

"BOUND FOR THE WILD WEST!"—Exciting Holiday Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co.



WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES, BY—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

THE DAILY ROUND.

(1)

For fifteen minutes of every day
We're out of the calaboose,
At half-past ten we shout "Hooray!
They're gonna turn us loose!"
Then out we go in a merry throng,
We're full of hurry and haste;
For fifteen minutes is not too long,
And we've got no time to waste.

AFTER SCHOOL HOURS
A Voyage Perilous

Poor Bunter once was lingering
In direst fear and dread
About the passage, fingering
A letter he had read—
A letter from old Quelchy to the Head.

Its words were brief and sinister,
'Twas written to beseech
The Doctor to administer
A flogging, just to teach
The youth who bore that note to mend
his speech.

And Bunter lingered tardily
Outside the Doctor's room;
He raised a knuckle hardily
To knock, and then with gloom
He found he could not make the tap of
doom!

Then Fishy came up jerkily.
"I'm gonna see the Doc.
It's great!" he added perkily,
And raised a hand to knock.
"I guess I'm asking leave from
Dr. Locke.

"My pop'll be here presently,
And so will Uncle Ed.
I reckon I'll talk pleasantly
And put it to the Head."
"Then take this note, old fellow,"
Bunter said.

So Fishy went in busily.
As blithe as heart could wish;
While Bunter, blinking dizzily,
Soon heard a steady swish,
Which mingled with the frantic yells of
Fish!

Instead of getting leave to meet his
popper,
He got it where the chicken got the
chopper!

10.30 a.m. Break.

(2)

And first we visit the letter-rack;
For the morning mail is there,
Where some are lucky, and some go
back
With a face of dark despair.
Among the latter is Bunter, who
Was expecting a— What d'ye bet?
A thing that's considerably overdue,
And hasn't come even yet!

(3)

Then out to the sunny quad we go
(Not always sunny, of course),
To banish the morning's care and woe
With exhilarating force.
And laughter rings on the morning air,
And something else as well,
For just as we start to forget our care
They ring the blithering bell!

THE GREYFRIARS
ALPHABET
MONTY NEWLAND,
the Jewish Youth of the Remove.

N is for NEWLAND, a Jew—
And a very attractive one, too.
There's nothing the matter with him;
He's clever and handsome and slim,
As straight as a die and as true.
He's proud of the name of a Jew.



His rich Uncle Isaac takes care
He has enough money to spare.
And, though he's not stingy or mean,
He certainly can't be called green.
He spends without any remorse
(But gets the full value, of course).
Let foreigners think what they choose
Of those ancient people, the Jews;
In Britain we're glad they're around
While fellows like Monty are found.

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

Because when he had found it he
wouldn't think of looking for it any-
where else.

A WEEKLY BUDGET
OF FACT AND FUNBy
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRINS

Loder's getting very absent-minded
lately. Yesterday I saw him licking a
stamp instead of a fag.

Bunter doesn't have to worry about
what work he'll do when he leaves
school. He has now enough lines to
keep him busy till he's seventy-six.

The serious floods in various parts of
the country are making the authorities
keep an anxious eye on the basin of the
school fountain.

"I feel; therefore, I am," was the
saying of an old Greek philosopher,
quoted by Quelchy in class. He must
have been the inventor of the "feel-
and-am" pie.

PUZZLE PAR

When Mauly mislaid his gold
watch, he said he couldn't re-
member where it was, but he
knew for a fact it was in the
last place he would ever think of
looking for it. How did he
know that?

Answer at foot of column 2.

Coker of the Fifth was seen oiling a
cricket bat yesterday. There is great
speculation about what Coker intends
to do with it.

Sir Hilton Popper is going to raise
corn on some of his fields this year.
Up till now he has raised nothing but
mortgages.

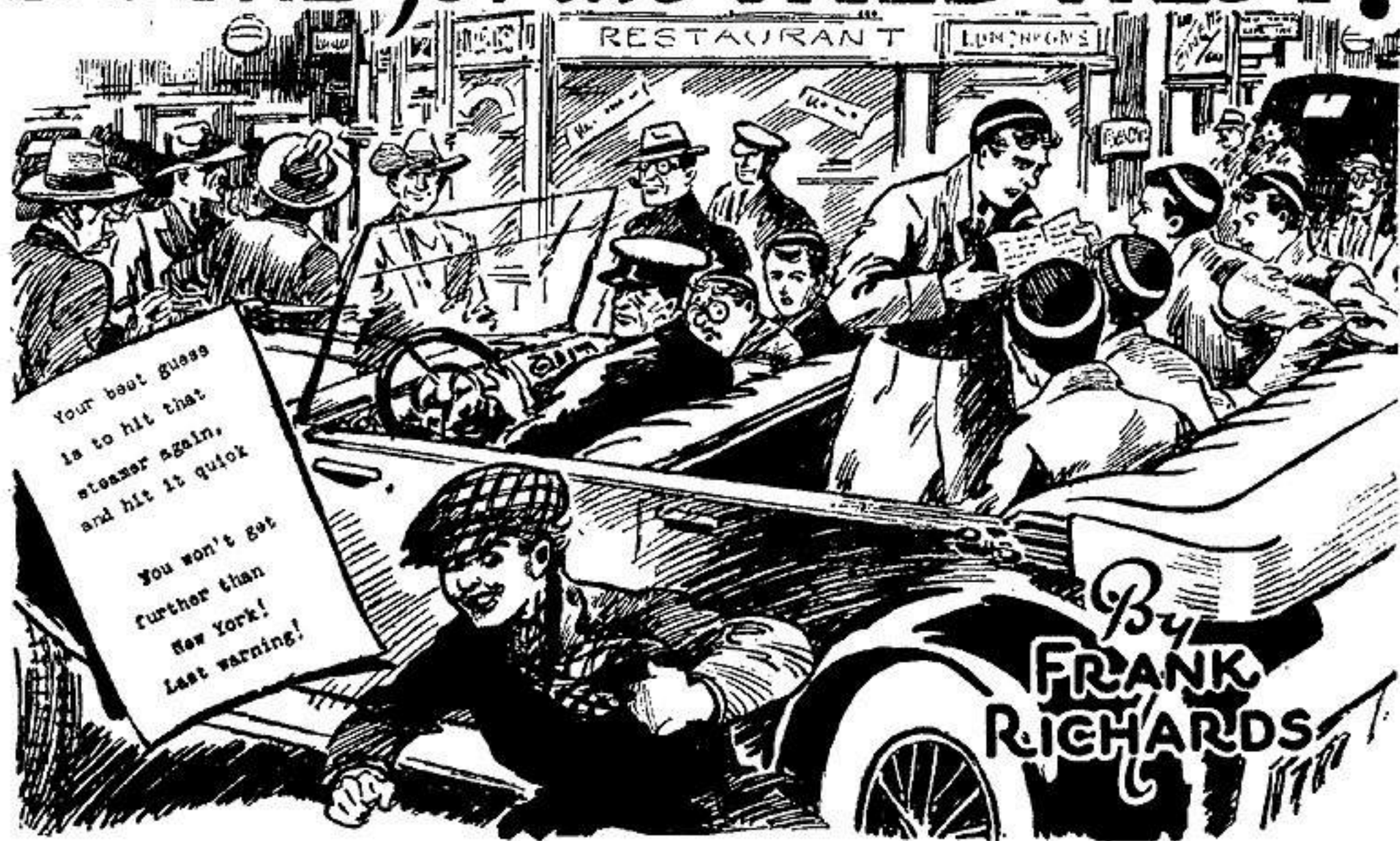
The story of a whale having been
sighted off Pegg was knocked on the
head when it was known that Bolsover
had been down for a bathe.

Fisher T. Fish recently visited the
dentist to have a tooth out. Extracting
the tooth didn't hurt him—but, oh, the
agony of extracting the fee!

Hearing that it was Desmond's birth-
day yesterday, Loder gave him a
hundred lines.

A RUN ABROAD FOR THE EASTER HOLIDAYS! Vernon-Smith has invited Harry Wharton & Co. to accompany him on a trip to his millionaire father's ranch 'way out on the rolling prairies of Texas—the land of hold-ups and cattle-rustling! Is the invitation accepted? Bet your sweet life! Nothing could be better than a trip aboard a steamer—

Bound for the Wild West!



"This looks as if there's a spot of trouble waiting for us in New York, you fellows!" said Vernon-Smith, showing his chums the type-written warning.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter is Too Obliging!

"SMITHY here?" Billy Bunter blinked into Study No. 1 in the Greyfriars Remove, through his big spectacles.

There were five fellows in the study, but not one of them was Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"No," answered Harry Wharton.

"Well, where is he?" demanded Bunter.

"Look in his study," suggested Bob Cherry.

"I've looked in his study," grunted Bunter. "He's not there. Where the dickens is he? I'm jolly well not going rooting all over the school to give him his beastly letter!"

The Famous Five of the Remove stared at Bunter. There was a letter in Bunter's fat hand. Seeing it in that podgy paw, the chums of the Remove had naturally supposed that it belonged to the fat Owl. But that, apparently, was an error. It was a letter for Smithy.

"What are you doing with Smithy's letters, you fat ass?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I suppose a fellow can oblige a fellow by bringing up a fellow's letter for him!" retorted Bunter. "I saw it sticking in the rack half an hour ago, and Smithy hasn't taken it—"

"Smithy went out after class," said Harry. "He will look for it when he comes in, fathead! I believe he's rather

anxious about a letter from his father. Take it back—"

"Catch me doing those stairs again!" snorted Bunter. "I say, you fellows, this letter is from his pater. I know the fist. I shouldn't wonder if there's a fiver in it. I know Smithy's keen on a letter from home—well, that means that he's expecting a remittance, of course."

At which the Famous Five chuckled. They could imagine other reasons for

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being keen about letters from home as well as the expectation of a "tip." But such reasons were beyond the scope of Billy Bunter's fat imagination.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "I'll bet you it's a fiver—might be a tenner. You know how those Smiths splash their money about. If it's a tip, I'm going to ask Smithy to cash my postal order for me—"

"Has that jolly old postal order come at last?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Well, it hasn't exactly come," admitted Bunter, "but I'm expecting it in the morning, and—"

at the sound of footsteps in the Remove passage. "I say, is that you, Smithy?"

"Not quite," answered Skinner.

"I say, seen Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"Yes; he's just gone into Quelch's study to borrow his phone," answered Skinner, and he walked on up the passage.

Billy Bunter gave an irritated grunt.

"I wish Smithy would leave his silly phoning till after tea!" he said crossly. "Keeping a fellow hanging about! Blessed if I shall take the trouble to bring up his letters again! I suppose he's coming up when he's finished. I'll wait here for him. Mind letting me have the armchair, Inky?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who was seated in the study armchair, grinned a dusky grin.

"The mindfulness is terrific," he answered.

Grunt!—from Bunter.

"I think one of you fellows might let a fellow have a chair after fagging up all those stairs. What's a fellow to sit on?"

"There's quite a nice floor," suggested Frank Nugent.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled across to the window and sat down on the box under it. Two flights of stairs seemed to have tired his fat little legs. It did not take very much to tire William George Bunter.

A few minutes later footsteps were heard again in the passage.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here's Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith stopped in the doorway. There was a very genial expression on his face. Smithy, who was not always good-tempered, seemed to be in a very good temper now. He gave the chums of the Remove a cheery nod.

"All serene, you men!" he said. "I've fixed it up all right for the Easter hols. I'm going on a cruise with old Redwing."

"I say, Smithy—" squeaked Bunter. The Bounder did not heed that fat squeak from across the study; it passed him by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"It was a bit of a worry," he went on. "You fellows know that Redwing left early for the hols, to join his father, and it was arranged that I should join up with them when we broke up here. Then I heard from my father that he was thinking of fixing up something else for me, so it had to be left in the air. But it's all right, as it turns out."

"I say—" "Glad it's all right, Smithy," said Harry Wharton cordially.

"The gladfulness is preposterous, my esteemed Smithy."

"Right as rain now!" said the Bounder cheerfully. "The pater said he would let me know by to-day at the latest. The afternoon post's in, and there's no letter from him—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I say—"

"I looked in the rack when I came in and there was no letter," said the cheerful Bounder; "so that settled it. I hiked off to Quelch at once and asked him to let me use his phone—"

"Oh!"

"I—I—I say—"

"I got old Redwing, and told him it was all right," said Smithy. "I don't know what it was the pater had in mind; but as he's not written, after all, it's washed out—whatever it was. I'm goin' to have these hols with Reddy; a life on the ocean wave, a home on the jolly old rollin' deep—what?" Smithy chuckled, evidently in great spirits.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, Smithy—"

"So that's that!" said the Bounder, still unheeding Bunter.

"I say, Smithy, I've got a letter—" yelled Bunter.

"Eh? What about it?" The Bounder took heed of his fat existence at last. "I'm not interested in your letters, fathead!"

"Tain't my letter; it's yours—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I brought it up for you—"

"What?" howled the Bounder.

"It's in your pater's fist, old chap."

Bunter held out the letter. "I thought there might be a fiver in it—I mean, I knew you were anxious about it, so I brought it up—"

"You fat fool!" roared the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

Vernon-Smith snatched the letter from Bunter's fat hand. The cheery geniality had quite faded out of his face. He tore open the envelope and threw it on the floor and hastily unfolded the letter inside.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched him rather anxiously. In the belief that no letter had arrived from Samuel Vernon-Smith, the Bounder had telephoned at once to Tom Redwing to tell him that it was all right for the holidays. And there was, after all, a letter from the millionaire—sticking in Bunter's fat paw while the Bounder was telephoning.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

And the expression gathering on Smithy's face as he read it indicated that the contents were far from being in accordance with his wishes.

It was easy to read in his knitted brows and his glinting eyes that the cruise with his chum Redwing was, after all, going to be washed out.

"By gad!" muttered the Bounder at last. He crumpled the letter in his hand. "And I've just phoned Redwing that I'm coming, and he's expecting me, and all the while—" He glared at Bunter. "You fat fool! What the thump did you meddle with this letter for?"

"Oh, really, Smithy! If that's how you thank a chap for taking the trouble to bring up your letters for you—" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly.

"You—you—you—" gasped the enraged Bounder. "You fat idiot! You blithering chump! You meddling dummy! You—you—you—" Words seemed to fail the Bounder, and he proceeded to actions.

"I say, leggo!" roared Bunter, as Smithy grabbed him by his fat neck. "I say, catch me bringing up your letters again— Yaroooh! I say, you fellows, make him leggo! I say— Oh crikey! Help! Fire! Yaroooooh!"

Bump! The fat junior smote the study floor, in the angry Bounder's grasp. He roared frantically as he smote it.

Bump. bump!

"Yaroooo! Help! I say, you fellows, stoppim!" shrieked Bunter, as the Bounder, still grasping his fat neck in a grip of iron, bumped him out of the study and bumped him into the passage. "I say—whoop!—I say—yoo-hoop! Oh crumbs! Oh crikey! Oh scissors! Oh jiminy! Leave off kicking me, you beast! Yaroooo! I said leave off kicking me! Oh scissors!"

Billy Bunter flew up the Remove passage, roaring. After him flew the Bounder, letting out his feet in turn. He dribbled the fat Owl from one end of the passage to the other, to an accompaniment of frantic howls and roars from Bunter.

Billy Bunter was not often an obliging fellow; but, for once, he had been too obliging. The result was so discouraging that it was likely to be a long time before Bunter obliged the Bounder again!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not a Postage Stamp!

"H OW many K's in spectacles, Toddy?"

"What?" ejaculated Peter Todd.

"One or two?" asked Bunter. "Mind, I can spell all right, Toddy. Precious few fellows in the Remove spell like me—"

"None at all, old fat man!" grinned Toddy. "Not a man in the Form!"

"But I want to be specially careful about this letter," explained Bunter. "I want it to make rather a good impression! I mean to say, you can't be too careful when the Easter hols may depend on it."

Billy Bunter was seated at the table in Study No. 7. He was chewing the handle of a pen; not, probably, because he liked the flavour, but as an aid to thought.

There was a spot of ink on his fat little nose, and a good many spots on his fat fingers. There were several smears and a number of blots on the letter he was writing.

Toddy, looking at it, grinned. If

Bunter wanted to make a good impression with that letter, Toddy's idea was that he should have been a little more economical with the ink. Few correspondents would have been favourably impressed by that collection of blots and smudges.

But that was one of Billy Bunter's little ways. Bunter could not eat a jam tart without becoming jammy. He could not use ink without becoming inky. And Bunter had already been a long time over that letter, and the longer he was the inkier he, and the letter, became.

"I've told you, Toddy," went on the fat Owl, "that that rich relation of mine, old Joe Carter, has asked Quelch for a copy of my report this term. I'm not at all sure that Quelch will play the game and give me a good report. Last time he said I was lazy—"

"You—lazy!" ejaculated Peter. "Now, I wonder what put that idea into Quelch's head!"

"He said I was slovenly, too, Peter."

"You—slovenly!" gasped Peter. "My dear old bean, how could Quelch have got it into his head that you were slovenly?"

"Oh, you know what schoolmasters are!" said Bunter disparagingly. "They get silly ideas into their silly heads and stick to them. I've given up expecting any sense from schoolmasters. I shouldn't wonder if Quelch said all over again this term that I was lazy and slovenly. It would be like him."

"It would!" agreed Peter.

"Well, I want old Joe Carter to see the sort of chap I am from my letter. He's a business man, you know, and he's bound to get a good impression from a neat, well-written letter, with faultless spelling. See? That's why I want to be specially careful about the spelling. Would you put one or two K's in spectacles, Peter?"

"I shouldn't put any!" grinned Peter.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter peevishly. "I know it begins S-P-E-C-K, but does it finish T-A-C-K-L-E-S?"

"Hardly!"

"You don't think there's a K in it?"

"No!" chortled Toddy.

"Well, you can't spell," said Bunter thoughtfully. "If you think there isn't, I expect there is. I'll chance it, anyhow."

And Bunter dipped his pen in the ink, spilled a couple more blots, and resumed writing, putting two K's in "spectacles."

Peter Todd, who was doing lines, grinned and went on doing lines. If Bunter chose to put two K's in "spectacles," Bunter was at liberty to do the same. He could, in fact, have put in half a dozen without disturbing Toddy's equanimity.

"I say Toddy, do you put a W in found?" inquired Bunter.

"No, ass! U."

"But it's just like round," objected Bunter. "Stands to reason that it's F-O-W-N-D for found, when it's R-O-W-N-D for round. Don't you think so?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Then there's the word pound," said Bunter. "P-O-W-N-D, pound! They're all alike in spelling Toddy. Hound, too—H-O-W-N-D, hound."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Toddy. "Make it a U, old fat man!"

"Shan't!" said Bunter.

"Please yourself!" chuckled Toddy.

"Well, I want old Joe Carter to see that I can spell," said Bunter. "Quelch put 'spelling very bad' in my last report. He might do the same again this term. I want old Joe Carter to see for himself that I can spell all

right; that's why I'm being so particular about this letter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up cackling, Toddy! You needn't be jealous of a fellow spelling better than you do. It's a gift, that's all."

Bunter resumed after the interval. More smears, more blots, and more original spellings were added to that epistle to his wealthy relative, Mr. Joseph Carter.

He was finished at last. He read that letter over with considerable satisfaction. Then he pushed it across to Peter.

"Just read that, old chap," he said. "I fancy that ought to work the oracle. Look at it."

Peter looked at it. He gurgled as he looked. It did not seem probable to him that a neat and methodical business man would be fearfully impressed by that letter from Greyfriars. It ran:

"Deer Uncle Carter,—Having herd that my Form-master is gowing to send you a kopyy of my report this turn, I rite to hoap that it will pleeze you. I hoap you remember the time when I vissited you wunce, and when I fownd your speektackles wich were lost. I should be phearfully pleezed to see you agane, bekause I have always thort of you with depe respekt and affecshun. I am not yet phixed up for the Easter hollydays, and if you wished to see me, I shoold be pleezed to come allong with a few friends.

"Your dewtiful newew,
"W. G. BUNTER."

"Rather good—what?" asked Bunter cheerfully, as Peter gazed at the remarkable letter. "Hits the nail on the head, I think."

Peter did not reply. His breath seemed to be taken away. He just gazed.

"You see, old Joe isn't exactly an uncle," went on Bunter. "Sort of second uncle twice removed, or something. Still, I think it ought to please him to call him uncle—what? Shows affection and all that. He's fearfully rich—rolling in oof—oodles and oodles of it! He's a self-made man, you know. I've heard my pater say that he laid the foundation of his fortune with his first bankruptcy, and since then he's never looked back."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Peter.

"That letter will show him that a chap's fairly bright and intelligent—what?" grinned Bunter. "It will make up for any nonsense Quelch may put in my report. I mean to say, it won't be much good Quelch making out that I can't spell, or anything of that kind. What are you cackling at, you silly ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter.

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter disdainfully.

"Thanks, I will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've given the old bean a bit of a hint about Easter," went on Bunter. "Think I've made it plain enough, Peter? Of course, a chap doesn't want to seem to be fishing for invitations—that would be rather beneath me. At the same time, I want him to see that I'll come if he wants me. Think I've made that plain?"

"Quite!" gasped Peter.

"Well, if I get the answer I expect to this I shall be going to a jolly wealthy place for Easter!" said Bunter complacently. "I shall ask a few of the fellows. I'd have asked Smithy if he hadn't been such a ruffian this afternoon. Now I shan't. Might ask Wharton—Nugent, too. I don't know about the

rest of that gang. A fellow wants tel-lows to do him credit when he goes to stay with a wealthy relative. I'd like to take you, Peter."

"Thanks!"

"Only you're hardly the class of fellow I could take—"

"Eh?"

