming in at the cottage door, when we caught the gang this afternoon?" he asked.



This is not exactly a happy beginning to the baffling mystery case that has taken Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant, out West. But even with that gun so unpleasantly close to his heart Locke doesn't lose his nerve. Read how he gets out of this tight corner in the opening chapters of:—

"THE MYSTERY OF FLYING V. RANCH!"

a powerful new detective and Wild West adventure yarn starting in next week's MAGNET.

"Do I not!"

"I had been outside that door for nearly two minutes. Before entering, I heard Merton Haynes confess out of his own mouth that he and no one else killed Joseph Comber; and that he put the stolen banknotes in your clothes. And my men are witnesses that he said it."

"Then that's that!" said Tommy, with a long sigh, and, sinking back, he fell into a profound sleep.

Just three days later John Carfax took Tommy in a taxicab to the Government buildings in Downing Street, where he was introduced to a tall, stout gentleman with a bald head, whom, Tommy learned with awe, was Lord Linsmere, the Home Secretary.

Lord Linsmere greeted Tommy with a welcoming smile, and held out a hand to him.

"I know your entire story, Mr. Comber," he said; "your innocence is established, and you are now free, with no stain on your character whatever!"

"I owe it to Mr. Carfax here, sir," stammered Tommy, "and to my pal Dan Bennett!"

"And a good deal to yourself, too," said his lordship. "You have been in prison three months for a crime you never committed," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "so we can't very well punish you for escaping. And we are fortunate that this wonderful secret of your uncle's, Joseph Comber, came into the hands of a patriotic English

boy, who refused to give it up to an enemy even under threat of death. We are proud of you. But there is one thing, Tom Comber, we shall test that secret, and if found correct it must be sold to the British Government, who will give you your own price for it."

"There's no one else on earth I'd let have it, sir!" said Tommy.

Whereon Lord Linsmere shook hands with him again, and he went off to join Dan.

A week afterwards a torpedo-boat landed Tommy, Dan, Carfax, and a distinguished crowd of people on the jetty at Curlew Island.

There was a general of Royal Engineers and five other famous soldiers, together with a group of distinguished scientists, most of them wearing Trilby hats and spectacles.

Tommy and Dan dug up the flask of Comberite from its hiding-place on the marsh. Half of it was handed to the scientists to look at. They were very clever men, but they could make nothing of it.

Tommy buried the flask with the rest of the powder under the floor of the bungalow, with a detonator and fuse. He had had enough of the bungalow. It had been the scene of a tragedy, and he wanted it wiped off the map. Then he withdrew the company to the wall half a mile away, and they waited.

There was a roar like ten thunderstorms breaking loose, a column of fire shot into the sky, the whole island shook, and the sky was filled with a rain of fragments. Two of the distinguished

scientists clutched each other round the neck, staggering in terror; another sat down violently upon the seat of his trousers on the wet grass. The general of Engineers cheered, and Tommy's hand was shaken by everyone of the company.

The torpedo-boat took him back to London in triumph. Comberite is now the property of the British Government, and is the most closely-guarded secret in the world.

Tommy and Dan—for Tommy insisted on going equal shares in the price with the chum without whose help he would never have won through to the end—are now wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. Their wealth is held for them by the Public Trustee, but they have all they ever want to draw out, and they own a big steam yacht, on which they are at present cruising round the world.

Nothing more was ever heard of Chuffer Foss, and none knew whether he went to the bottom of the Thames, or, having got ashore, made himself scarce for ever. If the latter is true, he was a good judge, for three years imprisonment for perjury awaits him if he ever turns up. Karkoff got fifteen years.

Nor has any news been received of O'Hara—or Soltoff. If he perished in the storm off Foulness, the sea has not given up its dead. But Tommy sometimes wonders whether that dark, restless spirit, for whom he often feels pity, is still alive—a stormy petrel that flits over the waters and can find no peace.

THE END.

WHAT THE WILD WEST TEC IS UP AGAINST!

THE land of the "yegg," of the hold-up man, the remittance-man, the quick-action crook, of detectives equally quick on the uptake and at the draw, the Great Far West is naturally the land of big criminal undertakings and of swift living and dying—like a sitting at the "flickers" only not so comfortable!

