

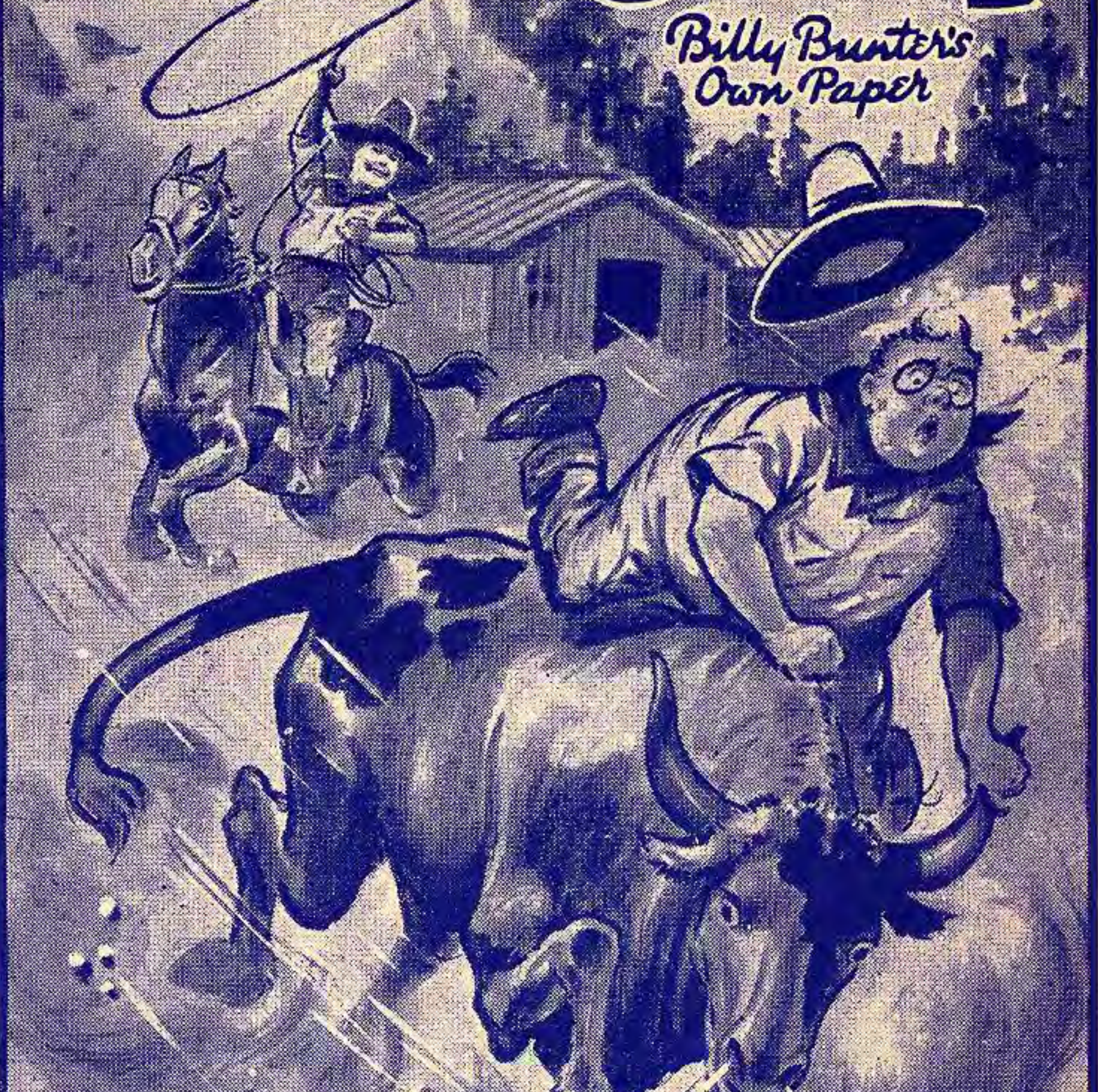
THOUSANDS of PRIZES to be GIVEN AWAY!

SEE
INSIDE

The Magnet

2^D

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



**RIDE HIM,
COWBOY!**

Inside Information About Greyfriars, By the Man Who Knows—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



THE DAILY ROUND. 12 Noon (Wed. and Sat.) HALF-HOLIDAY!

(1)

We've finished with lessons, hooray!
We're off for the rest of the day,
With rowing or biking or cricket or
hiking
We're all going out to play!
Away with our grammars and maps,
And out with our flannels and caps,
Our labours are ended, our lessons
suspended,
And now we'll forget 'em—perhaps!

(2)

There's some fellows fond of ozone,
And some prefer ways of their own,
There's Fishy expecting to go round
collecting
The interest due on a loan.
If Bunter were seen, I'll be bound
He's silently making a round
Of cupboards and lockers for pastries
and "chockers,"
Of which there's a lot to be found.

(3)

And some to the riverside run
To laud on the island for fun.
They'll soon come a cropper if seen by
old Popper,
Who'd like to break loose with a gun!
But give me a bat and a ball,
I think them the finest of all.
I'm glad I'm not sitting in class when
I'm hitting
A "sixer" right over the wall!



AFTER SCHOOL HOURS "What a Fag!"

"Fagging ought to be abolished!"
Thus said Tubby of the Third.
"Why should Loder's shoes be polished
By a junior? It's absurd!
Morning, noon, and night I'm slaving
Like a nigger!" And I think
That he was right, for he was raving
Like a nigger—due to ink!

"Making toast and frying kippers,
Snorted Tubb, in towering wrath,
"Warming Loder's beastly slippers
While I lay the tablecloth,
Running errands at the double,
Working till I'm nearly dead,
All I get for all my trouble
Is a clip across the head!"

"Every time he's feeling rotten,
Loder takes it out of me,
Makes out something I've forgotten,
Whacks me till I wriggle free!
Every other fag refuses
To go near the beastly tyke.
I'm a mass of cuts and bruises,
And it's time I went on strike!"

In the future I'm not fagging
For the rotter," Tubby said.
If he tries to start a ragging
I'll go straight and tell the Head!"
Here we both heard Loder calling:
"Tubb, you sweep, I'll slaughter you!"
Do you hear me?" he was bawling.
Tubby gasped—and simply flew!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET ROBERT DONALD OGILVY, the Scots Junior of the Remove.

O is for OGILVY—Scots Wha Hae!
Donald's a Highlandman all the way,
Sure he was reared in the heather and
peat,
A bonny braw laddie who's hard to beat.
Bagpipes were playing when Don was
born,
Mountains re-echoed the Ogilvy horn.



Now, like a Scot, he is sturdy and true,
Splendid at games and dependable, too.
Everyone likes him, he's always the
same,
Cheerful, good-tempered, and playing
the game.
When he kicks Bunter for stealing his
grub
He still keeps his temper with that
bloated tub.
In class he's not brilliant, but tries all
the while,
He works as he plays, with a will and a
smile.
I can't think of anything else I can say,
So cheerio, Oggy! Let's call it a day!

