

"THE FILM STAR'S FEUD!"

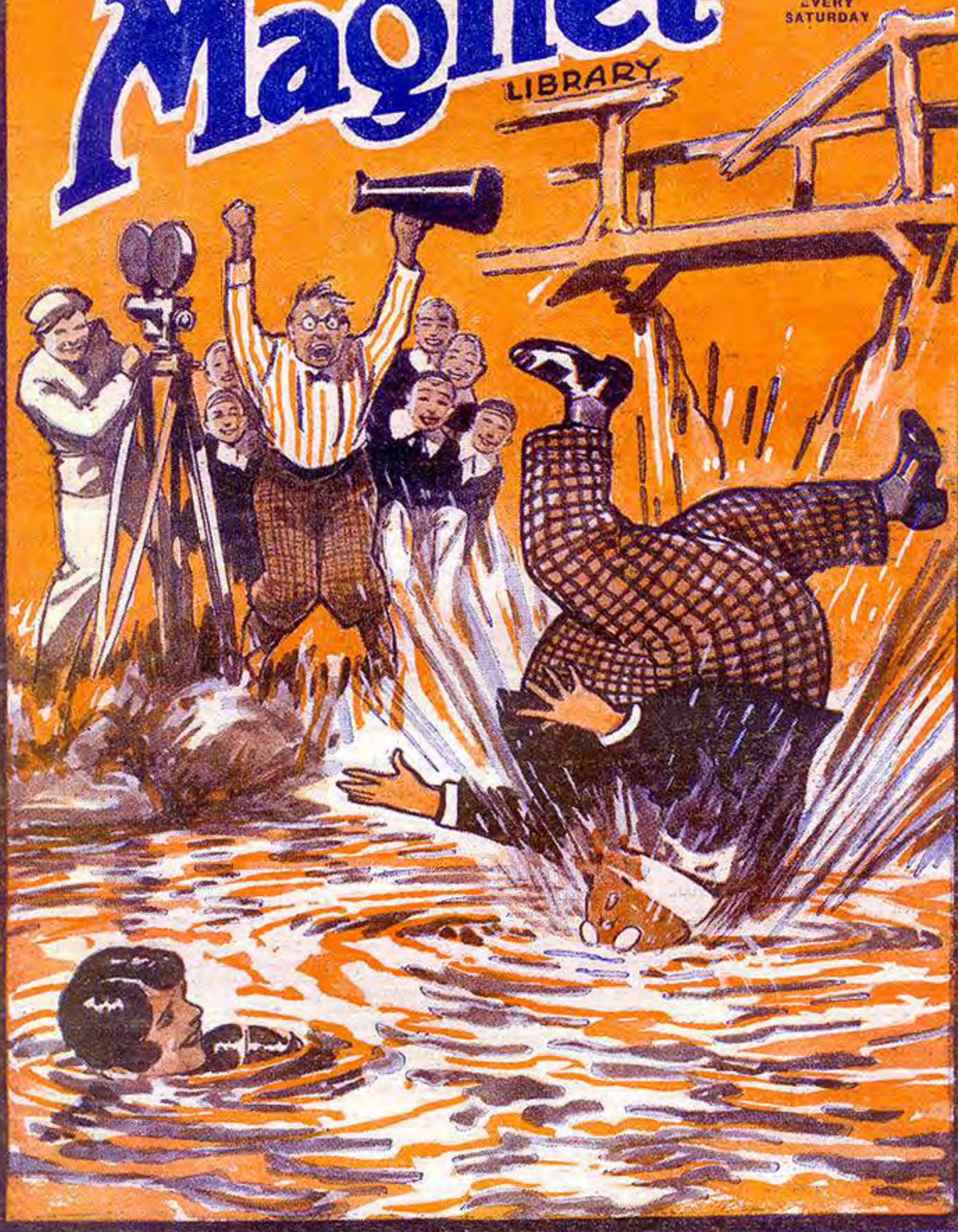
Long, complete story of thrilling
schoolboy adventure in America.

No. 1,102. Vol. XXXV. Week Ending March 30th, 1929.

The Magnet

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EVERY
SATURDAY



BUNTER'S BIG SPLASH AS A FILM STAR!

(Fun, drama and thrills are included in this week's unique story of Harry Wharton & Co.,
the Chums of Greyfriars—inside.)



**THE
MAGNET
EDITORIAL
OFFICE**

Come into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

NOTE.—All Jokes and Limericks should be sent to c/o "Magnet," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.)

I PROMISED last week that I would tell you the story of one of our author's escapes from what seemed at the time to be almost certain death. Those of you who read this chat of mine regularly will remember that I mentioned the catacombs of Paris some time ago. Well, this author and a pal of his paid a visit to the catacombs, and being of rather venturesome dispositions, they left the beaten track and went exploring amongst passages which are not open to the public.

When they came back to the main passage, after some considerable time, they found that the custodian of the place had gone his rounds, and, seeing no one in the passages, had apparently decided that the two of them had gone out. He had therefore locked the steel doors which close the catacombs, and gone off home. The catacombs are only opened once a fortnight. They are, as I told you, used as a vast charnel-house, and the skulls and bones of about six million corpses are ranged around the walls of the underground labyrinth. Judge of the horror of these two men when they found they were

ALONE WITH SIX MILLION SKELETONS!

A great steel door barred them from the outer passages which led to the spiral staircase to the street. They had neither food nor water, and their candles had almost burned out. In addition to that, the catacombs are infested with rats, and on a previous occasion, when two visitors were similarly locked in, they were found, a fortnight later, with their bones picked clean by the rats. Certain death stared the adventurers in the face, and if it hadn't been for one little thing, our last serial wouldn't have been written, for Mr. McKeag wouldn't have been alive to do it! That little thing was this:

The struts which bolted the lock to the steel door were on the inside! That gave our adventurers a gleam of hope! One of them had a knife, and with that, and a piece of stone which they found, they commenced their attack on the door. Bit by bit they chipped the rust from the nuts which held the lock to the door, and after working for an hour or so, and breaking their fingernails in their endeavours to escape, they managed to unscrew sixteen nuts, remove the struts, and take the lock bodily from the steel door! They still had a mile or so of twisting underground passages to negotiate, and then another door to open at the top of the spiral staircase, but this was easy compared to the steel door of the charnel house itself.

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Anyway, they escaped, but if it hadn't been for that knife—Which just goes to show you that you should always carry a knife with you. And if you haven't got a knife, well,

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE

to get one free! Perhaps you've had a holiday experience that was out of the ordinary? If you have, write it down, and then send it along to the address shown underneath the heading of this page. For every one published I'll award a "MAGNET" penknife. Keep your yarns short—don't let them run into more than two hundred words at the outside.

I have just been reading about

A NOVEL HOLIDAY

which an American has spent. He spent it at the bottom of the sea, which is the most curious place I have ever heard of for a holiday. He made his holiday pay for itself, too, for he has written a book about it. This was how he managed it: He went off to an island in the Tropics, and took a diving-bell with him. Then he spent as much time as he could in the diving-bell, observing undersea life. He says the bottom of the sea is the loveliest and strangest place anyone could imagine. I wouldn't mind a holiday there myself, but I am afraid I will have to put up with something less exciting!

Here's a Greyfriars Limerick which earns for its author a useful leather pocket wallet:

There's a Greyfriars fellow named Cherry,

Who is always so bright and so merry.

He belongs to the Five

Who always will strive

To share to the very last ha-penny.

The pocket wallet has been forwarded to: C. Boam, 22, Melrose Street, Sherwood, Nottingham.

CAN SHIPS STEER THEMSELVES?

asks Bert Lewis, of Barrow-in-Furness. Yes, Jack, they can. Some time ago an automatic pilot was invented which, when connected up with a gyroscopic compass, is so arranged that it turns the steering-wheel when the ship goes off its course, and brings the vessel back again. Many warships and large liners are already fitted with it.

The next question comes from Jim Southren, who wants to know

WHAT IS A "DIME MUSEUM"?

"Dime Museum" is American slang for a freak show. It is so called because a "dime" is the price of admission. A dime is ten cents or fivepence. There are two nickels in a dime, and two dimes and a nickel make a "quarter," which is twenty-five cents, or a shilling and a halfpenny. A "greenback" is a bill of fairly low value, while a "yellowback" is a much more valuable one.

A QUERY ABOUT HIGHWAYMEN

comes from Leonard Crawford, of Bristol, who wants to know if highwaymen really were so prominent in "the good old days." By a coincidence I had just finished reading a cutting from an old paper, which showed that one hundred years ago there was a great outcry against highwaymen, and it is said that not a day passed without news of a hold up. Even the prospect of being hanged did not deter the highwaymen, as, if they managed to get away after the robbery there was very little chance of them being identified. Their masks, of course, hid their faces, and we had no Scotland Yard in those days to keep an eye on known criminals and to tabulate them all by keeping finger-prints and photographic records.

Now let me see

WHAT THE BLACK BOOK SAYS,

the black book being the diary in which I keep a record of our future issues. It tells me that the long complete Greyfriars yarn is entitled:

"THE SCHOOLBOY SHEIK!"

By Frank Richards.

And it deals with the further adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. in the film city of Hollywood. Who the schoolboy sheik is I'm leaving you to discover for yourselves. Don't miss this yarn, whatever you do!

"THE BLACK HAWK!"

Readers will find the conclusion of this excellent serial story in next week's issue, together with full particulars of its successor—a "dirt" track story, written by popular Carney Allen. How's that? And, of course, there will be another "shocker" from the nimble pen of Dicky Nugent, entitled:

"THE LUCK OF MR. LICKHAM!"

Let's finish up with a laugh. Here's a yarn which earns a penknife for R. J. Faulkner, of 48, Bramhall Lane, Stockport:

An Aberdonian, on a visit to a friend in London, overstayed his welcome. It was getting towards Easter and his host thought a kindly hint might have the desired result. "Don't you think," he said, "that your wife and family will want you to be with them at Easter?" "Mon," replied the Aberdonian, "I believe you're right. It's rare thochtful o' ye. I'll just send for them!" A pocket knife has been awarded to: R. J. Faulkner 48, Bramhall Lane, Stockport.

Quite easy to win a pocket knife, isn't it! Have a shot at it this week. Cheerio, chums,

YOUR EDITOR.

THE FILM STAR'S FEUD!



Here's another lively schoolboy adventure story. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Left Out!

BILLY BUNTER snorted. He had reason to snort. Harry Wharton & Co. were busy that morning. William George Bunter was not busy. William George, with nothing to do, blinked at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles and snorted.

Had the Greyfriars fellows been at Greyfriars that morning Bunter would not have groused. In class in the Remove Form-room, nothing would have suited Bunter better than to sit idle while the other fellows worked.

But matters were different on the Perfection location at Jack-Rabbit Canyon.

There Bunter was willing to work. At all events, he was willing to place his fat features on permanent record on the "movies" and his fat voice on the "talkies."

In vain Bob Cherry had explained to him that his features would burst the camera, and that his voice would crack the microphone. Bunter was not to be convinced.

So far as the Co. were concerned, Bunter understood well enough why he was left out of the picture. Jealousy of his good looks and his musical voice accounted for it. But why Mr. Hiram K. Fish and Mr. Rigg Schootz left him out was a mystery. As film directors, they ought to have known a good thing when they saw it. They saw Bunter every day—and did not know that he was a good thing! The fact that Nature had specially designed him for a Valentino part was utterly lost on them. They were deaf to the dulcet tones of a voice which in itself would have made any talking-film a success.

Perfection Pictures was a big company in Hollywood, and a prosperous company. How it had ever become so with such duds for directors, Bunter

could not guess. A man who did not see at a glance that Bunter was a born film actor was not the man to produce pictures—in Bunter's opinion, at least.

Harry Wharton & Co. came out of the old adobe ranch-house, where the Perfection company had their headquarters, in cheery spirits. They did not heed Billy Bunter's frown, and heeded not his indignant and contemptuous snort.

"I say, you fellows——"
"Busy, old fat bean!" said Bob Cherry.

And the Famous Five walked on, regardless.

"Beasts!"

**"In the spring a livelier iris
Shines upon the burnished dove.
In the spring a young man's fancy
Lightly turns to thoughts of love."
And Cupid's latest victim is Lord
Mauleverer, one of the Greyfriars
juniors touring America!**

Lord Mauleverer strolled out after the Famous Five. His lordship's movements, as usual, were leisurely.

"I say, Mauly!" squeaked Bunter.

"Yaas?"

"They're leaving me out, as usual, old fellow!" said Bunter bitterly.

"Yaas."

Lord Mauleverer walked on, accelerating a little.

"I say, Mauly——"

Mauly was gone.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled in at the arched entrance of the old rancho. Vernon-Smith and Fisher T. Fish, going out, passed him, and smiled as they passed. They seemed to find something entertaining in the deep frown that corrugated the brow of William George Bunter.

In the patio, the central courtyard.

Coker and Potter and Greene, of the Greyfriars Fifth, were chatting. Mr. Van Duck, the assistant director, hooted to them.

"Say, you guys, beat it! You reckon you're going to keep the scene waiting—what?"

Horace Coker gave the assistant director a lofty glance. He had not, as he often told Potter and Greene, come to California to be ordered about by an American. Coker never liked being ordered about, and he did not think much of Americans, anyhow. However, he decided to "beat it" as requested, and walked out of the rancho with Potter and Greene, though with a haughty expression on his rugged brow.

Mr. Van Duck followed them.

Mr. Van Duck was in charge of the scene that was to be filmed up the canyon that morning, and Mr. Van Duck was a hustler. He was not to be kept waiting a fraction of a second, even by so great a man as Coker of the Fifth. As a matter of fact, Mr. Van Duck did not know that Coker of the Fifth was a great man, being in blissful ignorance of the importance of the great Horace.

Billy Bunter blinked after them sourly.

Even an ass like Coker had a part in the picture, while William George Bunter was left out of it. Really, that was the unkindest cut of all.

"I say, Mr. Van Duck——" squeaked Bunter.

Van Duck did not even glance at him. He hurried out of the rancho after the Fifth-Formers.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter.

Mr. Rigg Schootz came out of his office. His car was waiting outside to take him to Hollywood. The Perfection director divided his activities between the location and the film town.

"I say, Mr. Schootz——" said Bunter.

The plump gentleman trotted on, unheeding.

Nobody in the Perfection company seemed anxious for the delights of Billy Bunter's conversation that morning.

"Mr. Schootz!" hooted Bunter.

Mr. Schootz stepped into his car and buzzed away on the road to Los Angeles.

"Beast!" snorted Bunter.

The fat junior stood under the old adobe arch and blinked at the scene in the distance. The great "school" film, for which Mr. Hiram K. Fish had brought the Greyfriars fellows out to Los Angeles, was well under way now. Mr. Schootz was well pleased with its progress, and the schoolboy cinema actors were equally pleased. Mr. Fish confidently averred that it was going to be a winner; indeed, he declared that he guessed it would sure hit the film fans where they lived. He even guessed that the "sheikh" film, featuring Myron Polk, had nothing on it—not a thing!

The only fellow who wasn't pleased was W. G. Bufter. Bunter considered that a Greyfriars picture without his fascinating self in it could hardly be a success. He frequently expressed his opinion that it was rotten, but nobody seemed to mind.

"After all I've done for 'em!" murmured Bunter bitterly. "Talk about ingratitude! Talk about a serpent's child being sharper than a thankless tooth! Yah!"

Then slowly a fat grin overspread the podgy features of the Owl of the Remove.

He gave a little fat cough.

Had any of the Greyfriars fellows been within hearing, they would have recognised what they called Bunter's atmospherics, which indicated that the Greyfriars ventriloquist was on the warpath.

Bunter blinked round him cautiously.

Like Moses of old, he looked this way and he looked that way.

He was unobserved.

He slipped into Mr. Schootz's office—a room nobody was allowed to enter except on business. But as Mr. Schootz was whizzing away to Hollywood in his car, and everybody else was occupied or interested in the scene now going on, there was nothing to deter Bunter.

He closed the door after him and turned the key in the lock.

Then he sat down to Mr. Schootz's telephone.

A wonderful wheeze was working in Billy Bunter's powerful brain.

He grinned over Mr. Schootz's telephone, as he rang up the exchange.

In Mr. Van Duck's office, in the same building was another telephone and it was Mr. Van Duck's number that Bunter gave.

And when the call was taken by Mr. Van Duck's stenographer, Bunter spoke into Mr. Schootz's transmitter, not in his own natural dulcet tones, but in a voice that weirdly resembled the fat, nasal accents of Mr. Rigg Schootz.

The Greyfriars ventriloquist was on the warpath, and something was going to happen.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Does It!

"GET busy!" snapped Mr. Van Duck.

Harry Wharton & Co. were busy already, but Mr. Van Duck generally snapped. The assistant director of Perfection Pictures was full of pep and mustard, and push

and go. He would have been quite disappointed had he been given no excuse for roaring through his megaphone at somebody.

"You, Robinson, move! You hear me? Move! Smith, you ain't paid to loaf around. You, Leonora, quit fooling!"

"Keep your shirt on, old thing!" answered the movie girl cheerily, and the juniors grinned.

Only Mauleverer did not grin.

Mauly disliked hearing any man speak in sharp tones to a member of the gentle sex. Particularly did he not like hearing Leonora la Riviere addressed in such tones. And perhaps he did not wholly like hearing the "Lovely Leonora" reply so slangily. But if that was the case, Mauly was not admitting it to himself. In his admiring eyes, Leonora was, if not actual perfection, next door to it. Fisher T. Fish had remarked, with many a chuckle, that Mauly had "fallen" for Leonora's ginger hair, which to Mauly's eyes was not ginger at all, but that adorable Auburn tint beloved by Rubens.

"I say, Mr. Van Duck—" began Mauleverer.

The assistant director interrupted him.

"Don't spill anything."

"Yaas; but—"

"You here to chew the rag?" inquired Mr. Van Duck disagreeably.

"I was goin' to say—"

"Waai, don't! Don't spill a syllable. Keep your head closed! Now, then," roared Mr. Van Duck, addressing the many assistants who were arranging the scene, "I ain't waiting here till the cows come home! I surely am not! You get me?"

It was a scene of the big school film that was to be "shot." The camera men were in readiness, and the schoolboy actors were ready. The scene was almost ready.

The lovely Leonora represented the headmaster's pretty daughter, who obligingly fell into a stream in time to be rescued by a gallant schoolboy. She was already in position on the little wooden bridge that spanned the torrent in the canyon. Harry Wharton was the gallant schoolboy. There was no "poo," about that scene. The movie girl had to go headlong from the bridge into the water, and Wharton had to plunge in and save her. His qualities as a swimmer had already been demonstrated. In case of accidents there was a boat in readiness lower down the stream, out of range of the cameras. But no accidents were to occur.

Wharton was to swim with the fainting movie girl in his grasp, and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull to reach down from the bridge and give him a hand in the nick of time. It was a well-planned scene, and quite thrilling, and had been carefully rehearsed. Now it was to be shot.

All the Greyfriars fellows, dressed as at Greyfriars, were to come into the picture. They were to rush from various directions on to the bridge and form an excited crowd.

Mr. Van Duck arranged the scene, rearranged it and re-rearranged it. At last he was satisfied.

He was about to give the word when a man came running down from the rancho.

"Mr. Schootz on the phono, sir!" he gasped.

"Oh, search me!" granted Mr. Van Duck.

"He says stop the scene till you've spoken to him."

"Thunder!"

Mr. Van Duck was annoyed. But the word of Mr. Rigg Schootz was law to the Perfection Company. To hear was to obey. A Russian Czar, or even a Russian Bolshevik, had nothing on Mr. Rigg Schootz when it came to autocratic authority.

"Hang on!" snapped Mr. Van Duck to the company, and he whisked round and whisked away to the house.

The company hung on, to await the return of Mr. Van Duck. Mauleverer shifted his position a little to get a little nearer to Leonora. Leonora extracted a cigarette from somewhere and lighted it. She blew out a little stream of smoke and gave Mauly a cheery grin, and, rather to his horror, a wink. The movie girl liked Mauly, not only because of his kind and respectful manners, but because he had rescued her from the fire in the Perfection studio at Hollywood. She did not conceal her opinion that Mauly was some guy, and all wool and a yard wide.