Not that the scenery doesn't feature things other, and more pleasant, than those named, but in the remote corners of the Far West it is pretty much all that.

The yeggman camps out in a lonely valley, or a mountain fastness, and there, secure—he thinks—from prying eyes, makes a devil's brew in preparation for his projected descent on some prosperous and thriving town. He is cooking dynamite, to get the oil with which he hopes to "bust" some bank's safe and make a lightning get-away with all the loot he can pack, with the help of an accomplice, into a waiting "tin Lizzie."

Then it is back to his valley or mountain fastness for him, until his adventure has blown over—the blowing over doesn't take long in that part of "God's country"—or until some hard-mouthed, steely-eyed, remorseless detective, crook-hunter to the very bone, tracks him down and draws him back to civilisation—almost like a winkle hooked out of his shell at the end of a pin.

A QUESTION OF LUCK!

No room there for the armchair crook-hunter, who works from theory to fact. The Far West tec works the other way. He jumps at a fact or two, and if he wants a bit of theory to make things "look nice" he works it up afterwards—after his capture is cooling his heels in Sing Sing!

There is nothing song-like about Sing Sing, by the way. It is just a gigantic prison, where many of the bad men of the Far West end up, with most of any recollection of song or any other form of happiness driven from their minds by a regime that is hard and inflexible as chilled steel.

Hold-up men hate the valleys and mountain fastnesses. They have no such use for them as the roaming yeggman. Their "job" lies along the broad highways, not infrequently in the busiest towns where civilisation has encroached on the not-so-long-past wildness of the original Far West.

They do what their name implies—hold folk up at the snout of an automobile, which is as ready to bark and bite as the hold-up men are to "break camp" with the wealth that comes to them when a bit of business meets with luck.

Luck does not always come. It certainly doesn't when, having made a slight error in calculations and identity, the hold-up man finds at the end of his over-ready gun not the timid citizen, ventured a bit too far into the Far West, that he calculated to find but some tough proposition, like the ex-chief of the New York detective force, who promptly proceeds to beat him to a pulp and make a grand clean-up of his carcass.

WHERE GRIT COUNTS!

Mr. George Doughty, the ex-chief detective alluded to, once had this hectic experience. The hold-up man had never met anything quite like him, for Mr. Doughty dared him to shoot. The trigger finger served the astounded hold-up man a scurvy trick. It hesitated. The ex-chief tec knew at once his "bird" was a hoverer, and instantly went for his opponent like a hurricane suddenly let loose. The result was a limp captive, who went like a dazed lamb back to the civilised East. But he was dramatic to the last, for he celebrated his sensational arrest by committing suicide.

It is when one of the fraternity of hold-up men or yeggmen kills his party and, with the rake-off, beats it for the far side of the Far West, that the sticking quality of the police stands out. Used almost from birth to the rough and tumble of that region where scarce anyone but carries a gun as naturally as law-abiding folk carry fountain-pens, the tees scour the country for hundreds of miles—sometimes thousands—taking calmly all the inevitable hardships that the tracking means—heat, cold, hunger, danger, thinking them naught so that the finish comes with one less bad man to scarify the face of the lively Far West.

(And Ferrers Locke, the English detective, drops into this new kind of life as easily as a duck takes to water. You'll enjoy reading the opening chapters of our brilliant new serial: "The Mystery of Flying V. Ranch!" which features the famous detective. Starts next week.)