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
**THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER**

GREYFRIARS GRINS

Coker of the Fifth is in detention until
he has learned to spell. I understand
his relations will be allowed to visit him
at intervals.

Peter Todd had a cake and missed it.
He then had a cricket stump—and
didn't miss Bunter.

With the aid of a dictionary Dr.
Locke is now trying to construe
Gosling's complaint that "some young
rip has nabbed the ticker" off his
mantelpiece in the hope that he'll be
late with the rising-bell.

Lord Mauleverer has fallen for the
damsel in the Friardale Stores, a mile
from the school. He doesn't often see
her because she lives so far away.

PUZZLE PAR

When a new boy entered the
Second Form and Twigg asked
him how old he was, he replied:
"Two days ago I was only eight.
Next year I shall be eleven."
What was the date of his
birthday?

Answer at foot of column.

What's the difference between a
cheque for £1,000 and Bunter? One's a
fat figure on a cheque, and the other's a
fat figure in a check.

There was a rumour that Fishy had
lost a pound note. But it's quite false,
because he's still alive.

Greyfriars is having air raid drill.
An alarm bell rings at night, and we
all have to turn out. An extension bell
is also being fitted at the Three Fishers
for the benefit of Loder & Co.

Morgan's collection of foreign stamps
is so extremely valuable that even Fishy
has offered him two bob for it.

At an early practice match yesterday
Wibley disguised himself as a cricketer,
but he couldn't act the part.

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

His birthday was on December 31st,
and he was speaking to Twigg on
January 1st. Work it out and you'll see
it's right.

ROUNDING UP CATTLE is dangerous work, for a fall among the countless tramping hoofs of stampeding cattle might mean death to a luckless rider. But Vernon-Smith and his schoolboy chums from Greyfriars absolutely revel in it. They say it's better than sticking at lessons in a stuffy Form-room!

The SCHOOLBOY RANGE-RIDERS!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

With cracking whips, the schoolboy punchers strove hard to keep the herd together!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Painful for Smithy!

"EASY!" said Billy Bunter.

That was Bunter's opinion—for what it was worth. Probably it was not worth much.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not think it easy.

They were watching Bill Buck, cowpuncher, of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, in the Frio valley of Texas.

Bill was giving a demonstration in the handling of the lasso—or as he called it, the "rope."

The Greyfriars fellows had heard it called variously a lasso, a lariat, and a riata. But it was usually referred to as the rope. And they were quite keen to pick up the trick of handling the rope while they were on holiday at the ranch in the "Wild and Woolly West."

They had seen Bill rope in a charging steer, twirling a forty-foot rope as lightly as a feather. Now, however, Bill was roping a post that stood near the corral gate, showing the juniors how it was done.

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove stood in a group watching him. Herbert Vernon-Smith sat on the corral fence. Billy Bunter came rolling down from the rancho to see what was on, and, seeing, pronounced that it was "easy."

It looked easy the way Bill did it. But the juniors could see that it was not so easy as it looked. Bunter couldn't.

The lasso whirled from Bill's swinging hand, uncoiling as it flew, and the

loop dropped over the post forty feet from the cowpuncher.

"See, you 'uns?" said Bill.

He released the rope and coiled it again.

"Now you jest try," he said, glancing round at the Famous Five.

"Right-ho!" said Billy Bunter cheerfully.

He rolled over to the big puncher.

"Fathead!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter, over a fat shoulder.

Bill grinned and handed Bunter the rope. He did not guess, reckon, or cal-

A full-of-punch story, telling of the exciting holiday adventures of **HARRY WHARTON & CO., the Cheery Chums of GREYFRIARS.**

culate that the fat junior would have much luck with it. Six fellows had been watching Bill for some time to see how it was done before they tried their luck in imitation. It was like Billy Bunter to butt in and take first shot. It looked easy enough to Bunter, and he was going to show the other fellows how easy it was.

Grasping the coiled lasso in a fat paw, the Owl of Greyfriars swung it round his head as Bill Buck had done.

Bill backed out of range just in time. He had a narrow escape of a swipe from his own rope.

"Search me!" ejaculated Bill.

"I say, you fellows, you watch!" called out Billy Bunter, blinking round through his big spectacles.

"We're watching!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"The watchfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Show us how it's done, Bunter," said Johnny Bull with deep and withering sarcasm.

"Oh, do!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"I'm just going to!" said Bunter. "All you've got to do is to swing the rope—like that—and take aim, you know—like that—and then let it go—like that—and— Oh jiminy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Bill Buck.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Bunter did not quite know what had happened to that lasso or to himself. He had, so far as he could see, handled the rope just like Bill.

But the result was not the same.

Instead of uncurling in the air and roping in the post, the lasso dropped round Billy Bunter, encircling him in its coils. Wh! it dropped over his own head Bunter never knew—but it did.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Vernon-Smith, from the corral fence, as the fat Owl tottered, surrounded by rope.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Search me!" howled Bill Buck.

"I'll say that guy ain't no slouch with the rope! I'll tell a man he surely ain't! I ain't never seen a guy rope

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himself in afore! He sure is roped in dead to rights!"

"I say, you fellows," yelled Bunter, "get this beastly dope off a chap—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, I'm all tangled up in this rotten rope—"

Billy Bunter struggled in the encircling lasso. He caught his foot in it, stumbled, and sat down in the midst of uncoiling coils.

Bill roared, and the juniors howled. Lariat, the horse-wrangler, stepped out of the corral; Hank, the cook, came out of the cookhouse; several punchers gathered round; Barney Stone, the foreman of the ranch, came along from the bunkhouse and stopped to stare at Bunter, his lean, brown face wrinkling into a grin. Bunter was getting quite an audience.

Bunter would have liked an audience had that shot come off. In the circumstances—and the tangled rope!—he was not enjoying it. He wriggled in endless coils and howled.

"Beasts! Will you lend a fellow a hand? I say, I can't get out of this putrid rope—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that how it's done, Bunter?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bill, gurgling with merriment, stooped his six-feet-six over the sprawling fat junior and dragged the rope off him.

Billy Bunter tottered to his feet, gasping for breath. His fat face was red with exertion and wrath.

Bill coiled the lasso, chuckling.

"Now, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir—" he said.

"I say, give me that rope!" yapped Bunter, as Smithy was about to slip down from the corral wall. "I can do it as easy as anything."

Bunter was not beaten yet.

"Roll away, fathead!" snapped the Bounder of Greyfriars. "You've got the whole ranch chortling already."

"Yah! You gimme that rope!" snorted Bunter, and he grabbed the lariat from Bill Buck. "The beastly thing slipped! I'll show you how it's done. I say, you fellows, just watch me!"

Bunter swung the rope again.

Smithy, with an impatient snort, sat back on the top of the corral fence. It was rather a precarious perch, for the fence was high. From that perch the Bounder of Greyfriars watched Bunter, expecting to see him coil himself up in the rope again.