Mr. Van Duck, with a very irritated expression, whisked into the rancho, and whisked into his office. The receiver was off the telephone, and Van Duck grabbed it up.

"Hallo!" he yapped.

"That you, Van Duck?" came a fat, nasal voice, which could only have belonged to Mr. Rigg Schootz, or to a ventriloquist who had a weird facility for imitating voices.

"Yep."

"You ain't started on that shooting, what?"

"Jest beginning," answered Mr. Van Duck crossly. "You got to Hollywood already, Schootz?"

"Oh, sure! I guess I made that auto hit the high spots," answered the voice. William George Bunter was familiar with the American language by this time, and could turn it on as easily as he could turn on Mr. Schootz's voice. "I reckoned I'd get you in time, Van Duck. I've changed my mind about that scene."

"Spill it!" said Mr. Van Duck resignedly. He saw himself having all his work to do over again. But such peremptory interventions by the director had occurred before, and were the natural troubles of an assistant director.

"Is that guy Bunter around?"

"Bunter! What about Bunter?"

"I asked you whether he was around."

"Oh, I guess he's around somewhere! If there's any grub loose anywhere, that's where he is, I guess."

"Look here—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I want Bunter on in that scene."

"Not that fat mugwump!" ejaculated Van Duck in astonishment.

"You figure that you know better than I do, Van Duck?" demanded Mr. Schootz's voice angrily.

"Nunno. But—"

"I haven't phoned you up to hear you blowing off your mouth, Van Duck. I been thinking it over, and I reckon Bunter is the guy we want on that scene."

"Oh, all O.K.!" said Van Duck, with the patience and resignation of an early Christian martyr. "It's your say so."

"I'll say it is," answered the fat nasal voice emphatically. "I reckon I'm running Perfection Pictures, Van Duck. I'll allow that I ain't asking for instruction. You got me?"

"I get you, Schootz," answered Van Duck breathing hard and deep. "I'll sure put on that jay, Bunter, in the crowd if you say so."



"You prize boob! You dog-goned geek!" yelled Mr. Van Duck, waving his arms about frantically. "You—you—you— Oh, there ain't a word for you!" "Yow—ow—ow! Groogh!" spluttered Bunter. "I'm soaked! Wow! I'm catching cold! Yarrggh!" "You've got to dive off that bridge again!" raved Van Duck. "Shan't!" said Bunter. (See Chapter 4.)

"Forget it! You'll put Bunter into the leading part."

"Eh?"

"Cut that guy Wharton! He's no good."

"Search me!" said Van Duck in amazement.

"Give Bunter his part."

"But—but—but—" babbled Van Duck. "That fat guy don't look the part. He can't even swim."

"You teaching me my business, Van Duck?"

"Nunno! But—"

"I ain't asking your advice; I'm giving you directions. Cut Wharton out and give the part to Bunter. Take the rest of the scene as arranged. Wharton can come on in the crowd. If he raises any trouble, kick him out."

"I guess he'll do as he's told. But I—"

"Bunter's the man we want. I've been thinking it over, and I guess he's the goods. Right from the word go! Give him every chance. And chew on this, Van Duck—you got to be civil to Bunter. He's a guy I don't want to lose. I'd rather lose you. Got that?"

Mr. Van Duck looked for a moment as if he would bite the transmitter.

"I got it," he answered sullenly.

"Get ahead with it, then. I want to try over that scene when I get back to Jack-Rabbit. I guess it means big business, with Bunter in it. That's the lot!"

Van Duck hung up.

He paused to address a few words—emphatic words—to space before he left his office to look for Bunter. He was both exasperated and amazed. Mr. Schootz had dallied more than once with the idea of getting Billy Bunter into some comic part, but had decided, on the whole, that Bunter was too all-fired a jay to be any good—an opinion in which Van Duck fully concurred. As

for putting him into a serious part, especially an heroic part, that had never hitherto entered Mr. Schootz's head. Now it seemed to have entered his head and stuck.

Breathing hard, Van Duck went along into the patio to look for Bunter.

Bunter was not to be seen there, and Van Duck went up the steps to the gallery that surrounded the patio and kicked open the door of Bunter's room.

But Bunter was not there. More and more exasperated, Mr. Van Duck descended to the patio again to inquire around for Bunter.

In the meantime, that astute youth had let himself out of Mr. Schootz's office, after making sure that the coast was clear.

He was lounging in the arched entrance when Mr. Van Duck came back that way, snorting.

"Oh, here you are!" hooted the assistant director.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"Want me?" he asked.

"Yep."

Bunter grinned.

He had not felt absolutely sure that his imitation of Rigg Schootz's voice on the telephone would work the oracle. But it had been, in Bunter's opinion, worth trying on.

Evidently it had been a success.

He was wanted!

As he was wanted, and as Mr. Van Duck had no choice but to give him Wharton's part in the rescue scene, Bunter naturally adopted a lofty attitude.

"That's all very well," he said, "but I was distinctly told I should not be wanted, and I've made other arrangements."

Van Duck almost exploded. Not only had he to give this fat gink the leading

part in an important scene, sorely against his will, but he had to persuade him to take it.

"I tell you you're wanted!" he snarled. "Special order from Mr. Schootz."

"Mr. Schootz never said anything to me about it before he went in his car," demurred Bunter.

"He's telephoned me up from Hollywood to say so. You're wasting time," hooted Van Duck. "The scene's waiting. Come on!"

"Well, if Mr. Schootz is really keen on it I don't mind," said Bunter graciously. "I'll make the thing a success for you, if you like."

Van Duck suppressed his feelings and started again, with long strides, for the shooting scene up the canyon. Billy Bunter rolled after him.

His fat face wore a satisfied grin.

It was his chance at last!

Rigg Schootz, when he returned to Jack-Rabbit, would no doubt be surprised. But that would be all right! By that time the scene would be filmed, and when Schootz saw it thrown on the screen he would see that it was a real winner. That would satisfy him, if anything could. Bunter had no doubt that the scene would be a winner. How could it be anything else, with Bunter in it?

In that mood of cheery confidence William George Bunter rolled after Van Duck, grinning with the anticipation of triumph.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Bunter Takes the Lead!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here's jolly old Bunter!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"He looks jolly pleased with himself," remarked Nugent.

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"The pleasesfulness of the esteemed and idiotic Bunter is terrific," observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Van Duck doesn't," observed the Bouncer.

"I guess Van Duck looks as if his mad's up!" said Fisher T. Fish.

There was, indeed, a striking contrast between the expressions of Billy Bunter and Van Duck as they came up.

Bunter looked as if he were fully satisfied, at last, with the imperfect universe that was honoured by his existing in it. Van Duck looked as if he would like to bite somebody—Bunter, for preference. The assistant director had his "mad" up, as Fishy expressed it. There was no doubt about that.

"Here, you guys!" said Van Duck crossly. "We got to make a change—Schootz's orders. You're out, Wharton!"

"Oh!" said Harry, rather blankly.

"You come on in the crowd, that's all."

"Right-ho!" said the captain of the Remove, as cheerily as he could. He could hardly be expected to look pleased, but he was there to receive directions, not to give them. He did not, like Bunter, suppose that he could run Perfection Pictures better than Mr. Schootz.

"Bunter takes your part!" snapped Van Duck.

There was a gasp from the juniors.

"Bunter?"

"Yep."

"But—" gasped Wharton.

"Don't chew the rag," hooted Van Duck. "Are you managing this scene, or am I? Say!" Mr. Van Duck, like many persons in subordinate positions, liked to pass on the unpleasantness of a person higher up to a person lower down. "You here to do as you're told, or to manage Perfection Pictures on your lonesome own? What?"

"But Bunter can't swim!" stuttered Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"There'll be an accident," said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Begad! It really isn't safe, you know," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, really, Maule—"

"Schootz's order goes," snarled Van Duck. "I ain't pretending to understand it, but it goes. Bunter's the goods in this scene. He says he can swim."

"I can jolly well swim better than any other fellow at Greyfriars!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "I say, you fellows, is this a time for your miserable jealousy of a superior fellow? I put it to you!"

"You crass ass!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Quit chowing the rag!" roared Van Duck. "Is this a pesky scene, or is it a dog-goned conversazione? Great gophers! Get busy!"

"I guess there's some mistake," said Fisher T. Fish. "Schootz must sure be plumb loco."

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"Get busy!" snarled Van Duck.

The assistant director had his orders, and he had to carry them out. Argument was out of the question.

Harry Wharton retired from the leading role, as gracefully as possible, into the position of an "also ran."

Billy Bunter took his place.

As Bunter had watched the rehearsals of the scene, he knew what was required, and he had no doubt whatever that he could fill the role better than Wharton. Good looks and gumption were what was wanted, and that was where Bunter came out strong—in his own opinion, at least.

The Lovely Leonora gave Bunter rather a curious look. He did not impress her as the real goods as a movie rescuer. But the movie girl was there to play her part, not to criticise the arrangements of the director. She played up nonchalantly.

Miss La Riviere, under the skilful hands of the make-up man, was "dressed down" to sixteen. She looked quite the schoolgirl part as she tripped on the bridge and sat down on the low

parapet. The schoolboy rescuer had to be strolling along the bank with his friends, just as the wooden parapet gave way and the headmaster's daughter fell into the stream. He had to rush on the bridge and dive in for the drowning girl. As Bunter was to be the rescuer, it was perhaps fortunate that Leonora was a good swimmer.

Mr. Van Duck, bawling through his megaphone, gave directions. Most of his remarks were addressed to Bunter. Bunter was directed not to grin like a hyena, not to roll about like a sack of coal, and not to blink like a dying cod-fish, and several other things. All of which Bunter heard with the scornful contempt natural to a fellow who knew that he was the right man in the right place.

All was ready at last, and Van Duck gave the signal. The wooden parapet on which the schoolgirl sat suddenly gave way, and Miss La Riviere was precipitated into the torrent, to the accompaniment of the grinding of the cameras.

A loud shriek rang out most realistically.

Bunter rushed on the bridge.

He was being filmed now, and his fat face beamed with satisfaction.

Satisfaction was not the expression that should have been "registered" by a fellow who was rushing to the rescue of a drowning schoolgirl. But trifles like that did not occur to Bunter.

Just as he reached the bridge Van Duck signalled to the camera men to stop, and roared at Bunter through his megaphone.

Leonora, in the water, swam.

Her desperate struggles for life had to be postponed till the cameras began to click again.

"Hold on, you guy!" roared Mr. Van Duck. "Ain't I told you not to grin like a pesky hyena? Register alarm."

"Eh?" gasped Bunter.

"You figure that a galoot goes diving with a grin on his face like a Chinaman at a chop-suey joint?" shrieked Van Duck.

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Get back and try again, you mug-wump!"

Bunter snorted.

But he got back and tried again. This time he rushed on the bridge and registered alarm as he did so.

The cameras clicked merrily.

Bunter's next and instant proceeding should have been to dive from the bridge into the water, to the rescue of the movie girl, who was now realistically struggling for life in the flood.

But at that moment Bunter's fat heart misgave him.

It was not uncommon for Billy Bunter to bite off more than he could chew, in more ways than one.

On the verge of the leap, it rushed into Bunter's mind that the dive was deep, and the water deeper; and he hesitated. And although Bunter had stated that he was the best swimmer at Greyfriars, so often that he really believed it himself, he had a sort of feeling that he did not want to put his swimming powers to the test as far as the danger-point.

The clicking cameras registered Bunter hesitating on the bridge, blinking down at the water, and undoubtedly registering alarm!

Mr. Van Duck raved.

"Got to it, you jay!" he roared. "Great snakes! How many yards of film do you want us to cut out? Miles of it, what? Get to it! What you rubbering there for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from all the assistants in that remarkable scene.

They really could not help it. But it

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elicited a yell of rage from the worried and driven Van Duck.

The juniors composed their faces as well as they could, and waited for their cue. They were not to rush on the bridge till Bunter had made his heroic dive. Bunter was taking his time about it.

"Get to it!" shrieked Van Duck. "Dive, you dummy, dive! Dive, you all-fired gink!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Leonora's voice floated up from the perilous waters.

"Say, bo, I'm getting wet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" bellowed Van Duck. "Oh, great snakes! Oh, suffering cats and dogs! Great Christopher Columbus! Hit it! Hit it, you big stiff!"

Bunter made the plunge. It had to be, and the Owl of the Remove screwed up his courage, such as it was, to the sticking-point, and plunged.

He dived with the easy grace of a falling barrel.

Splash!

Bunter had pictured himself in that thrilling scene, cleaving the water, with airy grace. But the cameras did not picture him like that. They pictured him smiting the water in anything but a diving position. The next instant they pictured him with his mouth open, yelling with terror. After that they did not picture him, for he had vanished under water.

"Grooooooh!"

That was Billy Bunter's last word. Then he was gone!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Not As Per Programme!

"**H**A, ha, ha!"
"Oh crumbs!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Some swimmer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no help for it. All the spectators had to yell. Every face on the scene registered hilarious mirth.

"My!" said Leonora.

A fat face showed over the water as the Owl of the Remove, helpless and out of his depth, was swept away in the torrent.

With two or three swift strokes Leonora reached him.

She grasped him by the hair, and brought his fat face right up out of the stream.

"Ooooooh!"

"Hang on, you boob!" gasped Leonora.

"Groooooh!"

"My! This sure is the rhinoceros' whiskers!" gasped Leonora. "Hang on! Don't wriggle! I'll sure get you out."

"Gurrrrrrrggg!"

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

The rescue scene was reversed. Bunter, utterly helpless, would have been swept down the stream to where the rescue boat was waiting, with a chortling boatman in it, had not Leonora undertaken the role—unrehearsed—of rescuer. Bunter certainly would have been half-drowned by the time he got to the boat. But the hefty grip of Leonora kept his bullet head above water.

"Yurrrrrrrggg!"

Mr. Van Duck stood transfixed.

In his paralysed state, he omitted to give any signal to the camera men, and the cameras were still grinding. They registered a scene that was undoubtedly entertaining, but could not possibly be considered thrilling or heroic. Yards of film reeled off to record the rescue of Bunter by the movie girl.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooooooh!"

The lovely Leonora swam to the bank, and Bob Cherry ran down and grasped Bunter. That fat junior was hauled out of the water, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

Leonora followed him out. The water was, as she had remarked, wet, and Leonora had had enough.

"Shucks!" said Leonora, as she wrapped a cloak round her dripping person. "This is sure some scene! I'll say that it will make Schootz jump when he sees it thrown."

"The jumpfulness will probably be terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—grooooh—I'm wet—oooooh! I say, I'm drenched! Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aren't you going to thank the jolly old rescuer for saving your life, Bunter?" roared Bob Cherry.

R. Ashdown, of 210, Bexley Road, North Heath, Erith, Kent, carries off a useful pocket-knife for the following amusing joke.

THAT DID IT!

An official, with a very annoying manner, was making an inspection of a newly opened aerodrome. On this particular afternoon parachute practice was being undertaken by several pilots. The official asked question after question of one man about his experiences and sensations while falling through the air. "But supposing your parachute fails to open while you are coming down?" he asked finally. "What do you do then?" The pilot had had more than enough by this time. "Take it back and change it!" he replied.

Now put your thinking cap on, chum, and see if you can beat the above effort.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! I'm soaked! Wow! I'm catching cold! Yurrrggg! I say, you fellows—grooooh!"

Bunter spluttered and gasped.

"Oh, carry me home to die!" articulated Mr. Van Duck, finding his voice again, and waving frantically to the camera men to stop. "You prize boob! You dog-goned geek! You—you—oh, there ain't a word for you! There sure is not!"

"Ooooooh!"

"You got to do it all over again!" raved Van Duck.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Shan't!" he answered.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter was keen to figure on the films. But he had no intention of falling off that bridge again. Once was enough—in fact, Bunter found it once too often.

"You prize boob!" roared Van Duck.

"Yah!"

Bunter tramped away towards the house, spluttering for breath, and leaving a trail of water behind him.

Van Duck stared after him.

"Say, you galoot!" he roared. "You

got to act this scene! Schootz's orders, you boob."

Bunter did not heed! He had been half-drowned already. He had a natural disinclination to completing the job. Not to be featured on the films like Myron Polk, not to be awarded fame like Douglas Fairbanks, would he have taken the plunge again. Very often Bunter did not know when he had had enough. But he knew now.

He tramped away regardless, spluttering as he went.

He left the Perfection company rooking with laughter—with the exception of Mr. Van Duck, who was raving with rage.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Van Duck. "Oh, search me! What Schootz mean by landing the world's prize boob on me? If this ain't the dog-goned limit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Van Duck. "Beat it—the shooting's off for this morning—beat it, the whole caboodle of you."

And Van Duck tramped away, the most exasperated and incensed assistant director in all Los Angeles.

Leonora tripped back to the frame house in the orange grove, where the movie girls had their quarters. Lord Mauleverer walked with her as far as the grove. Mauly never lost a chance of basking in the sunshine of Leonora's smile, and the movie girl certainly liked Mauly, though probably she did not suspect that his susceptible lordship had "fallen," as Fishy expressed it, for her charms.

Harry Wharton & Co. strolled away, chuckling. They had found the morning's entertainment quite exhilarating.

Billy Bunter was still feeling the effects of his ducking, and he was not seen again till lunch-time. Smiling faces greeted him when he appeared.

But Bunter did not smile.

The fat junior was quite morose. He had counted on that "shot" to demonstrate to Mr. Schootz what a ripping film actor he was, and how impossible it was to leave him out of the "school" film. But even Bunter had to realise that Mr. Schootz was not likely to be favourably impressed by that "shot" when he came back from Hollywood. Mr. Van Duck had the impression that Bunter was the world's prize boob, and Bunter had a well grounded apprehension that Mr. Schootz would share that opinion.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Trouble Ahead!

COKER of the Fifth snorted.

"That popinjay!" he growled. The juniors smiled.

Coker's remark was called forth, by the sight of Myron Polk, the Perfection star, sitting beside Mr. Rigg Schootz, in the latter gentleman's car, coming up the hill road from Hollywood. Coker never could behold the "handsomest man in Hollywood" without some sign of his lofty disapproval.

Coker turned and stalked away. Myron Polk "got his goat," as he would have expressed it in the language of the country. But the other fellows stayed by the entrance to the rancho to see Mr. Schootz arrive.

They were not interested in Myron Polk, and the film stunts he was to undertake that afternoon. But they were interested in Mr. Schootz's opinion of the film the assistant director had

taken that morning. Why and wherefore Mr. Schootz had ordered Van Duck to "feature" Bunter was a mystery to them, but that Mr. Schootz would rejoice in the result seemed impossible.

Van Duck was waiting for the director to arrive, a sarcastic grin on his face. Bunter had been featured and filmed, and he hoped the boss would like it. His orders had been carried out—his supposed orders at any rate—and a lot of film wasted, and a whole morning, too. The result was about what Mr. Van Duck had expected, and he wished the boss joy of it.

"I say, you fellows," murmured Billy Bunter, who had spotted the car in the distance with uneasy eyes behind his big spectacles. "I say, don't wait here for Schootz and that Polk man."

"Why not, fathead?" asked Harry.

"Let's go for a walk down the hills," suggested Bunter.

"Walk as much as you like, old fat man," answered Bob. "We'll start an hour later, and overtake you in the first fifty yards."

"Beast! I say, do come," urged Bunter. "I—I know a beautiful bit of scenery I want to show you. Glories of Nature and all that."

"The esteemed glories of Nature can wait," remarked Hurrea Jamset Ram Singh.

"You don't want to hang about here to see Polk," argued Bunter. "Coker says he set on that man Gomez and his gang to collar him the other day, and—"

"Coker had better mind what he says," remarked the Bounder. "There's no evidence that Polk did anything of the kind."

"Well, he's a beast anyhow," said Bunter. "Don't wait here to see such a swanking ass! Come along."

"Look here, you fat duffer, what are you up to?" demanded Frank Nugent. "What do you want to get us away from here for? What's on?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Nothing."