"I mean to say, you're a bit of a freak, old chap, if you don't mind my mentioning it. A chap can't be too careful, when he's taking friends from school," said Bunter sagely. "I'm afraid I couldn't own you as a pal, Toddy, at my rich relation's mansion. You'd rather let me down."

Peter gazed at him.

"I mean, fellows sometimes ask me home for the holidays, to let their people see that they're in the best set at school," explained Bunter. "Wharton likes to get me to his place for that reason—Mauly the same. And Smithy would be jolly glad to make out that he knows fellows like me at school. Nobody's likely to ask you for that reason, Toddy—what?"

"Oh!" gasped Toddy.

"Lend me a stamp, old chap," added Bunter cheerfully.

"Eh?"

"A stamp!"

Peter Todd gazed across the study table at William George Bunter. He did not speak; his feelings seemed, for the moment, too deep for words.

Bunter blinked at him impatiently.

"I want to catch the post with this letter," he said. "Lend me a stamp, will you? I'll write to you from old Joe Carter's place in the hols, Toddy, and tell you what a topping time I'm having. Got a stamp you can let me have?"

"Oh!" gasped Peter. "Yes, I'll give you a stamp. You put it so nicely, Bunter, so tactfully, and all that. I'll give you more than one stamp, if you like."

"Oh, one will be enough!" answered Bunter, as Peter rose and came round the table. "I mean, one will be enough for this letter. But if you've got lots—"

"As many as you like."

"Well, in that case, old chap, you can let me have some. Mrs. Mimble will take stamps at the tuckshop," said Bunter. "Can you let me have a dozen, Peter?"

"Two dozen, if you like."

"Oh, good!"

"Here's one to begin with," added Peter.

Stamp!

There was a fearful yell in Study No. 7 as Peter Todd raised a foot, and brought it down on Bunter's toes.

It landed hard.

"Yoo-yoo-hoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. He hopped on one leg, yelling frantically. "Yoo-hoop! You mad ass! Wharrer you doing?"

"Giving you a stamp—"

"Ow! My toe!" yelled Bunter. "Wow! You silly ass, I didn't mean—yow-ow!—that kind of stamp. Wow!"

"I did! Keep your hoof steady! I'm going to give you two dozen—"

"Beast! Keep off!" shrieked Bunter. He dodged rapidly round the study table. "You rotter, you swab! Keep off—"

"My dear old porpoise, there's twenty-three more to come! I said two dozen, and I meant two dozen! Stop!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

He did not stop; he flew! He shot out of Study No. 7 like a stone from a catapult. His letter was still unstamped; but he did not want any

more stamps from Toddy. One was enough—in fact, one too many.

Billy Bunter disappeared, yelling, and Peter, grinning, resumed lines.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

About Easter I

SKINNER of the Remove chortled. It was the following morning, and some of the fellows had gathered to look in the rack for letters. Among them was Billy Bunter, whose eyes and spectacles fixed on the letters with unusual eagerness.

No doubt Billy Bunter nourished a hope that his celebrated postal order might have arrived. He was still more hopeful of seeing an answer to his letter from old Mr. Carter.

Really, there was not much time for the old "bean" to have answered, so far, as he could only have received Bunter's letter that morning. But whether there had been time, or not, evidently he had not answered yet, for there was no letter for W. G. Bunter.

Skinner's chortle was suddenly emitted as he watched the fat Owl blinking eagerly over the letters. Skinner had a sense of humour that was not always good natured; and some idea of a hilarious nature seemed to have occurred to his active mind.

"No answer yet, old fat man?" he asked blandly. "Might get a phono call from the old bean—what?"

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Bunter. At which there were several other chortles.

All the Remove knew about Billy Bunter's great expectations from his wealthy and distant relative, old Mr. Carter. Few of them believed that those great expectations had any solid foundation.

All that Bunter had to build upon, was the fact that Joseph Carter had asked for a copy of his term's report, and hinted that it might be to Bunter's advantage if the report were a good one.

As Bunter's report was fairly certain to be a pretty bad one, this seemed rather like a foundation of sand for the fat Owl to build upon.

No doubt Bunter hoped, however, that his letter would make the desired good impression on the old gentleman. It would, at least, show him what a bright and intelligent fellow Bunter was, and forestall the effect of a bad report from his Form-master.

"Taking a party along for the hols, Bunter?" asked Skinner, winking at Snoop with the eye that was farthest from the fat Owl.

"Yes, I expect I shall take a few friends," assented Bunter. "I'd ask you, old fellow, only, of course, I shall have to be a bit particular about the fellows I take—"

"Oh!" gasped Skinner.

"But I say," went on the hopeful Owl, "my postal order hasn't come this morning, after all. If you could lend me five bob, Skinner—"

"You fat cuckoo!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—I say. Wharton—I say, Bob, old chap—I say, you fellows, don't walk off while a chap's talking to you! Beasts!"

In third school that morning, Billy Bunter did not devote his whole attention to the valuable instruction he was receiving from Mr. Quelch.

He was unable to give the Remove THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

master more than one fat ear. The other was on the alert, listening for the sound of a telephone bell.

Bunter had not thought of it himself; but since Skinner had suggested it, he thought it rather probable that old Mr. Carter might ring him up in reply to his letter. Bunter would have been very glad to have been called out of the Form-room to answer the telephone.

No such call came for Bunter, however. Instead of which he received several sharp snaps from Mr. Quelch.

Quelch was quite unaware that Bunter had matters to think about that were much more important than lessons.

After the Remove were dismissed, Skinner and Snoop walked out of gates. Both of them were grinning as they went. Their footsteps led them to the post office at Friardale, where Skinner ensconced himself in a telephone box, and Snoop watched him with a series of chuckles.

Billy Bunter, not in the least interested in Skinner or Snoop, did not even notice that they had gone out—and certainly did not dream of guessing how Skinner was occupied.

Bunter looked for the Famous Five. He had matters of deep import to discuss with those cheery youths.

Unluckily, the desire for that discussion was all on Bunter's side, and not in the least shared by the Famous Five.

The fat Owl rolled up to them in the quad; but when he started talking, the Famous Five started walking, as if Bunter had given the signal.

"I say, you fellows, about Easter, I—"

That was as far as Bunter got.

Then the chums of the Remove were walking off, at such a rate that Billy Bunter's fat little legs had no chance of keeping pace.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

He spotted Lord Mauleverer under the elms. But, for some reason unknown to Bunter, Mauly disappeared before the fat Owl could reach the spot where he had been loafing.

Looking for Mauleverer, he came on Smithy.

The Bouncer had a knitted brow. He had looked glum ever since that letter from Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith the previous day.

"I say, Smithy—" began Bunter.

Once more Bunter's remarks were cut short. This time it was a boot that did it. Vernon-Smith gave him a glare and a kick at the same moment and walked away, leaving Bunter spluttering with indignation.

It was half an hour later that he spotted the Famous Five again. They were grouped near the doorway of the House, discussing the Easter holidays—the very subject that Bunter wanted to discuss—when he bore down on them once more.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, you fat bluebottle!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"You can shut up, Bull! I say, Wharton, I was going to say—"

"Don't!" suggested Harry.

"Eh? Don't what?"

"Don't say!"

"Beast! I mean, old fellow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you fellows wouldn't cackle whenever a fellow opens his mouth," yapped Bunter irritably. "It's about Easter, Wharton—"

"I was afraid it was!"

"I rather think," explained Bunter, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

"that I shall be taking a party of fellows to my uncle's magnificent mansion for the Easter hols. I'm thinking of asking you, old chap."

"Think again!"

"What I mean is this if I go to old Joe's place, I'll take you. If I don't, I'll come to your little place! What do you think of that idea?"

"Rotten!"

"Look here, you cheeky beast—" roared Bunter.

Trotter, the page, came out of the House and looked round.

"Master Bunter—" he began.

"Oh, don't bother!" snapped Bunter. The Famous Five showed signs of walking off again. "I say, you fellows, you—"

"You're wanted, sir!" said Trotter.

"Mr. Quelch—"

"Oh, blow Quelch!" snapped Bunter.

"He says you can come and take the call, sir—"

"Eh?"

"Mr. Carter, sir, wants to speak to you on the telephone!"

"Oh!"

Trotter went in.

Billy Bunter grinned gleefully. He was called up on the telephone—Mr. Carter wanted him. He turned his big spectacles on the Famous Five, with a vaunting blink.

"I say, you fellows, hear that?" he chuckled.

"The hearfulness is terrific!" assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"That means that old Joe wants me for Easter!" said Bunter confidently.

"Not much doubt about that—what?"

"Gratters, old fat man!" said Harry, smiling.

"Sorry I shan't be able to come to your poor little place, after all, Wharton. You can hardly expect it, you know, when I'm asked to a magnificent mansion by a wealthy relative. I dare say you'd do your best, with your humble means, but I'm afraid I could hardly stand it."

"You fat ass—"

"Sorry, and all that!" said Bunter. "But it can't be done! You really can't expect it, you know!"

And with that, Billy Bunter rolled into the House to take his telephone call. He went like a fellow walking on air.

— — —

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Kind Invitations Declined!

MR. QUELCH did not look pleased when the fat ornament of his Form presented himself in the study.

Quelch's telephone was, in point of fact, installed in Quelch's study for Quelch's use, and not for that of parents and relatives of boys in his Form. Still, he could hardly refuse the request of a relative, especially one who had never rung up before; and more especially as the call was in reference to the Easter vacation, now close at hand. So, pleased or not, Quelch sent for Bunter—and here Bunter was, grinning all over his fat face, ever so much more pleased than his Form-master!

"Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Someone has rung up—a Mr. Carter—your relative, I presume! He desires to speak to you in connection with the Easter holidays. You may take the call."

"Thank you, sir!" chirruped Bunter.

He rolled across to the telephone. The receiver was off the hook, and Bunter grabbed it up with a fat hand.

Mr. Quelch, with a faint sniff, walked out of the study.

"Is that you, Uncle Carter?" chirped Bunter into the transmitter.

"I have received your letter, William!" came back a voice on the wires—a rather husky, wheezy voice, as if the speaker had a cold. "I was very pleased—I may say, delighted—"

"Oh, good!"

"Are you free for Easter, William?"

"Yes, rather! I mean, I've got rather a lot of invitations, but I haven't made any definite promises yet."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Bunter. He was quite surprised to hear such an exclamation from old Mr. Carter. Gentlemen of the ripe age of sixty-seven did not usually invoke their hats like schoolboys!

"I mean," went on the voice hastily, "I have no doubt that you are very much sought after, William."

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter breezily. "Wharton—he's the captain of my Form—has just been urging me to go home with him. Lord Mauleverer is looking for me this minute to pin me down—the fact is, I'm rather dodging him till I hear from you."

"Oh crikey!"

"What? What did you say, Uncle Carter?" exclaimed Bunter, in astonishment.

"I said very likely—very likely, indeed! Well, if you prefer to go home with some of your schoolfellows, of course—"

"Oh, no, no! Not at all!" Bunter hurried to cut in. "I've told Wharton it can't be done! Only half an hour ago, I turned Vernon-Smith down, too! I'm not going with Mauly—I'm fed-up with him. Not at all, Uncle Carter."

"Would you care to come here?"

"What-ho! I mean, yes!"

"No doubt you could bring a party of friends with you, to make your holiday a little more lively?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I will give orders to the butler at once for a suite of apartments to be prepared."

"Fine!" gasped Bunter.

"Would you like me to send the car for you, the day you break up at your school," came the wheezy voice, "or do you prefer to travel by rail?"

"Oh, the car!" said Bunter. "The car, please! Yes, rather!"

"Then I will send the Rolls."

"The Rolls? Oh, good!"

"Then the matter is settled, William! I shall expect you and your friends the day you break up for Easter. Good-bye, William!"

"Good-bye, Uncle Carter!" gasped Bunter.

He put up the receiver, and stood grinning at the telephone in a state of unbounded satisfaction.

Strange to relate, at the other end, another fellow put up a receiver and stood grinning at the telephone.

That call had not come from such a distance as Billy Bunter happily supposed.

It had, in fact, come from no farther off than Friardale; and Harold Skinner left the telephone, grinning, and went out into the village street, Snoop following him almost in hysterics.

Of that, however, William George Bunter was blissfully unaware.

He rolled out of Mr. Quelch's study, his fat face irradiated by a wide grin, feeling like the classical gentleman of old, who was like to strike the stars with his sublime head.

Bunter was beaming like the sun at noonday when he rolled out into the quad.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! All serene, old fat top?" called out Bob Cherry.



"You needn't go looking for any other guy to cash your postal order, Bunter," said Fisher T. Fish, feeling in his pocket for half-a-crown. "I guess if I'm joining your party for Easter, I can oblige you." "Right-ho, then!" said the fat Removite, cheerfully. "I'll put your name on my list at once, Fisby!"

"He, he, he! Rather!" chortled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, my Uncle Carter's fearfully keen on having me for Easter, and I'm to take a party! No end of a place, you know! Hunting and shooting and yachting, and all that! Hosts of liveried flunkys! Everything regardless of expense! He, he, he!"

"Gratters, old bean!"

"The gratterfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh solemnly. Billy Bunter blinked at them thoughtfully. Everything having turned out quite all right, and in accordance with Bunter's highest hopes, the next step was to make up his party for Easter.

"I say, Wharton, I think I'll take you, after all!" he said graciously. "You, too, Nugent! And, dash it all, I'll stretch a point, and take you, Bob!"

"Will you?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Yes, old chap! You're a bit of a clumsy hippopotamus about a place, but you've been pretty decent to me this term, one way and another! I'll jolly well chance it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared four members of the famous Co., quite entertained by the expression on Bob Cherry's face.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter, in surprise. "I mean it—I'm taking you, Bob! All I ask is that you're a bit careful about your manners—don't let me down, you know, at my Uncle Carter's magnificent place. You're not used to a crowd of menials, as I am at Bunter Court; but take this tip—keep your eye on me, and do exactly as I do! Then you'll be all right."

Bob Cherry seemed speechless. "As for Bull and Inky, I'm afraid there's nothing to be done!" said Bunter, shaking his head. "Nothing against you, Bull, old chap, but your manners, you know—"

"You pie-faced porpoise!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"You needn't call me names, Bull, because I can't take you to my Uncle Carter's magnificent abode! I'd work you in, if I could—but it simply can't be done! I'm not so sure about you, Inky—"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—"

"I mean to say, you're a prince in your own country, but after all, you're a nigger!" explained Bunter. "I hardly know what my Uncle Carter's staff of liveried menials would think! But I'll tell you what—I'll think it over, and let you know what I can do."

"You terrific ass—"

"Don't get shirty, old man, when I tell you that I'm going to do the best I can for you! But you three can bank on it!" went on Bunter. "I'm going to put three names down on my list—Wharton, Nugent, Cherry! I shall expect you not to put on any swank in the hole, Wharton."

"None at all?" gasped Wharton.

"None!" said Bunter, firmly. "You may be captain of the Form here, and no end of a little tin god in the Lower Fourth—but at Uncle Carter's mansion, you'll be simply a chap I knew at school, whom I've kindly taken up for the holidays! You'd better get that right into your head, to start with—and understand once and for all, that I've no use for any swank!"

"Ye gods!"

"That's settled, then!" said Bunter, cheerily. "I wonder whether I might ask Smithy, after all. He's got plenty of dubs—I mean he's not a bad chap in his own way! You needn't glare at me, Bull—and you needn't either, Bob! I'm going to take you, and chance it, as I said. And I say—Whooooop!"

Why five fellows grasped him, all at

once, and sat him down on the quad, with a bump, Bunter did not know.

But he knew that they did!

There was no room for doubt on that point! He bumped on the quad with a bump that almost made it shake!

"Yooh-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Wharrer you up to? I say, Wharton—"

"Bump him!"

"I won't take you now!" yelled Bunter. "Leggo, or I won't—"

yarooooop!"

Bump!

"Nugent, you beast, leggo my ear! I won't—whooooop!"

Bump!

"Bob Cherry, you rotter—"

Bump!

"Yaroooooooooooooh!"

Bunter sat and roared.

The Famous Five strolled away, and left him to wake the echoes.

"Beasts!" gurgled Bunter.

And not one of those five names, after all, was included in the list of Billy Bunter's Easter party!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Who's for Texas?

HERBERT VERNON SMITH looked into Study No. 1, not with a very agreeable expression on his face.

But as he had evidently looked in to say something, the five fellows there gave him a cheery welcome.

"Trot in, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Welcome as the flowers in May!" said Frank Nugent.

The Bouncer kicked the door shut, and sat on the corner of the study table,

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

swinging his legs, his hands driven into his pockets.

"It's about Easter!" he grunted.

"You're going to have a tip-top time, as usual, I suppose!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"I'm going to have a rotten time!" growled Smithy.

"Is the rottenfulness going to be terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, sympathetically.

"Not cruising with Redwing, after all?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No! That's washed out!" growled the Bounder. "The pater's got something else in mind, as he told me he might have. It was all in the letter that fat blitherer Bunter snaffled yesterday. I can't refuse—I—I suppose—" added Smithy, rather uncertainly.

"You can't refuse anything your father wishes, old chap!" said Harry Wharton, quietly. "I don't think you'd really like to, either."

Grunt, from the Bounder. He sat in silence, swinging his legs; and the Famous Five did not need telling that he had dallied with the idea of disregarding his father's wishes, whatever they were.

"You fellows got anything special on for the hols?" asked the Bounder, abruptly.

"Nothing very special!" answered Harry. "Whatever we do, we shall all be doing it together, that's all we've really settled."

"Like to come with me?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"To share the rotten time you've just mentioned?" he asked.

"That's it!"

The Famous Five looked curiously at the Bounder.

"I shouldn't wonder if you fellows would like it, though!" the Bounder

added. "I might have liked the idea myself, if I hadn't wanted to do something else. I can't let the pater down, when he makes a point of it. I shall have to fix up a party to take with me, and I'd rather take you fellows than anybody else, if you'd care to come. You've roughed it before, and could rough it again, I dare say! Still, I'd better tell you the idea! Ever heard of Texas?"

"Texas!" repeated Harry Wharton. "Yes, ass! What do you mean?"

"I mean Texas!" answered the Bounder. "Ranches and cowboys and lassoes and six-guns and Stetson hats, and the whole bag of tricks."

The chums of the Remove stared.

"You're going out to Texas for the holidays?" exclaimed Bob.

"Yes!"

"Oh crumbs! Is that what you're grousing about?"

"Yes!"

"Then you're an ass!" said Bob, warmly. "I'd jolly well jump at it!"

"Jump, then!" said the Bounder. "I'll be jolly glad to have you along. You other fellows feel like jumping, too?"

"The jumpfulness will be terrific, if the esteemed and idiotic Smithy is serious!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I'd better tell you the whole lot," said Vernon-Smith. "I dare say you know that my pater has a lot of irons in the fire. When he isn't buying a rubber plantation in the east, or buying an island in the South Seas, or a diamond mine in South Africa, or a big-game proposition in Kenya, or something. The latest is a ranch in Texas."

"By gum!" said Bob, his eyes glistening. "A real ranch, with real cow-punchers—phew!"

"Right off the track of civilisation," said the Bounder. "Texas is a big State, as I suppose you know; towns and ports and oil-fields and things—but the pater's latest spec. is in the cow country, in the west—sixty miles, I understand, from the nearest railway point—"

"Fine!" said Bob.

"The district is called Packsaddle—"

"Packsaddle!" repeated Bob. "That sounds like the genuine goods!"

"Oh, it's the genuine goods!" grunted the Bounder. "It's a happy spot that hasn't changed for about a century or so, and when you get there, I fancy you'll think you're in a Western film! The ranch is called Kicking Cayuse—what a name!"

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Bob.

"It's been run for donkey's years, by the foreman, whose name is Barney Stone!" went on Vernon-Smith. "I don't know what Barney Stone is like—but I fancy him about six feet high, with a ten-gallon hat, and a gun—"

"Phew!"

"He's going to take us in, look after us, show us the ropes generally. The pater says I can take any party I like—he seems to think that a lot of fellows would be keen on it—"

"Why, you ass!" roared Bob. "You could take all the Remove, if you liked! Of course, any fellow would be keen on it!"

"The keenfulness would be preposterous!"

"Smithy, old man, if you're not talking out of your hat, you've come to the right study to collect a party!" said Harry Wharton.

"What-ho!" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

The Bounder looked round at five eager faces, and his own grew more cheery and good-humoured.

"Like the idea?" he asked.

"Tip-top, old bean!"

"Well, look here, then, is it a go?" asked Smithy. "Am I to count on you five fellows to hit Texas with me?"

"Yes, rather!" answered five voices at once.

"Of course, the pater will fix the voyage out, and all that," said the Bounder. "It won't run you into anything. We take the steamer to New York, and then the railway. The last fifty miles or so is done by stage-coach—"

"Oh, ripping!"

"Or on horseback—"

"Bravo!"

"You'll have to get your people's consent. The fact is, it's a pretty rough country—hold-ups, and cattle-rustling, and that kind of thing—"

"Hurrah!" roared Bob Cherry.

The Bounder laughed.

"Well, if you fellows would like it, O.K.!" he said. "I've got to go, anyhow—the pater wants me to give the show the once-over. He can't find the time to run out to Texas, of course—and he's got a lot of faith in my sagacity—blow it! It may turn out quite a good time in one way or another—"

"Topping time!" said Harry Wharton. "Many thanks for asking this study first, Smithy! You won't find a lot of fellows who'll say no!"

"I'm not asking anybody else, if you come along! There'll be seven in the party—"

"Seven!"

"You five, myself, and Buckskin Bill!"

"Who?" yelled the juniors.

"William Buck I think his name is," said Smithy. "He's called Buckskin Bill at Packsaddle! That's the sort of

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name they give one another in that happy spot."

"Sounds fine!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"But is this Mr. Buck going to travel with the party?" asked Harry.