But this time the lasso flew.

By sheer luck Bunter got it going, and it flew through the air, uncoiling. Bunter had taken aim at the post, but the uncoiling rope did not whiz in the direction of that post. Bunter had got it going with amazing luck, but he had not got it going in the right direction. A fellow, after all, could not do everything all at once.

"Look out, Smithy!" yelled Bob Cherry in alarm.

But Smithy had no time to look out.

As he was at right angles from the line of Bunter's lassoing it had not occurred to him that he was in danger. But he was!

Something struck him on the head; it was the rope, and the noose dropped round his shoulders. Bunter pulled.

Bunter knew that a fellow had to drag on the rope to tighten the loop when it caught the object lassoed. He knew that he had caught something, but

did not for the moment realise what. He tugged.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Look out—"

"Great pip!"

Crash! came the Bounder off the corral fence. He hit Texas—and he hit Texas hard. He roared frantically as he hit it. From the horse-wrangler and the foreman and the cook and the punchers came a howl of laughter. This performance struck them as funnier than ever.

It did not strike Vernon-Smith as funny as he rolled on the hard, sun-baked earth, bruised and bumped and breathless. He spluttered with rage.

"I say, you fellows, I've done it!" yelled Bunter in great excitement. "I told you it was easy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aw, carry me home to die!" yelled Bill. "Let up on that rope, you pesky piecan; you've roped in the boss' son! Let up, I'm telling you!" He grasped the lasso and jerked it away from Bunter's fat hands.

"Eh?" gasped Bunter. "What?"

He blinked at the sprawling Bounder through his big spectacles. He blinked at him in surprise and horror as he realised what he had done. The expression on Smithy's face was terrifying. Billy Bunter was Smithy's guest at the Kicking Cayuse Ranch—but it was clear that that was not going to save him from dire punishment as soon as the Bounder could get at him.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, wha-a-t's Smithy doing in the rope? Did I get Smithy? Oh crikey!"

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

"I—I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry caught the fat Owl by the shoulder and twirled him round.

The Bounder was struggling out of the rope, breathless, enraged, and obviously intending to get at the redoubtable lassocr.

"Cut!" gasped Bob.

"I—I—I say—" gasped Bunter.

"Cut, you fat ass! Smithy's going to slaughter you!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter gave a blink at the Bounder, coming towards him with a face of fury. He bolted. Harry Wharton & Co. jumped into Smithy's way, and delayed him for a few moments. Those few moments were enough for Billy Bunter! He darted into the ranch-house with the swiftness of a prairie rabbit bolting into a rabbit-hole and disappeared.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Wanted!

"I'll smash him!"

"My dear chap—"

"I'll quirt him all over the ranch!"

"But—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled the Bounder.

Harry Wharton coloured—and shut up! He had followed Herbert Vernon-Smith into the ranch. There was a door from the long wooden veranda, on which several rooms opened, into the living-room of the ranch-house, and it was into that doorway that Billy Bunter had bolted.

Vernon-Smith had stayed only to grab a quirt, and then he had followed. His face was red with rage and he was limping. It was not surprising that he was enraged. He had had a painful fall and he had six or seven bruises; he had hurt his knee and scratched his hands; he was packed with aches and pains from top to toe.

It had been an accident, of course. Billy Bunter had not intended to rope in the Bounder. He had never dreamed of it. But it was the sort of accident that ought not to have happened. Smithy was going to impress that fact on Bunter's obtuse fat mind, with the aid of the quirt! And it was useless to argue with him.

Harry Wharton breathed rather hard. His friends in the veranda doorway exchanged looks, and Johnny Bull gave an audible grunt.

The chums of the Greyfriars Remove had willingly accepted Smithy's invitation to join him for the Easter holidays at the ranch his father had bought in Texas and which Mr. Vernon-Smith desired his son to visit and survey. But they had wondered on more than one occasion whether they had done wisely to join up with the Bounder of Greyfriars.

They liked Smithy well enough so far as that went, and generally he could make himself quite agreeable, and certainly he never dreamed of sparing any trouble or expense in entertaining his friends. And a holiday on a Texas ranch was extremely attractive.

But when the Bounder was savage or sulky he was savage or sulky—and that was that! At such times he forgot his manners, and demonstrated, in fact, that the nickname that had been given him at school was not undeserved.

He was going to quirt Bunter, as no doubt that fat Owl deserved, and he had only savage and angry words for fellows who tried to remonstrate. The fact that they were his guests seemed to make no difference at all to the headstrong Bounder.

He glared round the living-room, expecting to see Bunter there, and gripped the quirt. But Bunter, if he were there, had packed himself out of sight.

The fat Owl was, as a matter of fact, parked in a corner behind a big rocker, and as he heard the Bounder's angry voice he was very careful to keep parked!

"Where is the fat fool?" snarled Vernon-Smith. "By gad, I'll hunt him all over the place and take the skin off him!"

"Bunter's your guest here, Smithy," said Frank Nugent from the veranda.

"You mean that he planted himself on me for this trip to Texas, and I was fool enough to let him!" snapped the Bounder.

"Very likely; but all the same—"

"All the same, I'm going to wallop the fat fool!" roared the Bounder. "I've got bruises from head to foot, and my knee's crooked—"

"It was an accident," said Bob Cherry.

"Why couldn't the fool let the rope alone? You'd sing a different tune if you'd been dragged off a ten-foot fence!" snarled the Bounder.

"I shouldn't pitch into a fellow who was staying under my father's roof, anyhow!" retorted Bob tartly.

The Bounder gave him an angry glare.

"That's enough from you!" he snapped. "I've told Wharton to shut up—now I'm telling you the same! Shut up!"

Bob gave him a look, and a glint came into his blue eyes. He did not answer, but he turned his back and walked across the veranda to the steps, breathing hard and deep.

Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed him. It was useless to argue with the Bounder in his present truculent mood, and they did not want a row with the fellow whose guests they were. The

Famous Five had rather more regard for the fitness of things than Herbert Vernon-Smith had—when his temper was roused, at least.

"Look here, Smithy—" said Harry Wharton, making a last effort, as the Bounder began to search round the room for Bunter.

"Mind your own business!"

Harry Wharton stood silent for a moment, looking at him; then he walked out of the room and joined his friends at the veranda steps. His face was almost pale with anger.

Heedless of the feelings of his guests—for the present, at least—Herbert Vernon-Smith rooted through the room for the fat Owl, having little doubt that he was there. The altercation with the Famous Five only added to his bitter exasperation, and he was obstinately determined to root out Bunter and make the cow-whip fairly ring on his fat person.

He gave a start as he peered behind the rocker and spotted the fat Owl in the corner behind it.

"Oh, there you are!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "You fat fool, I'll—" "Oh crikey!"