"Then dry up!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

The director's car was quite near now. It was turning from the hill road into Jack-Rabbit Canyon. The little fat director was driving, the slim and handsome Polk sat by his side, his usual supercilious and disdainful expression on his handsome face—the expression which, as Coker often confided to Potter and Greene, always made him want to punch that face when he saw it. A glint came into his eyes at the sight of the group of Greyfriars juniors outside the rancho. The film star's feud with the Greyfriars party was bitter, and grew more bitter with every passing day. Every member of that party was honoured with the special dislike of Myron Polk.

"I say, you fellows!" breathed Bunter, who grew more and more uneasy as the director's car neared the rancho. "I say, I—I've got something to tell you—something important! C-o-come away from here!"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"The ratfulness is terrific!"

"I say you fellows, do come!" pleaded Bunter. "Just a little way—out of hearing of those other beasts!"

In great surprise, Harry Wharton & Co. acceded. It was evident that Bunter had something to say which he was reluctant that Mr. Van Duck and other members of the Perfection company should hear. The juniors moved off to a little distance out of hearing. Fisher T. Fish eyed the fat Owl suspiciously.

"Cough it up!" he said. "What have you been up to, you fat clam?"

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"Get it off your chest, Bunter!" said Harry.

"Well, you—you see—" mumbled Bunter.

"We don't see yet."

"The seefulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"The—the fact is—" stammered Bunter.

"For goodness sake, jerk it out!" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently.

"What's the trouble?"

"You—you know that Schootz telephoned to Van Duck this morning to feature me in the shot?" said Bunter.

"Yes, ass!"

"Well, I—I think very likely he's forgotten it, and—and he may say he didn't!" gasped Bunter.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You know what a fool he is," argued Bunter. "He thinks I'm no good for the films. That shows that he's practically an imbecile. Well, being such a fool, he may have forgotten telephoning to Van Duck, and—and may make out that he never did telephone."

The juniors gazed at the Owl of the Remove in blank amazement.

"What is the fat idiot driving at?" asked Bob Cherry, in wonder.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"He can't have forgotten phoning; but if he has, what the thump does it matter to you or to us?" demanded Wharton.

"He—he—he may fancy that somebody else phoned!" gasped Bunter.

"He—he might suspect that somebody got into his office here and rang up Van Duck in the next room. He's suspicious, you know."

"Great Scott!"

"What I mean is, that if he kicks up a row—he's always kicking up rows, you know—don't you fellows mention anything about me being a ventriloquist," explained Bunter. "Ventriloquists can imitate voices and all that, and if you let on he might fancy that I'd played a trick on the telephone this morning—see? If he begins to rave, just don't say anything—especially about me being a ventriloquist."

"Oh crumbs!" said Bob Cherry, with a gasp. "So that was it, was it? Schootz never phoned at all. It was you speaking from his office and imitating his foot!"

"Nothing of the kind!" gasped Bunter. "But—but if he knew I was a ventriloquist, he—he—he might think that was it. That's why I want you fellows to keep it dark."

"Great snakes!" said Fisher T. Fish. "If that ain't the elephant's hind leg!"

"Begad," said Lord Mauleverer, gazing at Bunter in wonder. "you howlin' ass, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"You fat villain! You've spoiled the film, and Schootz will be bound to kick up a fearful row!" said Harry. "I suppose you don't expect him to imagine that he phoned? He will know that somebody has played a trick on Van Duck."

"That don't matter, so long as he doesn't spot who it was," explained Bunter. "Not that it was me, of course. I was somewhere else at the time. I was nowhere near the house when I rang up Van Duck—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I—I mean, when somebody else rang up Van Duck. Only old Schootz is a suspicious beast, and if he knew I was a clever ventriloquist he might suspect—"

"The mightfulness is terrific!"

"You prize jay!" heated Fisher T. Fish. "You figure that I'm going to let you horn in and spoil film? Don't you know that film costs dollars? I guess—"

"You ought to be jolly well kicked, you fat idiot!" said Harry. "But it's not our business to give you away."

"That's all right, then," said Bunter. "I rely on your honour, of course. Besides, it wasn't me, you know. I—I—I say, Fishy, where are you going?"

"I guess I'm moseying along to put Van Duck wise!" snorted Fisher T. Fish.

"I—I—I say—" gasped Bunter, in alarm.

"Hold on, Fishy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Bunter's a prize idiot, but it's not in the game to give him away."

Snort! from Fisher Tarleton Fish.

"Film costs money!" he said. "Yards and yards of film wasted! You figure that my popper's got heaps of dollars to chuck away on film for that prize boob to waste? No, sir!"

"Look here, Fishy—" began all the juniors together.

But Fisher T. Fish did not heed. Snorting with indignation, he whisked away, his long, thin legs fairly twinkling in his haste. Indignation filled Fisher T. Fish to overflowing. Money had been wasted! If life or limb had been wasted, Fishy could have borne it with fortitude. But money had been wasted, and that hit Fisher T. Fish where he lived, as he would have expressed it. Had Bunter committed a theft, Fishy might have helped him dispose of the booty. But to waste money that belonged to the Fish family was an offence that cried out to the earth and the heavens. Boiling with indignation, Fishy hurried away, Bunter blinking after him in alarm.

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter.

"Well, you have done it now!" said Bob Cherry. "Of all the benighted idiots—"

"I—I say, you fellows, what—what do you think old Schootz will do?" gasped Bunter.

"Well, he may kick you out of the location or he may only give you a jolly good hiding!" said Bob.

"Ow!"

Neither prospect seemed to appeal to Bunter.

"Well, you've asked for it!" said the Bounder, with a grin.

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter. "Stand by me, you know! Back up a pal! If that rotter Fishy tells old Schootz it was me, you fellows swear that it wasn't!"

"But it was!" yelled Bob.

"Keep to the point, old chap! Don't waste time talking piffle!" said Bunter.

"You fellows all swear that I'm not a ventriloquist, and never was. Specially mention that I never was able to imitate any fellow's voice. They'll believe you if you give your word of honour, you know!"

"Oh, scissors!"

"It's up to you," said Bunter. "I'd do as much for any of you chaps."

"We're a little more particular about telling lies, old bean," said Harry. "We'll say nothing. But you must expect Schootz to tumble if Fishy tells him, and he certainly will. What did you expect to happen when you played that silly trick?"

"Well, of course, I thought the shot would be a tremendous success with me in it."

"Eh?"

"Then Schootz would have been pleased—"



A footstep close at hand startled Bunter, and he blinked round, with a gasp of affright, at the sight of a swarthy, low-browed Mexican. It was Gomez. "Buenas noches, señorito!" grinned the ruffian. "You must come with me. I have some friends in the hills who will be delighted to see you." "Oh crikey!" groaned the fat junior. (See Chapter 6.)

"Oh crumbs!"

"And it would have been all right. But, of course, I never had a real chance, acting with such a set of duds! The cleverest actor requires some backing up," argued Bunter. "I don't suppose Douglas Fairbanks could bring off a really good scene surrounded by a lot of blithering idiots!"

"Great pip!"

"You see that?" said Bunter.

"Ha, ha! Not quite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I—I say, you fellows, old Schootz is getting out of his car! I—I—I think I'll go for a walk!" gasped Bunter. "I think I'll give him time to cool down."

"Better," agreed Bob.

"The betterfulness is terrific."

And Billy Bunter promptly went for a walk, and disappeared from sight by a path over the hill. He left the juniors chuckling. Billy Bunter did not always do the wise thing; but there was no doubt that he had acted wisely in this case.

For ten minutes later Mr. Rigg Schootz was inquiring for William George Bunter, in a voice that resembled the roar of the celebrated Bull of Bashan.

He inquired for him with a big stick in his hand.

What Mr. Schootz intended to do with that stick, as soon as he found Bunter, could be easily guessed.

Fortunately, he did not find him.

Bunter was giving him time to cool, and by his looks he needed it, for he was at boiling-point.

Up and down and round about went Mr. Schootz, inquiring for Bunter. He was still raging when he stamped into the rancho at last. The chums of the Remove wondered what would happen when Bunter came back. But Bunter was not in a hurry to come back.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Out of the Frying-Pan—

"O H dear!"

Thus William George Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove sat on a boulder on the rugged hillside, and blinked towards the rancho, a mile away, down in the canyon.

Dusk was spreading over the Santa Monica Mountains, and the lights were beginning to gleam on the Perfection location at Jack-Rabbit.

Bunter was tired; Bunter was hungry; Bunter was worried. He had that up-against-it feeling, and he had it badly.

To remain where he was was impossible. The claims of the inner Bunter were not to be denied. But to return to Jack-Rabbit was to brave the wrath of Mr. Schootz. Bunter sat on the boulder, blinked at the distant lights of the rancho, and groaned.

So far as Bunter could see he was not to blame in any way. The trouble was that he never got justice.

Had he been given a leading part in the school film he never would have played that trick on the telephone. Had the "shot" been a success, its success would have made his peace with the director. Owing to the general incapacity of the Perfection company, it had not been a success. Bunter, as usual, was the injured party, and, as usual, he was not going to get justice. What he was going to get when he returned did not attract him to Jack-Rabbit. Yet he had to return, for he was hungry. And when Bunter was hungry it was time for the stars in their courses to sit up and take notice.

Bunter was quite unaware of the fact that for some little time eyes had been watching him from the wooded hill. His present state of trouble had driven

from his fat mind all thought of the gang of "thugs," of whom Jose Gomez was the leader. And Bunter naturally had no knowledge of the plot that had been laid between Myron Polk and the leader of the gang of rum-runners. That a watch was being kept on the location was quite unknown to anyone at Jack-Rabbit. Bunter was about to discover it.

He was still sitting on the boulder and blinking dismally at the distant rancho when a footstep close at hand startled him. He blinked round and jumped to his feet, with a gasp of affright at the sight of a swarthy, low-browed Mexican. He recognised Gomez at a glance.

His first impulse was to run. But his fat knees knocked together, and he stood blinking at Gomez like a very fat rabbit fascinated by a snake. There was not a run left in Bunter. Gomez grinned evilly as he came towards the fat junior, and that evil grin almost froze the blood in Bunter's veins.

"Buenas noches, señorito!" grinned Gomez.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"You have taken a little walk on the sierra, señor?"

"Yes," stuttered Bunter. "I—I—I'm going back now. G-g-g-good-evening!"

"I think not, señor," said Gomez.

"Ow!"

"I think that you will take another little walk with me, señor," said Gomez. "I have some friends in the hills who will be delighted to see you."

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter. "I—I say, you—you needn't be waxy, you know. I—I never meant to give you away when I spotted you hiding at Polk's bungalow at Hollywood. I—I wouldn't, you know. I—I rather like you, Mr. Gomez. I—I think you're rather a—a—a nice chap, you know."

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"Gracias, señor," grinned Gomez, "and now come."

"I—I've got to get back," gasped Bunter. "My—my friends will be rather anxious about me by this time."

"I am desolated to think of their anxiety," said Gomez. "But they will no doubt be relieved when they join you in the hills."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Bunter.

"Come!"

"I—I can't, you know," groaned Bunter.

Gomez smiled. He slid his hand into a pocket, drew out a sheath-knife and opened it. Bunter watched that proceeding in horror.

"You prefer to stay on this spot, señor?" asked Gomez.

"Ow! Yes!"

"Muy bien! Your friends will doubtless find you, and provide you with a funeral."

"A fuf-fuf-funeral!" stuttered Bunter.

"Sin duda! You see, señor, if I leave you here, you will not be alive when I leave you," explained the thug of Spanish Town pleasantly.

Bunter almost collapsed.

"I—I—I say, I—I'll come with you!" he gasped. "I—I want to come! I—I shall enjoy a walk with you. Oh dear, I—I-I'd like nothing better, Mr. Gomez! Honest injun!"

"You are sure, señor?" asked Gomez, toying with the knife, which Bunter might have guessed he had no intention of using, had he not been in a state of mortal funk.

"Ow! Yes, rather! I—I like you, you know," moaned Bunter. "I—I never saw a chap I—I liked so much."

"Muy bien!" Gomez returned the knife to his pocket. "I will give you a chance. But give me no trouble, señor. Come!"

"Oh dear!"

Billy Bunter tottered away by the side of the low-browed Mexican. His fat brain was in a whirl. What the ruffian wanted with him he could not guess. Certainly the hardest-up bandit in the wide world would never have dreamed of kidnapping Bunter for ransom. Even a pickpocket might have disdained to deprive Bunter of his whole wealth, which consisted of a threepenny-piece. What Gomez wanted him for was a mystery. It could not be for the fascination of his society. Even Bunter did not think that was it. But evidently it was the intention of the thug to take him a prisoner into the mountains, doubtless to the hidden gulch, where Coker of the Fifth had been held a prisoner for a time.

From a shadowy opening in the rocks a man stepped out and joined Gomez. He grinned at Bunter. Bunter blinked at him dismally. This man was not a Mexican, but he was obviously a member of the gang.

"You got one of them, Jose?" he said.

"Si," answered Gomez. "This fat fool is the first. It is an easy hundred dollars."

"Sure!" assented Slick Wilson.

He joined Gomez, and they proceeded together by a rugged path under dusky trees. Bunter stumbled and lagged behind them. It came into his fat mind to lag behind and dodge away along the rugged rocks. Gomez glanced round.

The glitter in his eyes quite banished that half-formed scheme from Bunter's mind. He hurried on.

"Do not lag, señor," said Gomez softly. "I have warned you not to give trouble. If you desire to be left for the buzzards—"

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"Ow!"

"Don't you be skeered, you fat gink," grinned Slick Wilson. "You ain't going to be hurt. You're jest going to a place where you'll be kept quiet, and then you're going on a little sea voyage for your health, and you'll sure have your friends with you before long. You sure will!" And the ruffian chuckled.

"Oh dear!"

Bunter stumbled on after the two ruffians. That some scheme had been laid to kidnap the Greyfriars fellows, and that he was the first victim, was clear to his terrified mind. He remembered Coker's narrow escape of being taken on board a motor-boat; and he quite understood the thug's allusion to a sea-voyage. His fat limbs quaked as he stumbled and gasped after the ruffians.

The darkness deepened on the mountains. Gomez and Slick Wilson were at no loss to find their way; but all was darkness and mystery to Billy Bunter. He was aching with fatigue, but he dared not lag behind. If he lagged, one glance from Gomez's glittering black eyes was sufficient to spur him on to renewed efforts.

It seemed an age to Bunter before that dreadful journey came to an end. He covered perhaps two miles; but to Bunter it seemed at least twenty. Gomez and Slick stopped and whistled, and an answering whistle came from somewhere in the darkness. Bunter was grasped by the shoulder and led through a screen of thickets. A light gleamed, and he caught sight of two or three rough, evil faces. Then he was pitched headlong into a hut, and collapsed on the floor.

"Ow!" groaned Bunter.

In the hut he was left to his own devices. He blinked round, and groped his way to a pile of ragged blankets. In his terror he had forgotten even that he was hungry. He rolled on the blankets and lay still, a murmur of voices coming to his ears from outside the hut.

Gomez and his associates had possibly forgotten Bunter, when they were reminded of his existence about ten minutes later.

Snore!

From the hut came a deep and resonant sound, like the muttering of thunder in the mountains.

Snorrrre!

Billy Bunter had forgotten his troubles and his terrors in sleep; and his deep snore echoed in the remote den of the rum-runners, as it had been wont to echo in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Where Is Bunter?

"HEM! Mr. Schootz!"

Harry Wharton coughed apologetically.

It was night on the Santa Monica Mountains, and the hour was growing late. Myron Polk had stayed to dine with Mr. Schootz, and was now about to drive back to Hollywood. Mr. Schootz was chatting with him, standing by the car, and for some time Wharton had been waiting for an opportunity to speak to Mr. Schootz. But the director was deep in discussion with the Perfection star, and Polk did not step into his automobile, and at last the captain of the Remove ventured to interrupt. Bunter had not returned to the location, and the juniors were growing uneasy about him.

The Perfection director gave Harry an impatient glance.

"I guess I'm talking to Mr. Polk," he said pointedly.

Wharton coloured.

"Sorry, sir, but Bunter hasn't come back!"

"Dog-gone the fat gink. As soon as he comes back I guess I'm going to boot him all over the canyon."

"Yes; but—"

"Can it!" snapped Mr. Schootz.

Mr. Schootz was still in a state of wrath over Bunter's performances on the telephone that morning. Really, that was not surprising. A morning's work, and a lot of film, had been wasted owing to the obtuse machinations of the Owl of the Remove. The Perfection director could not be expected to take it kindly.

Nevertheless, if Bunter had lost himself in the hills, something had to be done. So Wharton persisted.

"I think Bunter may have gone back to Hollywood, Mr. Schootz, to Long Beach Boarding-House," he said. "I think—"

"Don't spill any more."

"May I use your telephone to inquire, sir?"

Myron Polk, who had been eyeing the captain of the Remove very curiously, broke in.

"I am just going back to Hollywood. I will look in at Long Beach House and ask if Bunter is there, Mr. Schootz, if you like."

"That's real good of you, Polk," said the director. "I guess the fat gink knows how to take care of himself. I'm sure going to make him cringe when I see him again, the goldarned geck!"

"I could telephone, Mr. Schootz—" began Harry. The Perfection star's offer surprised Wharton, but he was not disposed to accept favours from Myron Polk, if he could help it.

Mr. Schootz snorted.

"Ain't you heard what Mr. Polk says? Beat it!"

After that there was nothing more to be said. Harry Wharton went back into the starlit patio, leaving the director to finish his conversation with Myron Polk.

It was getting near bed-time now for the juniors, but they were not disposed to go to bed till they knew what had happened to Bunter. The fat Owl had cleared off the location to escape the wrath of Mr. Schootz, and as he had not returned, the probability was that he had gone back to the boarding-house on Sunset Boulevard at Hollywood. But it was quite possible that he had lost himself in the hills, and, irritating duffer as Bunter was, the other fellows naturally did not want to leave him to it if that was the case.

The whirr of Myron Polk's automobile was heard at last. It buzzed away on the road to Hollywood, and Mr. Schootz went to his office.

Harry Wharton & Co. loitered among the trees and flower-beds in the patio, under the starry splendour of the Southern Californian sky. It was a glorious night, like most of the nights in that favoured clime. Coker & Co. had gone to their rooms, and Fisher T. Fish and the Bounder had turned in. But the Famous Five stayed up, rather worried about the fatuous Owl; and Lord Mauleverer stayed up with them. His lordship was thinking, but apparently not about Bunter, as he sauntered in the starlight. Thoughts of Bunter certainly would not have brought that half-beatific, half-idiotic smile to Mauly's amiable face. It was more probable that he was thinking of the Lovely Leonora.

"Look here, we'd better bag a telephone and ring up Coot at Long Beach House," said Bob Cherry at last. "Ten

to one Bunter has rolled in there and he's all right."

"Polk said he would inquire," said Harry. "That means, I suppose, that he will ring up Schootz and tell him."

"Jolly good-natured all of a sudden!" granted Johnny Bull.

"Well, I suppose even that outsider can do a good-natured thing occasionally," remarked Nugent.

"Perhapsfully," said Harreo Jamsot Ram Singh thoughtfully. "But as the excellent and ridiculous Laocoon remarkably observed to the preposterous Trojans, it is necessary to fear the esteemed Greeks when they offer gifts."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, I don't see how Polk could have any axe to grind in making that offer, Inky. If he doesn't keep his word we shall have to ring up the boarding-house."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Schootz!" said Bob.

Mr. Schootz opened the door of his office, and looked out into the patio.

"Say, you ginks!" he called.

The famous Five hurried towards him. They guessed that Polk had rung up from Hollywood.

"Polk's phoned," granted Mr. Schootz. "That fat gink is O.K. You guys want to go to roost."

"Oh, good!" said Harry. "Did Mr. Polk say that Bunter was at the boarding-house?"

Mr. Schootz was turning back into his office. He answered over his plump shoulder.

"Nope. He says he passed the fat geck in Sunset Boulevard, in his auto. That's O.K. Dog-gone him!"