"That's it! He's coming here for me—"

"Here?"

"And for you fellows, if you join up. Goodness knows what he's like—my pater simply says he's coming. I shouldn't wonder if he turns up in chaps and a Stetson hat, and a gun sticking out of his belt—"

"Oh crumbs! That would make Greyfriars sit up and take notice!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"But who is he exactly?" asked Harry.

"A Texas cow-puncher! He was sent over to this country by Barney Stone, the foreman, with particulars of the place, when the negotiations were going on," explained Smithy. "An honest, simple man is my father's description of him. As he's in this country, my father thought of the idea of my traveling back with him—he fancies I'm not equal to crossing an ocean and a continent on my own. If we find him a worry we can drop him about somewhere."

"Um!" said Harry.

"What do you mean by um, fathead?"

"Well, I'd better put it plain! If we go, and your father puts us in charge of Mr. Buck, we can't drop him about anywhere! We shall have to do what we undertake to do," said the captain of the Remove, frankly.

Vernon-Smith knitted his brows for a moment. But his face cleared at once.

"O.K.!" he said. "If you fellows can stand him, I dare say I can. My pater's letting Barney Stone know that his son and some friends will be coming back with Bill—I don't know whether the news will overjoy him or not. Anyhow, he will get ready for us! If you fellows ain't afraid of six-guns and bucking broncos—"

"Not a lot!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Then it's a go!" said the Bounder. And with a more cheerful expression on his face, he slipped from the study table, nodded to the Famous Five, and walked out of the study.

Harry Wharton & Co., exchanged glances, full of satisfaction.

"Some holiday!" said Bob.

"What-ho!" said Nugent.

"Gorgeous!" said Johnny Bull.

"Tip-top!" said Harry.

"The tip-topfulness is terrific!"

Whether Herbert Vernon-Smith was satisfied or not, there was no doubt that the Famous Five were—more than satisfied. A run abroad for the holidays was always welcome; and a run as far as Texas, was, as Johnny Bull declared, gorgeous!

That night, the Famous Five were dreaming of bucking broncos, ten-gallon hats, and six-guns—cow camps and rolling, boundless prairies.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Doesn't See the Joke!

"SMITHY, old chap!"

"Scat!"

"I say—"

"Buzz off!"

"If that's what you call civil, Smithy, when a chap's inviting you for the Easter holidays—" hooted Billy Bunter.

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, through

his big spectacles, surprised and annoyed.

He did not expect much in the way of manners from Smithy; but really, this was the limit! There was nothing so far as Billy Bunter could see, in an invitation for the Easter holidays, to cause a fellow to burst into a roar of laughter.

But the Bounder roared as if Bunter had just told him the best joke of the term.

"Look here, you cheeky ass!" hooted Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" yelled the exasperated fat Owl.

"Your little joke!" grinned Smithy.

"Best I've heard! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not joking, you ass—"

"You are, old man, you are!" chortled Smithy. "You'll see the joke yourself later on! Had a letter from the old bean yet?"

"Eh? No! I had a telephone call yesterday—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is there funny in getting a telephone call, you fathead?" yelled Bunter.

"Lots and lots!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him, and blinked round at the other fellows in the Rag. He was quite puzzled.

Other fellows, as well as Smithy, were laughing. Skinner was almost weeping. Bunter was not aware that Harold Skinner had told the story of that telephone call, and that more than a dozen fellows had heard it.

Bunter had had no answer yet from old Joseph Carter. Old Joseph, no doubt, was a busy man, and was not in a hurry to write to his fat relative at Greyfriars School. But Bunter had, as he believed, at least, had an answer on the telephone. It was, Bunter was assured, all right!

All he had to do now, was to make up his party for Easter at Carter Croft. Bunter had given that matter a considerable amount of thought.

He was, as he had told Toddy and Skinner, rather particular whom he took with him to stay with his rich relative. He was prepared to take Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, as fellows who would do him credit! Wharton and Nugent, however, were off the list, after the ungrateful way in which they had declined the invitation. Smithy, Bunter thought, would not do him so much credit—but, on the other hand, a millionaire's son would have a lot of uses as a guest—a fellow could borrow cash of him occasionally, which a guest could scarcely refuse to lend! For which reason Bunter was disposed to "take the cash and let the credit go."

He was aware that Smithy's cruise with Tom Redwing had fallen through. He was as yet, unaware of the Texas idea. So he considered that, as Smithy was at a loose end, he might be rather glad to come along with the Bunter party. At the very least, he might be expected to render polite thanks for such a kind invitation. Instead of which he howled with laughter.

"I say, Smithy, it's all right, really!" persisted Bunter, "I'm really taking a party to my Uncle Carter's for Easter—"

"Really?" grinned the Bounder.

"Really and truly?" chortled Skinner.

"It's really O.K.," said Bunter. "No end of a place, Smithy—old Joe's rolling in oof. He phoned me specially yesterday—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"—to tell me it was settled. He's sending the Rolls to take me away when

we break-up here! I say Smithy, you'd like to come!" urged Bunter. "I mean to say, it's a bit above what you're accustomed to—"

"Eh?"

"You'd get a chance of mixing among some really decent people—a bit of a change from the City crowd you're used to in the hols!" said Bunter, temptingly.

The Bounder ceased to laugh. Six or seven other fellows, on the other hand, laughed still more loudly. They found the expression on Herbert Vernon-Smith's face quite entertaining.

"You'll pull through all right, if that's what's worrying you, Smithy," went on Bunter. "I'll give you a few tips how to behave, and all that! None of your coloured waistcoats, you know—and don't talk about money—that sort of thing won't go down at a country-house party! Perhaps you'd better be careful not to mention your connections in the City, too. If you're careful about a few things like that, you'll be all right! And—"

Bump!

Why Smithy gave him a sudden, heavy shove, which sat him down on the floor of the Rag, Bunter did not know. But that was what Smithy did: and he stalked out of the Rag, leaving Bunter spluttering, and the other fellows roaring.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter. "Beast! Oooogh! I jolly well won't take that cad home for Easter now—oooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter, as he tottered to his feet. "I jolly well shan't invite you, anyhow, Skinner!"

"Oh, do!" gasped Skinner.

"Shan't! Or you either, Snoop, you giggling ass!"

"I shall miss such a lot!" sighed Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Newland—"

Monty Newland chuckled.

"Look here, you fellows, it's too bad!" he said. "You'd better tell Bunter, Skinner—"

"Shut up, you ass, and don't spoil a good joke!" said Skinner.

"Well, a joke can be carried too far," said Monty Newland. "I don't see pulling the fat duffer's leg to that extent."

"Shut up, I tell you!"

"Eh? There isn't any joke about it, Newland," said the fat Owl, blinking at Monty through his big spectacles. "It's all right. I'm putting in Easter at my Uncle Carter's place—tip-top show—he's sending the Rolls for me when we break up. He telephoned—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Specially to tell me so! I can take as many friends as I like. I'll take you, Newland, old chap."

"Thanks," said Newland, grinning. "But—"

"I mean it," said Bunter. "I don't care about you being a Jew, old chap. After all, you can't help that. It's going to be a numerous party, and I dare say you'll pass among the rest without being specially noticed."

Like the Bounder, Monty Newland suddenly ceased to be amused. But the other fellows seemed more amused than ever, and they shrieked.

It was possible that Bunter lacked tact in extending his generous invitations.

"What about it, old chap?" asked the cheery Owl. "It will be rather a leg-up for you, won't it—a decent crowd instead of the usual mob of— Wow! Leggo my collar, you silly ass!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

Wharrer you grabbing my collar for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Newland did not explain why he was grabbing Bunter's collar. But his object was soon quite plain to the fat Owl. He spun Bunter round and planted a foot on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars.

Thud!

"Yaroooooh!"

Thud!

"Yo-hoop! Leave off kicking me, beast! Wharrer you getting your rag out for, I'd like to know?" yelled Bunter. "I say—Yarooooop!"

Thud!

The third thud landed Bunter at the doorway. He bolted through that doorway, just escaping a fourth! He roared as he went down the passage—and left the Rag in a roar behind him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter failed to see the joke; but there was no doubt that Bunter's Easter party was adding considerably to the gaiety of existence in the Greyfriars Remove.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Cashing a Postal Order!

"SAY, old-timer!"

Fisher T. Fish of the Remove spoke in his most agreeable tone—which was, perhaps, one degree less like the filing of a saw than his usual tones. At the same time he bestowed his most agreeable smile on Billy Bunter.

Bunter gave him a morose blink.

Bunter was not feeling so merry and bright as a fellow might have been expected to feel who was making up a holiday party for a vacation at a most expensive and magnificent residence.

Everybody knew—or ought to have known by this time—that old Joe Carter was fearfully rich, and that a holiday at Carter Croft was a thing to be jumped at with both feet. Bunter had expected a rush! He had expected to have invitations fished for right and left, and to turn fellows down left and right! Instead of which, nobody seemed keen—and the whole gorgeous affair seemed to be regarded by half of the Remove as a screaming joke! Bunter's Easter party consisted, so far, only of his fat self, which was not in the least what he had expected.

He was puzzled and irritated, and, to add to his annoyance, his long-expected postal order had not come along. He was blinking in at the window of the school shop when Fisher T. Fish happened—feasting his eyes, as there was a lack of the wherewithal to feast his fat inside.

His fat face did not reflect the agreeable expression on Fishy's bony one. He guessed at once what Fishy was after, and he had no idea of being landed with Fisher T. Fish for the hols.

"Oh, don't bother!" grunted Bunter, and he turned back to the contemplation of the tuckshop window—like a fat Peri at the gate of Paradise, gazing at the good things in which he could not share.

"I year you're making up a party for Easter, old scout!" remarked Fisher T. Fish, addressing Bunter's fat back.

Fisher T. Fish was not in Skinner's confidence on that subject. And Fishy, who was too far from his home in "Noo Yark" to go home for the holidays, usually spent his vacations at the school. So Bunter's Easter party had considerable attractions for Fisher Tarleton Fish.

Whether old Joe Carter's place was quite so splendid as Bunter's de-

scription thereof Fishy doubted. Still, it was bound to be preferable to sticking at school through the holidays.

And it would not cost anything—which was fearfully important to Fishy! If a car were coming for Bunter, as stated on Quelch's telephone, there would not even be a railway fare to pay! Whatever the shebang was like, Fishy felt that a guy who got the holiday there for nothing would not have any kick coming! So here was Fishy—on the make!

"Ain't that so?" asked Fishy, as the fat Owl did not take the trouble to reply.

"Yes," grunted Bunter.

"Made up all the party yet?" hinted Fishy.

"Oh, no! Not the lot," answered Bunter. "I've got to think that out, of course. I can't take all my friends—I've got so many, you see."

"Oh, sure!" agreed Fisher T. Fish. "I'll tell a man there ain't a more popular guy than you in the school, old scout."

Billy Bunter winked at his reflection in the tuckshop window. Fishy was laying it on thick—with what object Bunter did not need telling!

He condescended at last to blink round at Fisher T. Fish.

"I might be able to squeeze you in, Fishy," he remarked thoughtfully. "After all, my Uncle Carter's told me to take as many friends as I like."

"It's sure a go!" said Fisher T. Fish heartily. "I'll say I'll be mighty pleased to come, Bunter!"

"By the way, I dare say you heard me mention that I was expecting a postal order," remarked Bunter.

"Oh!"

"It never came this morning—"

"Did—did—didn't it?"

"No! It's rather odd, too, as it's from one of my titled relations. Still, the post will be in after tea, and it's pretty certain to come then, so that will be all right!" said Bunter.

"Sure!"

"Only," added Bunter, "I haven't had my tea yet! Toddy's teasing out to-day, and you know what Toddy's like; when he teas out he never thinks of any other fellow in the study. Wharton's asked me to tea in his study, but as I've turned him down for Easter I can't very well tea there. As my postal order will be here after tea, Fishy, you might cash it for me."

"Oh, sure!" said Fisher T. Fish uneasily. "The minute you get that postal order, old bean, you bring it to me—"

"You see, that's the difficulty," explained Bunter. "It won't be here till after tea. And I want my tea."

"Come along to Hall!" suggested Fishy. "I'm sure going to tea in Hall, and—"

"I don't care for tea in Hall, thanks!" said Bunter stiffly. "I dare say I can find a chap to cash that postal order for me—some chap I'm taking to Carter Croft for Easter!"

Fisher T. Fish looked at him. His keen transatlantic brain got Bunter's meaning at once. If he cashed that celebrated postal order he was booked for the Easter holidays. If he didn't, he wasn't!

Fishy breathed hard.

He had a mental struggle. Parting with cash was to Fisher T. Fish like parting with teeth! It was worth it, no doubt—but Fishy did not like parting, even for value received! But he bit on the bullet, so to speak, and made up his mind at last.

"You needn't go looking for any other guy, Bunter," said Fishy. "I

guess if I'm joining your party for Easter I can sure oblige you."

"Right-ho, then!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I'll put your name on my list at once, Fishy!"

"And—and—and here's the half-crown!" almost groaned Fisher T. Fish, slowly and reluctantly drawing a coin of that denomination from his pocket.

"The postal order will be for five shillings!" answered Bunter calmly.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!"

Fisher T. Fish paused—a long pause. Billy Bunter held out a fat hand! The half-crown remained gripped in Fishy's bony one!

Parting with a half-crown was like parting with a tooth. Parting with two was like parting with a double tooth. It was almost more than flesh and blood—Fishy's flesh and blood—could bear.

But Fishy heroically made up his mind to it, after a painful struggle. Still more slowly, a second half-crown came to light.

Both dropped into a fat palm.

"Thanks, old chap!" said Bunter carelessly. "I'll let you have that postal order as soon as it comes. If it happens to be delayed, and doesn't come to-day, it will be here in the morning all right."

"Oh, sure!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. He had deep and painful doubts about that postal order, either that afternoon or the morrow morning.

Billy Bunter rolled into the tuckshop. His fat face was merry and bright now. Fishy's bony countenance was neither.

It was worth while, Fishy told himself. It was a sprat to catch a whale—quite a small sprat to catch so large a whale. He was safely and officially booked as a member of Billy Bunter's Easter party—three or four weeks for nix. Really, it was worth it. Fishy admitted that it was worth it; but it gave him a pain, all the same.

Billy Bunter, in the tuckshop, disposed of sticky comestibles to the exact value of five shillings. He was happy and shiny and sticky.

Fisher T. Fish drifted away, thinking sadly of the five shillings. It was worth it—more than worth it—but it was a blow to him. Fortunately for his peace of mind, he did not dream of the awful blow that was coming.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! One for you, Bunter!"

"Oh, good!"

Billy Bunter was blinking at the letter-rack after tea with a hopeful blink. His expectation that his celebrated postal order might materialise was not, perhaps, great. But he was in hope of a letter from old Mr. Carter.

True, the matter of Easter had been settled on the telephone—at least, Bunter thought it had. But he had no doubt that the "old bean" would follow that up with a letter; and he had a very considerable hope that the letter would contain something of even more value than avuncular affection.

In view of the fact that Bunter was taking a party to his place for Easter, and that the school was about to break up, Bunter considered that that wealthy relative could hardly do less than send along something in the shape of a "tip."

A pound note, Bunter thought, was probable; even a fiver was possible; and a tenner was not beyond the range of hopeful possibility.

Bob Cherry handed down the letter, and Bunter grabbed it eagerly.

"Tain't the pater's fist," he said, blinking at it through his big spectacles. "This is from old Joe all right."

Skinner winked at the Bounder, who grinned.

There were grins on other faces. Quite a number of fellows were interested in Bunter's correspondence with "old Joe."

More than half the Form knew of Skinner's spoof on the telephone, though Billy Bunter was still happily ignorant of it.

Fisher T. Fish, who was in the same state of happy ignorance, gave the letter in Bunter's fat hand his keen attention. If, by happy chance, there was a postal order in it, that five shillings might not be so hopelessly gone as Fishy feared.

Heedless of grins, Bunter jabbed a fat thumb into the envelope and jerked it open. Eagerly he grabbed out the letter within.

There was only the letter. No postal order, no banknote, no currency note met Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles. He gave a grunt, and Fisher T. Fish, abandoning his momentary hope, sighed.

However, Bunter proceeded to peruse the letter. A dozen fellows watched his fat face, greatly entertained by the varying expressions on it as he travelled through the epistle from Mr. Joseph Carter.

Billy Bunter did not look bucked. He looked puzzled, then bewildered, and then dismayed and dolorous.

"Nothing wrong, old fat bean?" asked Bob Cherry kindly.

The Famous Five so far were not in Skinner's joke, and they had taken Bunter's Easter party for granted, though they had declined to join therein.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Something wrong with that Easter party?" grinned Skinner; and there was a giggle from Snoop.

"Isn't the Rolls coming, after all?" chuckled the Bounder.

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish caught his breath. Evidently, only too clearly, there was something amiss with that Easter party. And only an hour ago Fishy had parted with five shillings for the privilege of being included in that party! He felt a pang of dread.

"Say, what's the noos, you fat clam?" exclaimed Fishy.

Bunter did not heed him.

He gazed at that letter with popping eyes behind his big spectacles.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I can't make this out!" he gasped. "I—I say, you know I had that telephone call from old Joe Carter, don't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you chaps!" said Harry Wharton. "Nothing to cackle at, is there?"

"Isn't there?" chuckled Skinner.

"Just a spot!" said the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, shut up!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"What's the trouble, old fat man? We know you had the telephone call all right—"

"The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!"

"Well, look at this!" said Bunter in a gasping voice. "What can the old ass mean by this—after that telephone call, you know? Look at it!"

The juniors looked at it.

In view of that telephone call, supposed to have proceeded from old Joseph Carter, that letter was really enough to surprise the unhappy recipient. It ran:

"Dear William,—I have received your absurd and ill-spelt letter, and am astonished that any Greyfriars boy should write in so slovenly and disgraceful a manner.

"I can scarcely believe that you are in the Lower Fourth Form at your school, and that you are not, indeed, the most backward member of the Second Form.

"I judge from your letter that your term's report will be as bad as your previous reports, and that you have not improved in any way, and have made no effort whatever towards improvement.

"I have no desire whatever to see you at Easter, as you suggest, so kindly dismiss the idea entirely from your mind.

JOSEPH CARTER."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Hard cheese, old chap!"

"The hardness of the absurd cheese is preposterous!" said Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh sympathetically.

"Rough luck, old fat pippin!" said Frank Nugent.

The Famous Five, at least, were sympathetic. They had bumped Bunter for his cheek when he was puffed with importance, but they could not help sympathising now. This was a crushing blow.

"But what does the old duffer mean?" said Johnny Bull warmly. "This doesn't fit in with what Bunter told us he said on the phone."

"Um!" said Harry Wharton. "Did you get it quite right on the phone, Bunter?"

"I jolly well did!" gasped Bunter. "But—but this doesn't sound as—as if old Joe telephoned at all, does it? I—I can't make it out!"

"It's too bad, pulling the fat duffer's leg like that!" said Monty Newland, laughing. "He asks for it, but—"

"Pulling his leg?" repeated Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Skinner.

"Do you know anything about it, Skinner?" asked the captain of the Remove, with a rather grim look at Skinner.

"What should I know about it?" asked Skinner blandly. "I've had a sort of idea that that telephone call never came from anywhere much farther off than the village post office—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, of course, I don't know anything about it!" said Skinner cheerily.

"Do you, Snoopey?"

"Just about as much as you do!" grinned Snoop.

"Bunter asks for these things!" remarked the Bounder. "He can't complain of getting them!"

"Skinner, old man, you're too funny!" said Bob Cherry, laughing in spite of himself. "It's too thick!"

"The thickfulness is terrific!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows, w-w-was it Skinner?" gasped Bunter. "I—I remember now it was Skinner who suggested the old bean might phone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

He glared at the grinning Skinner, his very spectacles glittering with rage.

Billy Bunter was not quick on the uptake; but he realised now how his fat leg had been pulled.

That telephone-call, which had bucked him to such an extent that he had felt like striking the stars with his sublime head, had not, after all, come from old Joseph Carter, at Carter Croft! It had come from Harold Skinner, at Friardale Post Office.

It was all spoof—and Billy Bunter's Easter party had no more substance than the baseless fabric of a dream! He understood now why so many fellows had yelled when he invited them to join that Easter party.

Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, the fat and fatuous Owl fell from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof!

He glared at Skinner with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles, and shook a fat fist at him.

"Beast! Pulling a fellow's leg!" he hooted. "Beast! Swab! Rotter! Worm! Toad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Old Joe never phoned at all!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was that swab Skinner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner almost doubled up with mirth.

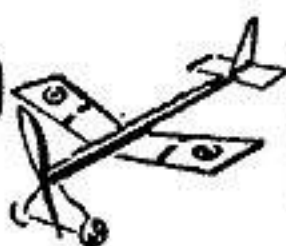
But all of a sudden Skinner ceased to gurgle with merriment. Billy Bunter, boiling with rage, hurtled at him, hitting out with a fat fist.

(Continued on next page.)

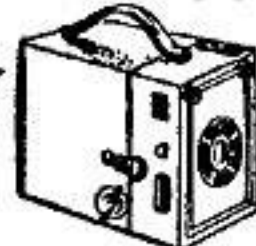
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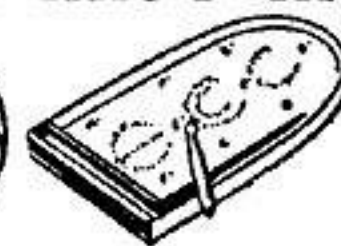
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That fat fist landed in Skinner's eye! Bang!

It took Skinner by surprise! He went over like a skittle! The bang was followed by a bump, as Skinner landed on his back.

"Ooooh!" gasped Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner sat up dizzily. He put his hand to his eye. He gurgled—not with merriment.