Bunter had no chance to dodge. He was in the corner—fairly cornered! Smithy put his hand on the big rocking-chair to pull it aside. A moment more and the quirt would have been in full play.

But Billy Bunter was desperate. He did not wait for Smithy to pull the chair aside. He grasped it by the back and hurled it over at Smithy.

Vernon-Smith had not expected that! Really, he might have, in the circumstances—but he hadn't!

The rocker crashed right at him, sending him staggering over backwards. He landed on the floor on his back, the heavy chair crashing over on his legs. His yell of rage rang through the rancho.

Bunter shot for the doorway.

He was out on the veranda in the twinkling of an eye and running along it at top speed.

He darted into the first door that he found open and vanished.

What room he had entered he did not notice—and he cared nothing; it was unoccupied, and he hunted cover, squeaking with alarm. If the Bounder had been enraged before, he was likely to be more enraged after that crash under the rocker, and Billy Bunter fairly palpitated at the idea of coming in contact with him before he had had time to cool down.

There was a big roll-top desk across a corner of the room into which he had darted, and in a flash Bunter was behind it, deep in cover, striving to suppress his terrified gasps.

Meanwhile, the Bounder was picking himself up in the living-room. He panted with rage. Several more bumps had been added to the collection he already had—and he was fairly boiling now!

He had dropped the quirt in his fall; he glared round for it, picked it up, and rushed out into the veranda.

He was less than a minute after Bunter, but the fat Owl of the Remove had vanished from sight.

He shouted across to the group of juniors at the steps.

"Where's Bunter?"

There was no reply.

"Which way did he go?" yelled Vernon-Smith savagely. "You must have seen him."

All the five had seen Bunter's frantic flight. They could have told Smithy, if they had chosen, that he had darted in at the door of the ranch foreman's

business-room—the room used as an office by Barney Stone. But they certainly were not going to tell him.

"Will you answer me?" roared Vernon-Smith.

"No!" said Harry Wharton quietly and contemptuously. And he went down the steps of the veranda, his friends following him.

Vernon-Smith opened his lips—but he checked the torrent of angry words that rose to them. He tramped back into the room, left by the door on the hallway, and proceeded to root through the ranch-house, room by room, in search of the vanished Owl.

His wrath, like wine, seemed to improve with keeping, and there was no doubt that Billy Bunter was booked for a high old time if the Bounder rooted him out.

Bunter, squatting behind Barney Stone's roll-top desk in the office, could only hope that the Bounder wouldn't.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Schoolboy Punchers!

BARNEY STONE, foreman of the Kicking Cayuse, glanced at a group of schoolboys standing by the corral, with a rather peculiar glimmer in his keen, grey eyes, deep set in his lean, tanned face.

A less keen observer than the foreman of Kicking Cayuse would have discerned that there was a spot of trouble about.

The Greyfriars fellows had been a week at the ranch, and during that time their looks had generally been merry and bright.

Now they were looking neither bright nor merry.

Barney, watching them from a little distance, smiled—a hard, sarcastic smile. Possibly, for reasons of his own, the foreman was not displeased by a spot of trouble between Herbert Vernon-Smith and his friends.

The Famous Five were, in point of fact, considering whether to cut short their stay at the Texas ranch. Lower Fourth fellows of Greyfriars did not expect the polished manners of Lord Chesterfield from one another; but there was a limit.

"We were rather fools to come," said Harry Wharton, with a frowning brow.

"Oh, I don't know," said Bob Cherry. "Smithy has his jolly old tantrums, but they blow over. We knew what he was like at Greyfriars."

"The knowfulness was terrific!" agreed Harree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Smithy can't expect fellows to put up with his tantrums," said Harry tartly. "We can't be talked to like Bunter."

"Well, Bunter's enough to exasperate an archangel," said Bob. "It's no joke to be jerked off the top of a high fence."

"I know; but—" Wharton paused. "Look here," he went on, "Smithy was in danger when we came out here with

him; but that's over now. That brute Two-gun Sanders is laid up with a bullet in him. He's been sent to a prison hospital sixty or seventy miles from here. We're done with him for good. Smithy won't see anything more of him."

Bob shook his head.

"We all thought

that there was somebody behind Sanders in getting after Smithy," he said. "That gunman couldn't have acted as he did on his own account. He couldn't have had anything against Smithy on his own."

"Nothing's happened since we've been here, and Smithy must be safe, with Barney Stone and three or four dozen men in the outfit to look after him."

"Yes; but—"

Barney Stone came over to the group of juniors, and they ceased to speak as he came. The foreman gave them a nod.

"You young fellows like to make yourselves useful a piece?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Harry, at once.

"Anything we can do—"

"If you'd like to ride with Bill Buck—"

"Yes, rather!"

All the Co. had a liking for Bill Buck, the big puncher who had "ridden herd" over them on the trip out to Texas. Bill was the man they liked best of all the bunch on Kicking Cayuse.

"Bill's got to take a herd to a new pasture," explained Barney. "I've got a heap of men out on the ranges, and it would be a help if you'd ride with Bill, instead of my sending a couple of the bunch with him. I've noticed that you're handy enough with horses."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Nothing we'd like better, Mr. Stone!"

All the Co. were keen at once. They liked the idea of taking part in the work of the ranch, and riding with Bill to herd a bunch of cows over the plains appealed to all of them.

The rather disagreeable matter they had been discussing was dismissed from their minds at once.

A ride with Bill, and a spot of ranch work were both welcome; and at the same time the ride would keep them at a distance from the Bounder without the appearance of avoiding him. In his present temper it was obviously better to leave him to himself for a time.

"Get your cayuses, then," said Barney.

The Famous Five went into the corral at once for their horses. They saddled and bridled the broncos themselves, and led them out on the trail.

Barney, standing by the gate, pointed with his quirt across the plain.

"You'll find Bill by those pecans, sorting out the cows," he said. "Tell him I've sent you to ride with him."

"Right-ho!"

The Famous Five dashed away at once, the foreman watching them as they went with the sarcastic grin lingering on his face. As they disappeared behind the fringe of pecans in the distance, he turned and walked back to the ranch.

"Hi-yi!" shouted Bob Cherry, as he spotted Bill's stetson.

Bill looked round. He was sorting out cows with cracks of his quirt, gathering the bunch for the drive.

(Continued on next page.)

ROYAL NAVY

Boys may now enter between the ages of 15 and 17½ years. Full particulars are contained in the illustrated booklet "The Royal Navy as a Career and How to Join It," which may be obtained on application to the Recruiting Staff Officer, R.N. and R.M. (N), 85, Whitehall, London, S.W.1, or at any Post Office.

He waved the quirt to the juniors, and they joined him.

"We're riding with you, Bill," said Harry Wharton cheerily. "Mr. Stone's sent us to help you drive the cows."

"You're welcome," said Bill. "I guess you're handy lads, though I ain't saying that a guy needs a heap of help with a bunch of two hundred cows. You got a ten-mile ride ahead of you, and the same back."