Slam!

The office door closed.

"Well, that's all right," said Bob Cherry. "If Bunter was in Sunset

Boulevard, he was heading for the boarding-house. I dare say he's snoring there long before this. Let's go to bed."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

The juniors proceeded to their rooms. Harry Wharton going into the patio to call Lord Mauleverer, who was still sauntering under the trees, with his hands in his pockets, and an expression on his face which indicated that his thoughts were far away.

"It's all right, Mauly," said Harry, tapping his lordship on the shoulder.

"Eh?"

Lord Mauleverer seemed to wake up from a dream. His amiable face coloured faintly as he looked at the captain of the Remove.

"I say, Wharton, old chap," he murmured. "I—I've been thinking—"

"I know; but it's all right," said Harry. "Polk's telephoned—"

"Polk?" repeated Mauleverer.

"Yes; he's seen the silly idiot—"

Lord Mauleverer jumped.

"You cheeky ass!" he exclaimed.

"Wh-a-at?"

"You thumping dummy!"

Wharton stared.

"You howlin' ass!"

"Mauly—"

"If you want your cheeky nose punched—"

"What on earth—" gasped Harry.

"Haven't you any manners?" demanded Mauleverer hotly. "Haven't you any sense? Begad! You cheeky, fatheaded, burblin' ass—"

Wharton blinked at him in amazement. Lord Mauleverer was angry, but what he was angry about, was a mystery to Wharton.

"What the thump do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" snapped Mauleverer. "How dare you use such an expression—especially to me? How dare

you speak of her as a silly idiot, begad?"

Wharton almost staggered.

"Her?" he gasped.

"If you can't speak respectfully of Miss Leonora, don't speak of her at all, you rank outsider."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry.

"Begad, I've a jolly good mind—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Wharton.

"Look here—" roared Mauleverer.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the captain of the Remove. "I was speaking of Bunter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter!" repeated Mauleverer blankly. Evidently he had not been thinking of Bunter himself, and he had supposed that Wharton's remark alluded to the subject that was uppermost in his own noble mind.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Wharton. "I thought you were thinking about Bunter—I didn't know—ha, ha, ha!"

"Why the thump should I be thinkin' about Bunter?" demanded Lord Mauleverer crossly.

"He hasn't come back?"

"Hasn't he?" said Mauly. Apparently, his lordship had not even noticed that Bunter had not come back.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton.

"Oh, chuck cacklin'!" said Lord Mauleverer, his noble face crimsoning. "Bother Bunter! Who's botherin' about Bunter? I was thinkin'—I mean, I thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Lord Mauleverer, and he stalked away, followed by another roar from the captain of the Remove.

(Continued on next page.)

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Works the Oracle!

"O H, 'crikey!" moaned William George Bunter.

It was morning on the Santa Monica Mountains. On wooded hillside and wide canyon and foaming torrent, the semi-tropical sunshine of Southern California shone brightly. In the narrow, rocky gulch in the heart of the hills, the sunlight streamed down, but it brought no comfort to the Owl of the Remove.

He blinked out of the open doorway of the jacal in which he had snored on the ragged blankets through the night. The sight that met his gaze was not hopeful or encouraging.

At one end, the gulch was closed by precipitous rocks. At the lower end it was barred by thickets that looked impenetrable. The sides were steep and rugged. Four or five rough jacals, or huts, were there, of the roughest materials, mere hovels, hastily and carelessly constructed. At a camp-fire before the huts, two men were seated at breakfast. One of them was Slick Wilson, whom Bunter had seen the night before; the other a Mexican, whom Slick addressed as Diego. Nobody else was to be seen in the gulch; Gomez and the others were gone.

Bunter was not aware that the gang were rum-runners, or bootleggers. But he knew that they were smugglers of some sort, and that goods, brought by motor-boat to the cove on the shore of the Pacific, were secretly carried up to this hidden den in the hills. That knowledge made him aware that he was in lawless and desperate hands.

The two ruffians who remained at the camp looked rough and brutal enough to terrify a more courageous fellow than Bunter. But Bunter was thinking, at that moment, less of his danger, than of the awful state of famine he was in. The smell of cooking had an almost overpowering effect on the Owl of the Remove.

The looks of the two bootleggers were not encouraging. But Billy Bunter, after blinking at them uneasily for some time, rolled out of the jacal at last. He simply had to have something to eat, and these unspeakable beasts did not seem to care whether he was hungry or not.

"G-g-g-good-morning!" stammered Bunter.

The Mexican stared at him, and took no other heed. Slick Wilson gave him a grin.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Oh, dear! Yes! Awful!"

"I guess we ain't paid to feed you," remarked Wilson, "but I'm sure a kind-hearted galoot. You can feed, fatty."

It was not a gracious invitation, but it was good enough for Bunter. He sat on a rock near the fire and tucked in. The food was coarse, but anything in the nature of foodstuffs was welcome to the famished Owl of the Remove just then. Beans and bacon and sausages vanished at a great rate, and Bunter was soon feeling better. But he had not eaten more than enough for three, when Slick Wilson stopped him.

"Let up!" he said. "I guess we ain't running a special pack-train to bring food up here for you, you darned lobo-wolf! Let up!"

"I say, I'm awfully hungry——"

"I guess I said let up!" snarled Wilson.

"Ow! Yes! All right! Certainly!" gasped Bunter.

And he "let up" promptly.

The meal over, the two bootleggers

l lounged about, Slick Wilson smoking a pipe, Diego rolling and smoking incessant cigarettes. Billy Bunter rolled away towards the thickets that barred the lower end of the gulch, and Wilson's voice rapped out:

"Say, you gink!"

"Oh!" Bunter spun round. "Yes?"

"Git back into your quarters!"

"I—I say——"

Slick Wilson slid his hand into his hip-pocket, and, to Bunter's horror, produced a Colt revolver. Like a fat rabbit making for its burrow, Bunter bolted back into the hut.

"You ask for it again, and you'll sure git it, where you live!" growled Wilson.

Billy Bunter was not likely to ask for it again. He remained quaking in the hut.

The morning hours passed drearily to the Owl of the Remove.

Slick Wilson and Diego sat down to smoke and play cards to pass the time. There was no sign of the other members of the boot-legging gang returning. But from remarks dropped by the two ruffians, Bunter elucidated that they expected their associates at nightfall. The "goods," whatever they were, were to be taken away under cover of night, and Bunter gathered that they were to be taken down to Los Angeles. And he was not long left in ignorance of the nature of the goods. Both the thugs paid frequent visits to the huts, emerging therefrom with flushed faces and a strong scent of liquor.

Bunter discerned that kegs and cases were packed in the flimsy buildings. He knew already that the gang were smugglers, and now he guessed what it was they smuggled. Gomez's gang was one of the ten thousand boot-legging gangs called into existence in the United States by the Prohibition laws.

All along the American coasts, both the Atlantic and the Pacific, were similar gangs, active in defeating the Volstead Act, smuggling forbidden liquor into the country that was supposed to be "dry." It was, indeed, through supplying him with unlawful liquor, that Gomez had first come into touch with Myron Polk, the Perfection star, though Bunter was not aware of that.

Bunter's thoughts as he watched the boot-leggers, and listened to their talk, were not agreeable.

What his fate was to be was not clear to him; but it was obvious that he was going to be kept a prisoner. From what had nearly happened to Coker of the Fifth, and from what the boot-leggers said in his hearing, he knew that he was to be sent aboard the rum-running steamer next time it came. That the boot-leggers themselves could have any object in thus kidnapping him, was impossible, and it was clear even to Bunter's obtuse mind that somebody was behind them—that they were paid by somebody who had an implacable enmity for the Greyfriars party.

Bunter could guess who that was. Behind the rum-runners was the hand of the Perfection star. Coker of the Fifth, and Lord Mauleverer, were the special objects of Myron Polk's bitter enmity; but that he aimed to avenge himself on the whole party was clear from the fact that so insignificant a member of it as Bunter had been seized.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Bunter.

Nowhere on the horizon was a bright spot. There was no help, no rescue, and no possibility of escape. Bunter had to wait where he was, till the rum-running steamer came again, and then he was to be shipped away—where! He could not

even guess. And the same fate was intended for Harry Wharton & Co. That, indeed, did not worry Bunter so much as his own fate. Had the whole party, with the exception of Bunter, fallen into lawless hands, the Owl of the Remove could have borne it with something like fortitude. But when William George Bunter himself was in such a strait, matters were undoubtedly serious.

Liberal draughts of boot-leg liquor in the morning hours were not improving the temper of the two ruffians. They were quarrelling over the cards, and muttering threats and curses. Billy Bunter quaked with the apprehension that their ill-humour might turn upon him.

Diego, with a string of Spanish oaths, threw down the cards at last.

"Carambo! I play no more!" he snarled.

"Suit yourself, you durned greaser!" growled Slick Wilson.

Diego scowled at him blackly, and lounged away, the other ruffian jeering him as he went.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles.

A sudden thought had flashed into his fat brain.

He gave a fat little cough.

"Carambo! You cheat, you American dog!"

Slick Wilson jumped up, red with rage. If that voice was not Diego's, it was exactly like Diego's voice; and Slick Wilson had no suspicion that he was entertaining a ventriloquist unawares.

"What's that, you pesky greaser?" roared Slick, and he made a rush after the Mexican.

Bunter shivered with excitement. The two half-intoxicated brutes were already on the verge of a quarrel, and the intervention of the Greyfriars ventriloquist gave it the finishing touch.

Diego was going into one of the huts for more liquor. He heard the voice that sounded so like his own, and stared round, wondering who had spoken. Slick Wilson grasped him by the shoulder and swung him round.

"Carambo! Hands off!" snarled the Mexican.

"You figure you can call me a cheat, you crawling half-breed?" roared Wilson.

"Fool of a gringo! I did not!"

"Search me! Didn't I hear you?" shouted Slick furiously, and with his open hand, he struck the Mexican across his swarthy face, sending him reeling to the ground.

The Mexican bounded up like a tiger, reaching for the knife in his belt.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He watched the scene, fascinated by horror and fear.

The Mexican was springing on his associate, knife in hand. Slick Wilson jumped back, grabbing the revolver from his hip-pocket.

"Drop it!" he roared.

The Mexican stopped, cowed by the levelled revolver. The knife clattered from his hand to the rocky ground. He stood, panting, eyeing the American like a demon.

Slick picked up the knife, and tossed it away over the rocks. Then he thrust the revolver back to his hip.

"Now, you durned greaser!" he roared. And he advanced savagely on the Mexican, who, equally savage and infuriated, met him more than half way. In a moment they were fighting fiercely.

Billy Bunter blinked at them. His fat heart was beating wildly. The Mexican was fighting like a wildcat; but the more powerful American drove him back under a rain of blows. Every



"What do you mean, Mauleverer?" said Bob Cherry. "Do you want me to come for a walk with you, or not?" "Yaas, old chap. But—" "You do, and you don't?" asked Bob, sarcastically. "Yaas." "Well, as I can't make head or tail of that, I'll clear," said Bob. "If you want to sneak off by yourself, sneak off, and be blowed to you!" (See Chapter 9.)

moment they were farther and farther from the hut when the Owl of the Remove crouched, watching them in terror.

The Greyfriars ventriloquist had succeeded better than he had hoped—with the aid of the poisonous liquor the two brutes had been consuming. Burning with rage and enmity, they had forgotten Bunter. But no, that he had his chance the fat junio hesitated to take advantage of it.

The two ruffians clinched, and rolled struggling to the rock ground. Bunter, screwing up his courage, forced himself to an effort.

He crept from the jaca.

Once outside he ran for it. The rustling of the thickets as Bunter forced his way through, passed unheeded by the two savage wretches who were fighting like wild beasts. Panting, gasping, quaking with terror, Bunter burst through the screen of thickets, and found himself on the open hillside.

He gave a wild blink round him.

To his eyes the hills seemed pathless. To find his way back to the location was a matter of chance. But he could put a safe distance between himself and the den of rum-runners, and that Bunter proceeded to do.

He ran and ran, stumbling, falling, picking himself up again, and panting on. Not till he was utterly exhausted did Bunter stop, and then he crawled into a clump of bushes that concealed him, as he lay down to gasp for breath.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, taking out a handkerchief and wiping his perspiring brow. "Thank goodness I've dodged them! If it hadn't have been for my ventriloquism I don't know what would have happened! Of course, if it had been a case of one man against one there would have been a very different tale to tell."

And Bunter waited, hoping for the best.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Awkward!

"GOING for a walk, old chap?"

"Yaas." "Good. Which way shall we go?" asked Bob Cherry cheerily.

"Oh!" said Lo Mauleverer.

He paused.

A "shot" had been taken on the Perfection location. The scene that Bunter had spoiled the previous day had been filmed with great success. Harry Wharton, in the role of the schoolboy rescuer, had scored quite a hit, and the Lovely Leonora, in the character of the schoolmaster's pretty daughter, had been duly rescued from the torrent, and the gallant rescue duly recorded on the film.

Now the Greyfriars fellows were at liberty, and were variously occupied. Coker & Co. had gone off to Santa Monica to lunch there and stroll by the seaside. Harry Wharton was studying a special part, which he had to "talk" later. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh was basking in the brilliant sunshine, which almost recalled the sun blaze of his native land. Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull were in a boat on the stream in the canyon. The Bouncer had disappeared from sight, and some of the other fellows more than suspected that he was engaged in a game of draw poker with a Perfection man.

Fisher T. Fish, seated on a bench in the patio of the ranch house, was making abstruse calculations of the amount of money he had spent since leaving Greyfriars, much worried because there was a sum of five cents for which he could not account. Fishy went through his accounts again and again in search of the elusive twopence half-penny. What had become of it beat him to a frazzle. He knew that he could not have lent it to anybody—that was extremely unlikely. He knew that he

could not have given it to anybody—that was absolutely impossible. With a stump of pencil, a wrinkled, bony brow, and the air of a fellow who meant to do or die Fisher T. Fish worried and worried through his accounts, determined to track down that missing sum or perish. Bob Cherry, with time on his hands strolled about till he saw Lord Mauleverer starting on a walk, and then he joined him.

A slight embarrassment in Mauly's manner was visible, but Bob did not take any heed of it. It did not occur to him that Mauleverer could have any special reason for wanting to go on a ramble alone. Mauly was generally a gregarious fellow, and so was Bob; and as Mauly was going for a walk, naturally Bob dropped into pace beside him.

Mauly paused, started, paused again, and started again. There was an unusual colour in Mauly's cheeks. He was silent; but that did not matter, as Bob cheerily talked enough for two.

They walked down the canyon to the road, Mauly going slower and slower, and Bob good-naturedly accommodating his pace to the progress of his lagging lordship.

At a point where a path turned off the road into the hills Mauleverer stopped.

Bob stopped also. By this time it had dawned upon him that there was something peculiar in Mauly's manner.

He looked at him inquiringly. Under his inquiring gaze Lord Mauleverer's colour deepened still more.

"Anything up, old bean?" asked Bob.

"Up?" repeated Mauleverer vaguely.

"Yes. What's the jolly old trouble?"

"Trouble?" murmured Mauleverer.

"Thinking out some giddy problem?" asked Bob more and more surprised.

(Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

"Problem?" stammered Mauly.
 "They're not giving you a parrot part on the talkies, are they?" inquired Bob.
 "Oh! No."
 "Oh! Thought perhaps they had. Well, are we going on, or going back, or staying here till we take root?" asked Bob.
 "The—the fact is—" stammered Mauleverer.
 "Cough it up!" said Bob encouragingly. "Blessed if I can make you out this morning, Mauly. I can see that you've got something on your chest. Shoot—as old Schootz says!"
 "The—the fact is—" stammered Mauleverer.
 "Try again!" said Bob. "Keep on coughing, and you'll cough up the trouble, in the long run."
 "You—you—you see—" stammered Mauleverer.
 "I don't!" reminded Bob. "You're not off your jolly old rocker, by any chance, are you, Mauly?"
 "Nunno."
 "No insanity in your family, I hope?" asked Bob, sympathetically.
 "Don't be an ass, you know."
 "Well, then, if there isn't, don't act as if there was," suggested Bob. "Let's get going. This path leads to a jolly pretty spot in the hills—a sort of glen."
 "The—the fact is—" Mauleverer recommenced.
 "My only hat!" said Bob.
 Lord Mauleverer stood where he was, flushed and discomfited. At long last a suspicion forced itself into Bob's mind, and he coloured, too.
 "If you mean that you don't want my company, Mauly—" he exclaimed.
 "Not at all, old chap!" said Mauleverer hastily. "Always glad of your company. But—" stammered Mauleverer.
 "But there's a 'but' in this case!" said Bob gruffly.
 "Yaas."
 Bob Cherry stepped back. He was a good-natured fellow, and not prone to take offence; but the obvious fact—obvious at last that Mauleverer did not want him was both disconcerting and displeasing. He was on the friendliest terms with Mauly, and there was no reason that Bob could imagine why Mauly should not want him. Yet it was clear that Mauly did not.
 "That's plain enough," said Bob gruffly. "Ta-ta!"
 "Hold on!" exclaimed Mauleverer, as Bob turned to walk back to the location. "Don't be stuffy, old bean. I don't mean—" stammered Mauleverer.
 Bob turned round again.
 "What do you mean?" he demanded.
 "Do you want me to come for a walk with you, or not? I suppose you can talk plain English?"
 "Yaas, old chap. But—" stammered Mauleverer.
 "You do, and you don't?" asked Bob sarcastically.
 "Yaas."
 "Well, as I can't make head or tail of that, I'll clear," said Bob. "If you want to sneak off by yourself, sneak off, and be blowed to you!"
 "I—I say—" stammered Mauleverer.
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Bob Cherry strode back towards the location. Lord Mauleverer gazed after him for some moments, and then slowly resumed his way. When Bob glanced over his shoulder Mauly had disappeared up the steep path that led into the glen. Bob gave a grunt and snorted on his way, irritated, in spite of his sunny good-nature.

Why Mauleverer had wanted to "sneak off," as Bob had expressed it, by himself was a mystery. It was not pleasant for a fellow to be told he was not wanted by a fellow with whom he was chummy for no reason that could be imagined.

Bob, having nothing special to do, loitered along the sunny road, and stopped to look down across the terraced shore to the beach and the Pacific. Santa Monica Bay and the great ocean were stretched before his gaze, and far out at sea white sails and the murky smoke of steamers dotted the wide waters. In the clear atmosphere he could see the town of Santa Monica in the far distance, to the left, and other seaside resorts along the shore of the bay. Bob's gaze dwelt on the vast blue Pacific, stretching away to infinity, his thoughts running on coral islands, and schooners, and adventures at sea. He was suddenly recalled to himself by a footstep, and a cheery voice hailing him:

"Say, bo!"

It was the voice of Miss La Riviere, and Bob spun round and jerked off his cap. The movie girl, who was Leonora la Riviere on the films, and Miss Snookson in private life, gave him a nod and a smile.

Bob grinned back cheerily. All the juniors liked Leonora, who had a frank and unceremonious manner, and seemed to them a nice, sensible girl. They had wondered sometimes what Leonora would think if she learned that Mauly was in a state known as "spoony" on her account. And they had no doubt that she would be "tickled to death," as she would have expressed it herself. On the films Leonora was romantic, but in real life she was an exceedingly practical young lady, and there was no nonsense about her.

"You seen Mauleverer moseying along this way, kid?" asked Leonora.

Bob started.

"Mauleverer? Oh, yes; he's gone up the path further on. It leads to a sort of glen."

"That's it," said Leonora. "He's sure honing to show me that glen, and I allowed I'd go. I guess I'm late, bub. So-long!"

And with another cheery nod the movie girl tripped on her way, leaving Bob staring.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

He grieved.

He understood now why Mauleverer had not wanted his company on that morning ramble. It was a case of two being company, and three none.

Mauly had not told him that he had an appointment in the glen with the auburn-haired Leonora. Mauly no doubt regarded it as romantic. Miss La Riviere obviously didn't. To her Mauleverer was a nice, well-mannered schoolboy, who had done her a great service—merely that and nothing more. She had no objection to telling all Los Angeles that she was going to view the glen with Mauly.