A punch with Bunter's weight behind it was not a light matter. Skinner's eye was already blackening! The juniors, staring at that blackening eye, laughed more loudly than ever. This was quite an unexpected outcome to Skinner's jape on Bunter! It struck the other fellows as funny!

"Why, I—I—I'll—" gasped Skinner.

He staggered to his feet.

"Cut, Bunter!" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Skinner made a dive at him.

Peter Todd put out a foot, and Skinner went over it headlong.

That gave Bunter a chance. He flew!

By the time Skinner had righted himself again, Billy Bunter had disappeared. Up and down and round about, Skinner, with a hand to a black eye, hunted him. But he hunted in vain! Bunter had disappeared—and he wisely stayed disappeared!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Man from Texas!

"**B**EAST!" hissed Billy Bunter—under his breath.

Bunter heard footsteps—footsteps at that moment were alarming to Billy Bunter!

He had blacked Skinner's eye! Skinner deserved it, no doubt, for having perpetrated that unfeeling jape on the fat Owl. As a matter of choice, Bunter would have preferred to blacken both Skinner's eyes!

But he wanted to keep clear of Skinner!

Like many humorists, Skinner could not enjoy a joke when it turned against himself! Skinner's great joke having ended in a black eye for Skinner, other fellows thought it funny. Skinner did not! Skinner was hunting for the fat Owl of the Remove with the deadliest intentions.

Bunter had dodged into the visitors' room. That was rather a safe spot to keep out of the way, as fellows were not allowed to enter that apartment, except when they had to see a visitor. Skinner was not likely to look for him there.

With the door an inch open, Bunter blinked into the passage outside and listened, in a state of great trepidation.

Footsteps approached—and alarmed him! Skinner, having drawn other covers in vain, was, apparently, coming that way. Billy Bunter shut the door, backed across the room, and squatted out of sight behind a big settee.

Hidden from view, if that beast Skinner opened the door and looked in, the fat Owl palpitated.

He hardly breathed as the door opened.

Footsteps came in!

Billy Bunter quaked! If the beast guessed that he was there, and searched through the room, the fat Owl's game was up.

Then, to his surprise, he heard a familiar voice—that of his Form-

master, Mr. Quelch. It was not Skinner who had entered. It was Quelch.

Bunter suppressed a gasp of relief.

Certainly he did not want Quelch to spot him there. But Quelch, of course, was not likely to look behind the settee. Bunter was safe, so long as he kept quiet. He kept very quiet!

"Pray be seated!" was what Mr. Quelch said.

Apparently there was a visitor along with Quelch.

"Sure!" answered a voice, with a nasal accent, which rather resembled that of Fisher T. Fish. Bunter realised that the visitor, whoever he was, was from the other side of the Atlantic.

"If you will kindly wait a few minutes, Mr. Buck, I will send Vernon-Smith here to speak to you," said Mr. Quelch.

"Sure!" repeated the other voice.

Bunter heard Mr. Quelch leave the visitors' room. The man he had addressed as "Mr. Buck" remained.

Bunter did not need telling who Mr. Buck was. He understood now. All the Remove knew, by that time, of the Bounder's coming trip to the far land of Texas for the holidays. Most of them were very curious to see Mr. Buck, otherwise Buckskin Bill, when he arrived at Greyfriars. A real live cow-puncher from a Texas ranch had a great deal of interest for the Greyfriars juniors.

It was, however, rather annoying to Bunter.

He did not want to leave the safe cover of the visitors' room at the risk of running into the vengeful Skinner. He could not have remained while Vernon-Smith interviewed the man from Texas, if he had shown up. So he had no choice but to remain where he was, squatting behind the settee, out of sight—which was neither grateful nor comforting.

His only comfort was that he would hear a conversation not intended for his fat ears—always a satisfaction to the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars.

He heard the man from Texas cross to the window to look out into the quadrangle while he waited for Smithy. His back being thus turned to Bunter, the fat junior ventured to peer round the corner of the settee, to see what he was like.

Certainly he did not look anything like a cowpuncher.

He was a rather spare man, dressed in dark clothes, with nothing in his aspect, that Bunter could see, to indicate that he came from the wild and woolly West.

Bunter had a back view of him, for about a minute, and then the man turned and looked across the room towards the door.

Then the fat Owl had a profile view of his face.

It was a clean-shaved, hard face; looking as hard in outline as if moulded in iron. The lips were close-set; the eyes narrow, with a glint in them that reminded one of ice.

Obviously, the man from Texas had no suspicion that anyone else was in the room; as, of course, no one else ought to have been.

Had he looked towards the settee by the wall Bunter's fat head would have popped back, like that of a tortoise into its shell.

But he stood with his profile to Bunter, his icy eyes fixed on the door, and did not turn his head once in Bunter's direction.

The fat Owl watched him curiously.

He saw a peculiar, sardonic grin on that hard face which puzzled him. He could see no reason why the hard-faced man should grin. A vague, uneasy feeling came over the fat Owl.

But the man's next proceeding made Billy Bunter hardly able to suppress an alarmed squeak. He slipped his hand to the back of his trousers, under the tail of a loose lounge jacket, and it reappeared with something in it that glistened in the April sunshine from the window.

Bunter's fat heart jumped.

It was a revolver that the man from Texas had in his hand. Billy Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the sight of it.

Possibly they "packed guns" on the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, in the Pack-saddle country, in Texas; and possibly this man kept his "hardware" about him from force of habit. But what did his present action mean?

Apparently, it meant that the man from Texas wanted to make sure that that weapon was ready to his hand—if wanted! After a moment or two he slipped it back into his hip-pocket.

Billy Bunter blotted himself from sight behind the settee, in case those cold, icy eyes should glance round and spot him. The hard-faced man was pacing to and fro; and, after that glimpse of the revolver, Billy Bunter was very anxious not to be seen. There was something in this that he could not understand, but which gave him a deep feeling of alarm.

From what he had heard, Mr. Buck was to call at the school and see the Bounder, and make arrangements for the journey to Texas. But even on Billy Bunter's obtuse brain it dawned that the man in the visitors' room was waiting for Smithy, not as a friend, but as an enemy!

Billy Bunter squatted in his hiding-place, in a state of alarmed astonishment, catching his breath as the door opened, and Herbert Vernon-Smith came in, closing the door after him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

In Desperate Hands!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH glanced at the man in the visitors' room, and started a little. He scanned the hard-faced man very curiously.

"Mr. Vernon-Smith, I guess," drawled the man from Texas.

"That's my name."

"I guess your schoolmaster has told you—"

"Mr. Quelch has told me that Mr. Buck has called to see me, as my father arranged," answered the Bounder coolly. "Who the dickens are you—and what does this mean? You're not Buck!"

"You reckon?"

"I've never seen Buck, but my father has told me about him, in his letter," snapped the Bounder. "He's six feet high—and you're six inches under that! What sort of a fool game is this? Who the dooce are you, and what do you want?"

"I'll say you're smart, feller!" assented the man from Texas. "I ain't Buck, and never was! Keep away from that door!"

"What if I don't choose?" said the Bounder contemptuously.

"Because it won't be healthy for you to kick," said the man from Texas quietly. "I guess I could make my get-away easy enough, if I left you here on the floor with a hole through your cabeza. Stand still!"



Creak! Snap! "Oooooooooogh!" gurgled Bunter. The branch snapped, and the fat junior dropped. He landed square in the middle of the back of the gunman who was crouching below. Two-gun Sanders gave a horrible gurgle. "Ooogh! Groooooogh! Ooooooh!" "Oh scissors! Ow!" gasped Bunter.

His hand whipped to his hip, and a levelled revolver looked the astonished Bunder in the face.

Over it the icy eyes glittered.

The Bunder of Greyfriars stood rooted to the floor, almost petrified, staring at the man from Texas. He was taken utterly by surprise.

With a swift, cat-like step, the man passed him and reached the door. He turned the key in the lock. Then he faced the Bunder, still watching him over the levelled revolver.

"Mebbe you're thinking of letting out a yaup!" he remarked quietly. "I guess you want to pack it up, big boy!" The Bunder breathed hard.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked. His voice was quite steady. He realised that he was in the presence of an armed desperado; but the Bunder of Greyfriars had had fear left out of his composition. He was not scared; but he was as watchful and wary as the gunman himself.

He was more astonished than anything else. This man, whoever he was, had used the name of Buck to get admitted to an interview with the millionaire's son. He had some motive; but that motive was quite a mystery to Smithy.

"I guess my name won't tell you anything!" drawled the gunman. "But if you was a Packsaddle guy, you'd know that when Two-gun Sanders says jump, you gotter jump, and jump lively."

"Oh! You're from Packsaddle, in Texas?" asked the Bunder.

"You said it."

"And what do you want—apart from playing-film tricks with a gun?" asked Smithy coolly.

"Jest a leetle pow-wow with you, Mr. Vernon-Smith! Sit down on that settee." Mr. Sanders waved his revolver to the settee, behind which,

unknown to either of them, a fat and palpitating Owl crouched, in terror.

Vernon-Smith paused a moment. Then he crossed to the settee and sat down. The gunman followed him, and sat down, a couple of feet away. He allowed the revolver to rest on his knee.

"Now that's all hunky," he remarked. "I guess I got to talk turkey to you, big boy! You're aiming to hit Kicking Cayuse, I reckon, with a party of side-kickers. Ain't that so?"

"You seem to know all about my holiday arrangements," said the astonished Bunder. "There's no secret about it, though I don't see how you know."

"I guess I'm wise to it! Your popper's sure bought the Kicking Cayuse, and you're going out to give it the once-over. I'm telling you, I've moseyed all the way from Packsaddle in Texas, to warn you that that section ain't healthy for strangers. You get me?"

"Thanks!" said the Bunder sarcastically.

"I'm putting you wise!" explained Mr. Sanders. "I've got friends in that section, that don't want strangers hornin' in. It ain't no spot for school-boys and such. Nope! I'm telling you, something might happen to you if you was to hit Packsaddle, and it might happen sudden."

"You're awfully good, Mr. Sanders!" said the Bunder, in the same sarcastic tone. "Whose pie shall I be putting a finger in at Packsaddle?"

"I'll mention that I ain't here to answer questions," said Mr. Sanders.

"I'm here to warn you off! I guess you can put in a school holiday somewhere else, where the climate's more healthy. You keep safe in this little island, big boy. I'm telling you it's your best guess."

"Is that the lot?"

"I guess that's about the lib!l!" agreed the gunman. "That's what I've come here to spill! What do you reckon to do?"

"I'll tell you!" said Vernon-Smith coolly. "My father's bought the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, and he's got his reasons for sending me there. I was unwilling to go, having made other arrangements—and even yet, I hadn't quite made up my mind that I would! Now I've made it up! You've as good as told me that there's something going on, on my father's property, that you don't want my father's son to nose into! That does it! I'm going!"

"You figure on going, after what I've spilled!"

"Exactly! Nothing would keep me away, after that!" said the Bunder. "You've helped me make up my mind, Mr. Sanders!"

The gunman sat looking at him, his hard face growing harder and grimmer. The revolver still rested on his knee.

"You want to think twice, big boy!" said Sanders, at length. "I ain't come here jest to blow off my mouth promises. You ain't wanted at Packsaddle. You got to ride clear of that burg! You won't be safe there."

"I fancy I can take care of myself!" answered Vernon-Smith contemptuously. "I shall chance it, at any rate! Anything more to say?"

"Yep—a few!" said the gunman grimly. "If you're fixed on that trip—"

"Quite!"

"Then I guess you won't be startling none! You won't be in no condition to start on any Western trip!"

"If you mean that you're going to

(Continued on page 16.)

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BOUND for the WILD WEST!



(Continued from page 13.)

handle that revolver, Mr. Sanders, I don't believe a word of it!" retorted the Bounder. "In this country, your sort get hanged for that sort of thing. There's a bit of difference between England and Packsaddle."

"Oh, sure!" assented Sanders. "I ain't going to blow your roof off, and bring the whole shebang running! I'm jest going to give you a sockdolager over the cabeza with the butt—and when you wake up, you'll be in hospital, and you won't be honing for no Texas trips, Mr. Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder breathed hard and deep. Almost unbelievable as it seemed to the Greyfriars junior, the man was in deadly earnest. He grasped the revolver by the barrel, his icy eyes gleaming at the schoolboy by his side.

"Don't stir!" said Sanders, in a low tone of menace. "You get it the minute you do, Mr. Vernon-Smith! I guess I ain't no baby killer, and I sure do not want to spill your juice over this here floor—but you ain't hitting no Texas trail! You ain't wanted at Packsaddle, and you got to ride clear! I reckoned that a warning would be enough for a schoolboy. But if it ain't enough for you, you got more coming."

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands, almost convulsively.

He was at the gunman's mercy—the door locked; the pistol-butt ready to strike him down at the first attempt to stir, or call for help. There was little danger for the ruffian himself; he had only to unlock the door and walk out, leaving the schoolboy senseless on the floor; he would be gone long before there was an alarm.

"I guess," said Sanders, "you're getting it clear that this is business! I'm telling you, Mr. Vernon-Smith, that it's business from the word 'go.' And I reckon—"

He broke off, with a snarl, as the Bounder, taking a desperate chance, made a sudden spring at him, grasping at his right arm.

The icy eyes blazed.

For a second the gunman rocked in the Bounder's grasp; then his grip forced Vernon-Smith back and pinned him on the settee. His right hand went up, with the clubbed revolver in it.

Another second and the heavy metal butt would have crashed on the head of Herbert Vernon-Smith. But in that second a fat hand whipped from behind the settee, and the revolver was grabbed from Two-gun Sanders' hand.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Spot of Excitement!

BILLY BUNTER did not stop to think!

It was fortunate for the Bounder that he did not!

Crouching behind the back of the settee, palpitating with terror at what he heard, Bunter's terrified eyes saw the clubbed revolver lifted—and before it could crash down, he grabbed.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

Utterly unaware that he was present, never dreaming that anyone was behind that settee, Sanders was taken utterly by surprise. He did not know, in fact, what was happening, or how or why that six-gun had been suddenly jerked from his hand.

He gave a gasping howl of utter amazement. His empty hand, sweeping down, struck the Bounder.

"Help!" came a yell. "Oh, help! I say, you fellows, help!"

From behind the settee a fat figure shot, bounding for the door.

Two-gun Sanders' eyes started from his hard face at the sight of it.

"Carry me home to die!" he gasped.

He made a spring, but at the same moment the Bounder grasped him again. As he sprang after Bunter, Smithy's grasp dragged him over, and they rolled together on the floor.

The gunman, panting with rage, struck Vernon-Smith aside, and leaped to his feet with the activity of a cat. He leaped after Bunter.

But the fat junior was at the door. Billy Bunter was not often quick in his movements, but at the present moment a flash of lightning had nothing on Bunter.

Bunter fairly streaked to the door, grabbed the key and unlocked it, and tore it open. He bounded into the passage, yelling wildly.

"Help! Help! Murder! Fire! Help! Yaroooh!"

"Help!" came another yell from the Bounder.

Two-gun Sanders jumped through the doorway after Bunter. It was the gun he wanted; but that gun, in Bunter's convulsive clutch, was going down the passage, Bunter's little fat legs fairly flashing as he fled.

Wild yells and howls pealed from Bunter as he went, waking the echoes far and wide.

Two-gun Sanders made one stride in pursuit, then he stopped. That utterly unexpected happening had knocked his whole game sky-high. His own escape was doubtful now.

Already fifty voices, at least, were calling, in startled tones; footsteps were approaching from a dozen directions.

The gunman, gritting his teeth, turned and dashed away down the passage, heading for the nearest door.

A stalwart Sixth-Former appeared in his way.

"What——" exclaimed Wingate. "Who—Here, stop! Oh!"

Wingate of the Sixth went spinning, and Sanders rushed past him.

From the doorway of the visitors' room came the Bounder, yelling breathlessly.

"Stop him! Stop that man!"

"I say, you fellows, help!" Bunter's yelling was fading into the distance.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump——"

"What's up?"

Harry Wharton & Co., in the quad, stared in amazement at a slim, spare figure that leaped from a doorway and ran for the gates. A moment later the Bounder was seen.

"Stop him!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"Who——"

"What——"

"Stop him!" shrieked the Bounder. He dashed desperately in pursuit, and the Famous Five, amazed and alarmed, rushed after him.

Fellows were running up from all directions.

Coker of the Fifth, seeing the man running, with a mob in pursuit, rushed in his way, grasped him, and stopped him in full flight.

In his own happy country Mr. Sanders was a two-gun man—whence his peculiar name. Luckily he packed only one gun in a land where such articles had to be kept carefully out of sight. Had the desperate rascal been armed at that moment it might have fared very badly with Horace Coker.

As it was, Mr. Sanders had only his hands to depend upon; but they were hefty hands.

Coker, grasping him, dragged him over; but a set of knuckles, that seemed to be made of iron, jarred on Coker's chin, and Horace let go and rolled over, spluttering.

Sanders was on his feet again in a twinkling, and running. He just escaped the Bounder's grasping hand.

He ran desperately for the gates.

Gosling stood there, blinking at him in bemused astonishment.

"Stop him, Gosling!" roared a dozen voices.

But Gosling had no chance of stopping him. Gosling made a clutch, but he was rolling heels over head the next moment, and the gunman darted out of the gateway.

"After him!" yelled Vernon-Smith. "Back up, you fellows!"

A score of excited fellows rushed into the road after the Bounder. They saw a slim, active figure leap a hedge and vanish. The Bounder plunged savagely through the hedge, the Famous Five scrambling after him.

They had a distant glimpse of a running figure disappearing into the shadows of Friardale Wood.

Two-gun Sanders was gone!

Herbert Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth as he came to a breathless halt.

"He's got away, Smithy!" panted Bob Cherry. "But what the dickens—who was he, and what——"

The Bounder snarled.

"His name's Sanders, and he came here to crack my nut, to keep me away from that Texas ranch——"

"Wha-a-t?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"And he would have got it with it, too, if that fat fool Bunter hadn't butted in, goodness knows how. I never knew he was there, and that blighter couldn't have. That fat ass——"

"But why?" gasped Bob. "Why should he——"

"What the dickens——" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Oh, let's get back!" grunted the Bounder. "I've got to get on the telephone to the police station. They'll get him all right. He'll find that this country isn't like Packsaddle!"

The Bounder hurried back to the gates, Harry Wharton & Co. following him, breathless and amazed. They found Greyfriars in a roar of excitement from end to end.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Wanted!

"**B**UNTER——"

"Help!"

"Bunter, what——"

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Bunter!" roared Mr. Quelch.

He grabbed the fat junior by the shoulder.

Billy Bunter, stopped in full career, spun round his Form-master.

Crash!

It was Mr. Sanders' revolver that went to the floor. It crashed almost at Mr. Quelch's feet, and he jumped.

Bunter had forgotten that it was in his hand. He had snatched it from Two-gun Sanders in time to prevent the butt from crashing on Vernon-Smith's

head, and it was clutched in his fat paw as he bolted out of the visitors' room. It crashed, and rolled over at the feet of the astonished Remove master.

"What—what—what is that?" stammered Mr. Quelch.

"Leggo!"

"Bunter—"

"He's after me!" yelled Bunter. "Help! Fire! Murder! He's murdered Smithy! I say, help! Leggo!"

The fat junior gave a terrific wrench and got away from Mr. Quelch. Before the Remove master could clutch him again he vanished.

Mr. Quelch, in alarmed amazement, picked up the object Bunter had dropped, and his eyes bulged as he realised that it was a six-chambered revolver, fully loaded.

He stared at it. He almost goggled at it. A six-gun was an everyday sort of thing where Mr. Sanders came from, but it was a remarkable and unusual article at Greyfriars School.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

The whole House was alarmed now. Fellows were shouting and running in the quad; passages and stairs echoed to voices and footsteps.

Mr. Quelch hurried to the door, the revolver held in a rather gingerly manner in his hand. A crowd had gathered there, staring out.

"What has happened, Wingate?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I—I hardly know, sir!" gasped the Greyfriars captain. "I heard shouts for help, and met a man running. He knocked me over and ran out of the House. I think a lot of the fellows are after him."

"A—a—a man! But who—what—how—" stammered Mr. Quelch.

"What—what's that, sir?" exclaimed Wingate, staring at the revolver in Mr. Quelch's hand.

"I took this from Bunter—or, rather, he dropped it, and I picked it up," answered Mr. Quelch. "I cannot imagine how or why—I found Bunter running, in a state of terror, and this dreadful weapon in his hand."

"That man you took to the visitors' room, sir," said Hobson of the Shell. "I saw him with you—"

"What do you mean, Hobson? What—"

"That's the man who was running, sir!"

"Bless my soul! Are you sure, Hobson?"

"I saw him cut into the quad, sir. There's about twenty fellows gone after him out of gates."

"That man called to see Vernon-Smith. Wingate, please hurry at once to the visitors' room and see if Vernon-Smith is there."

"Here he comes now, sir."

"Oh!" Mr. Quelch looked at a little crowd of breathless juniors coming back to the House—the Bounder and the Famous Five and several others. "Vernon-Smith, come here at once! Has anything happened in connection with the man who called to see you from your father?"

"He never came from my father, sir," answered the Bounder. "I was expecting to see a man named Buck—"

"That was the name he gave—"

"His name is Sanders, sir, and he never came from my father. He attacked me in the visitors' room," answered Vernon-Smith. "He was going to crack my head with the butt of a pistol—"

"Vernon-Smith!"

"And he would have done it, sir. He had me pinned on the settee, and I

should have got it the next second, only Bunter—"

"Bunter?"

"Yes, Bunter, sir—he was hiding behind the settee—goodness knows why—and he grabbed the pistol away—"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Then—then that is why Bunter was running up the passage with this—this deadly weapon in his hand!"

The Bounder glanced at the revolver.