"Oh, we take that in our stride!" said Bob.

Bill grinned.

"Kim on, then!" he said.

Two hundred cows lumbered away through the thick grass, heading to the west, where the great mass of Squaw Mountain barred the blue sky.

The juniors had already observed a good deal of the ways of the cowmen in a week on the ranch, and they knew how to make themselves useful. They carried out Bill's instructions with great care.

Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent rode on one side of the herd, Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh on the other, to keep in stragglers. Harry Wharton rode with Bill in the rear.

Cracking quirts kept the cows in motion, and the bunch lumbered away over the prairie, herded by the school-boy punchers.

Harry Wharton noticed that Bill's rugged, bearded face had an unusually thoughtful expression. Something seemed to be worrying Bill and perplexing him, and every now and then, between the ringing cracks of his quirt, he ejaculated: "Search me!"

"Anything up, Bill?" asked Harry, at last.

Bill looked round at him.

"I guess I don't get it!" he said.

"Which and what?" asked Harry.

Bill pointed with his quirt towards the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain.

"You ain't rode that-a-way yet," he said, "and you better not. There's sure rustlers in the gulches in that mountain, buddy. It was jest afore I fetched you 'uns out here that a Kicking Cayuse herd was run off, and I'm telling you that nobody on this ranch ever seed hide or hair of them cows again."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry. "Do you mean that there's a chance of a scrap with cattle thieves?"

"Aw, forget it!" grunted Bill. "Think I'd let you wade into a rookus with rustlers, or that Mr. Stone would send you into it? Nope! We got to drive these here cows to the Squaw pasture and leave them there."

"What's wrong with the pasture here?" asked Harry.

"Nothing," answered Bill. "It's good pasture, buddy—none better on the Kicking Cayuse ranges. But it's only a step from the gulches of Squaw Mountain, and if I was foreman of this outfit I'll say I wouldn't leave a herd to graze there without four-five men in charge with their guns packed."

"We're packing guns since we've been at the ranch," said Harry, with a smile. "We're quite ready to watch the herd, Bill."

"That ain't the orders," said Bill. "Mister Stone figures that them rustlers lit out after they roped in the last bunch of cows, and he don't reckon this herd will be in any danger. I s'pose Barney Stone knows, seeing that he's foreman of the ranch, and he ain't got any use for argufying, that's a cinch. But I'm telling you, buddy, that when we leave these here cows on the Squaw range we're going to say good-bye to these here cows."

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And Bill grunted and cracked his whip at a straggling cow.

Harry Wharton smiled a little as he rode on after the herd. Bill was evidently troubled by the recollection of what had happened to the last herd left on the Squaw pasture; but it seemed to Wharton that the foreman of the ranch must know what he was about.

The value of a herd of two hundred cows was very considerable, and it did not seem likely to him that the foreman would run the risk of having the herd run off by cattle thieves into the inaccessible recesses of Squaw Mountain.

Bill, however, was evidently worried, and he was unusually silent and thoughtful as the cattle-drive went on.

It was slow work, for the horsemen had to ride at the pace of the lumbering cows. But they reached, at last, the range that lay at the foot of the great mountain.

It was as lonely a range as any that the juniors had seen on the wide-stretching lands of the Kicking Cayuse.

It lay in a loop of the upper Squaw River, between the river and the mountain. On the bank of the Squaw stood a wooden hut, with a corrugated-iron roof—for the use of a cowman when a man was left in charge of the herd on the range. But on this occasion no man was to be left in charge. Bill's orders were to drive the herd to the range and leave it there.

The cows lumbered to a halt in the rich grass by the stream. The school-boy punchers joined Bill for the ride back.

But Bill did not seem in a hurry to start.

He sat in the saddle, scanning the rugged slopes of the mountain, split by innumerable gulches and canyons and rifts. Clearly Bill was puzzled and dissatisfied; more and more puzzled, and more and more dissatisfied, as the time came for leaving the herd in its new pasture.

"I don't get it!" he grunted. "By the great horned toad, I guess I got a hunch to locate in the stockman's hut, and keep tabs on that herd, Barney or no Barney! I'll tell a man!"

The juniors exchanged glances.

Barney Stone was not a man to have his orders disregarded. They had little doubt that Bill would be "fired" from Kicking Cayuse if he followed his own judgment instead of his foreman's.

So it was a relief to them when Bill swung round his horse to hit the trail back to the ranch. They rode after him cheerfully but Bill was not so cheerful. He was plainly worried and disgruntled, and continually, as he rode, he ejaculated "Search me!" and that he would "Tell a man!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Takes a Hand!

BANG, bang!

"Ha ha, ha!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith came out of the rancho, the quirt under his arm and a frown on his brow.

He had not, apparently, succeeded in rooting out Billy Bunter. And he was still in a state of great exasperation—all the more, perhaps, because he already felt a spot of compunction for his bad manners to his guests.

He was about to look round for the Famous Five when that uproar from the direction of the gateway drew his attention, and he cut across to see what was happening.

Every man in the Kicking Cayuse outfit "packed" a gun, and it was not

infrequent for some "guy" to bang off a revolver. But a regular fusillade seemed to be going on now.

Outside the open gateway five or six punchers were gathered, and Lariat, the horse-wrangler, had a gun in his hand, shooting. The others were roaring with laughter.

Vernon-Smith stared at the scene.

He was aware that the Kicking Cayuse bunch were a rough-and-ready outfit, far from lily-fingered in any respect. He did not think the worse of them on that account. There was, in fact, a hard, tough streak in the Bounder of Greyfriars himself. From his first day at the ranch he had packed a gun, and in his dealings with Two-gun Sanders he had shown that he could handle it, and had no hesitation whatever in handling it. Smithy was not, therefore, likely to "jib" at any rough joke on the part of the cowpunchers. But what he saw going on at the ranch gate made him knit his brows.

A man had ridden up the trail and stopped at the gate. The coppery colour of his skin, his black eyes and black hair, in which several dragged feathers were sticking, and the tattered blanket that hung on him told that he was an Indian.

He was the first Indian that Smithy had seen since he had arrived in the Packsaddle country. He did not look much like the fierce Red braves of whom he had read. He looked dusty, dirty, tattered; his blanket was little more than a rag, and the horse he rode looked more like a bag of bones than anything else—an Indian pony, rough and shaggy and bony.

A coiled lasso hung to his saddle, and there was a knife in his ragged girdle. His coppery hand was clutching at the knife now—but with difficulty, for the loop of a lasso was round him, pinning his arms to his sides. One of the punchers, a brawny man called Panhandle, held the rope. Lariat, the horse-wrangler, was shooting the feathers from his matted mop of thick black hair.

Lariat was a crack shot. He shot away feather after feather, here and there a strand of thick hair going with the bullet. But the Indian was in no danger from the shooting, close as the whizzing lead went to his head.

But the rage in the coppery face was terrible to witness. The black eyes rolled; the lips were drawn back from snarling teeth; the nostrils were dilated; the coppery features twisted with fury.