Bob chuckled.

"The howling ass!" he said.

Miss La Riviere disappeared up the

path to the glen. Bob Cherry walked away to the location.

But he was no longer feeling offended; he was chortling.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Leonora Chips In!

LORD MAULEVERER stood in the glen, leaning against a moss-grown rock, with a dreamy expression on his amiable face.

From where he stood he could see the path down to the road, though the road itself was out of sight.

He waited and watched for the graceful figure of Leonora to come into view.

The expression on Mauleverer's face would probably have been described by any Greyfriars fellow as "moony." It was dreamy and rapt. Mauly was thinking—of Leonora, of course. He was engaged in mental calculations—of a very different kind from those that absorbed the faculties of Fisher I. Fish. That Leonora was older than himself, Mauly knew must be the case. But how much older was she? Was she so much older as to make his devotion a little absurd? He had asked Wharton's opinion, and Wharton had opined that Leonora was about twenty-five. Johnny Bull had stated that with so much make-up on her face she might be anything from twenty to seventy, for anything a fellow could see. Both opinions had annoyed Mauly. When he mooted the subject with the Boulder, Vernon-Smith said, without hesitation, thirty-five. He narrowly escaped having his nose punched.

Twenty at the most, Mauly thought—perhaps nineteen—perhaps only eighteen! But, after all, twenty-five was a nice age. Still, there was a lot of difference between fifteen and twenty-five; Mauly could not help realising that.

It was a deep and important question; for already the idea was floating in Mauly's susceptible mind that Leonora was the only possible candidate for the heart, hand, and earldom of Mauleverer. Already Mauly's thoughts were running on a long engagement. As Mauly was still a schoolboy, and in the Lower Fourth Form, it was obvious that the engagement—if any—would have to be a fairly long one.

With these important matters occupying his mind, Mauleverer was not likely to give much attention to his surroundings. He was not aware that two rough-looking fellows were approaching him till they came into his sight suddenly. Then they were too close at hand to be avoided.

One of them was Jose Gomez; the other was another Mexican, a "tough" of Spanish Town.

Mauleverer stared at them as they stopped directly before him, but without any sign of alarm. He recognised Gomez at once as the hooligan who had attacked Coker of the Fifth at Hollywood, and who, according to Coker's story, had made him a prisoner in the Santa Monica hills. That he was in danger Mauleverer saw at once; but the rascals had found in him a customer very different from Billy Bunter.

Even the thought of Leonora was driven from his mind as the two Mexicans closed in on him. Mauly carried a light cane under his arm, and he slid it into his hand to use as a weapon if needed.

"Stand back, please!" he said quietly.

Gomez grinned.

"Senor, I have been looking for you," he said. "You more than any of the others, carambo! You will come with us."

"I shall do nothin' of the kind!" answered Mauleverer, coolly. "And if you lay a finger on me, you rascal, look out for yourself!"

"Take him, Ramon," said Gomez.

Ramon stepped up to Mauleverer and grasped him by the arm; he did not seem to expect any resistance from a schoolboy.

The next moment he was undeceived, however.

Mauleverer slashed at him with his cane; and Ramon staggered back, with a fearful yell, as he caught the slash full across his swarthy face. He stumbled over a rock and went with a crash to the ground.

"Madre de Dios!" hissed Gomez.

He sprang at the schoolboy earl and grasped him in his powerful hands.

Mauleverer struck again with all his strength, and Gomez uttered a howl of pain under the slash. But the next moment the cane was torn from Mauly's grasp, and he was struggling ineffectually in the brawny grasp of the bootlegger.

Ramon staggered to his feet, spattering out Spanish oaths. He rushed to the aid of his associate.

Mauleverer had no chance in a struggle with the two ruffians, but he put up a determined fight. Overwhelming as the odds were, they found him a very different proposition from Bunter.

But his resistance was unavailing. Overpowered by sheer strength and brutality, Mauleverer was grasped by both arms, pinioned and helpless. With savage oaths, the two Mexicans began to drag him away up the steep glen.

There was a pattering of running feet on the lower path. It was at that moment that Leonora came in sight.

"Say, you guys!"

Gomez and Ramon stopped and stared round. They had been hanging about the vicinity of the location, looking for a chance of seizing some straggler from the Greyfriars party, and certainly had never dreamed that Mauleverer was there to keep an appointment. The sight of Leonora was disconcerting to the bootleggers. They did not want any witnesses to the dastardly work they were carrying out for the disgruntled Perfection star.

"Carambo!" muttered Gomez savagely.

Mauleverer gasped.

"Stop!" he called out breathlessly.

"Go away! Go away! Run away at once, Miss La Riviere! For goodness' sake, go away!"

Leonora did not heed Mauleverer's alarmed entreaty, or the threatening looks of the bootleggers. She came on quickly. Something gleamed in her hand as she ran on the scene; and Mauleverer realised, with a startled shock, that it was a revolver.

Evidently Leonora was not a timid and shrinking creature.

"Away with you, fool of a woman!" snarled Gomez. "If you dare to meddle here—"

"Can it!" interrupted Leonora cheerfully. "Say, what sort of a pesky thug do you call yourself, anyhow? Let up! You hear me, too?"

And the movie girl raised the revolver and levelled it at the two bootleggers, who held Mauleverer in their grasp.

"You want to let up on that guy," said Leonora, with perfect coolness—"and you want to do it quick! You get me, feller? I guess if you don't play up like a good little man I shall leave a dead man on these here rocks! I mean business—and don't you forget it!"

The movie girl's hand was steady, and

her dark eyes gleamed over the levelled revolver.

Mauleverer gazed at her in wonder. Under the romantic delusion that he was in love with Leonora, Mauly had many times pictured himself rescuing her from deadly perils. But certainly he had never pictured her rescuing him.

The state of affairs was certainly not what it should have been. Still, it was very fortunate for Mauleverer that Leonora was a resolute young woman, and not a timid, shrinking miss. For there was no doubt that the two ruffians had Mauly at their mercy, and that they were daunted and scared by Leonora's "gun."

"You hear me yaup?" snapped Leonora. "Let up on that guy! Pronto!"

Gomez and Ramon glared at her savagely. But the revolver daunted them, and they released Mauleverer.

Smuggling forbidden liquor was their business, and Myron Polk's pay had turned them into kidnappers, but beyond brutality they dared not go. Gomez, indeed, was capable of using his knife on an enemy on a dark night and in a secret place—and probably had done so more than once. But even if he had thought of using that weapon now the revolver would have stopped him.

Both the ruffians cowered away from the levelled firearm and the steady eyes that looked over it.

Had Leonora shown any sign of fear the ruffians might have rushed on her, seized the pistol, and driven her off the scene with blows. But there was no sign of fear about the movie girl. Her manner was cool and contemptuous, and she evidently feared the two Mexicans no more than she would have feared a couple of rats—perhaps less.

With black, scowling brows, the Mexicans released Mauleverer and backed away.

"That's the music!" said Leonora coolly. "You want to beat it, you two hoboos, and you want to beat it sudden! You hear me? Get out of it, you pesky thugs! Search me! I ain't waiting long for you to vamoose!"

"Oh, begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

Gomez and Ramon, muttering curses, retreated up the path, eyeing Leonora malevolently and the revolver uneasily.

At a little distance they turned into an opening of the rocks and disappeared.

Leonora lowered the revolver.

"Quick!" she breathed. "Come on, kid! We want to go while the going's good."

"Oh, gad!" gasped Mauleverer.

Leonora grasped his arm and led him away hurriedly down the path. Mauleverer went like a fellow in a dream.

"Buck up, kid!" said Leonora.

"Yaas!" gasped Mauleverer.

They hurried down the steep path and reached the road. There Leonora stopped to take breath.

"O.K., here!" she said. "There's cars passing every other minute, and I guess those guys sure won't want to horn in where they can be seen. Say, bo, we've been lucky!" The movie girl chuckled. "I guess I had them scared stiff with this gun—what?"

"You had!"

gasped Mauleverer. "Begad! Would—would you really have fired on them, Miss La Riviere?"

"I sure would if the gun had been loaded!" answered Leonora cheerfully. Mauleverer jumped.

"Wasn't it loaded?" he stuttered.

"Not likely!" said Leonora, laughing. "It's sure a movie gun, and I guess it's never been loaded in its life!"

"Oh, gad!"

"I was jest bluffing them hoboos," said the movie girl. "That's why I made you beat it—reckoned they might guess. But they was sure too scared of the gun to tumble." And Leonora laughed again. "Say, kid, what did them hoboos want, anyway?"

"They were going to take me away into the hills," said Mauleverer. "Goodness knows why! It must be the same gang that got hold of Coker—he said that Gomez was one of them."

"You kids have sure woke up a lot of hornets," said Leonora. "I guess you want to stick to the location, kid. But don't you be scared. I'll see you ain't hurt."

"Oh, begad!" gasped Mauleverer. "Really, you know—"

"We want to beat it back to the location," said Leonora. "I guess we ain't going for a walk with them jaspers loafing around."

"Yaas," said Mauleverer, and he walked along the road by the side of the movie girl. "I—I say, Miss La Riviere, I—I'm no end obliged!"

"Forget it," said Leonora.

"But you really saved me from those rotters, you know."

"I sure did," agreed Leonora.

"You've an awful lot of pluck," said Mauleverer—"as—as plucky as—as you are beautiful, Miss La Riviere!"

"My," said Leonora, "that's real nice, kid! You sure can throw a compliment! Of course, you don't mean it, but it's real nice!"

"But I do mean it!" persisted Mauleverer. "I've never seen anybody so beautiful, if—if you'll allow me to say so!"

Leonora glanced at him.

"I'll allow you to say so to all Hollywood, kid," she answered. "I sure would like you to make Rigg Schootz think so. He might give me one of the parts he keeps for Janet Jooce. My, wouldn't that be the grasshopper's whiskers!"

"You're fond of the films?" asked Mauleverer, rather wistfully.

He was wondering whether the movie girl would ever be induced to give up the pictures to become chatelaine of Mauleverer Towers.

"Not so all-fired fond of them," explained Leonora. "But they're tea and toast, you know. A girl must live, and

(Continued on next page.)

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I sure must pay my board till I get married."

Mauleverer breathed hard. Leonora had come to the very subject that was uppermost in Mauly's mind.

"Yaas. But—but you will—will—marry some day!" gasped Mauleverer, with a face like a beetroot.

Now was the time to hint at a long engagement.

"Sure!" said Leonora. "I sure hope so, kid. I guess Peter will be some disappointed if I don't."

Mauleverer jumped.

"Peter?" he said blankly.

"Yep! Peter's my beau."

"Your—your—your beau?" said Mauleverer.

"Yep! He's a good-looker, is Peter," said Leonora softly. "But he ain't rolling in dust yet. He's at Los Angeles."

Earth and sky and sea swam round Lord Mauleverer.

This was the first he had heard of Peter. Really. Mauly might have guessed that there was a Peter, but he hadn't.

His romantic thoughts had been concentrated on the lovely Leonora, and he had never even dreamed of the possibility of a Peter.

He came to himself, from a sort of trance, to discover that Leonora was holding out something for his inspection.

It was a photograph in a locket. It was the photograph of a young man Leonora evidently considered a good-looker, but who seemed to Lord Mauleverer to have a most unpleasant face. Perhaps Mauly at the moment was prejudiced.

"That's Peter," said Leonora.

"Oh!" gasped Mauleverer.

"You'd like Peter," said Leonora.

Lord Mauleverer doubted it.

"You—you—you're engaged to—to—to Peter?" he stammered.

"Sure! He's my beau."

"Oh!" said Mauleverer.

Leonora put the locket away and looked at Mauly with some concern.

"You sure look peeved," she said.

"You're upset. Them hoboos handling you that-a-way, poor kid! Come on! Let's get back to the location!"

How Lord Mauleverer reached the location he never quite knew. All he knew was that the whole firmament was darkened by the existence of an obnoxious Peter who was at Los Angeles. Peter had burst on him suddenly like a bolt from the blue, shattering poor Mauly's romantic dreams at one fell swoop. When Leonora left him Mauleverer gazed after her with sad renunciation. Like a lion in the path stood Peter. Mauleverer's romantic visions had, so to speak, petered out.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Schootz is Wrathful!

"GUFF!" said Hiram K. Fish.

"Jost guff!" agreed Mr. Rigg Schootz.

He waved a podgy hand, and Hiram K. Fish waved a bony hand, dismissing the matter.

But Harry Wharton was not to be dismissed.

Lord Mauleverer's adventure in the hills was known to all the juniors now, and they had made up their minds that the matter was serious, and that something had to be done. So the captain of the Remove presented himself to the two directors, who were smoking after-lunch cigars under a tree in the patio.

Neither Mr. Fish nor Mr. Schootz

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wanted to be bothered. But they had to be bothered, and that was that.

"Sorry!" said Wharton. "But we've talked this over, and we think—"

"You ain't here to think!" declared Mr. Fish.

"You surely ain't!" assented Mr. Schootz. "You're here to make yourself useful. And you sure won't make yourself useful by digging up a police case, and bringing a mob of cops along. No, sir. If you know as much as I do about American police methods, you'd be as glad as I am to keep cops at a safe distance. We're here to take pictures, not to provide Los Angeles papers with a story. Forget it, and now jist beat it, see?"

Wharton stood his ground.

"That villain Gomez is hanging about this place—" he said.

"Let him."

"He got hold of Mauleverer, and would have dragged him away into the hills—"

"Well, he didn't get home with it," said Mr. Schootz. "You kids keep close in camp, see? Keep out of mischief."

"I'm anxious about Bunter," said Harry.

Mr. Schootz snorted.

"You'll sure have reason to be anxious about that fat gink when I get a hold on him," he said.

"Can it, kid!" said Mr. Fish. "Bunter's at the boarding-house in Hollywood. Polk saw him going there last evening."

"I'd like to telephone to the boarding-house and make sure, at least," said Harry.

"Oh, phone if you like!" said Mr. Schootz. "Any old thing, so long as you stop chewing the rag."

Harry Wharton left the directors and went to Mr. Schootz's office. Since the attempted kidnapping of Mauleverer, following so closely on Coker's similar experience, the juniors were uneasy about Bunter. They had taken it for granted that he was at the boarding-house at Hollywood, as Mr. Polk had stated that he had seen him on Sunset Boulevard. But it was growing clear to Harry Wharton & Co. that the Greyfriars party were the objects of an enemy's machinations, and they guessed accurately that that enemy was the Perfection star.

If Polk, as they could not help suspecting, was behind the attack on Lord Mauleverer that morning, it was possible that the same gang might have seized on Bunter, in which case Polk's statement that he had seen the fat junior in Hollywood was false. It was just such a statement as he would make, to throw suspicion off the scent. He had not said that Bunter was at Long Beach House, but that he had passed him on the boulevard, a statement that could not be disproved by inquiry, unless Bunter was found. If anything had happened to Bunter in the hills, Polk's statement was designed to lead suspicion and search in the wrong direction.

The matter could be settled by phoning Mr. Coot at the boarding-house. Having obtained Mr. Schootz's permission, Harry rang up Long Beach House.

Mr. Coot answered him on the phone. "Is Bunter with you now, Mr. Coot?" asked Harry.

"Nope."

"Has he been back since we came away?"

"He sure has not."

"He hasn't been to Long Beach Boarding-House at all since we came out to location."

"Nope."

Wharton hung up, with a contracted brow. That point was settled now, and he returned to the patio. The two Perfection directors eyed him impatiently as he came up.

Harry could quite understand their unwillingness to be bothered by a police investigation. It meant waste of time and money, a lot of trouble, and delay in the "shooting." But it could not be helped. If Bunter was in bad hands, that matter was more important than the big school film, or any other film turned out by the Perfection Picture Syndicate.

"You aiming to chew the rag some more?" snapped Mr. Schootz.

"Bunter's not been back to Long Beach House," said Harry.

"Then I guess he's somewhere else. He was seen in Hollywood last evening, anyhow."

"I'm not sure of that," said Harry.

"You know what Polk said!" snapped Schootz.

"I'd rather not say anything about Mr. Polk. Bunter can't be anywhere in Hollywood. He has no money."

"I guess the fat gink may have lost himself somewhere!" grunted Mr. Schootz. "What's the odds? We don't want him here."

"I know. But we can't leave him to it. If he's lost in the hills he must be found," said Harry. "If he's been collared by that villain Gomez, he's got to be got away from that gang."

"He ain't lost in the hills. I keep on telling you he was seen on Sunset Boulevard last evening. Polk saw him."

"I don't believe Polk saw him there," said Harry, coming out into the open at last. "I don't trust his word."

"Great John James Brown!" ejaculated Mr. Fish.

"The Los Angeles police ought to be informed of the attack on Mauleverer to-day," said Harry.

"Oh, guff!" grunted Mr. Fish. "Mauleverer shouldn't get into a rookus with a gang of hoboos."

"That fat fool may have lost himself in the hills," said Mr. Schootz. "Polk may have seen some other fat guy he took for Bunter on Sunset Boulevard. I can tell you I'm fed-up with that guy. Look at the trick he played yesterday!"

"I know," said Harry. "He's a troublesome fool. But if that gang have got hold of him—"

"What the pesky thunder should they want to get hold of him for?" hooted Mr. Schootz.

"What did they want to get hold of Coker and Mauleverer for?" answered Harry.

"They sure did not. It's all guff."

Mr. Schootz was evidently determined not to be convinced. He waved the captain of the Remove away.

Hitherto, Mr. Schootz had found Wharton obedient and respectful. But he discovered now that the captain of the Greyfriars Remove could be as determined as himself.

"If you say we're not to speak to the police," said Harry, "we're going to search for Bunter."

"You are not!" said Mr. Schootz, frowning. "You're wanted for the shooting this afternoon."

"I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. Bunter's a Greyfriars man, and we're not going to leave him to it. It's not his fault, either, but the fault of the rascal who has set those hooligans on to us!" said Harry, with a flash in his eyes.

Mr. Schootz raised a fat hand.

"You turn up for the shooting this



The look on the swarthy face of Gomez was more than enough to spur Bunter into activity. Hardly knowing what he did in his terror, the Owl of Greyfriars lowered his head and butted at the Mexican. Gomez uttered an agonised gasp as the fat junior's bullet head smote him fairly in the pit of the stomach!

(See Chapter 12.)

afternoon, or, there'll 'be trouble!' he pronounced.

"There'll be trouble, then," said Harry quietly.

And with that he turned away, and went to rejoin his comrades. Mr. Schootz glared after him.

The autocrat of the Perfection company was not accustomed to back-answers. But in this case he had to make the best of it.

Heedless of the wrath of Mr. Schootz, Harry Wharton & Co. left the location to search for Bunter. The Boulder and Lord Mauleverer went with the Famous Five. Fisher T. Fish guessed that he was not taking any. But Fisher T. Fish was not wanted. Seven juniors started on the search, and when the hour came for the "shooting" that afternoon, and Mr. Van Duck yelled for the schoolboys, he yelled in vain. And Mr. Schootz made remarks that almost turned the atmosphere blue, and vowed that he would fire the whole caboodle of them, a drastic step which, however, he had no intention of taking.

Leaving Mr. Schootz to "blow off his mouth," as much as he liked, Harry Wharton & Co. went on their way, quite resolved that there would be no more "shooting," so far as they were concerned, till the Owl of the Remove was found.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

"O W!" gasped Bunter.

It was awful luck.

For an hour or more, the Owl of the Remove had lain hidden in the clump of bushes, gasping for breath, and trembling at every sound.

In every stirring of a twig, he heard the footsteps of the pursuing boot-leggers.

But if Slick Wilson and Diego had followed him from the gulch, they had lost him, for only the silence of the

desolate hills surrounded Bunter, and he was reassured at last.

Having rested his fat limbs, and recovered his breath, the fat junior peered out of his hiding-place, and ascertained that the coast was clear. He crawled out of the bushes, to make an attempt to find his way back to Jack-Rabbit Canyon.

Where Jack-Rabbit was, Bunter had no idea. The hills were utterly trackless to him.