"That's it, sir. Bunter grabbed it just in time, or my nut would have been cracked!"

"This—this is amazing!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "The man gave the name of the man expected here, and I had no suspicion. The police must be informed of this at once. Follow me to my study, Vernon-Smith."

Mr. Quelch hurried back to his study, the Bounder following him. The crowd of Greyfriars fellows were left in a buzz. It was a spot of excitement such as the school had never experienced before, and every fellow was eager to hear more.

"Where's Bunter?" called out Bob Cherry.

"Anybody seen Bunter?"

"The wherefulness is terrific."

"Bunter! Bunter!"

Billy Bunter was not to be seen or heard. Exactly what had happened was known only to Vernon-Smith and Bunter, and as Smithy was in Quelch's study, Billy Bunter was in great demand to tell the thrilling story.

But Bunter seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Half an hour ago Skinner had been hunting him; now nearly all the Remove were hunting him, and they had no more luck than Skinner. He was not to be seen in the passages, he was not in the quad, he was not in Hall, and he was not in the Rag.

Evidently that gunman had frightened Bunter out of his fat wits, and he had packed himself somewhere safely out of sight.

"The fat ass must be somewhere!" exclaimed Peter Todd. He looked into Study No. 7 in the Remove. He had already looked in once without seeing anything of Bunter. Now he looked again—and this time he stooped to look under the table, and then looked into the corner behind the armchair.

Then he chuckled.

Looking over the top of the armchair-back, he had a view of the summit of a fat head.

There was Bunter!

Peter Todd stared down at that fat head; then he picked a cushion out of the armchair and tossed it up to fall just behind the chair-back.

Plop!

"Yarooop!" yelled Bunter.

The cushion landed fairly on the fat Owl's head.

Billy Bunter roared as he tumbled over. He bounded up with a howl of terror.

"Ow! I say, I'm not here! Keep off! Help! Murder! Fire! Yarooop! Keep off, you beast! Oh crikey!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That sounds like Bunter!" came Bob Cherry's voice from the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush to Study No. 7 at once. A fat figure came shooting out of the doorway.

Bob Cherry grabbed it by one fat shoulder. Harry Wharton by the other.

"Hold on, Bunter—"

"Stop, you fat ass—"

Bunter struggled frantically.

"Ow! Leggo! Gerraway! He's after me—"

"Who is?" gasped Bob.

"That gunman!" howled Bunter.

"Lemme go! He nearly got me in the study! Help! Leggo! I say, you fellows, he nearly got me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors. Evidently the frightened fat Owl was under the impression that it was the gunman who had rooted him out in the study. He had not stopped for one blink at Peter Todd.

"Leggo, I say! Lemme gerraway!" raved Bunter.

"You fat ass—"

"You blithering Owl—"

"It's Toddy—"

"The gunman's gone—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He blinked round through his big spectacles into Study No. 7. Only Toddy was to be seen there, doubled up with merriment. "Oh, Toddy, you beast! I thought you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I mean, I—I knew it was you, you beast! I say, you fellows, is—is—is that villain gone? Sure he's gone?"

"Bolting like billy-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Miles away by this time!"

"Oh, all right, then!" gasped Bunter. "I mean to say, I'm not afraid of him, of course—"

"You're not!" gurgled Bob. "Appearances are frightfully deceptive in that case, old fat man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm not afraid of the rotter if you're sure he's gone—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I jolly well took that revolver away from him when he was going to bang Smithy on the nut, anyhow!" yapped Bunter. "I'd have liked to see you fellows do it—and chance it! Pluck, if you like! I—I say, you're sure he's gone?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now tell us what's happened, you fat ass!" said Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter cast a cautious blink along the passage. He seemed uneasy lest that gunman might pop up all of a sudden. However, there was no sign of the gunman, and the fat Owl recovered his fat confidence and proceeded to tell the Remove fellows what had happened.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Telling the Tale!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH left Mr. Quelch's study with a grim expression on his face and a glint in his eyes.

He had given his astonished Form-master a succinct account of what had happened in the visitors' room, and Mr. Quelch was getting busy on the telephone, passing it on to Inspector Grimes at Courtfield.

Before long the gunman from Texas
(Continued on next page.)

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would be hunted far and wide, and he was not likely to be seen near Greyfriars again. He had left behind him his six-gun as a souvenir of his startling visit; it lay on Mr. Quelch's table, to be handed over to the police-inspector when he came.

That he would see anything more of Two-gun Sanders before the term ended Vernon-Smith did not suppose, but he had a very strong impression that he would see something more of him later if he carried out his intention of visiting the Kicking Cayuse Ranch in the holidays.

It was clear to the Bounder that somebody at Kicking Cayuse had a very powerful motive for keeping the son of Samuel Vernon-Smith away from that delectable spot in the wilds of Texas. He had not the slightest doubt that danger would dog his footsteps in the lawless country of Packsaddle, in the valley of the Frio river.

That was all that was needed to make the Bounder of Greyfriars absolutely determined to carry on. Whoever it was that had dispatched that gunman to frighten him off was going to learn that Herbert Vernon-Smith was not easily frightened. Hitherto he had been irritated and discontented by the Texas trip, which was not what he had wanted for the holidays. Now there was no inducement that would have made him abandon it. That—little as Mr. Sanders could have anticipated it—was the outcome of the gunman's visit to Greyfriars School.

So far as the Bounder himself was concerned, he was determined, but he realised that the other fellows whom he had invited to join him in the trip to Texas might have other views.

Certainly if they cried off at the prospect of danger they were likely to see the Bounder's lip curl with its most sardonic sneer. Still, he was going to give them their choice. They had a right to know what they were butting into and to change their minds if they liked.

He went up to the Remove passage to look for the Famous Five. He found that passage crowded with Remove fellows. In the midst of the crowd was Billy Bunter—evidently in a state of recovery from his alarm.

Skinner was in the crowd—with one eye shut, and eyeing the fat Owl savagely with the other.

Vernon-Smith came up the passage, and grinned as Billy Bunter's fat voice reached his ears.

"It was like this, you see," the fat Owl was explaining. "I thought it was that cad Skinner, when Quelch came in with that brute, and I got behind the settee—not that I'm afraid of Skinner, you know. I've jolly well blacked one of his eyes, and I'll jolly well black the other one, if I have any more of his cheek! You can tell Skinner so when you see him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!"

"You fat frump!" hissed Skinner. "You won't get away again—"

"Oh!" Bunter jumped. "Is—is the beast there?" The short-sighted Owl had not observed the black-eyed junior in the crowd. "I say, you fellows, keep that beast off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All serene, old fat man! Skinner isn't going to worry you," grinned Bob Cherry. "Get on with the thrilling story!"

"Look here—" began Skinner.

"Shut up, Skinner!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

"Now, then, Bunter—"

"Well, that's how it was," resumed Bunter. "They sat down on the settee, you see, and that brute—Sanders he called himself—had the pistol in his hand. I—I was watching him—"

"How was it he didn't see you, if you were watching him?"

"I was down behind the back of the settee, between it and the corner—see!" explained Bunter. "He never saw me there. He couldn't see through the solid back of a settee."

"But you could?" asked Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh? No. Wharrer you mean? Of course I couldn't."

"Then how were you watching him?"

"Oh, I—I mean—I—I wasn't exactly watching him! I—I was—was—was just watching, but I didn't exactly see him—see? Well, then his hand went up, with the pistol clubbed in it, to crack old Smithy's nut. Of course, I wasn't having that. Smithy's been rather a beast to me—you remember how ungateful he was, the day I fetched his letter up for him—and he got into a rotten temper, too, when I asked him to join my Easter party, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, do leave off cackling! As I was saying, he's rather a cad, and a rotter, and a beast, and a worm! And I'd jolly well say the same if he was here, too!"

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

The fat Owl had not observed Vernon-Smith join the crowd in the Remove passage. Everybody else had, but not Bunter.

"Cackle!" said Bunter. "But I'd jolly well tell that lout, Vernon-Smith, what I think of him! You wait till I see him! Still, as I said, I wasn't going to see his nut cracked; so I just chipped in. I grabbed that pistol away from Sanders, and walked out of the room with it."

"Walked?"

"Strolled," said Bunter. "Smithy was fearfully scared, but I wasn't. I—I was as cool as ice. I walked out, and met Quelch in the passage. I wasn't running past him, you know, and he never hooked me by the shoulder, or anything like that—"

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I said to him: 'Oh, here you are, sir! You'd better take care of this,'—and handed him the revolver. You fellows needn't think I was funky. I'm not the sort of chap to get into a funk, I hope."

"You hid behind that armchair in the study because you weren't funky?" asked Peter Todd.

"Beast! I—I was looking for a collar-stud—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Then that beast Toddy came in, and chucked a cushion on my head," said Bunter. "I didn't think it was that gunman after me—nothing of the kind. I wasn't keeping out of his way. I got behind that armchair to look for my fountain-pen—"

"As well as a collar-stud?" asked Bob.

"I—I mean a collar-stud—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" howled Bunter indignantly. "You'd have thought it pretty plucky, if you'd seen me handling that gunman. I'd like to see any of you fellows doing it. Catch me hiding behind an armchair. I was looking for a fountain-stud, as I said—I mean

a collar-pen—that is, a collar-bone—I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wasn't scared. Smithy was, but I wasn't. Poor old Smithy was speechless with funk. He called out to me—"

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

"I mean, nearly speechless. He called out: 'Save me, Bunter!' I said: 'Keep cool, Smithy! Leave the man to me!' My very words."

"You remember that part, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton, glancing round at the Bounder.

"Not quite," answered Vernon-Smith, laughing. "You fat, fibbing freak—"

"Oh, I—I didn't see you there, Smithy! I say—"

"I'd boot you up and down the passage, you frabjous porpoise, only you did grab that gun away from Sanders," said Vernon-Smith. "Blessed if I know how you had pluck enough to do it, but you did!"

"He really did that?" exclaimed Peter Todd. "Mean to say there's a spot of truth in what he's been telling us?"

"Just that spot."

"Well, wonders will never cease," remarked Toddy.

"Look here, Smithy, you jolly well know—"

"I know you grabbed that gun, and stopped that brute from cracking my nut," said Vernon-Smith. "You were frightened out of your silly wits, and bolted like a scared rabbit!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Well, now Bunter's done telling lies, you fellows can get out of the way, and let me get at him!" snarled Skinner.

Skinner was tired of rubbing his eye, and waiting for a chance at Bunter.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked the fat Owl. "I say, keep that beast off!"

"You can chuck that, Skinner!" said Vernon-Smith. "You're not going to touch Bunter!"

"Look at my eye!" howled Skinner.

"Well, you japed him, and one good turn deserves another. Anyhow, you're not going to touch Bunter! He's saved me from having my nut cracked, and I'm going to see him through!" said the Bounder coolly.

"You cheeky fool—"

"Same to you, with knobs on! Leave Bunter alone!"

Skinner breathed fury. He was not in the least disposed to leave Bunter alone, so long as his eye was the hue of the ace of spades.

But he did not want trouble with the Bounder—in which case, there was little doubt that his other eye would have assumed the same dusky hue. He moved away to his study, tramped in, and slammed the door. Which was a relief and a satisfaction to the fat Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 7. He was safe from Skinner now, and that worry was off his fat mind.

But that worry being off his mind, he was at leisure to reflect on another—the devastating disaster to his Easter party.

That Easter party was off—very much off. He was not going to old Joe Carter's for Easter. And the question remained unanswered—what was he going to do for the hols? Or, to be more exact, whom was he going to do for the hols? Billy Bunter wrinkled his fat brow over that problem, and he was still thinking it out, and still in want of a solution when the Remove came up to the studies to prep.



As the "gunman" sprawled on the floor, gasping, Billy Bunter rushed at him. A fat knee was planted on the sprawling man and a fat fist banged on his mask. Thump, thump, thump! "Help!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Come and lend a hand, you fellows!" The door was thrown open and Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull looked in.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter, Too!

"WHY not?" said Billy Bunter suddenly.

Prep was going on in Study No. 7—so far, at least, as two members of that study were concerned. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were at work; Billy Bunter was in the armchair, too busy with his problem to have time for prep.

Apparently Bunter's cogitations on that abstruse subject had led to some result. A satisfied grin spread over his fat visage.

"Why not?" repeated Bunter.

Peter Todd glanced up.

"Why not put in a spot of prep?" he asked. "Good idea, if you don't want Quelch to scalp you in the morning."

"Blow Quelch, and blow prep!" answered Bunter irritably. "I'm not thinking about Quelch, or prep, either."

"You'll think of both if Quelch puts you on con!" grinned Peter.

"Blow con! I say, Peter, do you know anything about Texas?" asked the fat Owl, blinking at Peter through his big spectacles. "It's in America, ain't it?"

"Sort of," agreed Peter.

"Is it in Mexico?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha! Not quite. Next to Mexico, in the United States, fathead! It's one of the United States—the biggest. But shut up! We haven't got Texas in prep!"

"Never mind prep! If you know anything about Texas, you might tell a chap, as I may be going there in the hols," said Bunter. "Are there Red Indians there, Peter?"

"Probably a few left," answered Peter; "not a lot!"

"They don't go on the warpath and

all that, and scalp a chap?" asked Bunter anxiously.

"Oh crumbs! No. You don't get scalped in Texas these days. You'll get scalped in the Form-room if you haven't done your prep!"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Do they speak English in Texas?" asked Bunter.

"No."

"What language do they speak, then?"

"American," answered Peter.

"You silly fathead! Talk sense!" hooted Bunter. "Do you know anything else about Texas, fathead?"

"Oh, lots! It was part of Mexico once, but was grabbed by the Americans, and since then it's been one of the United States. It's bordered on the south by the Rio Grande, west by New Mexico, east by the Gulf of Mexico, north by other States that I forget the names of. That do?" asked Peter.

"Are there any railways there?"

"No."

"No railways?" gasped Bunter.

"No; railroads."

"Well, that's the same thing, ain't it, you funny ass? I suppose there's railway stations and all that?"

"Not one. There's depots."

"Well, if there's railways, it must be more or less civilised," said Bunter. "Do they have hold-ups and such things there, Peter? I shouldn't like some beast to hold me up!"

"No danger at all, old fat man. Nobody in Texas could hold you up! You're too jolly heavy!"

"You silly chump!" howled Bunter.

Peter grinned, and went on with his prep.

Bunter snorted, and went on with his reflections.

Evidently the fat Owl was thinking of joining in the Texas trip. The idea rather appealed to Bunter.

True, he did not like the look of Mr.

Sanders; still less did he like the look of the six-gun that Mr. Sanders had left behind at Greyfriars. Still, it was Smithy who was Mr. Sanders' game, not Bunter. Moreover, it was probable that Mr. Sanders would be "run in" before long and would not return to Texas till he had served sentence in "choky." He would get three months, at least, for his exploits at the school that day—which would see the holiday party safe over the Easter holidays.

Bunter would have preferred Easter with his wealthy relative, old Mr. Carter. But it was not a matter of choice; it was a case of any port in a storm.

Smithy, anyhow, could hardly refuse to ask him after what he had done for Smithy. That was a trump card in Bunter's fat hand.

The Famous Five were going. If it was safe for them, it was safe for Bunter. Bunter was rather particular in the matter of safety.

So Bunter asked himself "Why not?"—and decided that there was no reason why not. He was going!

After prep the fat Owl rolled along to Study No. 1. He found the Famous Five gathered there, cheerfully discussing the Texas trip. Clearly, what had happened that day made no difference to them.

"I say, you fellows, you're going with Smithy all the same?" asked Bunter, as he blinked into the study.

"Eh? Oh yes!" answered Harry Wharton. "Why shouldn't we?"

"You're not frightened?" asked Bunter.

"Not a fearful lot," answered Harry, laughing.

"What I mean is, you fellows haven't my pluck, as you know! You think you'll be safe in Texas?" asked Bunter. "Fathead!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

"After all, if there's any danger, I shall be there to see you through," remarked Bunter.

"You will!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "I'm thinking of coming along," said Bunter carelessly—"I mean, I may consent if Smithy's very pressing. It will mean turning down a lot of other invitations. Still, if Smithy's very pressing—"

"The pressfulness will probably not be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can tell you chaps a good deal about Texas, if you'd like to know," went on Bunter. "I've just been asking Toddy—I mean, I'm pretty well up in geography and things, you know. Texas used to belong to—to Thingummy, and—"

"Did it, really?" gasped Bob.

"Yes; but it was grabbed by What-do-you-call-'em. They call railways railroads, and railway stations depots. It's bordered on the south by Something-or-other, and on the west by Thumgummybob, and on the east by I forget what. On the north there's something I can't remember."

"How does Bunter acquire all this knowledge?" gasped Bob.

"Well, I'm pretty well up in these subjects," said the fat Owl. "Just as well for you to know something about the country you're going to, you know! Is Smithy in his study? I'd better go and fix it up with him. If I'm coming, I shall have to write to all the people who've asked me for Easter—"

"It won't cost you much for postage!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

Bunter rolled out again, to fix it up with Smithy. It did not seem probable to the Famous Five that it would be fixed. They thought it more probable that the Bouncer would give Bunter a boot than an invitation for Easter.

But that proved to be a miscalculation.

Ten minutes later the Bouncer came into the study, with a scowl on his face.

"You fellows have settled that you're coming?" he asked.

"Yes, old bean."

"Do you mind if that fat slug sticks on?"

"Bunter?"

"Yes; that fat, frowsy, frabjous frump, Bunter!"

"It's for you to say, Smithy; you're running the show," said Harry Wharton.

"If you want Bunter—"

"I don't!"

"Then why—"

The Bouncer gave an angry growl.

"I'm under an obligation to the fat frump! You know what he did to-day when that brute Sanders was going to crack my nut. I should be lying in sanny now with a cracked head, doctors and nurses, and the whole bag of tricks—that would be my Easter vac., but for Bunter! I'd rather boot him; but I've told him he can come, if you fellows think you can stand him."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We've stood him before, old man, and we can stand him again. I fancy he will be sorry he came by the time he gets as far as Packsaddle!"

"Very likely. But he's coming."

And the Bouncer stalked away, evidently not the least little bit pleased or gratified by the latest addition to the party for Texas. It was rather fortunate that Billy Bunter did not require a hearty or cordial invitation before he joined up. The fat Owl looked into the study after the Bouncer had gone, with a cheery grin on his face.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

"It's all right, you fellows!" he said. "I've consented to come! I could hardly get out of it, really—Smithy was so keen—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Anyhow, I'm coming!"

And that was that!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Bumps!

"O H crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter.

He sat very still.

A few moments before, the fat junior had been dabbing perspiration from his fat face, and wondering irritably why all the flies of early April seemed to have a special fancy for that podgy visage.

Now he forgot both the warmth of the April afternoon and the flies.

It was the last half-holiday of the term, and Billy Bunter was on his way to Courtfield to look in at the pictures. Having missed the motor-bus, Bunter had to walk. It was an uncommonly warm spring afternoon. Bunter, at the present moment, was resting under the shade of a tree by the wayside. He had been resting there for about half an hour, and had not yet made up his fat mind to restart after the interval.

Sitting in the grass, with his podgy back against the tree-trunk, Billy Bunter faced the road, which was shut off by a fringe of hawthorn-bushes. Through the openings of the hawthorns he noticed, without heeding, a pedestrian who came along from the direction of the town.

But as that pedestrian came nearer, the fat junior took heed—his eyes almost popping through his spectacles, as he recognised a hard, clean-shaven face under a black bowler hat that seemed clamped down on a hard bullet head.

Since the visit of Mr. Two-gun Sanders to Greyfriars, nothing had been seen or heard of the man. He had not been "run in," as was generally expected—and the general supposition was that he had cleared off to a safe distance.

And here he was!

But for the hawthorns in front of Bunter, he would have seen the fat junior as he sat under the trees.

As it was, Bunter was screened from his sight. But, as he passed an opening in the bush, Bunter had a momentary, but distinct glimpse of the hard face under the black hat.

He passed on the next moment, and Bunter was very glad to see that hard face disappear. He listened to the footsteps on the high road—and his fat heart gave a jump as he heard them stop.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bunter

The man had come to a halt, not more than a dozen yards from the tree where Bunter sat in the shade. Bunter could not see him, and he could no longer hear him—but he knew he had stopped, and he listened intently. He heard, suddenly, the sound of footsteps coming back towards the tree.

Bunter had been feeling too tired to move! But at the sound of the gunman approaching, he ceased at once to feel too tired to move. He moved very quickly.

He was on his feet in an instant and backing round the trunk of the tree.

The man had not seen him—and Bunter was very anxious that the man should not see him. Mr. Sanders was

altogether too dangerous a character for Billy Bunter to want to meet him on a lonely road over a common. If Mr. Sanders saw him, he would probably recognise him as the fellow who had snatched his six-gun that day at the school; and in that case Mr. Sanders was likely to prove very unpleasant.

Bunter was behind the tree almost in the twinkling of an eye.

Why the gunman was approaching the spot Bunter did not know, unless he was, like Bunter himself, seeking a rest in the shade from the bright April sunshine. But the sound of footsteps showed that he was coming; there was no doubt on that point.

Bunter's first thought was to get out of sight behind the tree. But his next was—suppose the beast glanced round the trunk?

He clambered rapidly.

It was an old, thick, gnarled elm, and not difficult to climb—which was lucky for Bunter, for climbing was not his long suit! How he lifted his weight so rapidly Bunter never knew! But by the time the gunman was pushing through the hawthorns from the road, Billy Bunter was stretched on a branch ten feet from the ground.

He had intended to climb higher; but the sight of a black bowler hat in the hawthorns clamped him to that branch. He dared not risk being heard by the man below. In his haste he had clambered on a big branch that butted towards the road, and the black hat passed under it as the man from Texas arrived under the tree.