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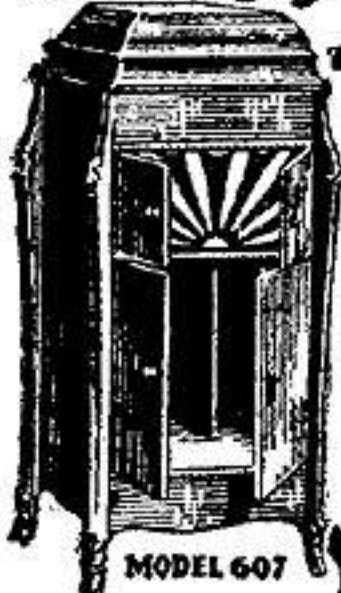
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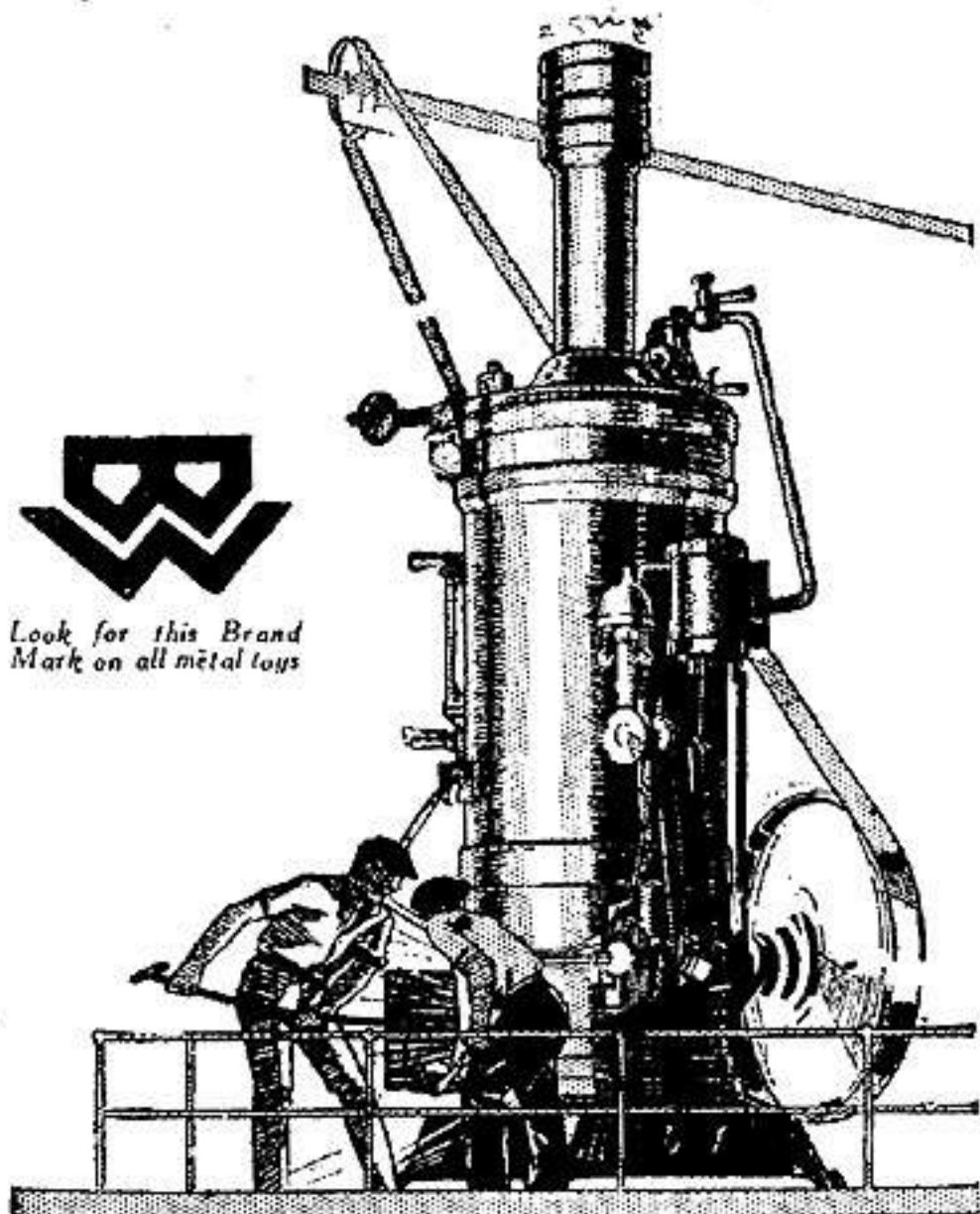