The rage of a derelict Redskin did not worry the thoughtless punchers. They were having a little "fun" with the Indian, as regardless of his feelings as if he had not been a human being at all.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar, as the Indian yelled something in his own language.

Bang! roared the six-gun again, and another feather went.

"Hook him off'n that cayuse, Panhandle!" said Lariat, lowering his revolver, now emptied. "I guess I'll fan him and make him run! I'll tell all Texas he sure rustled that cayuse!"

"Bet your life!" agreed Panhandle.

Vernon-Smith strode on the scene. A rough joke on the part of the outfit was one thing, but there was a limit.

"Hold on!" he rapped.

Lariat stared round at him. All the punchers stared. Panhandle, regardless, dragged on the lasso, to jerk the Redskin off his horse.

"Stop that!" snapped Smithy.

"Aw, can it!" grunted Panhandle.

"Stop it, I tell you!"



The rage in the Indian's coppery face was terrible to witness as Lariat shot feather after feather from his matted mop of thick black hair. "Hold on!" cried Vernon-Smith, suddenly appearing on the scene. "What has this man done?"

Vernon-Smith grasped the lasso, and wrenched it from the cowman's hands.

Panhandle breathed hard. But the anger in his face had no terrors for the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Look hyer, you young geek—" began Lariat, knitting his brows.

"What's this row?" demanded Vernon-Smith. "What has this man done, I'd like to know?"

"I guess he's rustled that hoss!" snapped Lariat.

"How do you know?"

"Aw, you're a stranger here! Every guy in the Frio valley knows that dog-goned Wolf-Apache, and knows that he's the durndest hoss-thief in Texas!" growled the horse-wrangler. "Don't you horn in here, Mr. Vernon-Smith! This bunch don't stand for being bossed around!"

"I'll say nope!" snorted Panhandle.

The Bounder's eyes gleamed. He was the son of the owner of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, and he intended that fact to sink into the minds of the bunch.

Smithy, with all his headstrong and obstinate ways, was no fellow to "throw his weight" about. But he was the fellow to stand up for his rights, every inch of them and not to recede a fraction of an inch in upholding them.

"You can pack that up!" he said coolly. "Any man here who doesn't like my ways can step up to Barney Stone's office and ask for his time! My father hasn't bought this ranch to have it run by the outfit!"

"That's hoss-sense, Lariat!" remarked Yuba Dick. "But I'll tell a man, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir, it's a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent that that gold-darned Redskin rustled that critter!"

"His horse is not going to be taken from him!" said the Bounder. "We're not horse-thieves here, whether the Indian is one or not!"

There was an angry growl from all the punchers at that. Every face was angry except the Indian's, which had calmed. The Wolf-Apache, as Lariat had called him, looked very curiously at the schoolboy who was standing between him and the rough punchers.

"What does the man want here?" went on Vernon-Smith.

"Looking for a chance to rustle hosses, I reckon!" snarled Lariat.

The Bounder, glancing at the dusty, tattered Indian, could not help thinking that it was quite probable. All the same, he was going to see that the out-cast of the prairie had fair play.

"What did you come here for?" asked the Bounder, addressing the Indian.

"Wah!" grunted the Wolf-Apache. "Injun want water for hoss!"

The Bounder knitted his brows.

"He looked in here for water for his horse, and this is how you handle him!" he exclaimed.

"Aw, can it!" snapped Lariat. "He's the biggest hoss-thief in the valley of the Frio, and I'm telling you, Mr. Vernon-Smith, that we're having him off'n that cayuse, and I'm fanning him with bullets till he vamooses the ranch!"

"And I tell you," said Vernon-Smith, "that you're doing nothing of the sort, Lariat!"

He stepped up to the Indian and loosened the gripping lasso.

The Wolf-Apache threw the rope off. There was a roar of rage from the horse-wrangler. He made a stride at the Bounder and grasped him by the shoulder.

With a clenched fist, Vernon-Smith struck his hand away.

"Hands off, you fool!" he snapped.

"By the great horned toad!" roared the horse-wrangler. "I guess —"

"Put that gun down!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

The horse-wrangler was raising his revolver towards the Indian, but he remembered that it was empty. With a furious face, he crammed cartridges in.

"I allow I'm fanning that Injun off'n the ranch!" he roared. "And if you horn in, Mr. Vernon-Smith, I'll sure fan you, too! Get that!"

"Will you?" said Vernon-Smith grimly; and he grasped the horse-wrangler's arm, and dragged it down.

The Indian, at the same moment, wheeled his horse, and dashed suddenly away. In a moment he was going at a gallop, riding southward towards the Squaw River, miles away over the prairie. Shaggy and bony as his mount looked, it was swift—the Indian was gone in a flash.

Lariat, red with rage, wrenched his arm away from Vernon-Smith, and threw up his revolver, to fire after the Indian. The Bounder, equally enraged, leaped at him, and grasped him again, dragging at him with such force that the brawny horse-wrangler stumbled, and went over.

He sprawled in the grass, spluttering with rage, and, as he sprawled, the Bounder kicked the revolver from his hand.

"By the great horned toad!" gasped Lariat.

He scrambled to his feet. He gave one glare after the Indian, vanishing to the southward as fast as the shaggy pony could gallop. Then he turned on Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder faced him with perfect coolness. But at the same moment a sharp voice broke in as Barney Stone strode on the scene.

"Pack that up, Lariat! You rough-housing with the boss' son. Forget it!"

"I guess—" roared the horse-wrangler.

"I said pack it up," said Barney Stone quietly. "Mr. Vernon-Smith, mebbe you'll come with me. I got to chew the rag with you a piece."

The Bouncer gave a glance after the Apache. He was already disappearing in the far distance, and safe from the rough-fisted punchers. Smithy gave the foreman a nod, and followed him to the rancho, leaving a group of very angry cowmen glaring after him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In the Sinking Sand!

"SPILL it!" said Smithy.

The Bouncer of Greyfriars was already picking up the language of the country.

Barney Stone's manner to the owner's son was quite respectful, in a rather gruff sort of way. Smithy was no fool, and he had a very clear idea that the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse had not been pleased, by having a bunch of schoolboys landed on him at the rancho. But if that was the case, Barney was civilly making the best of it.

Barney had been foreman of the Kicking Cayuse for years on end, and during that period the ranch had changed hands more than once.

The latest purchaser was Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith who, as Smithy knew, had got a bargain in the ranch in the valley of the Frio.

It was only one of the millionaire's many speculations. Mr. Vernon-Smith had tea plantations in India, rubber plantations in Malaya, coffee plantations in Kenya, timber lands in Canada, sheep-runs in Australia. The Texas ranch was no great matter to him.

So busy a gentleman as Mr. Vernon-Smith, with so many irons in the fire, had, of course, no time for a visit to a spot so far off the map as Texas. But as the purchase of Kicking Cayuse coincided with the Easter holidays at Greyfriars School, he had sent his son out to the ranch, combining a holiday with business.