Overhead, Bunter watched the movements of that hat, with his eyes popping behind his spectacles. If the beast looked up—

He could not have failed to spot Bunter, in that case! Bunter was a good deal wider than the branch on which he had clamped himself.

But the gunman did not look up! Obviously, it never occurred to him that anyone might be in the branches above his head.

Billy Bunter was deeply thankful that he had climbed that elm, as he saw the black bowler pass round the trunk. Mr. Sanders was looking round the tree, apparently to satisfy himself that nobody was about.

For a few moments he was out of Bunter's sight. Then he came under Bunter's branch again.

Bunter, blinking down at the black bowler below, hardly dared to breathe.

What the man was up to was a mystery to Bunter. He did not sit down to rest in the shade—that was not his object. What other object he could have, Bunter could not guess.

Mr. Sanders stepped back to the hawthorns, and put his head through the bushes to scan the road. He drew it back again so quickly that Bunter guessed that he saw someone coming.

He wondered whether it was a policeman. No doubt the sight of a policeman would have caused Mr. Sanders to hunt cover promptly.

From the branch, Bunter could see over the top of the hawthorns. He turned his spectacles on the road.

It was not a policeman who was coming along from the direction of Courtfield. It was a big, burly, broad-shouldered man, with a rather untidy red beard, and a rugged face bronzed by sun and wind. He was dressed in a tweed suit that seemed rather ill-fitting to his brawny limbs, and a large hat with a slouched brim.

He was a total stranger to Bunter's

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573

eyes; but no stranger, evidently, to the gunman under the elm.

Bunter's spectacles turned on Mr. Sanders again.

His fat heart ceased to beat as he saw that the gunman was kneeling

close to the hawthorns, with a revolver in his hand.

The weapon was at a level, aimed at an opening in the bushes, which the bronzed man would be passing in a few minutes.

Kneeling there, out of sight from the

road, the gunman was as silent as a watching cat—finger on trigger.

Bunter blinked down at him in horror.

He knew now why the man was there! He had selected that spot as
(Continued on next page.)

LEARN TO PLAY FOOTBALL!

OUR INTERNATIONAL COACH

EVERY football "fan" who reads the newspapers—and there can't be many who don't—knows that first-class footballers are said to make elaborate plans for their games long before the matches start. It has even been suggested that many football matches are won in the dressing-room. That means that the plans and schemes which are made before the kick-off work out well, and help to bring about victory.

I remember the manager of York City, the surprise team of the season because of their doings in the F.A. Cup competition, telling me that their success had been brought about largely because of the success of the plans they made before their Cup-ties started. The goal by which Preston beat Arsenal in the Fifth Round of the Cup, and thereby made football fans all over the world lift up their eyebrows, was said to have been carefully planned beforehand. I could go on giving instances of matches which have been won because a new scheme, thought out at great length long before the kick-off, has worked.

Believe me, first-class footballers do go to great pains to work out these pre-match plans. There are very few League clubs whose players do not hold a "discussion hour" on the Thursday or Friday of every week, in which players and manager can talk together about the coming game. At these talks the manager is really no more than the chairman; all the players are encouraged to say their bit, and to suggest ways and means of beating the opponents who are to be faced in the coming game.

People like us only hear about these plans when they succeed. That is natural. If a side makes out an elaborate scheme for winning a match and then that match is lost, the players don't go around telling everybody about the plans which didn't work. If you have big ideas about something, whether it is football or anything else, and those ideas don't work out right, you keep them to yourself, don't you? Footballers are made of the same stuff.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

NOW to my big point. Whether the plans succeed or not, it is most essential that they should be made. You might say that if the footballers of a side are good and clever enough they will win their games, plans or no plans. But if you say that, you are wrong. The best of

Believe it or not, but many football games have been won before the start. Our special sporting contributor gives you some instances in this week's interesting article.

footballers can't play in their real form if they don't know what they have to do. Everything must be cut and dried before the players leave the dressing-room. Who is to take the penalty kicks and free-kicks; what is to happen if a player gets injured; who is to go in goal if the goalkeeper is hurt? Problems like these must all be decided before the game starts. If they are not, none of the players will know what to do when an emergency arises, everyone will get hot and bothered, and the play in general will suffer. Have it all settled before the kick-off.

The best way to make sure that all the players get to know their colleagues thoroughly is to let them play together several times. If I were a schoolmaster, whose job it was to arrange football matches amongst the boys, I would try to arrange that the same teams played together in every match for a month or so. Instead of "picking up" fresh sides every time, as I believe most of you do, I would prefer to see you choosing sides, and keeping to those sides for several games. I think that thus you would get to know the play of your teammates better, and, therefore, play better yourselves.

DISCUSS TACTICS

PERHAPS that idea of mine wouldn't work. If not, then a great deal can be done by the members of a football side having a talk together before the match starts. "Private" talks, between players who are to be directly concerned with one another's play, can be most useful for the purpose of working out little dodges, and talking over minor tactical points. Let the full-backs have a chat together, the half-backs have a pow-wow with the forwards, and so on. Such talks help to create a friendly spirit in a side.

In addition, a "communal" discussion amongst all the members of the team is necessary for the purpose of

arranging team tactics. What is the best way to tackle these fellows? Shall we go all out to score goals, or shall we concentrate on defence? Who is their most dangerous player? How can we put him off his game and stop him from doing damage? These are the sort of questions which must be answered.

They can only be answered fully if every member of the side takes a full part in the discussion. If you have an idea, out with it. If you know something about the fellows on the other side, tell your own colleagues about it. Never mind if it is a very small point. Someone may get a big idea from your little one. I don't advise you to try to make very elaborate schemes, such as I have told you are made by the big clubs before their matches. Keep your plans simple and clear. And make sure that you have the players on the side to carry out the plans you make. It is no good, for the sake of example, working out a scheme for letting the wing men score the goals if the wing men on your side aren't much good at shooting. The plans must be made to fit the players who are to carry them out.

I have told you that these pre-match schemes are important. At the same time, I don't want you to run away with the idea that they are everything. That is why I am finishing off with this story. The manager of a big football club was one day explaining to his team a new move he had thought of for scoring a goal. To make it clearer, he got a blackboard, drew on it a football field, with the twenty-two players all set out. Then he proceeded to show how the ball could be passed from one player to another until it was finally placed, quite simply, into the net. One player sat quietly throughout the explanation, and when it was over, this was his comment: "On your diagram of how to score that goal, the only people who have moved have been our own players. The other fellows have stood still." In actual fact, of course, the other fellows don't stand still. They have their say in the move; and that means, of course, that sometimes plans have to be changed because opponents do things they were not expected to do.

When that sort of thing happens, it is not possible to hold up the game for another discussion circle. Decisions regarding team tactics during a game have to be made quickly, without much thought. This is where the captain of a team can play such a big part.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

an ambush. He was ahead of the man in the slouched hat—and had been watching for a spot to lay in wait for him! He could not have selected a better one. Unseen, unsuspected, he watched the road, his revolver levelled, ready to pull trigger as soon as the man he was watching for passed the opening in the hawthorns.

The man in the slouched hat was at a little distance. But he was coming on with long, vigorous strides; and in a few moments more his footsteps came to Bunter's ears.

There was another sound, nearer at hand—a sudden creak!

It came from the branch that supported the weight of the fat Owl.

Creeaaa-ak!

Bunter gave a gasp.

He had not even noticed that it was an elm-tree when he climbed it. Had he noticed it, probably he would not have remembered that peculiarity of the elm—its liability to sudden snaps! The branch on which Billy Bunter was sprawled looked stout and strong enough; but its appearance was rather deceptive!

Creak! Snap!

"Ooooooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

The branch went—and Bunter went!

Where the branch went Bunter did not know, but he knew where he went himself! He landed square in the middle of the back of the gunman as he knelt crouching below—and he landed there with a terrific crash!

Two-gun Sanders gave one horrible gurgle and flattened out under Bunter, wriggling and squirming and moaning feebly, with every ounce of wind driven out of him. His finger crooked on the trigger, jerked; and there was a sudden, startling bang

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Gun-play!

BANG!

William Buck—more familiarly known on the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, in Texas, as "Buckskin Bill," jumped almost clear of the Courtfield road in his surprise.

From a fringe of hawthorn bushes by the wayside came that sudden bang of a Colt's revolver, and a bullet skidded across the road, only a few yards in front of his startled eyes, knocking up puffs of dust.

"I'll tell a man!" ejaculated Mr. Buck in amazement.

From behind the hawthorns came a mixture of sounds—the gasping and gurgling of a winded man and the terrified squeak of a frightened fat Owl!

"Ooogh! Groooooogh! Ooooooh!"

"Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Ow! Help! Oh scissors! Ow!"

Mr. Buck's long legs covered the ground swiftly. He would have been passing that opening in the hawthorn bushes in about a minute. Now he covered the distance in three seconds. He stared through the gap at the strange scene under the elm.

Face down, spreadeagled in the grass, lay Two-gun Sanders, squirming and gurgling for breath. Sprawled across his back was a fat schoolboy, squeaking with alarm.

William Buck stared blankly at that strange scene.

"I'll tell a man!" he repeated. "I'll surely tell a man from Texas! Say, bo, what's biting you?"

"Oooooogh! Oh crikey! Ow!" spluttered Billy Bunter wildly. "Oh lor! I say, where's my specs? Ow!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

Mr. Buck, grinning, stepped through the hawthorns, grabbed the fat junior by the collar, and lifted him to his feet.

Billy Bunter gave a howl of terror.

"Ow! Leggo! Keep off! Yaroooooh!"

"I guess I ain't going to hurt you me, buddy!" said William Buck. "Say, you tuck a tumble outer that tree? Yep! I'll say you're a tidy weight to fall on a guy! And then some!"

"Ooooooogh!" moaned Two-gun Sanders, still squirming and gasping for breath. "Wooooogh!"

Billy Bunter grabbed his spectacles, which had slid to the end of his fat little nose, and jammed them on again. He blinked at the bronzed man in the slouched hat.

"I say, look out!" he gasped. "I say—ow! That beastly branch broke, and I fell down—ow! Look out!"

"Buddy, I was sure born looking out!" assured Mr. Buck. "But mebbe you'll mention what there is to look out for?"

Billy Bunter, gasping, backed away from the spread-eagled gunman. He pointed to the sprawling Mr. Sanders, with a trembling, fat finger.

William Buck stared at the sprawling man.

As Sanders lay with his face in the grass, he had only a back view of the gunman. He noted the smoking revolver in the sprawling hand; but it did not seem to occur to him that he had been the intended target. In his own country, William Buck was not unaccustomed to gun-play; but he was not expecting it in a quiet road in the old country.

"Say, that guy has sure been loosing off promiscus!" he remarked. "I'll tell a man!"

"Look out!" gasped Bunter. "He was watching for you—look out!"

Two-gun Sanders made a move to rise. He was still gurgling spasmodically in a half-suffocated state. As his face appeared from the grass, William Buck gave a start, evidently recognising him now that he saw the hard features.

"Two-gun!" he ejaculated. "Say, what you doing so fur from Packsaddle, Two-gun? You are sure a long ways from your stamping-ground, old timer!"

Then the facts of the case seemed to dawn upon the puncher from the Kicking Cayuse Ranch. Sanders was clutching his revolver, as he dragged himself to his knees, in an effort to rise.

William Buck's hand shot to the back of his tweed trousers. Like the gunman, Mr. Buck packed his hardware on his travels; though, as a concession to the different customs of the Old World, he packed it out of sight! Now, however, it came promptly into sight.

A big, long-barrelled revolver glimmered in his hand, and the muzzle bore full on the gasping gunman. Mr. Buck's good-humoured, bronzed face suddenly grew as hard as steel.

"Drop that!" he said tersely.

Sagging on his knees, gurgling for wind, Sanders looked at him. He dropped his revolver into the grass.

"You was laying for me, was you?" inquired Mr. Buck.

The gunman muttered a breathless curse.

"Get on your hind laigs, Two-gun," said Mr. Buck, "and stick them paws of yourn over your cabeza! Pronto!"

Sanders, staggering to his feet, put his hands above his head.

Billy Bunter watched that proceeding with popping eyes. Bunter had seen this sort of thing on Western films. He had never expected to see it in real life. Now it was happening under his eyes, and his spectacles.

"Keep 'em up," said Mr. Buck, "and kick that gun over this way."

Sanders obeyed in silence. Mr. Buck picked up the gunman's revolver and slipped it into his own pocket.

The gunman eyed him evilly. But he stood quiet, with his hands lifted over his bowler hat.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

"Now, I guess you're going to put me wise, Two-gun!" said Mr. Buck. "I guess you was laying for me, when that fat guy dropped on you. You was going to shoot me up, from cover, like the ornery piecan you always was, Two-gun. I guess you forgot you ain't in the valley of the Frio now, hombre. They don't stand for shooting up guys in this here country."

"Aw, forget it!" snarled Sanders. "I wasn't aiming to shoot you up! I guess I was going to drop you with a spot of lead in your laig, to keep you from horning in where you ain't wanted, Bill Buck. But I sure have slipped up on it."

"You surely have!" grinned Mr. Buck. "Surest thing you know, Two-gun! I'll say I'm glad that fat guy nose-dived jest when he did—mebbe you'd have got by with it. If we was back on the Kicking Cayuse, I'd sure fill you so full of holes that cooky could use you for a colander, in the cook-house. Jump, you piecan!"

Bang!

Mr. Sanders jumped! So did Billy Bunter! The sudden roar of the six-gun startled Bunter more than it startled Mr. Sanders.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

For a moment the fat Owl fancied that the bronzed man was shooting Sanders. But it was not so bad as that!

The puncher from Kicking Cayuse was firing at Sanders' feet! Certainly, the gunman would have been hit if he had not jumped! But he jumped with the activity of a kangaroo. He jumped in time to save his toes!

The bullet crashed into the ground.

"Jump!" roared Mr. Buck.

Bang!

Sanders jumped again—again just in time to save his toes! The bullet grazed his boot as he desperately jumped.

"Oh crumbs!" gurgled Billy Bunter.

Leaning against the elm, gasping, the fat junior watched the scene as if fascinated. The manners and customs of the cow-country of Texas were rather new to Bunter. Buckskin Bill was "fanning" the gunman, as he would have called it—and Mr. Sanders was not going to be hit, so long as he jumped—but he had to jump, and he had to jump quickly, or the hot lead would have crashed through his toes!

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Grinning, the big cowman loosed off shot after shot, and, at every shot the gunman bounded, just saving his feet. Not till his revolver was empty did Buckskin Bill cease to play the "fanning" game.

Then Sanders came to rest, panting, his narrow, gleaming eyes burning with fury.

"You sure can jump a few, Two-gun!" said Mr. Buck. "I'll say I ain't never seen a gopher what had anything on you for jumping! Now you can beat it, you pesky piecan, and I'll whisper to you that I'm giving you a start."

He made a stride towards the gunman.

Sanders made a desperate bound through the hawthorns to the road. But quick as he was, he was not out of reach in time.

A heavy boot crashed on his trousers as he went, and fairly lifted him from



Bunter's little round eyes stared fixedly behind his big round spectacles, with a glassy look. "I—I—I say, you fellows!" he moaned. "I say, will you gug-gug-go to the kick-kick-kick-captain, and—and tell him to kick-kick-keep the ship steady? Oooooogh!" "Poor old Bunter!" sighed Bob Cherry.

the ground. With a yell, the gunman went sprawling into the road.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Buck.

Sanders was up in a second, and running.

Mr. Buck, chuckling, turned to the staring Owl.

"Say, buddy, I guess I'm obliged to you, a few," he remarked. "I'll tell a man! That guy Sanders is sure a pizen polecat! He sure is the world's prize skunk, and then some! Mebbe you can put a guy wise whether this hero trail will hit a shebang called Greyfriars!" he added.

Bunter blinked at him.

"You're going to Greyfriars!" he ejaculated.

"Surest thing you know."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Are you the man that Vernon-Smith's expecting?" He guessed now the identity of the big, bronzed man in the slouched hat.

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Buck. "You know that young hombre?"

"Oh, yes, rather—pal of mine!" answered Bunter. "I—I'll take you to the school if you like! This way!"

"You sure are an obliging guy!" said Mr. Buck.

Billy Bunter was more than willing to oblige Mr. Buck, by keeping in his company till he got off that lonely road! He quite gave up the idea of walking on to Courtfield, now that he was aware that Mr. Sanders was in the vicinity. He blinked uneasily up and down and round about, but there was no sign of the gunman to be seen now. Mr. Sanders was on his travels, and travelling fast!

"Come on, Mr. Buck!" said Bunter.

Mr. Buck's long legs were set in motion again—and Billy Bunter had to break into a trot to keep pace. The fat Owl was in a breathless and

perspiring state when they reached the gates of Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Forewarned is Forearmed!

"WHERE'S Bunter now?"

"Gone to the pictures."

"I suppose he'll be back for tea!"

"Bet on that! Catch him missing it!"

"Well, look here, I've got an idea for pulling that fat chump's leg, and getting Smithy off."

"My dear chap, you'll never make Bunter come unstuck! He's going to stick on to Smithy like glue."

"I tell you it's a wheeze!"

"Oh, all right! Carry on!"

Billy Bunter grinned as he heard those voices from the half-open door of Study No. 1 in the Remove.

He grinned—and came to a stop.

The Famous Five were in that study. Billy Bunter, coming up the Remove passage from the landing, was quite interested in the remarks that reached his fat ears.

As the Co. were aware that Bunter had gone to the pictures at Courtfield, they naturally did not suspect that he was, at that moment, within earshot of Study No. 1 in the Remove. They were, of course, quite unaware of the exciting happenings on the Courtfield road, which had caused Bunter to change his plans for the afternoon.

Bunter had not, after all, gone to the pictures. He had walked back to the school with Mr. Buck—and here he was! Vernon-Smith had met Mr. Buck at the door and taken him in to Mr. Quelch's study, to see the Remove master. Bunter had come up to the Remove, to rest his weary, fat limbs in

the armchair in Study No. 7. But he forgot that armchair now as he paused outside the door of Study No. 1 and lent an attentive, fat ear to the conversation within.

Evidently, those beasts had some scheme on for pulling his fat leg! Bunter was quite interested to know what it was!

"The fact is," Bob Cherry's voice went on, "Bunter won't like the trip when he gets going! He's such a mouldy funk—"

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

"And it's rough on Smithy," went on Bob. "He can't say no to the fat ass, in the circumstances, but he would be jolly glad if Bunter called it off."

"No doubt about that," said Harry Wharton. "But Bunter won't, fat-head!"

"Not likely!" said Johnny Bull.

"The likeliness is not terrific, my esteemed Bob."

"I tell you it's a wheeze, you fat-heads! Suppose a gunman—some pal of that blighter Sanders—got after Bunter, held him up with a gun—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What the thump—"

"Well, what do you think the result would be?" demanded Bob. "Think he would carry on with the trip if he fancied that a ferocious gunman was after him, like that brute Sanders after Smithy?"

"Hardly! But there isn't any gunman after him, you ass! What the dickens are you driving at?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Easy enough to provide a gunman!" chuckled Bob. "Wibley's got all the fixings in the property box in his study. He will lend me a hand making up as a gunman, too! Black beard and black mask, and a gun—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,573.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in Study No. 1.

Outside that study Billy Bunter grinned till his grin extended almost from one fat ear to the other! Bunter was fearfully interested now!

"A hulking gunman, with gun complete, corners that fat ass in his study," continued Bob. "If he's got all the pluck he tells us about he will be all right—right as rain!"

"If!" chuckled Nugent.

"The if-fulness is terrific."

"If he hasn't, it will feed him up with tripping to Texas. That will let old Smithy out—see?"

"Good egg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was another roar in Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter suppressed a fat chuckle. The Famous Five, evidently, were amused at the prospect of that jape on the fat Owl! So was Bunter!

"Well, I'll hike along to Wibley's study and get fixed up!" went on Bob. "You fellows keep an eye open for that fat chump, and tip me when he comes in."

"What-ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter tiptoed back to the landing. He rolled hurriedly down the stairs. Forewarned is forearmed, and the fat Owl had his own ideas how that jape was going to turn out!

Bob Cherry went up the passage to Wibley's study. The property-box of the Remove Dramatic Society was kept in that study.

His friends strolled down the passage to the landing, to keep an eye open for Bunter when he came in.

As it happened, they saw him sooner than they expected!

There was a sound of a fat grunt on the lower stairs, and a fat figure came labouring up.

Harry Wharton glanced over the banisters.

"Here he is!" he murmured.

The four juniors, grinning, looked down at Bunter! There he was, coming up the stairs!

That he had gone down those stairs only a few minutes ago they were not aware! Still less were they aware that he was fully informed of the plot that had been plotted for his benefit.

They smiled as he rolled past them on the landing and rolled up the Remove passage! They watched him roll into Study No. 7 and shut the door.

"Come on!" said Harry.

And they walked along to Wibley's study, to lend a hand in fitting out Bob Cherry as a bold, bad gunman from the wild and woolly West! There were many chuckles in Wibley's study as Bob assumed that fearsome aspect! And the japers were happily unaware that in Study No. 7 Billy Bunter was chuckling, too!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Bold!

"OH crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He had expected it! He knew what was coming, and forewarned was forearmed. But he was startled, and he gave a jump as his study door suddenly opened and a terrifying figure darted in and swiftly closed the door behind him.

It was a burly figure, in a rough coat, that hid him from neck to ankles. The lower part of the face was hidden under a thick, black beard. The upper part was covered by a black mask, through the eyeholes of which the eyes gleamed. On the head was a slouched hat. In the right hand was a revolver. Certainly, it was a "property" revolver, but it looked alarmingly like the real thing.

Billy Bunter sat bolt upright in the armchair. His eyes popped behind his spectacles at that alarming figure.