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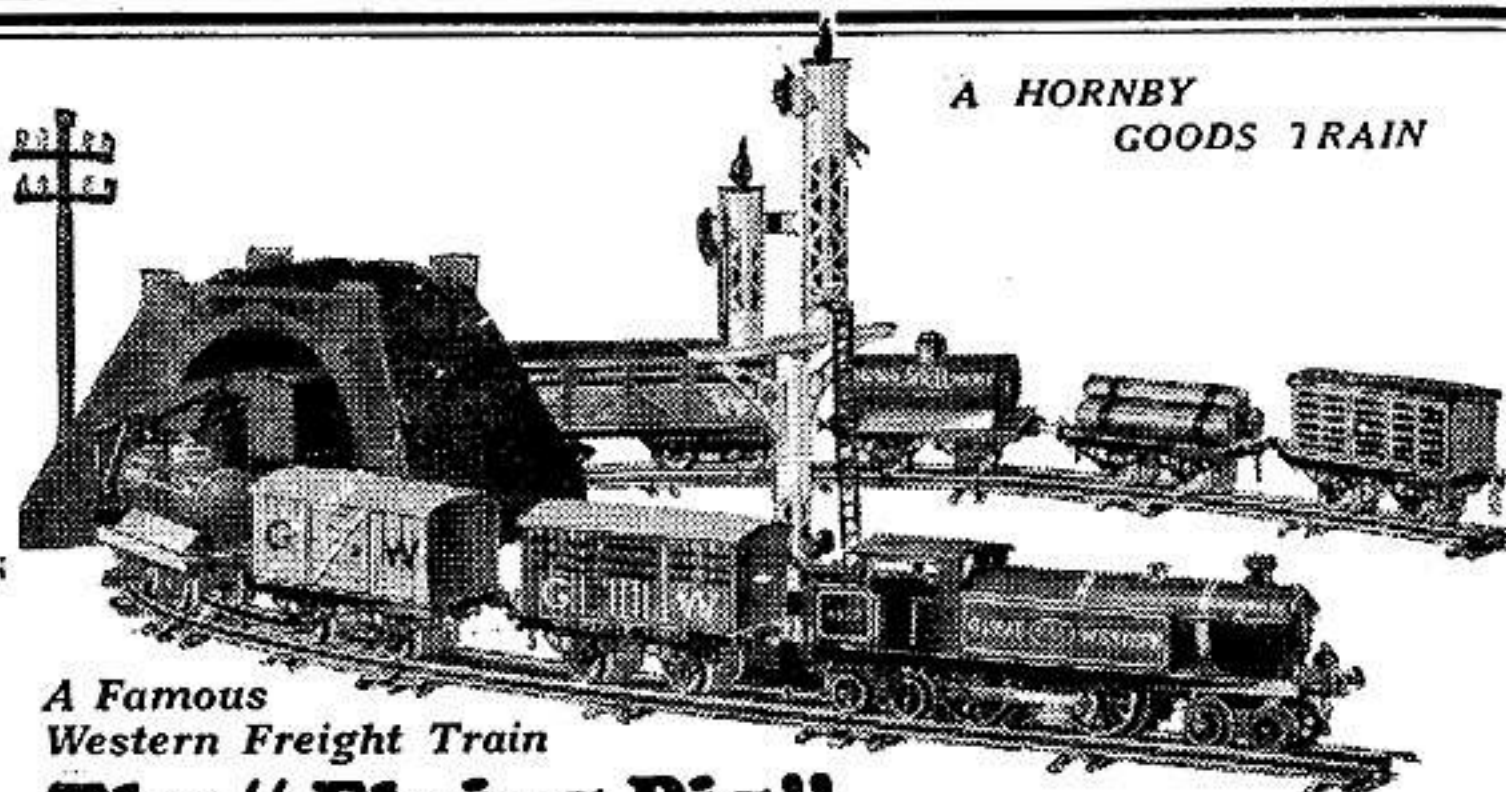


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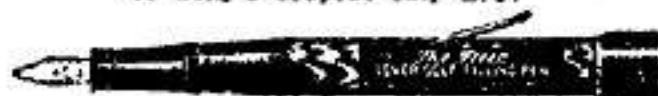
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