Smithy, schoolboy as he was, was a chip of the old block, and he had all his wits about him. He was going to know all about the ranch, from one end to the other, for a report to his father.

He already suspected that that was why some person unknown had hired the gunman, Sanders, to keep him away from the ranch.

Something was going on at Kicking Cayuse, detrimental to the interests of the owner. Smithy was sure of that, and the Famous Five shared his belief, thought none of them, so far, had been able to put his finger on the spot, so to speak.

The attempt to keep Smithy away had failed. Here he was, with his eyes wide open. He had rather expected the foreman to be able to give him some help in spotting his secret enemy, and that enemy's motive; but Barney seemed as much in the dark as he was himself. They had discussed the matter several times, but all that Barney could say was that it had "got him guessing."

Smithy rather wondered now whether Barney was going to give him a lecture on the subject of intervening with the bunch. He was quite ready to tell Barney where he got off, if he did.

But the foreman made no allusion to the scene at the gate. It was quite another matter he had in mind.

"I got a deal on in cows," the foreman proceeded to explain. "You being the boss' son, sir, I reckoned, mebbe, you'd like to be present, and pick up suthin' of the way of the business."

"Oh, quite!" said the Bouncer at once.

He had had an impression that Barney, accustomed to managing the business of the ranch entirely on his own, desired to keep him clear of the ranch office. This did not look like it.

"I'm selling cows," explained the foreman. "I got a buyer coming here to-day from down in Hatchet. The guy is a stranger here, and I reckoned, mebbe, you and your friends might like to ride out and meet him on the trail, and see him to the ranch."

Barney seemed to have forgotten that Smithy's friends had already left the ranch, riding away with Bill Buck to herd cows to a distant range.

"Where is he—at Packsaddle?" asked the Bouncer.

"Nope; he's coming up from Hatchet—that's south from here," said Barney. "He's got to cross the Squaw at the ford. Mebbe you know the spot?"

"Can't say I do," answered Smithy. "But we'll find it all right if you give us a few pointers."

Barney waved a brown hand to the south. Far away in that direction the Squaw River, flowing down from the great mountain, rolled across the prairie, to flow into the distant Rio below Packsaddle.

"I guess you'll find it easy," he said. "You hit due south to the river, and the ford's marked by a big cottonwood, sixty feet high. You keep to the left of the cottonwood, and you ride the Squaw as easy as if it was dry. I guess there ain't ten inches of water at the ford."

He paused.

"Mebbe you'll meet up with the guy this side of the river," he went on. "But, being a stranger in the country, mebbe he don't know the ford. He sure is due here, but, mebbe, that dog-goned guy is cavorting on the other side of the Squaw, looking for the ford. I guess it ain't an hour's ride from—"

"I'll go at once," answered the Bouncer. "If the man's anywhere about, I'll spot him, and bring him here all right."

"You said it," agreed Barney. "I guess I got to get the papers ready for the business; and when you ride in, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir, mebbe you'll be willing to go through it with me in the office. I guess your popper would be pleased at you picking up the way the ranch is run."

"That's what I want to do," said Vernon-Smith; and, with a nod to the foreman, he ran down the steps of the veranda, dismissing Billy Bunter, and the quiring due to him, from his mind.

Smithy, as a matter of fact, was a little repentant by that time of his display of temper. As Bob Cherry had remarked, he had his tantrums, but they blew over.

He went in search of the Famous Five, with the intention of being as agreeable as possible, and causing them to forget that spot of unpleasantness.

But he did not find them.

"Seen my friends about?" he asked, calling to Hank, the cook, at the doorway of the cookhouse.

"They done gone out on their cayuses," answered Hank.

"Oh, have they been gone long?"

"'Bout an hour, I reckon."

The Bouncer compressed his lips.

The Famous Five had gone off without speaking a word to him. As he had been in an angry and unpleasant temper, that was not surprising, but it irritated him. He had been thinking of a ride across the sunny prairie in cheery company to meet the cattle-buyer on the trail from Hatchet.

However, there was no help for it, and he led his horse from the corral, saddled up, and rode away from the ranch. He had told Barney that he would go, and the fact that company was not available made no difference to that.

He did not look round as he went, and did not observe, or imagine, that from the veranda of the rancho, Barney Stone was watching him as he rode away, with a strange, sardonic grim smile on his lean face.

Neither was he likely to guess that, after he had gone, a cattle-buyer arrived at the ranch by way of the Packsaddle trail from the east, and went into the ranch office with Barney.

The Bouncer rode away at an easy gallop, heading for the Squaw River. The river itself was not in sight, as it was deep down between high, clayey banks; but fringes of timber and thickets marked its course from west to east across the distant plain.

Higher up, near Squaw Mountain, the river was deep and swift; but on the plains it spread wider and shallower, and there were several fords, known to the cow-men of the locality.

Smithy, as he galloped to the southward, had his eyes open for the tall cottonwood Barney had mentioned to him.

Most of the timber along the river-course was small timber—pecan and post-oaks. And it was easy to pick out the gigantic cottonwood from a great distance.

He saw nothing of any traveller as he neared the river. It was quite likely that a stranger in the land, arriving from a distant town to the southward, might be doubtful about the ford. Smithy expected to see him when he passed the Squaw.

It was not only for a traveller, however, that he was watchful. Although his enemy, Two-gun Sanders, was now out of the game, and there was nothing further to be feared from him, Smithy was well aware that he might have other foes to look for, and he was on his guard. He had a revolver in his belt, a rifle in a leather case strapped to his saddle, and he was mounted on a swift bronco that could have shown its heels to most of the cow-ponies on Kicking Cayuse, so he did not suppose that he had much to fear from a possible enemy. But fear, as a matter of fact, had been left out of the composition of the Bouncer of Greyfriars, and he had not the slightest doubt about his ability to take care of himself. He had handled a "gun" with Two-gun Sanders and he was quite prepared to handle a gun again, if it was needed.

He arrived at last on the bank of the Squaw, under the branches of the tall cottonwood that stood like a column against the blue sky.

The miry, clayey bank of the river sloped down before him to the shallow water.

After rain, the Squaw was often full to the banks, and flooding over the

adjacent plain. Now, however, the water was low; and here and there sand-banks and mud-banks showed through it. There was hardly a foot of water in the deepest spot where Smithy looked down on the wide river-course.

Sitting in his saddle, he scanned the opposite bank of the river, a good distance away.

Fringes of scrubby thickets met his eye, but no sign of a rider.

But a man might have been hidden at any spot by the thickets; and as Barney had said that the cattle-buyer was already due at the ranch, Smithy had little doubt of spotting him when he had once passed the Squaw.

So he gave his reins a shake, and went trampling down the muddy bank, and rode across the shallow water. Barney had told him to keep to the left of the cottonwood, and he carefully followed his instructions.