It bore no resemblance whatever to Bob Cherry. Bob's nearest and dearest relative would never have dreamed of recognising him.

Had not Billy Bunter overheard the plot in Study No. 1, there was no doubt that that plot would have been a great success. Bunter's howl of terror would have awakened all the echoes of the Remove passage.

As it was, Bunter jumped—and then sat tight. His fat hand, behind him, closed on a cushion that he had placed in readiness.

"Stick 'em up!" roared the masked man, levelling the property gun at the fat face of the Owl of the Remove.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter.

"Wha-a-t?" gasped Bob, quite taken aback.

"Yah!"

Bob Cherry stared at the fat Owl through the eyeholes of the mask over the levelled gun!

Amazing as it was, the fat junior showed no sign of funk.

A stouter heart than Billy Bunter's might have quailed when a masked ruffian rushed into his study and levelled a revolver. But Bunter did not quail. He did not turn a hair.

"Say, bo, I guess you get it right where you live if you don't stick up your hands pronto!" roared Bob, flourishing the revolver. "You don't want to fool around with Six-gun Sam of Packsaddle! I'm telling you!"

"Yah!" repeated Bunter, undaunted.

"You fat chump—I—I mean, you dog-goned piecan!" roared the masked man. "You want me to fill you with lead! Look here, you big stiff, I guess I've horned in here to chew the rag with you a piece! You get me? I reckon you're aiming to hit the trail for Texas with that young guy Vernon-Smith. Spill it!"

"That's right," said Bunter calmly. "From what I hear, Smithy will be going into danger, so I feel bound to go along and protect him."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped the astonished gunman.

"Shoot, if you dare!" continued Bunter recklessly. "You can't frighten me with a revolver, you villain! Yah!"

"I guess you gotta give up that trip to Texas, bo, or I sure will spill your juice all over this here shebang!" hissed the gunman.

"Never!" said the undaunted Owl. "I'm bound to go and see Smithy through. The other fellows who are going with him haven't much pluck and—"

"What?"

"Rather a funky lot, in fact! I dare say you could frighten them easily enough—especially Bob Cherry—"

"Why, you—you—"

"But you can't scare me! No fear!" said Bunter contemptuously. "I handled a gunman all right the other day, and I'll handle you, too!"

His right hand went up, with the cushion in it.

Whiz!

Crash!

Bump!

The Greyfriars gunman was taken entirely by surprise.

According to programme, Bunter ought to have been howling with terror, in a state of palpitating funk! Instead of which, he regarded the levelled revolver with disdain, and hurled a cushion at the gunman's head! Before the gunman knew it was coming, it came!

Bob Cherry went over backwards. The cushion landed fairly on his black mask and his black beard, and bowled him over like a skittle.

The property gun flew from his hand, and the slouched hat from his head. He bumped down on his back, on the floor of Study No. 7, with a heavy bump.

As he sprawled there, gasping, Bunter rushed at him. A fat knee was planted on the sprawling gunman, and a fat fist banged on his mask.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

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That's a high spot in the grand story of the famous chums appearing in today's issue of The GEM—

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"Oh! Ow! Oooh!" roared the gunman.

Thump, thump!

"Help!" yelled Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, help! I've got him! I say, come and lend me a hand! Help!"

"Yaroooh! Gerroff!" shrieked the gunman.

Thump, thump!

"Help!" roared Bunter.

Billy Bunter had no doubt that four fellows were quite near the door of Study No. 7, in the Remove passage. He was right—they were. They were expecting to hear the frantic howls of a terrified fat Owl. What they heard was something quite different. They heard a heavy fall, a sound of vigorous thumping, and Bunter's roars for help.

"What the dickens—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Ow! Gerroff! You fat idiot—ow!"

Thump, thump!

"I say, you fellows, help!"

Harry Wharton threw the door open. It had been arranged for the Co. to keep off the scene. But it was clear—only too clear—that something had gone wrong with the programme! That jape was not going according to plan!

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wharton, as he stared at the wild and whirling scene in Study No. 7.

"Oh crikey!"

"Oh scissors!"

Bob Cherry, sprawling on his back, struggled and roared and heaved, as the fat Owl, kneeling on him, thumped and thumped.

"Oh scissors!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Stop it!"

He rushed at Bunter, and dragged him off the fallen gunman.

Bob Cherry sat up, dizzily. In ordinary circumstances, Bob could have handled the fat Owl, with one hand, with ease. But in that tussle, Bunter had had all the advantage, and there was no doubt that he had had the best of it.

"Ooooooooooh!" gurgled Bob.

He pressed his hand to his nose. That nose felt as if it had been driven into his head, like a nail! Bunter had got in six or seven thumps, and he had put his beef into them.

"I say, you fellows, leggo!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I say, lend me a hand—seize him—collar him—he's a gunman, you know, like that beast Sanders—"

"You silly ass!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"You potty porpoise!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Look at him!"

Really, it was surprising that Bunter had not recognised that gunman already. His thumps had knocked the mask off, and the black beard was hanging to one of Bob's ears by a single wire! Bob's face, crimson, was fully revealed to the general view! Perhaps Bunter had not wanted to recognise him!

"Ow! Yow! Wow!" gasped Bob. "Oh my nose! Wow! My eye! I'll burst that fat villain all over the study! Wow!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"It's Bob, you fat chump!" roared Johnny Bull. "It's a jape, you blithering idiot!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Can't you see it's Bob Cherry, you howling ass?" yelled Nugent.

Billy Bunter turned his spectacles on the panting figure on the floor. His fat lip curled. An expression of ineffable scorn overspread his fat features.

"Oh! It's a jape, is it?" he sneered. "Yes, I can see now that it's a jape! You fancied you could frighten me, did you? Yah! Fat lot you can frighten

me! I'm not so easily scared as some fellows."

Nugent gave Bob a hand up. The hapless gunman staggered to his feet, gasping for breath, and dabbing his nose, from which a thin stream of claret was exuding. He glared at Billy Bunter as if he could have eaten him.

The other fellows stared at the fat junior. That jape had been a ghastly frost! Bunter had not been scared! That was clear! The amazing pluck displayed by the fat Owl was really a little difficult to understand. But there it was!

"I—I—I'll burst him!" gasped Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Blessed if I make it out!" said Harry, blankly. "Hold on, Bob—"

"Look at my nose!" roared Bob.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, dodging round the study table. "I—I thought he was a gunman, of course—"

"You didn't!" yelled Bob. "You fat spoofer, you got on to it somehow—ow—wow—I jolly well know you spotted it somehow, or you'd have been scared out of your skin, you fat villain—ow!"

"Oh," gasped Harry. "Was that it? Did you—"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Of course, I thought he was a gunman—rushing in on me like that! I never knew it was Bob Cherry! How could I know anything about it, when I was gone to the pictures while you were talking in your study?"

"You heard us—" yelled Bob.

"No, I didn't!" yelled back Bunter. "How could I hear you, when I was at the pictures! Why, Wharton himself told you I was gone to the pictures, and you said I should be back for tea! I was miles away when I heard you—I mean, when I didn't hear you—not a syllable."

"I'll burst him all over the passage—I—I—I'll scrag him—I—I—I—" gasped Bob. "The fat villain knew it was me all the time, and he—what are you laughing at, you silly idiots? Look at my nose! What is there to cackle at? I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll burst him—I'll—"

"Cut, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

And the Co. gently but firmly restrained Bob, while Bunter dodged out of the study.

"He, he, he!" floated back, as Billy Bunter departed.

Bob Cherry, with deep feelings, went along to the tap at the end of the Remove passage, to bathe his nose. It needed it!

Billy Bunter rolled away with a grinning fat face! Bunter had not been scared into calling off the trip to Texas—Bunter had demonstrated that he was not afraid of a gunman; not at all events, when that gunman was a Remove fellow got up in an assortment from Wibley's property-box! Billy Bunter felt that he had scored this time—and there was no doubt that he had!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Not Likely!

"SEEN Bunter?"

"No!"

"Isn't he on the train?"

"Not that I know of!"

"Oh!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith smiled. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another, rather dubiously.

Mr. William Buck, filling the doorway on the corridor of the train with his burly, brawny form, chewed an unlighted cigar.

The train was booming northward. Harry Wharton & Co. were on the first lap of their journey to the distant land of Texas.

The juniors had separated for a few days, when the school broke up for the holidays. They had to see the old folks at home, and to make preparations for the trip. They had arranged to gather for that train, which was to convey them from London to Liverpool to take the steamer. The Famous Five had turned up in good time—and they had found the Bounder waiting for them with Mr. Buck. Bunter had not been seen.

It was like Bunter, of course, to be late! And if Bunter was late, it was obvious that the Liverpool express could not wait for him. Neither could the steamer. And Herbert Vernon-Smith was even less likely to wait, than the train or the steamer!

Bunter had glued on to the party for Texas. In view of the service he had rendered, Smithy had had to agree, feeling that it was up to him. Neither would he have taken any active measures to make Bunter come unstuck, so to speak. But there was no doubt that, had Bob Cherry's gunman wheeze been a success, the Bounder would have been pleased—and there was no doubt that he was pleased that the fat Owl had missed the express.

"Then—Bunter's left behind!" said Harry Wharton, slowly.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"Looks like it!" he answered. "Still, perhaps he's thrown us over to take on some of those pressing invitations he's told us about."

"The perhapsfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

The Famous Five looked—and felt—rather uncomfortable. Had the fat Owl called it off, it would have been one thing—but leaving him behind in London was quite another.

"I suppose we couldn't ask them to keep the train back because that fat ass didn't choose to turn up in time?" said the Bounder sarcastically.

"Hardly. But a later train—" said Bob.

"Rot!"

"H'm! That fat duffer is short-sighted; he mightn't have spotted us."

"You miss him an awful lot?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"No, ass. But—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bob.

It was too late for anything to be done, anyhow. And it was Smithy's party; and if Smithy chose to start without one member, it was Smithy's business. Certainly, the fact that Billy Bunter was left behind was not likely to spoil the trip for the rest of the party. It was likely to enhance its success. Still, the chums of the Remove did not like to think of the fat junior rooting and blinking up and down an immense station for a party that had gone off and left him behind.

"The fat ass knew the time of the train, and knew that we shouldn't wait!" said Vernon-Smith. "And that's that!"

That, undoubtedly, was that!

"The blithering chump didn't understand what he was butting into, either!" went on Smithy. "We shall have to rough it a good bit when we get out there, and that fat chump can't rough it. We shall very likely barge into a spot of danger. Is danger in Bunter's line?"

"Not quite," agreed Harry Wharton.

"I had to let him stick on; but if he chooses to come unstuck, more power

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to his elbow!" said Smithy. "The fact is, I'm jolly glad!"

The Famous Five made no rejoinder to that. They could quite understand Smithy's feelings on the subject, but they could not help feeling a little worried about the fat Owl. There was a spot of ruthlessness in the Bounder, which did not quite harmonise with the views of the other fellows.

"You haven't seen anything more of the Sanders bird since we broke up at Greyfriars, Smithy?" asked Frank Nugent, by way of changing the subject.

"No. I fancy he cleared off after the day he met Buckskin Bill," said the Bounder, laughing. "I still can't make out why he wants to keep us away from the Texas ranch. There's something going on there that somebody doesn't want me to spot—goodness knows what! Bill doesn't know, either."

Mr. Buck shook his head.

"Nope!" he said. "I guess it's got me beat to a frazzle! I sure was surprised a few when I saw that guy Sanders; I sure was surprised a whole lot. I guess there's some gun game on."

"Some what?" asked Bob Cherry.

The chums of the Remove had picked up quite a lot of the American language from Fisher T. Fish, but their vocabulary was far from complete.

"Shenannigan!" explained Mr. Buck.

"Which?" murmured Nugent.

"Double-crossing!" further elucidated Mr. Buck. "There's some double-crossing going on, I reckon, at Kicking Cayuse, and they don't want it to be spotted. But I sure ain't wise to it. I guess somebody's sent Two-gun over to see that Mr. Vernon-Smith's son don't come out to the ranch. But I'll tell a man, it's got me beat!"

"Sanders doesn't belong to the ranch?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Nope! He jest hangs out at Pack-saddle; he gineraly runs a poker game at the Red Flare," said Mr. Buck. "I was sure surprised to see him on this side of the pond. But I'll say that he won't worry us none arter I fanned him with lead! I sure did make that guy jump!"

"But when we get out to Texas——" said Bob.

"I guess you'll be O.K. on the Kicking Cayuse," said Mr. Buck. "Barney Stone and the bunch will see you through, you bet, if that cuss gets cavorting around. It's got me beat what the game is; but he won't be able to worry you none when you hit the Kicking Cayuse."

What the mysterious "game" was was evidently a puzzle to Buckskin Bill, as well as to the Bounder and the Co.

Some person, or persons, unknown, it was fairly clear, wanted to keep Mr. Vernon-Smith's son from visiting the ranch the millionaire had purchased on the banks of the Rio Frio.

Whether it was Mr. Sanders himself, or whether Mr. Sanders was acting for some other person in the background, they could not tell; but it was plain, from the gunman's actions at Greyfriars, that the unknown enemy would not shrink from desperate measures. Still, when they arrived at the ranch, they would be under the protection of the foreman and the "bunch"; and on the journey out they had Mr. Buck to "keep tabs" on them, as he described it.

Anyhow, a spot of danger on the horizon did not affect their spirits, and they were looking forward keenly to riding "cayuses" on the rolling prairies

of Texas, and perhaps joining the bunch in "punching" cows.

Mr. Buck strolled up the corridor to smoke his cigar, leaving the juniors to themselves.

"I wonder——" began Bob Cherry. He checked himself at the unpleasant expression that came over Vernon-Smith's face.

"Bothering about that fat ass Bunter?" sneered the Bounder.

"Well, I was rather wondering what had become of him," said Bob. "He must have intended to turn up for this train."

"Stopped on the way to feed, most likely, if he had any money," answered the Bounder. "Bit of luck for us, anyhow!"

"Oh, really, Smithy——" said a fat, familiar voice.

Six fellows jumped as if moved by the same spring. Six heads fairly spun round to the doorway of the corridor lately vacated by Mr. Buck.

A fat figure filled that doorway now. A pair of big spectacles gleamed in at the Greyfriars fellows.

"Bunter!" gasped Bob.

"Bib-bub-Bunter!" stuttered the Bounder.

"Or his ghost!" grinned Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, I wondered if you'd missed the train!" said Billy Bunter. "I couldn't see you anywhere, so I got on the train——"

"Oh!"

"I've been rooting up and down the train for you ever since. I've found you," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, did you think I'd missed the train? He, he, he! Not likely!"

"The not-likeliness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Herbert Vernon-Smith's face was rather a study. Five other faces were grinning. Billy Bunter had not, after all, missed that train. It was, as he said, not likely! It was not likely at all!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Bunter Begs for It!

"I SAY, you fellows—— He, he, he!"

"What's the joke, fathead?"

"That chap Buck—he, he, he! —seasick!" chortled Bunter. "He, he, he!"

Bunter was amused.

Harry Wharton & Co. were on the deck of the liner, churning down the Irish Sea, when the fat Owl joined them, grinning all over his fat face.

"Making no end of a row!" grinned Bunter. "He, he, he!"

"Anything funny in being seasick, you fat duffer?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter evidently thought that it was funny. So far, the fat Owl had felt no symptoms of inward trouble. But Mr. William Buck had struck trouble almost as soon as the steamer pulled out of the Mersey. The wildest buckjumper on the Kicking Cayuse Ranch would not have disturbed Mr. Buck, but the insidious motion of the sea had a dire effect on him.

"He's lying down in his cabin now," grinned Bunter, "gurgling—he, he, he! —and groaning—he, he, he! —and gasping! He, he, he!"

"It won't seem so funny when your turn comes!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I'm a pretty good sailor,

you know. I expect you fellows will be gurgling soon! He, he, he!"

"The gurgleness will not be terrific, my esteemed, idiotic Bunter!"

"Oh, you're bound to get it!" said Bunter. "The way to keep off seasickness is to keep perfectly fit, you know, and in absolutely good condition! That's where I come in strong."

"Oh crumbs!"

"You're looking a bit green, Smithy, and——"

"You silly owl!"

"Beast! You're going rather pale, Wharton——"

"Fathead!"

"Like me to call the steward, Nugent?"

"Idiot!"

"Well, you'd better keep a basin handy!" advised Bunter. "You fellows ain't fit like me, you know! I'll bet you'll get it! Feel it coming on, Bob?"

"No, ass!"

"You're looking rather weird, Inky! You can't turn pale—he, he, he! —but you're looking rather yellow! What about a bit of fat bacon?" grinned Bunter.

"What about a trot along the deck?" suggested Bob Cherry. He was getting a little tired of Billy Bunter's bright and genial conversation.

"I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you! If that's what you call manners——" hooted Billy Bunter indignantly. "I say, Smithy, will you listen to a chap? If this is the way you're going to treat a guest, I shall be sorry that I consented to come on this trip!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave him an expressive look. Since Billy Bunter had failed to miss the express at Euston, Smithy had made up his mind to it; but it was probable that he was not fearfully pleased. Smithy was not gifted to any great extent with the cheery good-humour of the Famous Five. Bunter, it was true, was a guest; but his manners and customs as a guest might have irritated a more patient host than Smithy.

"Well, what is it, you fat ass?" he grunted.

"I shouldn't call you names if you were my guest at Bunter Court," said the fat Owl, with dignity. "Still, I don't expect much from you in the way of manners, Smithy. But there's one thing that we'd better settle right at the start. It was understood—clearly understood—that all expenses would be paid on this trip. Not that I should care one way or the other, but owing to leaving Bunter Court in rather a hurry, I came away with hardly any money. The fact is, I left my notecase behind."

"How lucky that there was nothing in it!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! When we get to New York I shall cable for some cash," said Bunter. "In the meantime I shall expect you to pay up, Smithy. If you're going to be mean——"

Vernon-Smith's right foot rose about an inch from the deck, but he dropped it again.

Bunter, unaware of his narrow escape, went on:

"This sea air gives a fellow an appetite. It's another hour to dinner. Now, it's not much I eat, as you fellows know——"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But the fact is, I'm hungry," said Bunter. "I could do with a snack. Not much, of course; a cake or two, perhaps a pie, a box of chocolates, and a few candied fruits—just a spot of light

refreshment, you know. You can get anything you like on these steamers if you pay for it. The only drawback is that it's such a jolly long time between meals. If Smithy's going to be mean, I shall have to ask you fellows—"

Again the Bounder's foot rose an inch from the deck; again he replaced it. The Famous Five grinned.

Smithy evidently was yearning to kick his fat guest from one end of the liner to the other. They wondered how long he was going to refrain.

Rather to their surprise, a grin overspread the Bounder's face. Some thought seemed to have come into his mind that restored his good-humour.

"Leave it to me," he said. "You squat down here, Bunter, and I'll ask a steward to bring you something. I'm not going to be mean."

"Oh, good!" said Bunter.

The Bounder walked away.

The Famous Five, leaning in a cheery row on the rail, glanced at one another, a little puzzled to know what that grin on the Bounder's face implied.

Billy Bunter squatted in a deck-chair and blinked at them with cheerful satisfaction.

"That's all right, you fellows," he remarked. "Smithy's a bit of a bounder, and he's rather mean; but I don't see why he shouldn't play up—what? It's rather a catch for him to get a fellow like me to join up for a holiday abroad. He can let people know that he knows me at school. He scores there, you see."

In a few minutes a steward arrived with a tray.

Bunter blinked at that tray with satisfaction; in fact, he beamed at it. It was a well-laden tray. It was remarkably well-laden. It was almost mountainously piled.

"I say, you fellows, this is all right!" gasped Bunter.

And he started.

"Better go easy, old fat man!" grinned Bob Cherry. "If you surround half that lot you'll hit trouble."

"Oh, I'm never seasick!" Bunter's voice came muffled through plum cake. "I'm a pretty good sailor, you know—not like you fellows. Remember how sick you fellows were on the Channel one vap?"

"I remember how sick you were, you fat duffer!" said Harry Wharton. "You'd better chuck it after that cake."

"I'll watch it!" grinned Bunter.

A jam roll followed the cake. A chocolate roll followed the jam roll. Then a number of sticky pastries followed.

Bunter's fat face was sticky and happy and shiny. He was enjoying life! This, Bunter considered, was a ripping start. If the voyage to America continued as it had begun it was going to be a happy and prosperous voyage. Judging by that tray-load, Smithy was going to be anything but mean!

Champ, champ, champ, went Billy Bunter's podgy jaws. Everything on that tray was delightful.

But the Famous Five, as they watched Bunter, could not help thinking that there was going to be a reckoning after the feast. Vernon-Smith had rejoined the group, and he watched Bunter's performance with a sarcastic grin—a grin that the Famous Five understood now. But the chums of the Remove were getting a little alarmed.

"For goodness' sake, Bunter, chuck it!" said Frank Nugent. "Enough's as good as a feast, old fat man!"

"Eh? I've hardly started yet!" said Bunter.

"Oh crumbs!"

(Continued on page 28.)



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

READ the grand opening yarn of our great new Western series in this issue yet, chums? If so, I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I did. Vernon-Smith and his chums are booked for a lively adventure, what? But you've only had a taste of the thrills to come! Vernon-Smith has been warned that he will never reach Texas—that he will get no farther on the trip than New York. Does the Bounder get the wind-up? Not so as you'd notice it! He treats the warning with contemptuous disdain, with the result that his enemies stage a hold-up on the railroad to kidnap the millionaire ranch-owner's son. Thrill follows thrill in swift succession in next Saturday's hair-raising yarn, entitled:

"ON THE TEXAS TRAIL!"

By Frank Richards.

You can only make sure of reading it by ordering your copy of the **MAGNET** at the earliest opportunity!