But it was useless to remain where he was—he had to do something. So the Owl of the Remove plodded along, blinking to and fro, and round about, like a frightened rabbit, as he went.

He found himself in a steep arroyo, sloping down between precipitous cliffs. Bunter was not very bright, but he was bright enough to know that a downward path was likely to lead him out of the bewildering hill's. With renewed hope, Bunter tramped down the rugged ravine. Then all of a sudden he halted, with an ejaculation of dismay.

Two rough figures were coming up the arroyo from the lower hillside. One of them was Gomez, the other a Mexican Bunter had never seen before.

They were at only a short distance when they appeared among the rocks, but the descent was so steep, that Bunter was yards above their heads. He saw them—and for the moment, they did not see him. With a gasp of terror, the Owl of the Remove popped behind a big boulder.

"Oh, crikey!" he groaned.

For the moment, he was hidden from the sight of the ruffians.

But they were coming up the arroyo, and as soon as they passed the big rock, he would be full in their view, if they chanced to glance round.

Bunter suppressed a dismal groan.

The heavy footsteps came nearer, to the accompaniment of the clattering of loose stones dislodged by the Mexicans as they ascended. Their voices came to Bunter's ears now. They were speaking in Spanish, and he understood nothing

of what they said. But from their tones, he could guess that a good allowance of curses were mingled with their remarks.

Closer and closer came their tramping footsteps.

Bunter crouched low, palpitating.

Obviously they did not know that he was there, and were as yet unaware of his escape from the rum-runner's den. But in a minute more he would be in full view, and—

The two Mexicans passed the boulder.

Bunter was crouching only seven or eight feet from them as they passed, and his eyes were dilated with terror as he gazed at them. If they passed him unseeing—

"Carambo!"

Gomez spun round towards the Owl of the Remove, staring at him in amazement and rage.

Bunter gave a squeak of terror.

The movements of William George Bunter generally resembled those of a tired tortoise. But there were times when he could move quickly.

This was one of them. The look on the swarthy face of Jose Gomez was more than enough to spur the Owl of Greyfriars into activity.

Bunter bounded to his feet.

Gomez leaped to intercept him.

His arm was stretched out, in a second more he would have grasped the fat junior. Hardly knowing what he did in his terror, Bunter lowered his head, and butted at the Mexican.

Gomez uttered an agonized gasp, as the fat junior's bullet head smote him fairly in the pit of the stomach, and he collapsed on the earth.

Bunter staggered.

Ramon was jumping at him, but the Owl of the Remove sprang away, and rushed down the steep arroyo.

The next moment, he lost his footing, and rolled.

He brought up, at last, against a rock, and scrambled to his feet.

Gomez, spluttering for breath, was

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seated on the rocks, pressing his waistcoat with both hands. He seemed to be hurt. Ramon was springing after the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter sped on down the steep descent.

How the fat junior kept his footing was a miracle. He leaped from rock to rock like a mountain goat.

After him came the thundering footsteps of the Mexican.

Loose stones rattled past Bunter. Closer behind him came the thudding footsteps. He felt, rather than knew, that he was within the reach of an outstretched hand. Afterwards, Bunter declared that it was presence of mind, but in point of fact, it was sheer mortal funk that made him collapse on the slope under the Mexican's feet.

Ramon was close behind; too close to stop before he stumbled over the prostrate Owl.

He pitched forward over Bunter, headlong. Head first, Ramon went hurtling down the steep descent.

Bunter sat up dazedly.

He heard a crash and a groan below, without knowing what had happened. But he knew that he was not in the grasp of the Mexican, and that Gomez was not yet at hand.

He plunged breathlessly down the arroyo.

A few moments more, and he passed Ramon—lying still on the rocks. The Mexican's head had crashed on a boulder as he fell, and he was stunned.

Bunter fled past him, and went leaping down the arroyo, keeping his feet by a series of miracles.

There was a hoarse shout behind him. "Stop!"

It was the savage voice of Gomez.

Billy Bunter was not likely to stop. Gasping and spluttering, with his mouth wide open, his eyes round with terror behind his spectacles, he leaped and bounded onward.

"Stop! I will shoot!" came the roar of the boot-legger.

Bunter rushed on.

Bang!

A bullet struck a rock six yards from Bunter. It glanced off and whizzed away down the ravine.

Bunter gave a howl of horror.

Bang!

Another bullet missed him by several yards.

Bunter was too terrified to realise that the shots were fired only to frighten him. He dragged himself to a stop, in dire terror.

"Ow! Stoppit!" he yelled. "Stoppit, you beast! Wow! Oh, crikey!"

"Take another stop, and I will shoot you dead!" came Gomez's savage shout from above.

"Ow! I'm stopping! Don't! Yarooooogh!" yelled Bunter.

He staggered breathlessly against a rock. The banging of the revolver had scared him almost out of his fat wits.

Gomez came lurching down the arroyo.

He gasped and wriggled with pain as he came. Bunter's bullet head had butted him like a battering-ram, and he was hurt. But for the value he set on his worthless neck he would probably have used his revolver in earnest.

Bunter blinked at him, fascinated with terror. Gomez was not in a state to pursue him far if he fled. But the smoking revolver in the hand of the bootlegger banished all thoughts of flight from the Owl's fat mind.

He leaned on the rock, panting, while the ruffian limped down the arroyo, and Gomez, reaching him, thrust the revolver into his pocket, and grasped the fat junior by the shoulder.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Greyfriars to the Rescue!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"What—"

"That's Polk's auto."

The chums of the Remove were coming up the road from the location. They had determined to begin their search at the glen where Mauleverer had so narrowly escaped from the "thugs."

Whether Bunter had fallen into the hands of the thugs, or whether he was wandering, lost in the mountains, they could not tell; but the former appeared to them most probable. They had no doubt that Polk had lied when he stated that he had seen the fat junior on Sunset Boulevard. And if that was the case, he could only have lied to prevent a search being made for Bunter in the right quarter.

Wherever Bunter was they had no clue to his whereabouts; but they hoped to pick up some sign of the ruffians who had attacked Mauleverer. It was their intention to search for him till dark, and if they did not find him by that time, to go down to Hollywood and report at the police station that he was missing.

Mr. Shootz might think what he liked, but Bunter's schoolfellows had their duty to do, and they meant to do it, whether the great producer of Perfection Pictures liked it or not.

They had nearly reached the path that led up to the glen, when they came in sight of the well-known highly-polished purple automobile that belonged to Myron Polk.

It was standing by the roadside, empty.

Apparently Polk had driven out from Hollywood, and stopped his car there, and gone up the mountain-path that the juniors were intending to take. He was not in the car, and he was not to be seen on the road, so it was difficult to imagine where else he could have gone.

The juniors looked at the car and exchanged glances. Polk had obviously gone to the very spot where Gomez

had attacked Mauleverer. It might have been chance, but to the juniors, already suspecting that the Perfection star was at the back of the kidnapping, it looked much more like a meeting between Polk and the ruffians who were in his pay.

"Polk's there!" said the Bounder. "In the very place where Mauly came on those rotters a couple of hours ago. He jolly well hasn't gone up the hill to admire the scenery."

"He jolly well hasn't!" agreed Wharton. "Looks to me as if Gomez hasn't cleared off yet—he's waited to see Polk. They're hand in glove—we know that."

"The knowfulness is terrific!"

"Yaas, begad!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "I dare say those rotters were hanging about, waiting for Polk when I butted in and they dropped on me, you know."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There he comes!" murmured Bob.

The "handsomest man in Hollywood" appeared on the hillside, coming down the path.

He descended into the road and entered his car. The engine started, and Myron Polk came whizzing along the road at his usual reckless speed.

Then he sighted the group of Greyfriars fellows, and gave them a scowl in passing.

A moment more and he was gone, in a cloud of dust, in the direction of Jack-Rabbit Canyon.

"Come on!" said Harry.

The juniors pursued their way. Their suspicions were strong now that Polk had kept an appointment with the thugs in the lonely glen, and the chance of getting on the track of Gomez was good, if that suspicion was well-founded.

They tramped up the path that led into the rocky glen. In a few minutes they were out of sight of the road.

All was silent and deserted there.

If Polk had met anyone on that spot, as they believed, the associate he had met was gone.

Higher up, the glen narrowed into a rocky ravine, that wound upward into the heart of the hills.

That this was one of the usual paths by which the bootleggers reached their hidden den in the Santa Monica Mountains, the juniors could not, of course, know. But they knew it was very likely that Gomez was not very far ahead of them, and they moved on towards the ravine.

Picking up "sign" proved to be impossible; all their Boy Scout skill did not avail to find any sign on the barren, stony earth. They tramped on, the ascent growing more and more rugged and precipitous as they advanced.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

From the hills came the echoing report of a firearm.

"My hat! That was a shot!" exclaimed Frank Nugent, with a jump.

"The shotfulness was—" Before Hurroo Jamset Ram Singh could say that it was terrific, a second shot rang out.

The startled juniors listened. Silence followed the second report.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"Come on!" he said.

The juniors clambered up the rocky ravine. Who had fired, and why, they could not guess. But the shot came from the direction they believed Polk's associate had taken. Each of the Greyfriars fellows had brought a stout stick with him, to be used as a weapon in case of need, and they grasped their cudgels as they tramped up the steep arroyo.

The arroyo wound irregularly among high, precipitous rocks. Only a few

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yards of the way could be seen in advance.

Suddenly, from beyond a mass of irregular boulders, round which the path wound, came the sound of a voice.

"Owl! Leggo! I—I say, you know—ow!"

"Bunter!" breathed Wharton.

There was no mistaking that fat, terrified voice.

The fat junior whom they were seeking was within a few yards of them, though as yet hidden from sight.

"Carambo!"

The snarling voice came sharply to their ears.

"Owl! I—I wasn't going to run away!" came the quivering tones of the Owl of the Remove. "I—I give you my word, Mr. Gomez! I—I like you too much, you know."

"Fat pig!" snarled Gomez.

"Oh, really, you know—"

Harry Wharton & Co. crept on on tiptoe. At any moment now they might come in sight of the Mexican and the Owl of Greyfriars, and they knew that Gomez had a revolver. It was necessary to be cautious.

"How did you escape from the gulch?" Gomez's voice was hoarse with rage. "Speak, you fat fool!"

"I—I didn't—"

"Carambo!"

"I—I mean, I—I just took a little walk!" gasped Bunter. "I—I assure you I—I only took a little walk! I—I never wanted to—to—to g-g-go back to the location! They—they don't treat me well there. I—I'd much rather stay with you, Mr. Gomez! You—you're such a—a nice man!"

"Come!" snarled Gomez. "Come, you gringo dog! Give me any more trouble, and I will put the next bullet through your fool head!"

"Owl! I—I won't give you any trouble!" wailed Bunter. "I—I want to come back with you, you know."

"Close your mouth."

"Oh dear!"

Harry Wharton, at the head of the Greyfriars party, came round the pile of rocks, and in a moment Gomez and Bunter were before his eyes. Gomez had his grasp on the fat junior's collar, and both of them were facing up the arroyo, and consequently, had their backs to Wharton. But Gomez saw him the next instant, and spun round, with an oath.

Harry Wharton sprang directly at the ruffian, his cudgel lifted for a blow.

"Por todos los Santos!" panted Gomez.

He snatched a knife from his belt, and, at the same moment, Wharton's cudgel crashed on his arm.

The knife went spinning to the ground.

With a roar of rage, the ruffian hurled himself at the junior, receiving without heeding a heavy blow, and grasped Harry Wharton in his muscular grip.

The next instant Bob Cherry was on the scene. And as Gomez bore the captain of the Remove to the earth, Bob's cudgel crashed on the back of the Mexican's head.

Gomez, with a gasp, collapsed on the junior he was grasping. A moment more, and the whole Greyfriars party were on the scene.

They swarmed on Gomez, grasping him on all sides.

The Mexican struggled furiously.

He made an effort to drag the revolver from his pocket. In that moment of desperation there was little doubt that he would have used it with utter recklessness. But he had no chance. With five or six pairs of hands grasping him, he was pinioned fast,

and Vernon-Smith set a knee on his chest.

"Got him!" panted Bob.

"Owl! Oh, crumbs! I say, you fellows—"

"Keep him tight!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Give him another rap!"

Gomez struggled furiously, but a hefty rap on the head from Vernon-Smith's cudgel quietened him. He sank back, gasping.

There was a sound up the arroyo of clattering footsteps and stones dislodged by a hasty ascent. Harry Wharton shouted to his comrades.

"Look out! There's more of them!"

But the footsteps were not coming; they were going. Ramon had recovered his senses, and stared down from above to see his associate in the grasp of a crowd of enemies. Gomez was a prisoner, and Ramon's chief desire was to avoid a similar fate. He fled up the arroyo, and his scrambling footsteps died away in the distance.

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.

"I—I say, how did you get here?"

"Looking for you, old fat bean!" grinned Bob.

"Well, you might have looked for me before!"

"Eh?"

"Leaving me with those beasts all

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night!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly.

"Is that what you call pally?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I jolly well think—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Harry. "Make sure of that brute, you chaps! We've got him now, and we'll keep him this time!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

Gomez again struggled feebly. But he had no chance, and his hands were dragged behind his back, and tied together there with his own belt.

"Let's get out of this!" said the Boulder. "There may be more of the rotters hanging about!"

"Don't be afraid!" said Billy Bunter cheerily.

"What?"

"It's all right. There was only one other beast with this beast, and he's jolly well hooked it. Don't be funky."

The juniors looked at Bunter. Evidently the Owl of the Remove was himself again. Now that the danger was past, William George Bunter was as brave as a lion.

"Kick him!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, you fellows— Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as Vernon-Smith's boot landed on his tight trousers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Gomez was dragged to his feet. He was spitting out Spanish curses in a

torrent, and wriggling in his bonds. He refused to take a step as the juniors urged him down the arroyo; but they were not disposed to stand on ceremony with him. A hefty kick from the Boulder started him, and another from Bob Cherry urged him on his way, and, grinding his teeth and rolling his eyes horribly, Gomez went.

In a triumphant frame of mind Harry Wharton & Co. drove their prisoner down the arroyo, through the rocky glen, and down the path to the road. They had succeeded beyond all their hopes. Not only was Bunter found, but the kidnapper was captured. Bunter, of course, took all the credit to himself. Had he not escaped from the den of the rum-runners, and had he not met Gomez on his way up the arroyo this would never have come to pass. And by the time they reached the location at Jack-Rabbit, Bunter had settled it—to his own satisfaction, at least—that the whole success was due to his presence of mind and his boundless pluck. That opinion was firmly fixed in Bunter's fat mind, and Bunter had it all to himself.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Done!

"GREAT John James Brown!" "Gee-whiz!" Mr. Hiram K. Fish, and Mr. Rigg Schootz, ejaculated simultaneously. Myron Polk gave a convulsive start.

The two directors, and the Perfection star, were seated in the patio of the old adobe rancho at Jack-Rabbit. Polk, lounging elegantly and smoking a cigarette, was listening to a tirade by Mr. Schootz on the subject of a bunch of gol-darned schoolboy ginks, who had moseyed off somewhere instead of obeying orders. That topic was quite congenial to the Perfection star. His efforts to make trouble for the Greyfriars fellows in the Perfection Company had failed; and now he found it ready-made.

But Mr. Schootz's tirade stopped suddenly at the sight of a crowd of fellows pouring into the patio by the archway.

In their midst was a sullen-looking Mexican, with his hands bound behind his back.

Harry Wharton & Co. marched their prisoner up to the spot where Mr. Schootz sat, stared at by two score pairs of eyes from all directions.

"Carry me home to die!" said Mr. Fish. He stared at Bunter, and then at Gomez. "Search me!"

"We've found Bunter, Mr. Schootz," said Harry, "and we've got the man who kidnapped him—the same brute who's wanted by the Los Angeles police for attacking Coker."

"Gee!" said Mr. Schootz.

Myron Polk did not speak. He could not. His face was white, as he met the significant glance of Jose Gomez.

That glance told him, as plainly as words, what he had to fear for himself if Gomez remained in the hands of the law.

"Spill it!" gasped Mr. Fish.

The tale was briefly told.

"I guess that thug has got to be handed over to the police," said Mr. Schootz. "Bring him along, and I'll sure lock him in a room while I telephone to the station at Hollywood."

And Gomez was marched away to a room near Mr. Schootz's office, where the key was turned on him.

Billy Bunter's first proceeding was to place his circumference outside a solid meal. His next was to relate the thrilling tale of his adventures—how he had

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knocked out the two ruffians left guarding him, and escaped from the Gulch, with many thrilling details which, to his great indignation, evoked chuckles instead of thrills from his hearers.

Fortunately for Bunter, Mr. Schootz had had plenty of time to calm down, during his absence; and though he gave the Owl of the Ramona a glare, he did not produce the big stick.

After tea, Harry Wharton & Co. strolled out of the rancho. They found Mr. Schootz there, looking after Myron Polk's car, which was vanishing in the distance down the road to Hollywood.

The director condescended to give them an amiable nod. Now that it was demonstrated that Bunter had been kidnapped, Mr. Schootz graciously forgave the juniors for having gone in search of him, instead of standing up to the camoras. Even Mr. Hiram K. Fish no longer calculated that it was all "guff."

"You've telephoned to the police station, Mr. Schootz?" asked Harry.

"Sure!"

"Then they'll be sending for Gomez?"

"Nope! I've sent him down to Hollywood."

"Oh!"

"Polk was going back—"

"Polk?"

"Yep! He offered to take the galoot in his car, and drop him at the police station."

"He's gone in Polk's car?" exclaimed Wharton blankly.

"Yep!" Mr. Schootz stared at him. "What's the matter with his going in Polk's car, you young boob?"

"The matterfulness is terrific, esteemed sahib," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There will be no arrivé-fulness of the excellent and execrable scoundrel at the preposterous police station."

"Search me!" said Mr. Schootz.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry, in dismay. "That means that the rotter will get away again—"

"What do you mean?" snapped Mr. Schootz gruffly.

"I jolly well mean that Polk is hand in glove with that scoundrel, and he will let him go!" exclaimed Bob.

"Don't be a pesky young gink!" growled Mr. Schootz. "Talk sense, or keep your head shut."

And Mr. Schootz stalked away frowning.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Done!" said the Bounder.

"The donefulness is terrific."

Wharton set his lips.

"Even Schootz must see how the matter stands, when he hears that Gomez has got away," he said.

The juniors had no doubt whatever that that news would be received. Myron Polk, by that simple device, had

saved his confederate from the grip of the law; and they were assured that, as soon as his car was out of sight of Jack-Rabbit Canyon, Gomez would be free again. But there was nothing to be done. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked that where there was no carefulness, there must be endurance, and the juniors grinned and agreed that it was so.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

"The Frame Up!"

MYRON POLK scowled.

Seated at the wheel of his purple auto, which raised a cloud of dust as it tore towards Hollywood, the "handsomest man on the films" looked anything but handsome. Dark thoughts, as dark as the scowl upon his face, were chasing through his mind. And the subject of those thoughts were the Greyfriars party from England.

At every turn Harry Wharton & Co. seemed to crop up in the path of the Perfection star. Schoolboys—British schoolboys—who should have been beneath the notice of such an exalted personage as Myron Polk, whose film fans numbered millions, were proving a serious stumbling-block in his career.

Behind Polk sat Jose Gomez, a slight sneer upon his dusky face. The bootlegger's wrists and ankles were secured with rope, but they did not seem to cause him any perturbation.

According to Mr. Schootz's instructions, Myron Polk was taking the thug to the police station at Hollywood. But the Perfection director did not know how those instructions were destined to be carried out.

"Senor!"

The lisping voice of Jose Gomez whispered in the ear of Myron Polk.

The film star did not heed; he was far too busy with his thoughts—black, bitter thoughts.

At least three miles had been traversed, and the location at Jack-Rabbit Canyon was now at a safe distance. Ahead of the purple auto, so well-known to the pedestrians of the boulevards at Hollywood, the road lay silent and deserted in the gathering dusk.

"Senor!"