Now let me deal with a letter that comes from Joe Dix, a Welsh reader living in Swansea. Joe, who is apparently an athlete, writes to ask me if I will give him a few hints on training for the hundred yards' flat race. The season for sports meetings at which running races are held is near at hand, so the few tips I am giving my chum here may be useful to other readers who contemplate entering for their school sports. It is necessary that one should learn to start promptly upon the report of the pistol. In an event such as the hundred yards, where the result often depends upon the fraction of a second, a race may be easily won or lost at the start. In the main, the majority of starts are alike; but that known as the "hand-spring" is perhaps the most popular. The left foot must be advanced to the starting line with the toes pointing straight down the course, and the knee bent until the hands can rest upon the ground. The right leg must be drawn back a comfortable distance, and set down firmly on the ground. Practically all the weight must be upon the hands and advanced leg. When the starting signal is received, a push-off should be given by the right leg, and the hands lifted off the ground at the same instant. The runner will thus get into his stride at once.

My chum must peg away at practising this start until he can get off absolutely with the report of the

pistol. He must always remember to run well upon the toes and take short, quick steps, as long strides are apt to retard the runner.

PLEASE NOTE

There are several gifts illustrated on page 11 which are quite simple to obtain in exchange for the coupons in tins of Rowntree's Cocoa. All you need do is to make sure your mother buys tins of Rowntree's, and then watch carefully and collect the coupons. Meanwhile, send for a Free Voucher and a complete list of gifts. You will find the address to send to in the Rowntree's Cocoa advertisement.

THE next letter comes from Richard Hanley, of Co. Kildare, Ireland. And what a long and interesting letter it is, too. Richard, who classes himself as one of the "Old Brigade," writes to express his appreciation and thanks for the pleasure and entertainment the reading of Frank Richards' yarns has afforded him during his twelve years as a reader. "Although schooldays to me are but a memory," he says, "I still cling to the old **MAGNET** like the ivy on the wall, and no matter where I happen to be—for I have to travel around a great deal in the course of my employment—I still look forward to reading the **MAGNET** as I used to when a schoolboy."

My Irish chum has asked me several questions, the answers to which may interest a number of "Magnetites." Naturally enough, Richard's first question is: "When are Harry Wharton & Co going to spend a vacation in Ireland?" Well, I'll leave that to Frank Richards to deal with, and that he will oblige in due course goes without saying. A series of head and shoulder drawings of the most popular characters at Greyfriars is the next request. As a matter of fact, a portrait gallery has already appeared in the **MAGNET**, and I have been contemplating republishing it again. If the request is strong enough, I will start the "gallery" right away. Answers to other queries are as follows: Standard cinematograph films in scrap lengths can be obtained from Gamages, of High Holborn, London, W.C. Newspapers bargain for the photographs they use, and payment may be anything from a guinea to £100, depending on the interest and rarity of the pictures.

YOUR EDITOR.

"It's too bad, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry, laughing.

"Eh? What do you mean?" asked the Bounder. "Isn't Bunter a guest that a fellow delights to honour? I shouldn't like Bunter to think me mean. Try those candied fruits, Bunter—they're good."

"I'm just going to, old chap; but I think I'll have the other jam roll first," said Bunter cheerfully. "And those meringues, too."

"Ye gods!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Bunter was breathing rather hard after his exertions, but he was feeling very happy and contented.

That happy contentment was not, alas, destined to last. The steamer gave a pitch on the chops of the Irish Sea, and Billy Bunter gave a sudden gasp and a start.

"Ooooh!" he ejaculated.

"Anything the matter?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, no; I'm all right! I'm n-n-never sus-sus-sus-seasick, you know—not like you chaps!" groaned Bunter. "I'm as r-r-right as r-r-rain! Groooh!"

Bunter's fat face was getting ghastly. His complexion was an art shade, between sea-green and pale yellow. His little round eyes stared fixedly behind his big round spectacles with a glassy look.

"I—I—I say, you fellows," moaned Bunter, "I say, will you gug-gug-gug—"

"What?"

"Will you gug-gug-go to the kick-kick-kick-captain, and—and tell him to kick-kick-keep the ship steady? Ooooh!"

"Poor old Bunter!" sighed Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! You needn't say pip-pip-poor old Bib-Bib-Bunter as if you thought I was going to be seasick, like that chick-chick-chap Bib-Bib-Buck! I'm never seasick. I'm a good sis-sis-sis-sailor! Groooh! Wooooh! Ooooh! Oh crikey! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I say—groooh!—I say—woooch!—I say, gug-gug-gug-go and tut-tut-tell them to turn back!" gurgled Bunter. "I—I dud-dud-don't want to gug-gug-gug-go to New York! I want to gug-gug-gug-get ashore! I want to gig-gig-get off this bib-bub-beastly steamer! I want to— Grooooooh!"

Billy Bunter folded up!

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Last Warning!

"NEW YORK," remarked Bob Cherry, "is the city of hustle. Full of pep and go. They may be pepping, but they're not going!"

"The gofulness is not terrific," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Bright sunshine streamed down on the city of New York. It shone on towering skyscrapers, on streets like canyons, on elevated railroads, sights novel and interesting to the eyes of the Greyfriars juniors. But there was, at the moment, a traffic jam on Broadway, and innumerable lines of cars were at a standstill—among them the car in which Harry Wharton & Co. were packed.

Mr. Buck was busy about baggage; but he had packed the schoolboys into a car and dispatched them to the hotel at which the party were to stay for a few days before resuming their journey to the south-west. Now they were held up and waiting patiently till the traffic moved on again.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched the endless traffic and the numberless crowds with cheery interest.

A newsboy suddenly detached himself from the sidewalk, and, dodging among the innumerable automobiles, reached the car in which the Greyfriars party sat.

"One of youse guys named Vernon-Smith?" he asked.

The Bounder looked at him.

"Yes," he answered. "What—"

A grubby hand reached into the car with a folded paper in it.

"A guy give me this for you!" said the newsboy, and, leaving the paper in the astonished Bounder's hand, he dodged back again to the sidewalk.

Vernon-Smith stared at it.

"What the dickens—" he exclaimed.

"Know anybody in New York, Smithy?" asked Bob.

"Not that I know of," answered the Bounder, puzzled. "Somebody seems to know me, though, judging by this."

The Famous Five eyed the Bounder rather curiously as he unfolded the paper and looked at it; they saw Herbert Vernon-Smith's brows knit as he read what was written thereon and a glint come into his eyes.

"By gad!" said the Bounder.

"What—" asked Harry Wharton.

"Look at it!"

Vernon-Smith passed over the paper, and the Famous Five looked at it together. It bore a brief message in typewriting, unsigned.

"Your best guess is to hit that steamer again, and hit it quick. You won't get further than New York! Last warning!"

That was all!

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry. "That's from—"

"Sanders," said the Bounder quietly. He rose to his feet and stared over endless traffic and thronging crowds; but if Two-gun Sanders was in that throng, he was not to be seen.

In the voyage across the Atlantic the Greyfriars fellows had almost forgotten the gunman from Texas. They were reminded of him now. They had no doubt that that unexpected missive was from Mr. Sanders; it could hardly have been from anybody else.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"We haven't seen the last of that rotter!" he said.

"I never thought we had!" said the Bounder. "I dare say he watched us coming off the steamer. This is a tip to turn back!"

He laughed.

"This looks as if there's a spot of trouble waiting for us in New York, you fellows. I've no doubt that blighter has got his eye on us at this moment. If he has, I'll show him exactly what I think of his last warning!"

Standing up in the car, the Bounder tore the missive across and across again and threw down the fragments; then he sat down, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"So much for Mr. Sanders!" he said contemptuously.

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific."

"Good!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.

"Think so?" grinned Bob.

"Yes, rather!"

"You're not afraid of Sanders?"

"Sanders? Who's Sanders?" asked Bunter. "Who's talking about Sanders? I was speaking of this candy—"

"That what?"

"Candy! I say, you fellows, it's good—jolly good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The traffic moved on again, and the Greyfriars party rolled on their way. If the gunman was watching them, as they had little doubt, he had seen the Bounder's contemptuous answer to his threat. Two-gun Sanders had no terrors for the cheerful party who were bound for the West.

THE END.

(Who is this unknown person who wants to keep Vernon-Smith and his party from visiting the ranch of the millionaire? And what are his rascally motives? His warning, however, doesn't worry Harry Wharton & Co. a lot; in fact, they're keener than ever to hit the Kicking Cayuse, as you will learn when you read: "ON THE TEXAS TRAIL!"—the second story in this exciting holiday series.)

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THE SWELL WHO HAD TO SWOT!

First Instalment of a Grand New Rib-Tickling Serial, starring Jack Jolly & Co., the laughter-merchants of St. Sam's.

By DICKY NUGENT

Binding, the page, poked his boohit head into the Junior Common-room at St. Sam's.

"Which the 'Ead wants to see the Honorable Guy de Vere?" he announced.

"Bai Jove!" The Honorable Guy de Vere uttered that dismayed cry. He sat up in his armchair with a violent, spasmodic start, a worried wrinkle on his aristocratic brow.

"Bai Jove!" he cried. "What does the old buffah want me for, Bindin'?"

"Which 'e never said, sir!"

"Sounds like trouble, old chap!" said Jack

Jolly, simperthetically. "Take my tip and stuff some exercise-books in your trowis!"

"Beggins' your pardon, Master Jolly, but I thought the 'Ead seemed to be in a werry good mood," grinned Binding. "When I left 'im, 'e was 'oldin' a letter in 'is 'and an' doin' 'igh-kickin' all round the study!"

The fellows in the Common-room looked surprised. For the revered and majestic headmaster of St. Sam's to be indulging in high-kicking stunts was very unusual. It sounded as if Doctor Birchmell was in a remarkably genial mood.

"Bai Jove! I wonder what's 'is all about!" eggshelled the swell of St. Sam's.

"Better trot along and find out," said Frank Fearless. "I don't advise you to keep the Head waiting, old sport—good mood or not!"

"Bai Jove! Perhaps you're right, deah boy!" And the Honorable Guy de Vere jammed his sellybrated monocle in his eye and hurried after the retreating skool page.

Any lingering fears he might have felt regarding this summons to the Head's dreaded sanktum soon vanished when he reached it. Doctor Birchmell was

obviously as pleased as Punch over something. He greeted the swell of St. Sam's like a long-lost brother.

"Welcome to my humble little den, De Vere!" he said, with a simpering smile. "Have a toffy, my dear boy!"

He dived a somewhat grimy paw into his trowis pocket and brought to light a stickie morsel which he disentangled from a piece of string. The Honorable Guy repressed a shudder and put it in his mouth.

"Ugh!—I mean, thanks, awfully, sir!" he cried. "Er—mite I ask now, sir, why you sent for me?"

"To tell you the grate and glorious news, De Vere—that's why!" grinned the Head. "I have received an invitation from your noble father, Lord Fitzboodle."

"Bai Jove!" "He wants me to spend the entire Easter hollerdays with you at Fitzboodle Castle!" chuckled the Head, gleefully. "Isn't this the most thrilling serprize of the term for you, my dear boy? Of corse it is!"

"Oh, gad!" gasped the Honorable Guy.

It seemed that he did not share Doctor Birchmell's delight. Far from being a most thrilling serprize, the Head's news seemed to strike him as the most garstly thing that could have happened.

"Here is your esteemed father's letter," rattled on the Head, cheerfully, as he opened a sheet of crested notepaper. "Lissen to this, my boy:

"Dear Doctor Birchmell,—I trust that this finds you as it leaves me at present. I am suffering from an attack of the gout, so please egg-cuse scribble. Dear Doctor Birchmell, I do not think that my son is getting on so well with his studies as I could wish. Now I have thought of a topping wheeze to put this right. What about you coming to stay with us at Fitzboodle Castle for the Easter hollerdays so that you can give the Honorable Guy extra swot? You will be very welcome and I am sure you will have a ripping time. Needless to say, the tuck here is spiffing. Hooping you will be able to accept this invitation, I remain, dear Doctor Birchmell,

Yours sincerely, FITZBOODLE."

A groan of anguish burst from the lips of the Honorable Guy. His monocle dropped out of his eye and dangled down the end of its cord. "Extra swot!" he gasped. "Extra swot in the hollerdays! An'

you to give it me, too! Oh, bai Jove!"

Doctor Birchmell frowned.

"Look here, De Vere, I hoop you're not going to cut up rusty over a meer trifle like extra swot. I don't suppose it will amount to more than six hours a day—and the rest of the time will be yours!"

"Help!"

"We're going to have a really ripping hollerdays at Fitzboodle Castle and I'm looking forward to it no end!" grinned the Head. "Hip, hip, hooray! Here's to our hollerdays!"

With these words, the Head seized the Honorable Guy de Vere round the waist and started waltzing him dizzily round the study.

By the time the swell of St. Sam's escaped, he was breathless from his violent exertions. Nevertheless, he did not, as might have been expected, stagger straight to his study for a rest on the couch. Instead, he returned to the Junior Common-room.

The Honorable Guy's eye was gleaming behind his monocle, as he hurried back to that famous apartment.

"Bai Jove!" he muttered. "If the old buffah is really goin' to be indicted on me ovah the Eastah hols, then there is only one thing left to do—to drag in some othas to share the burden with me. I'll see what I can do right away, bai gad!"

With these words, the Honorable Guy de Vere opened the door of the Common-room.

The Fourth Form fellows, of corse, were very anxious to know what the Head had wanted; but the Honorable Guy thought it best to keep a discreet silence on this matter.

"Sorry, deah boys!" he said, in reply to their inquiries. "The mattah we discussed was rathah private! By the way, Jollay, talkin' of othah mattahs, are you doin' anythin' special for the Eastah hols?"

"Nothing special, old chap!" grinned the kaptin of the Fourth.

"What makes you ask?" The Honorable Guy de Vere did not answer that question immediately.

"What about you, then, Fearless? An' you Merry? An' you Bright?" he asked, turning to each of Jolly's pals in turn.

Fearless and Merry and Bright shook their heads.

"We've no partickular plans," said Fearless. "Why?" The swell of the Fourth beamed at the Co. through his monocle.

"I'll tell you why, deah boys!" he chuckled. "Because I want you all to spend the Eastah hollerdays with me at Fitzboodle Castle!"

The eyes of the chums of the Fourth fairly gleamed.

"My hat! That's jolly decent of you, yung De Vere!" remarked Jolly.

That settled it. The heroes of the Fourth had booked themselves to spend the Easter hollerdays at the Honorable Guy de Vere's ancestral home.

They mite have thought twice about it had they known that Doctor Birchmell had been invited, too—and for the eggspress purpose of giving their host extra swot. But on the other hand their plezzure would not have been dimmed if they had been able to foresee the comical consequences that were going to flow out of their posh vacation.

Jack Jolly & Co. were fairly bubbling over with joy when breaking-up day arrived.

But they had one or two set-backs before the day had finished.

The first was that Lord Fitzboodle's Rolls-Rice failed to call for them. A telegram arrived from his lordship instead containing the brief words: "Come by train; car not available; eggsplain later."

Fourth were still in grate spirrirts when they left the skool. Doctor Birchmell was going to follow later and they still had no idea that he was going to be their fellow-guest at Fitzboodle Castle. As there was no Rolls-Rice, they hired the station hack and sat on the roof cheering like mad all the way to Muggleton Station.



The second set-back greeted them on their arrival at Fitzboodle Castle. Lord Fitzboodle, a stately figger in ermine robes and a gold coronet, was waiting on the terrace to tell them the news that the servants had all departed.

"Most frightfully annoyin', boys, what, what!" he said, in his refined way. "They've bagged the first prize in a football points pool between them an' now they've gone an' ditched me, by gad! This eggspains why I couldn't send the Rolls for you."

"Bai Jove! What are you goin' to do, patah?" asked the Honorable Guy de Vere.

"Personally, Guy, I am not affected, havin' been summoned abroad on urgent diplomattick bizzness," replied his lordship. "For the benefit of you an' your guests, however, I have engaged an entirely new staff through the local registry office."

"Bai Jove!" "You shouldn't have troubled, your lordship," grinned Jack Jolly. "We could have looked after ourselves."

It was then that the chums of the Fourth received Set-back No. 3.

"Probably you could, my dear boy," said Lord Fitzboodle. "But that duzzent apply to Doctor Birchmell, whom I have invited for the hollerdays to give Guy extra swot! Well, I hoop you will find the new staff efficient, boys! See that you make Doctor Birchmell at home, Guy, what, what!"

With these words, his lordship shook hands all round, then went down the steps to the waiting Rolls-Rice and drove off at a fewrius speed.

"It's a bit thick when a chap spoofs his own guests," said Frank Fearless. "I don't care for the look of this hollerdays a bit. With your pater away, De Vere, the Head will want to take charge of things completely. It will be as bad as being at skool."

"Let's call it off," suggested Merry, "and do a bunk before he comes!"

Then Jack Jolly had a branewave. "I know!" he grinned. "I've thought of a sure and certain way of getting Doctor Birchmell under our thumb. I'll disguise and pretend to be Lord Fitzboodle myself!"

"Who-a-at?"

"If De Vere calls me 'pater,' that will be good enuff for everybody!" said Jack Jolly. "As for the Head, once he thinks I'm Lord Fitzboodle he'll simply eat out of my hand."

For a moment there was silence. Then the Fourth Formers roared. "Good old Jack Jolly!"

"I'm glad you like it!" grinned Jack Jolly. "Now let's go indoors and I'll dress up as Lord Fitzboodle before the new servants arrive!"

(Looks as if the Head is in for a warm time at Fitzboodle Castle! You will find Dicky Nugent in his element next week, describing the meeting between the bogus lord and Doctor Birchmell. Don't miss it!)

HARRY WHARTON CALLING!

Let's talk about Bunter! Really and truly I don't particularly want to talk about Bunter myself. But at least 50 per cent. of the readers who write me seem to want to talk about nothing else, so perhaps it's time I gave the fat and fatuous Owl a little space.

William George Bunter is a puzzle. No mistake about that!

He's a porker, a pilferer, and a prevaricator, and everybody knows it—and yet most of the people who write me about him complain that I'm too hard on him!

Believe me, dear readers, if you had to put up with him for a term at a time, you would not wonder at fellows scragging him occasionally. Bunter really is the sticky limit at times!

And yet at the same time I'll grant you he has redeeming features. As Mr. Frank Richards remarks: "Bunter is a gregarious animal." He loves the company of other human beings. To my mind, that is decidedly a point in favour of Bunter!

Another peculiar thing about Bunter is that he is at heart thoroughly well-meaning. His behaviour is simply atrocious most of the time; but he doesn't mean any harm by it. Underneath his outer veneer of greediness, trickiness, snobbishness, and conceit lies a foundation of good will and geniality. Bunter could never be a rank outsider; he could only pretend to be!

Finally, Bunter's long suit is that he is funny. Goodness knows, he can be exasperating at times. But, exasperating or not, our Prize Porker can always be relied on to give us a good laugh, and that's something for which we should be thankful.

May his shadow never grow less!

Meet you again next week, chums!

HARRY WHARTON.

PROTEST THAT STAGGERED SCHOOL!

Maully's Move Against Compulsory Footer.

When our prize slacker, Lord Mauloverer, made us sit up and take notice the other week by winning the cross-country run, the general opinion in the Remove was that he should be allowed to slack as much as he liked for the rest of the term.

But the powers that be recognise no exception to their rules—cross-country winner or anyone else! When the next Compulsory Footer Practice arrived and Maully failed to turn up, Wingate went right up to his study with an ashplant—and Maully arrived on Little Side five minutes later, yelling and dancing like a giddy Dervish!

Not content with getting him on to the pitch, Wingate also stood by to see that he put plenty of pep into the play. And Maully had a most unhappy time.

Once, when he leaned against a goalpost and watched an aeroplane fly over, trailing behind it an advertisement for somebody's soap, Wingate encouraged him to get into the game again

with the tip of his boot. On another occasion, when the ball was at the other end of the field and Maully spread himself out on the turf, Wingate brought the ashplant into use again, and Maully performed the quickest jump of his languid career!

There was a thoughtful gleam in Maully's eye when he staggered off the field that day. Contrary to expectations, Wingate had announced that there would be one more compulsory practice before the end of term, and Maully did not like it.

"Bogad! I'm goin' to protest, dear men—that's what!" he told us in the pavilion. "Down with dictatorship on the footer field!"

"Where are you going to make your giddy protest, old bean?" asked Bob Cherry. "Going to interview the Head about it?"

And the crowd grinned. But Maully remained serious.

"I'm goin' to make my protest to the whole

doocid world, bogad!" he said.

Well, believe it or not, readers, he did!

On Compulsory Practice Day this week, Greyfriars had a staggering shock from which it will take most of the school a long time to recover. The game had scarcely begun when an aeroplane started circling overhead. It was an advertising aeroplane with a slogan trailing behind it. But this time the slogan was concerned with some-



thing quite different from soap.

We looked up at it and blinked. Play stopped as if by magic. And no wonder! Behind the plane, in big, bold capitals, trailed the following message: "DOWN WITH COMPULSORY FOOTER!"

The effect of that aerial apparition was electrifying. All over Greyfriars, fellows stood stock still and gaped. Masters leaned out of

windows and stared up in frozen horror. Prefects surveyed it with blanched faces. Lower School chaps whistled and said that somebody was for it. Oh, it did cause a stir!

Somebody was "for" it, right enough. That "somebody" was our old pal Maully. Wingate marched him off to the Head without waiting for the practice game to finish. And Maully received a wiggling and "six."

All the same, we have an idea that Maully had the better of the day. He was not seen on Little Side again that afternoon and at teatime we found him snoozing peacefully on the sofa in Study No. 12. And Wingate wore a decidedly sheepish grin when he was next seen in public.

We rather fancy Maully will not be troubled half so much with compulsory practice when cricket starts next term!

The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 287.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

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