Again Gomez whispered the word. This time Myron Polk heard him, for he slackened speed and then, glancing cautiously to right and left, turned the car off the main road, and sought the shelter of a mass of irregular boulders.

The car came to a stop, and Myron Polk clambered out.

"You fool!"

That was the first time the film-star had spoken since Mr. Schootz had seen

him set off in the car from Jack-Rabbit Canyon.

"Senor—"

"Quiet, you fool, you bungling fool!" hissed Polk. "A nice mess you've landed me in."

The dark face of Gomez broke into a scowl. There were some times when he found it hard to bear the insults his employer put upon him; there were times when temptation came to him to mark for life the "handsomest man on the films." But, at that moment, Myron Polk was useful to the thug, just as Gomez was useful to Polk.

"You're a bungler!" went on Polk. "You might have landed me in the stone jug!"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders. Doubtless, he thought that a term in the penitentiary would do the conceited, arrogant film-star a world of good.

"Senor—it was not my fault. That fat pig of a schoolboy—"

But Polk waved him to silence with an irritable gesture.

"Quiet!" he snapped, taking a knife from his pocket and beginning to saw through the bootlegger's bonds. "We shall be lucky to get away with this frame-up. Those meddling schoolboys will—"

The Mexican's dark eyes gleamed.

"They shall be made to suffer, senor!" he said, in a hissing voice. "No man, let alone a lot of schoolboys, can cross the path of Jose Gomez without meeting trouble."

Polk sneered.

"Oh, you're all talk! I suggest a plan, a simple plan of getting rid of those interfering schoolboys; I pay you well, and yet you let yourself be beaten. **REN!** I thought you were capable of something better than that!" he added.

"Carambol! Senor, I tell you I shall be avenged; you will be avenged. A matter of time."

The last of the ropes fell from Gomez as Polk completed the task of freeing his prisoner, and Gomez massaged his aching wrists and ankles.

Polk stood watching him. He would have to invent some story to account for the escape of his prisoner, he knew, and that his story would have to be a plausible one to satisfy the investigations of the police, which were pretty certain to follow, was something to give him food for thought.

Gomez, having restored the circulation to his wrists and ankles, rolled himself a cigarette and lit it, eyeing his employer shrewdly through a blue cloud of smoke.

"You will tell the police, senor, that I escaped?"

Polk laughed harshly.

"Do you think I shall tell them that I purposely set you free?" he snarled. "Is there no grain of intelligence in your dago head?"

The Mexican's dark eyes glittered, and his hand felt for the knife that usually hung from his belt. But that knife had been lost in the tussle with Harry Wharton & Co. Perhaps it was fortunate for Myron Polk that this was so, for Jose Gomez had endured more insults from the Perfection star than he had done from any other man, white or coloured. And Polk had nearly reached the limit.

Polk, glancing at him sharply, perhaps realised that the patience of Jose Gomez was being sorely tried, for the next time the film-star spoke, his tone was more conciliatory.

"You must get clear as quickly as possible, Gomez," he said. "And wait up in the hills until you hear from me again."

"And the police—what will you tell them, senor?" asked Gomez.



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With a roar of rage, Gomez hurled himself at Wharton and grasped the junior in his muscular grip. The next instant Bob Cherry was on the scene. As the Mexican bore the captain of the Remove to earth, Bob Cherry raised his cudgel to strike. (See Chapter 13.)

"I shall tell them that a confederate of yours held up my ear at the point of the revolver," said the Perfection star slowly.

"But, señor—"

"I shall tell them that your confederate ordered me, at the pistol's point, to free you of your bonds. And, finally, I shall say that, in order to stop me acquainting the police in quick time of what had happened, you punctured my tyres, leaving me to walk the distance to Hollywood."

Gomez eyed his employer with something like admiration. That Myron Polk was a first-class film-actor he knew, but this was the first occasion he had discovered him to be a first-class liar. And his story, which was to account for Gomez' escape, struck the Mexican as being plausible in every particular.

"It means a long walk back to Hollywood," went on Polk, the scowl returning to his face, "but it seems to be the only way. Get in the car!" he added shortly.

The thing did so.

The engine purred, and a few moments later Myron Polk's purple auto was once again on the main road. He drove along about a mile until he reached another patch of boulder-strewn country. Then, with a cleverness that many a genuine crook would have envied, the Perfection star jammed on the brakes, just as if an accomplice of Gomez, the bootlegger, had, indeed, jumped into the road with levelled revolver and ordered him to stop.

"I will sit in the car," said Polk. "You will get out. Take this knife and plunge it into the tyres. Quickly, now!" Gomez performed this operation within a couple of minutes.

"Now beat it!" snapped Polk, a touch of irritation creeping into his

voice as he visualised the long walk to Hollywood that lay in front of him. "And if you want to keep in the service of Myron Polk, don't bungle again."

"Señor," lisped the Mexican, "Jose Gomez will not bungle again. I will await your instructions. You know where to find me."

With a sweeping bow, which had something of mockery in it, the bootlegger turned swiftly and was soon swallowed up in the dusk.

Myron Polk glanced after him for fully five minutes before he stirred.

"Fool!" he hissed at length. "The bungling fool! And but for that old idiot Schootz thinking that I would actually hand Gomez to the police, I should be ruined now! All through those meddling schoolboys!"

He broke into a choice flow of invective that would have surprised and shocked the millions of film-fans who worshipped at his shrine. Then, acting on the plan he had conceived, Polk re-started the engine. He turned the car off the main road, abandoned it, and began to tramp the weary miles to Hollywood. The car, with its four tyres flat, could be collected on the morrow by a Hollywood mechanic. If the police doubted Polk's tale that he had been held-up, they could come and see the damaged car for themselves. A keen-eyed detective would soon nose the deep scores in the dusty road where Polk had had to jam on his brakes when confronted with the mythical loaded pistol.

It certainly seemed a convincing story, but its conviction lay in the fact that Myron Polk, the film-star, the languid youth who hated anything in the shape of energy unless he were paid for it in dollars, had actually tramped the miles back to Hollywood police station on foot.

When Polk told his tale at the police station two hours later he was believed. What else could the police do but believe him? There was no evidence to prove, nor indicate even, that he had deliberately set the much-wanted bootlegger Jose Gomez free. And if any doubt lingered in the mind of the sergeant who interrogated him, that was soon dispelled when he glanced over Polk's dusty clothes, noted his tired face, and then verified the statement as to the whereabouts of the abandoned car by sending a fast motor-cyclist to locate it.

When Myron Polk reached his bungalow on the top of the hill that night, he congratulated himself on his astuteness. Certainly, he had given himself—and Jose Gomez—a new lease of life, as it were, even as Harry Wharton & Co., back at Jack-Rabbit Canyon, had declared.

But Harry Wharton & Co., fast in the arms of Morpheus, were not troubling themselves with thoughts of Myron Polk or Jose Gomez just then. If thoughts, or dreams, visited them that night they were of Greyfriars, in England, thousands of miles away, wondering how the Remove footer team was faring in their fixtures with St. Jim's, Rookwood, and Highcliffe!

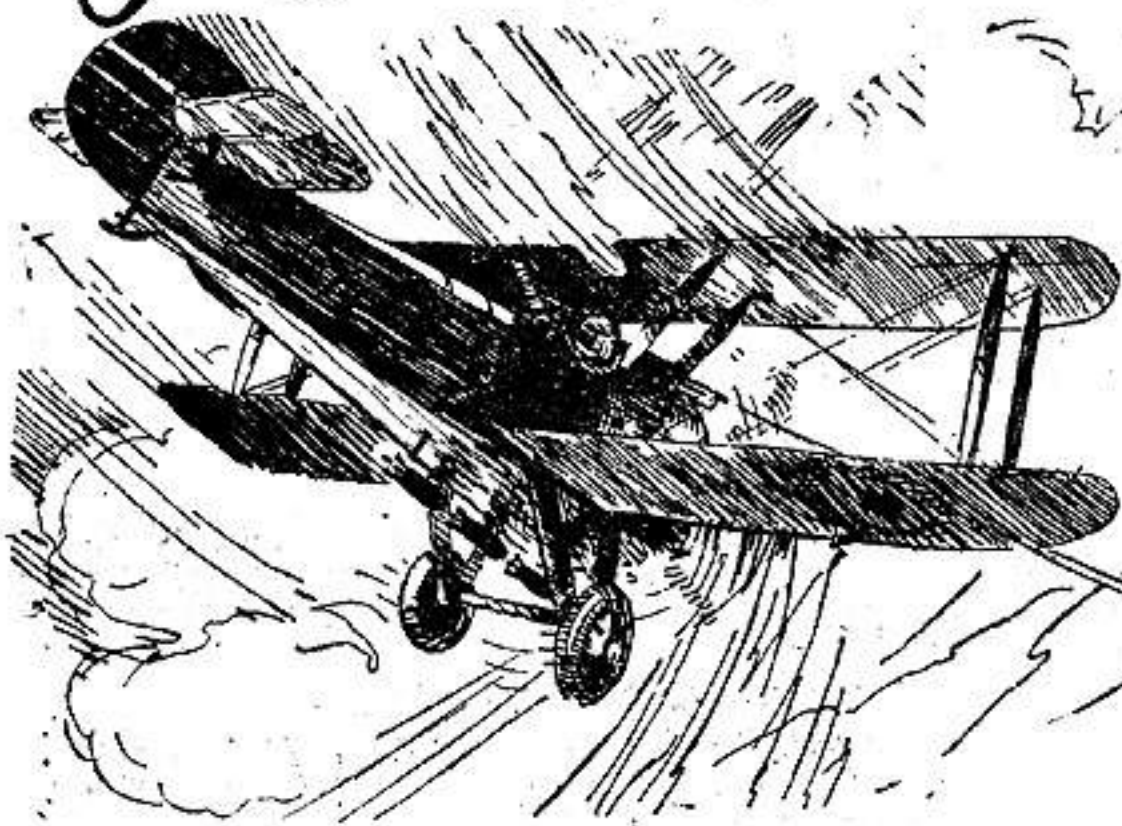
THE END.

(There will be another grand long story dealing with the further adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., in America, in next week's MAGNET, chums. Make a note of the title: "THE SCHOOLBOY SHEIK!" The wise "Magnetite" will order his copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,102.

The Black Hawk

by Geo. E. Rochester



In Enemy Hands!

DUSK was deepening into night when the black machine came dropping down to land in the field behind the lonely and deserted farmstead. Leaving his propeller ticking over, Derek clambered stiffly from the cockpit.

He stood a few moments listening intently. But nothing broke the stillness which brooded over the quiet countryside. Drawing his gun, Derek advanced towards the barn which served him as a hangar, peering about him in the dusk with alert and watchful eyes.

It was here that his greatest danger lay, for were he to be seen taking off or landing, investigations would be made. And to-night he felt vaguely uneasy. There seemed something strangely sinister in the hush and quietude which enfolded this lonely farm.

Derek reached the barn doors. The padlock was in place as he had left it. He would swing the doors open, then make a tour of the deserted buildings before housing his machine.

Thrusting the gun into the pocket of his black leather flying-coat, he fumbled for the key in the pocket of the peasant garb which he was wearing.

He found the key, and as the lock clicked back under its pressure, he swung open the creaking barn door. Then he caught his breath, and stood as though frozen.

For he was staring into the levelled rifle barrels of a squad of German soldiers. And from the shadows behind them came a harsh, imperious voice:

"Put your hands up—or you are a dead man!"

Slowly Derek's hands crept above his head. The man who had spoken stepped forward. He was a sergeant of the Bavarian Rifle Brigade, stockily built and brutish.

"You are my prisoner!" he rapped, jabbing Derek in the ribs with an automatic. "If you attempt to resist arrest, we will shoot you down. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," replied the boy quietly.

The sergeant grunted, and, running expert hands over Derek's peasant clothes and flying-kit, produced the boy's gun from the pocket of the flying-coat.

Slipping it into his own belt, he stepped back a pace.

"Now lower your hands!" he barked.

For months the Black Hawk, the terror of the skies, has waged, with extraordinary success, a pitiless war on the enemy. But the luck of this intrepid Britisher suddenly peters out in a dramatic and breathless fashion!

Derek obeyed. Resistance was worse than useless.

Click! Steel handcuffs snapped shut on his wrists. The sergeant wheeled on the soldiers.

"Remain here with him!" he commanded.

With that the sergeant quitted the barn. But within a few moments he was back, a grin on his lips.

"I have seen your machine!" he said, confronting the boy. "So you are the Black Hawk, you pig dog!"

Derek shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he replied.

The sergeant peered at him through the gloom.

"And you were surprised to find us here—yes?" he demanded.

"Disagreeably so," admitted Derek evenly.

"Yet you do not seem over-distressed, curse you!"

"Why should I?"

"Why should you!" repeated the sergeant sharply. "Why should you! Blood and fury! I would not like to be in your shoes!"

"No?"

"No, I would not!" shouted the sergeant. "They say you are a madman, and now I believe them! Well, madman or not, you can take that as a taste of what you are going to get!"

The sergeant's clenched fist hit Derek flush on the mouth, sending him reeling backwards with bruised and broken lips.

"Karl!" The sergeant swung on one of the soldiers. "You will remain here on guard over the machine. We take this dog to Strasbourg at once!"

He rapped out an order, and, with the exception of the man Karl, the soldiers grouped themselves round Derek. Then came the order to march, and, with the handcuffed boy in their

midst, the soldiers set off across the field towards the rough and narrow roadway which skirted the farmstead.

Dusk had merged by now into night. There was no moon, but the cold glimmer of the stars afforded an illumination more than sufficient to light them on their way. The sergeant marched by the side of the escort. Only once did he converse with his men, and that grudgingly. For in no other army in the world is there as great a gulf between non-commissioned officer and man as in the sternly-disciplined field-grey ranks of Germany.

"This will mean promotion," he growled, "and decoration for all of you! Some of the reward also may come your way!"

The roadway was reached, and the escort swung along it with their

prisoner. The tramp, tramp, tramp of heavily-booted feet and an occasional muttered word amongst the soldiers was all that broke the stillness of that glorious summer night.

And what of Derek Moncrieff? He was going to his death, and he knew it. Yet he felt strangely unperturbed. Was it, he asked himself, that the appalling suddenness of his arrest had stunned him mentally? Or was it that always in his subconscious mind there had been the knowledge that some day this must happen?

He would not be treated as a prisoner of war and sent to solitary confinement in some fortress or prison camp. The score against the Black Hawk was too heavy for that. Indeed, the fact that he was wearing civilian dress in enemy country would provide sufficient excuse for the shooting of him out of hand.

But who had sent the soldiers to the farm? And, in the first place, how had his presence there been discovered? If he had been seen landing there at dawn that morning, then, undoubtedly, the soldiers would have arrived on the scene before he took off again at sunset on what had now turned out to be his last flight.

It could scarcely be that he had been seen taking off at sunset, for it appeared that these soldiers were from the garrison at Strasbourg. If they were, then they certainly had not had time to travel from Strasbourg to the farm and secret themselves in the barn before his return.

Oh, well, what did it matter? The end would be the same. The Black Hawk would die with his back against a wall, and by this grim jest of Fate, the sentence of death passed on Derek Moncrieff at Le Courban would be carried out to that same crash of German musketry.

A harsh command from the sergeant brought the party to a sudden halt. Drawn close in to the hedge by the side of the road were two powerful touring-cars. Derek was hustled into the tonneau of one, and took his seat with a guard on each side of him. The sergeant clambered in beside the grey-clad driver whilst the remainder of the escort seated themselves in the other car. A few moments later both automobiles were roaring through the night towards Strasbourg.

They reached it in a little over the hour, and drew up at the drive gates of a large house standing in its own grounds on the outskirts of the town. A German sentry on duty stepped forward.

"Sergeant Schlag?" he demanded.

"Yes!" growled the sergeant.

"General Vorszelten is awaiting your report," replied the sentry, and, standing aside, signalled to the driver to proceed.

Both cars swung up a long, winding drive, and came to a stop outside the massively-pillared portico of the house where two sentries stood on guard, their long bayonets gleaming

in the dim illumination of a solitary shaded bulb.

The sergeant answered their challenge, and, stepping out of the car, paused for a word with Derek's escort.

"Look after the prisoner," he warned harshly. "He may be wanted any moment!"

With that he turned on his heel and marched up the short flight of wide stone steps which led to the open doorway of the house.

The Real Traitor!

IN a luxuriously furnished room on the ground floor of the house, at a table littered with grey, official papers, sat General Vorszelten, Governor of the Garrison of Strasbourg. With him was an officer of his staff; also Count Eberhard von Ergstrom, of the High Command, and the Commandante of Air Headquarters at Frankfurt.

There was a fifth man; one who wore civilian dress, and whose hands were clasping and unclasping behind his back as though in nervous tension as he paced the heavy pile carpet. It was Zanderberg.

A sudden, quiet knock, and the opening of the room door brought him tense and rigid, his eyes on the grey-clad orderly, who stood on the threshold.

"Sergeant Schlag to report, sir!" said the orderly, addressing General Vorszelten.

"We will receive him at once!" was the reply.

The orderly withdrew. Then came a clump of booted feet, and Sergeant Schlag strode into the room, halting stiff and erect at the salute in front of the general.

"Yes, sergeant?" rapped the latter.

"Acting on your instructions, sir," commenced the sergeant. "I proceeded to the deserted farmstead, situated between here and—"

"Never mind the details, you fool!" cut in Zanderberg gratingly. "Did you get the man we sent you to get?"

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

The victim of a cowardly plot, young Derek Moncrieff, a fearless British pilot, is accused of treachery, court-martialled and sentenced to be shot. Determined to clear his dishonoured name, however, Derek makes a daring escape by changing identities with Captain von Arn, a dead German airman. Using as his base a deserted Gotha hangar, near the village of Abergau, the young pilot becomes known and dreaded by the Germans under the name of the Black Hawk. Flying a black machine with the replica of a swooping hawk on its fuselage, he has again and again come to the rescue of Allied machines when hopelessly outnumbered by the enemy, and a reward of 100,000 marks is offered by the German High Command for his capture. The base of this mysterious airman is at last located by the enemy, and Derek barely escapes with his life. His only refuge now is a lonely, deserted farmstead. One evening when the Black Hawk is making his grim and watchful patrol behind the German lines, he encounters two Fokker scouts piloted by Von Zei and Ratterbau, the greatest of the enemy war aces, who have sworn that either they or the Black Hawk shall never reach the ground alive. Derek Moncrieff fights the greatest air battle of his life, and two more names are added to that steadily mounting list of victims of the Black Hawk. (Now read on.)

The sergeant turned a stolid gaze towards him.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"What—you did?" cried Zanderberg.

"Yes, sir. I have him outside now, handcuffed and under escort. And his identity, sir? He is the Black Hawk," said the sergeant.

Wild triumph and exultation leapt in Zanderberg's eyes, and, when he spoke, the effort which he made to keep his voice under control was very evident.

"You have done excellently, Sergeant Schlag," he said. "You have earned for yourself promotion to commissioned rank, and no little portion of the monetary reward which was offered. But that must wait. Bring in your prisoner!"

The sergeant saluted and withdrew. He had heard sufficient about the power of this Zanderberg to refrain from wonderment at the almost insolent manner in which Zanderberg was taking the matter from out the hands of General Vorszelten.

When he returned to the room with Derek, who was escorted by four of the soldiers, Zanderberg had seated himself at the table between the general and Count Eberhard von Ergstrom. The handcuffed boy was marched forward to the table and



DEREK MONCRIEFF,
a dare-devil pilot and hero of
this great story.

halted. His guards stepped back a pace, butts of rifles grounded.

Derek stood with head erect, his eyes moving from the face of Zanderberg to those of the grey-clad officers, then back to Zanderberg. There was the shadow of a smile on Zanderberg's thin lips as, leaning forward across the table, he stared at the boy with searching, probing eyes.

"So," he said softly, "you are in peasant dress. A strange garb, surely, for the Black Hawk!"

Derek did not reply. Zanderberg's next words came with harsh abruptness.

"You do not deny that you are the Black Hawk?"

"No, I do not deny it," replied Derek evenly.

"And your name—your real identity?" pressed Zanderberg.

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"Is entirely my own business," retorted the boy.

Zanderberg nodded, betraying nothing of anger as he went on:

"Very good. We will return to that point in a moment, my friend. We may have a surprise for you. Now"—again his voice was harsh and abrupt—"where is the German Secret Service agent who located you at the hangar of Abergau?"

"That, also, is entirely my own affair," replied Derek.

"You refuse to tell me?"

"I do."

"Which means that you have killed him and are afraid to admit it?" rapped Zanderberg.

Derek shrugged his shoulders. He knew Zanderberg was endeavouring to draw him out, and he kept silent. Passion flared in Zanderberg's eyes, and he continued, gratingly:

"Very good. You have killed a German Secret Service man. You have also assisted an escaped prisoner of war to cross the line. Do you deny that?"

"No, I do not deny it."

"But you are wondering how I know. I do know, and from a certain source which might interest you. You found that prisoner at the lonely farm where you were captured to-night. When we drove you from Abergau I thought it possible that you might attempt to make your base at that isolated spot. I sent soldiers there—and they found you."

"I congratulate you," murmured Derek, "on your foresight."

"Do not be insolent," growled General Vorszelten.

"We return now," went on Zanderberg, and his voice was almost a purr, "to the question of your

identity. Be careful how you answer, for, maybe, we already know your identity."

"You will never know my identity," replied Derek steadily.

Zanderberg's thin lips curled into a smile; a smile so black, so utterly lacking in mirth that it was almost a grimace.

"What if I were to tell you," he said softly, "that you were once a great British war ace? What if I were to tell you that you were condemned as a traitor to your miserable country?"

He leapt to his feet, crashing triumphant fist to the table.

"What if I were to tell you," he shouted, "that you are Derek Moncrieff, the Scourge of the Boche?"

Derek faced him, dumb with astonishment and dismay.

"You know it is true," shouted Zanderberg, whipping quivering forefinger towards the boy. "I can read it in your face, you cursed pig of an Englishman. But I will prove it. Yes, prove it!"

He wheeled towards a side door which had opened.

Derek, following the direction of his gaze, saw a German officer standing on the threshold. And suddenly the blood pounded madly in the boy's temples and his eyes blazed.

For the man standing there in German uniform was Colonel Scaife, from British Wing Headquarters at Le Courban.

The Death Warrant.

SLOWLY, step by step, Colonel Scaife advanced. Never for an instant did his cold blue eyes leave the boy's face. A pace from Zanderberg's chair he halted.

"So, Moncrieff," he said harshly, "we meet again!"

"You blackguardly cur!" burst out Derek passionately, and took a menacing step forward. "I know now—"

"Silence, you!" thundered Zanderberg.

The sergeant gripped Derek roughly by the arm.

"Then he is Moncrieff, the British war ace?" rapped Zanderberg, turning again to Colonel Scaife.

The latter nodded.

"Yes, Moncrieff, as we suspected," he replied. "To our minds," he went on, addressing the boy, "there could never be two such air fighters as Derek Moncrieff. So, in spite of the strongest evidence to the contrary, we were led to suspect that the Black Hawk must be Moncrieff. I learned to-night that your arrest was imminent, so I came here to identify you."

"From where?" demanded Derek hoarsely.

"Why, from Le Courban, of course," replied Colonel Scaife easily.

"You dirty traitor!" blazed the boy. "Then it was you—"

"Who prepared the trap for Captain Derek Moncrieff, of 108 Squadron," cut in Colonel Scaife sharply. "Yes, it was. We could not get you in the air, so we got you by other means. It was my friend and chief"—he indicated Zanderberg—"who conceived the idea of making you appear as a traitor. It was I who carried out that idea. It was I who planted the map and parachute in your cockpit locker. It was I who paid into your banking account in London, large sums which had, ostensibly, come from Germany."

He paused a moment, then resumed in low and grating tones:

"I tell you all this, Derek Moncrieff, in the knowledge that you will never live to use the information. You escaped the British firing party. You will not escape the German one!"

Derek was silent. Indeed, what use were words?

"And that your passing with the dawn may be the easier," continued Scaife, and the sneer now in his tones was very evident, "you will be interested to know that I return to Le Courban, to those blind and trusting fools at Wing Headquarters."

"There is no need to tell him that," cut in Zanderberg impatiently. "Von Ergstrom, the German High Command have approved the death penalty, have they not?"

Count Eberhard von Ergstrom shifted his gaze from the boy's face. He was unusually pale.

"Yes," he replied, with momentary hesitation. "Yes."

Zanderberg nodded, and turned to Derek.

"Derek Moncrieff," he said harshly, "by more act than one you have merited death. You will be taken from here to the fort and will be shot at the hour of dawn!"

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Derek swung open the creaking barn door. Then he caught his breath, and stood as though frozen to the spot. For he was staring into the levelled rifle barrels of a squad of German soldiers. And from the shadows behind them came a harsh, imperious voice: "Put up your hands—or you are a dead man!" (See page 24.)

There was a moment of silence, broken by the scratch of a pen as General Vorszelten appended his signature to the death warrant.

Blotting it, he folded the paper and handed it to Sergeant Schlag.

"You will convey the prisoner to the fort!" he commanded. "The commandante will be informed by telephone of your impending arrival!"

The sergeant saluted stiffly, and rapped out an order. The guards closed in on Derek. Another order, and, tight-lipped in the midst of his guards, Derek wheeled and was marched from the room.

Outside in the wide, carpeted hallway a grey-haired man, in overcoat and civilian dress, was conversing with a monocled captain of staff. He stepped aside to allow Derek and the escort to pass. For an instant his kindly eyes met those of the boy, then dropped to the handcuffs which glinted on Derek's wrists.

He frowned, and, turning to his companion, said something in a low tone. The latter nodded.

"Sergeant!" he said curtly. "Remain here with your prisoner and escort!"

Obediently, the sergeant halted his men and waited sullenly as the staff captain knocked at the door of the room.

"Enter!" came the voice of Zanderberg.

The captain opened the door, and, standing aside to usher the grey-

haired civilian across the threshold, announced:

"His Excellency, the Danish Ambassador!"

"Gentlemen"—the Danish Ambassador stepped quickly forward—"I trust you will pardon my intrusion. But am I permitted to ask the identity of your prisoner?"

"He is an enemy airman, sir!" replied Zanderberg courteously; albeit he was eyeing the speaker narrowly.

He knew this ambassador; this representative in Germany of the Danish Government. This was the man who had had the Commandante of the prison camp of Cassel removed from his command, designating him to the High Command as an "inhuman brute."

"An enemy airman?" repeated the ambassador sharply. "But he is handcuffed!"

"Yes," admitted Zanderberg. "He is in peasant dress, sir, and we dare not risk his escaping!"

"That does not matter!" rapped the other. "You say he is an airman. You are directly contravening the Hague Convention—to which your Government appended its signature—by having him marched through the streets handcuffed like a felon. Gentlemen,—I must protest!"

"But he is——" began General Vorszelten heavily.

Zanderberg silenced him with a look, and the words trailed away. If this officious dog of an ambassa-

dor learned the real identity of the prisoner, then, without doubt, he would spare no effort to see that he obtained a scrupulously fair court-martial—a court-martial at which it was doubtful if the death penalty could be enforced without world-wide and unwanted publicity.

Certainly the shooting at dawn would be postponed; unless the German High Command wished to take a grave risk of alienating a Government which up to now had refrained from any active participation in the war.

"We but took what we thought was a necessary precaution, sir," said Zanderberg suavely. "But, in view of your protest, we shall be happy to have the prisoner's handcuffs removed. At the same time, we would reiterate that the peasant garb he wears justifies us in the course we adopted!"

"I cannot agree," replied the ambassador frigidly, "the man being, as you say, an airman. But I thank you for your ready and courteous observance of my request!"

He bowed slightly. Turning to the staff captain, Zanderberg instructed him to order the removal of Derek's handcuffs and his immediate consignment to the fort.

(And so Derek Moncrieff was to be taken to the fort and shot at the hour of dawn, unless—— But you'll read all about it in the concluding chapters of this powerful serial which will appear in next week's MAGNET.)

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THE HEAD'S WILD RIDE!

By Dicky Nugent

As a driver of slaves, Dr. Birchmell would make the perfect tyrant. But as a bus-driver he would make any Insurance Company put up the shutters!

I. NOTICES

"From now on, walking or cycling into the village of Muggleton is forbidden, banned, and tabooed. Boys wishing to make the journey will be expected to take the Birchmell Bus, or the consequences. By Order, (signed) Alfred Birchmell, M.A., D.D., P.S.—The consequences will be a severe birching, and a thousand lines for each delinquent."

THAT notice, in Dr. Birchmell's skilfully fast, attracted quite a lot of attention in the Hall of St. Sam's one bright morning. Many caustic comments were made by the grate crowd that gathered round to read it. Despite the fact that breakfast had not been served, everybody felt awfully fed-up.

It was some days since the Head had astonished the natives by setting up a bus-service between the old school and the village, and the Head discovered that since his first triumphant trip, trade had fallen off considerably. Trade was not the only thing that had fallen off; many of the passengers had shared the same fate, as a matter of fact; hence the general reluctance to risk the perils of a ride in the Head's wretched old crock.

Dr. Birchmell had evidently made up his mind to alter this state of affairs, and his stern decree was the result. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,102.

"Well, of all the nerve!" ejaculated Jack Jolly, the captain of the Fourth, when he had perused the notice.

"Fancy the old fogey imagining he's going to order us to travel on his old bus!" exclaimed Frank Fearless breathlessly. "I shan't, for one!"

"Nor I!" cursed Merry and Bright indignantly.

And with the exception of a few miserable toadies and sneaks who always carried favor with orthodoxy, the whole school determined to cut out Muggleton altogether until the Head attained a more reasonable frame of mind.

But they hadn't reckoned on the trickery and ingenuity of the cunning old headmaster of St. Sam's. Dr. Birchmell had foreseen how they would take his order, and like the wily old fox he was, he had prepared accordingly.

When Jack Jolly & Co. strolled down to the school tuckshop after morning classes, they discovered what his wheeze was. Gratefully to their surprise, the tuckshop was booted and shuttered. Dr. Birchmell was standing before the closed door, grinning all over his diletto. "Good-morning, boys!" he said. "Come for some tuck?"

"Right on the wicket, sir!" answered Jack Jolly. "Then I'm afraid you've come to the wrong shop," said the Head, with a leer. "The school shop is closed until further orders!"

"What?" queried the Head pleasantly. "I remarked that the school shop is closed until further orders."

There was a weeping and nashing of teeth among the crowd at that announcement, for the grub they provided at St. Sam's wouldn't have nourished the average cat, and everybody rolled on the tuckshop for keeping body and soul together.

"Really, sir, this is a bit thick!" protested Jack Jolly.

"You'll find that you'll soon be a bit thin, too, unless you get supplies somewhere else!" said the Head, with a callous chuckle. "I recommend you all to visit the bunsop at Muggleton, where they keep an eggcellent stock of grub."

"But we can't!" cried Frank Fearless.

"Why not, pray?"

"Because you've forbidden us to walk into the village."

"Then why not ride?" asked Dr. Birchmell, with a sly shrug. "There is a handsum three-speed, overstrung, jewel-levered motor-bus at your disposal. My advice, boys, is, go by bus, and save your boot-leather."

"So that's the game, is it?" cried Jack Jolly, his lip curling. "You've closed the tuckshop, so as to force us to ride on your bus."

"Eggactly!" Has it taken all this time for the eggsplication to penny-trate your branbox?" chuckled the Head. "It's a rotten trick!" cried Frank Fearless hoarsely. "Only a basely cad could do such a thing!" eggclaimed Merry warmly. "Just what you mite eggpect of the old villan, though!" said Bright heatedly.

Dr. Birchmell recoiled for a minute under this fire of offensive remarks. Then he straightened himself up, and a dogged look appeared on his fzz. "Silence!" he barked. "Were it not for the fact that I anticipate collecting your fares on the bus soon, I should gate you all for the rest of the term. As it is, I will overlook the matter, and invite all those who intend travelling to Muggleton to step on the bus at once— if not sooner!"

With that, Dr. Birchmell crossed over to the bus, which was waiting in solitary state a few yards away from the tuckshop, and beckoned the juniors to follow him.

To his shagrin and dismay, however, not one of the juniors did so. Even the one or two toadies present didn't feel like inviting the scorn and contempt of the rest by boarding the bus just then. Dr. Birchmell got into a fearful wax when he realised there were no takers. He bore his scanty hair, and nashed his teeth with rage, while a grate noticed vain stood out on his forehead.

"Grato pip!" Are you obstinate young raskals still standing out?" he roared. "Can it be possible that there is not a single passenger among you?"

"Not to-day, baker!" grinned Japer minor of the Third.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then the Head played his trump card. "Lickham!" he bawled.

"Yes, sir!" answered Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, who was the official conductor and fare-collector.

"Run and tell the cook that no dinner is to be served to-day. If I can't do it any other way, I will starve those young villans into submission!"

"But—but you can't do that, sir!" gasped Mr. Lickham against. "Starving schoolboys, in those enlightened days, simply isn't done."

The Head larted harshly. "A good many things are done in this school that are not done elsewhere," he said. "If you don't want to incur the viles of my wrath and a couple of thick cars, you will buzz off immediately."

"Oh crickey! Certainly, sir!" gasped Mr. Lickham, and he ran off to execute the Head's order.

The crowd melted away, farily stunned by the alarming nollidge that they could draw in their bolts until they chose to patronise the Head's bus again!

II.

There is a himnit to hewman endurance, and most of the St. Sam's fellows had reached that himnit by tea-time. With no grub in Hall and none obtainable from the tuckshop, they began to eggspierience the mawing pangs of hunger.

Of course, this state of things couldn't go on for ever; sooner or later the Head would have to reintroduce the regular school meals again.

But Dr. Birchmell didn't seem to be in any hurry about it, and the fellows realised that they mite suffer dreadful aggrines of starvation before that time came. The Head prided himself on being as obdurate as an old mule, and there was no doubt that he would be more obstinate than ever in his effort to secure trade for the Birchmell Bus.

So at tea-time, most of the chaps decided to give in after all, and take the trip to Muggleton for the purposes of indulging in a jolly good feed. The bus was still waiting in the quad when a crowd of juniors, headed by Jack Jolly, turned up.

Dr. Birchmell, who had evidently been watching out for passengers from his study window, rushed out immediately, still munching the last of the half-duzen doonuts he had had for tea.

He grinned delightedly at the sight of the grate crowd of juniors. "Thought you'd soon come round!"

he remarked. "Where's that scoundrell of a conductor? Ah, here you are, Lickham!"

"At your service, sir!" said the master of the Fourth humbly. "I presume we are bound for Muggleton?"

"Eggactly!" nodded the Head, as loaded bus. "Don't forget to collect all the dibbs, Lickham. And let me warn you that if you make any mistakes in punching the tickets, I'll punch your nose afterwards."

Mr. Lickham boughed nervously. "Very well, sir. By the way, before we go, mite I respectfully ask you to be a little more careful in colliding with passing vehicles, brick walls, et setters, et setters? Forchuntly you have won every battle so far, but there is always a chance that you mite come up against something too heavy to knock out of the way."

Dr. Birchmell bestowed a withering look at his subordinate. "Dash it all, Lickham, you're surely not akusing me of careless driving?"

"I've cried indignantly. 'Why, we didn't have more than a dozen or so collisions yesterday, if my memory is not at fault.'"

"There were quite enuff casualties to fill Muggleton Hospital to overflowing, anyway," said Mr. Lickham gloomily. "What I'm afraid of is that I shall be the neckst."

"Tut-tut! I'm surprised at your worrying over such a trifle!" eggsclaimed the Head testily. "I'm sure the thought of your being injured duzzent cause me the slightest anxiety. Get on to the bus immediately, Lickham, and proceed with the all-important work of collecting the fares!"

"So be it!" murmured Mr. Lickham, and with a sigh, he stepped on to the platform and jerked the bell-cord.

Dr. Birchmell flung him a scowling look, then flung himself into the driver's seat. A minute later, the Birchmell Bus was pitching and rolling along at a terrific speed down the road leading to Muggleton.

Muggleton was eventually reached in safety, nothing eggsting happening on route, barring the destruction of a couple of farm-waggons and a baker's cart.

The famished juniors made a dive for the bunsop, and eagerly regaled themselves with pork-pies, ham-patties, doonuts, jam-tarts, and many other delicacies, too numerous to mention.

After that, looking well-fed and happy once more, the juniors got back into the waiting bus, and feeling at piece with the world, leaned back in their seats and waited to be driven back to St. Sam's.

Dr. Birchmell stuffed the commic paper he had been reading into his pocket and cranked up.

With a deafening roar, the engine started, and within a couple of minutes the bus was tearing through the village again, leaving clouds of dust and smoke in its wake.

The Head of St. Sam's was grinning all over his dille as the bus raced along the Muggleton lane. But, after half the journey had been covered, the grin suddenly faded away, and an eggspression of alarm took its place.

Dr. Birchmell had discovered that something had gone wrong with the works. The Birchmell Bus was no longer responding to his powerful kicks and pushes. It was going along at its own sweet will, and nothing would stop it!

"Oh crickey!" gasped Dr. Birchmell, in dismay, as the awful trooth penny-trated his wooden noddle. He wrenched frantically at one lever

after another, but the bus went faster. He trod on the brakes, but it axcellerated still more!

"G-g-grate pip!" stuttered Dr. Birchmell feebly.

Beads of inspiration began to stand out on his forehead. His beard stood out straight with terror, and his nose knocked together with a noise that almost drowned the rattle of the engine.

"Anything the matter, sir?" bawled Mr. Lickham, from his perch at the rear of the bus.

"Yes, rather!" shouted back the Head. "The wretched thing has got out of control somehow, Lickham. I'm afraid we are rushing headlong to destruction!"

"Yaroooco!" yelled Mr. Lickham, and he collapsed in a limp heap on the conductor's platform.

The passengers also heard the Head's remark, and started up from their seats in dismay. But they all fell back immediately afterwards as the bus hit the side of a house, and glarned off on to a passing lorry.

Crash! Bang! Wallop!

For a moment everyone imagined that the end had come. But no! By a miracle the vehicle righted itself again, and continued to fly along the road at a greater speed than ever.

The juniors breathed again. On, on, past flying hedgerows and trees, the bus raced, demolishing stone posts, and smashing up brick walls and other obstacles in its wake, until at last the spires and turrets, and battlements of the old skool leaped into view!

With a roar, the bus tore through the gates, past old Fossile's lodge, and up the drive. Dr. Birchmell closed his eyes and simply hoped for the best.

The crowd in the quad stared as the Birchmell Bus rumbled through the gates, and then, suddenly realising what was the matter, they fled out of the way in a state of panmick.

Right across the quad went the bus, rushing straight on to the Skool House. With a sickening thud it cannoned into the Skool House steps. An instant later, to everybody's astonishment, it was careering up the steps towards the main entrance.

Boom!

There was a crash like the sound of thunder. The passengers in the bus were pitched all over each other, and Dr. Birchmell was shot out of his seat into the air, to land with a dull thud some distance away.

In spite of the discomfort, however, everybody felt very relieved, for the bus had stopped at last, right in the main doorway of the Skool House!

Thus ended the Head's Wild Ride, and so far as the passengers were concerned, being typical British lads who knew no fear, they had rather enjoyed the eggspierience than otherwise. They trotted indoors satisfied.

With Dr. Birchmell, however, it was different. As he dragged his weary limbs back to the bus, his hawk-like eyes dwelt dolorously on the ruined doorway of the Skool House.

"Thirty quids' worth of dammidge if a pennyworth!" he groaned. "What on earth will the guverners say?"

It was a wretched and mizzerable Dr. Birchmell that went to bed that nite, to rack his brains with the problem of how to give the guverners of St. Sam's a satisfactory eggsplication of that dammidge door!

THE END.

(Make sure you read the last story in this amusing series, entitled: "THE LUCK OF MR. LICKHAM!" which will appear in next week's bumper.)

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