The bronco's hoofs sank in the soft mud and sand in the swirling shallows. Once in the river the Bounder's head was well below the level of the plains, and he was completely out of sight of any rider on the prairie, unless the rider came very close to the bank.

"By gum!" muttered Smithy, a little startled, as his horse squealed, the fore-legs sinking in the mud.

He pulled hard on the reins, and the squealing bronco scrambled and plunged onward.

Smithy was almost in the middle of the wide river-course now. Again the horse's legs sank deep, and the water splashed over the Bounder's stirrups. It was useless to urge the animal on; its legs were buried deep, and it floundered helplessly, unable to draw itself out.

The Bounder set his lips.

This was the ford—he had carried out Barney's instructions to the very letter; entering the river on the left of the tall cottonwood, a landmark not to be mistaken. It had looked easy enough from the bank. But the horse had sunk in soft sand, and was sinking deeper.

To ride on was impossible. The Bounder felt a throb at his heart. It flashed into his mind that the sand, which looked, to the eye, firm enough, was partly quicksand—and it was in a quicksand that the bronco was sinking.

He wrenched at the reins to wheel the horse and ride out the way he had come. But it was futile. Every plunge of the struggling, squealing bronco sank it deeper, and the wet sand was creeping over the Bounder's spurs.

He gritted his teeth. Unless Barney Stone had made a mistake, or he had made a mistake, this was the ford! But it was borne in on his mind that the bronco would never struggle out of the sinking sand alive; and with all his courage, all his nerve, the Bounder felt a chill run through him.

He was in the grip of the quicksand. He knew that now and he knew that his life hung on a thread.

To save the horse was impossible. He slipped over the tail, already on a level with the sand, to scramble back to the bank on foot.

He saw, with a beating heart, that the traces of his passage from the bank had already filled up—there was not a sign left that a horse had passed.

He slipped from the horse, up to his knees in soft, sinking sand—and, at the first plunging step, up to his thighs. He could go no farther. As fast as, with immense effort, he dragged one foot up, the other sank. He was pinned in the quicksand.

The sweat started out on his forehead.

From behind him, as he struggled, came a choked squeal. He glanced

round—the horse was sinking out of sight, and as he stared in horror, it disappeared from his eyes. Oozing mud and sand covered the spot where it had sunk—smooth, treacherous; hiding every vestige of the bronco.

The Bounder of Greyfriars shut his teeth. The horse had sunk—and he was sinking. There was no escape from the fatal grip of the quicksand of the Squaw River; there was no help—he shouted hoarsely; but even as he shouted, he knew that there were no ears to hear. He was sinking—sinking to his death—and his face was white as chalk, as the soft sand oozed and oozed round him, sucking him deeper and deeper.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Deal in Cows!

BILLY BUNTER lifted his fat head in the corner behind the roll-top desk, blinked through his big spectacles, listened—and popped that fat head back again, like that of a tortoise into its shell.

There was a heavy tread on the planks of the veranda.

Bunter squatted in cover.

Again and again he heard the angry Bounder in search of him, and trembled for his fat skin.

This, Bunter bitterly reflected, was the way Smithy treated a guest!

He was very much inclined to turn Smithy down, and shake the dust of Kicking Cayuse from his feet. But there were two good reasons for not doing so. In the first place, he did not want to go—in the second, he dared not show up till Smithy had got over his "tantrums."

Whether the beast was still hunting for him, after the lapse of an hour, Bunter did not know. He was quite unaware that Smithy had ridden away from the ranch and forgotten his fat existence!

That tread on the veranda alarmed the fat Owl; and he squatted in cover. The tread came in at the doorway.

It crossed to the interior door, which opened on the hallway of the ranch-house. Bunter heard a key turn in that door.

He suppressed a squeak of alarm.

This looked, to Bunter, as if Smithy knew that he was there, and was cutting off his escape before he rooted him out! Bunter had an awful vision of a whacking quirt in an angry hand. But he sat tight, and hoped for the best.

He heard a chair creak, as some heavy figure sat down. Then there was a voice:

"Squat, Corcoran!"

Another chair creaked.

The voice was that of Barney Stone, the foreman.

Bunter knew that he was in the foreman's office—and he realised, now, that it was the foreman who had come in and locked the inner door; and that there was another man with him.

It was a relief to find that it was not the exasperated Bounder. Bunter did not mind if the foreman sat there and discussed cattle-buying and selling, or any other business of the ranch. Certainly, Bunter was not in the least interested in such talk; but so long as the foreman sat there, that boast Smithy was not likely to come in hunting for him, so that was so much to the good.

"I guess I heard that the new owner's sent a bunch out here, Barney," said another voice.

Grunt from the foreman!

Bunter grinned behind the roll-top. Like the other fellows, Bunter guessed

that the foreman was not pleased by the arrival of the Greyfriars party. That grunt was expressive!

"I guess it was no cinch for you, Barney, when the ranch was sold out of Texas!" went on the unseen Corcoran, with a chuckle. "There sure ain't going to be no accident happen to the noo owner on the other side of the pond."

Grunt again.

"Mebbe he's better there, though!" remarked Corcoran. "The last owner came hornin' in and I guess I heard that suthin' happened to him in the valley of Frio."

"That guy sure did have bad luck," said Barney's gruff voice. "He rode the Squaw River at the wrong spot, and was never seen again. It was reckoned that he got lost in the quicksand. I ain't wise to what happened to the galoot, only he sure has never been seen since."

Bunter heard a chuckle again.

"The noo owner won't ride the Squaw in the wrong spot, Barney. I reckon you're O.K. s'long's he's satisfied with what you report to him, and it's a good distance. I guess he don't know a whole heap about Texas ranching. He bought blind from the lawyers in Austin, who had the selling of the ranch. But if he sends a man here—"

"Mebbe he will, and mebbe he won't!" grunted Barney. "Packsaddle country is unhealthy for strangers, anyhow."

"Yep! I guess you know how!" said Corcoran. "A schoolboy won't worry you a whole lot, I guess. The young gink ain't likely to get wise to anything, I reckon."

Another grunt from the foreman.

"That's where you miss your guess, Pete Corcoran. That young gink is sure spry, and keen as the edge of a bowie-knife. Two-gun Sanders, of Packsaddle, came out at the little end of the horn in handling him."

"Sho!" said Corcoran.

"I guess he wants to know why some galoot was aiming to keep him clear of this here ranch!" grunted Barney. "And I'm telling you, Pete, that he's the brand of guy to get wise to the whole game."

"A schoolboy!" said Corcoran.

"Yep—some schoolboy!" snorted Barney. "He put it across Two-gun Sanders! He had a gun on Lariat the day he got here, and made that guy jump to orders. Only jest before you blowed in, he stood off a bunch of the punchers who was having fun with a Redskin, and never turned a hair! I guess he'd have pulled on Lariat, if he'd handled him, as slick as any gunman in Texas! I'm telling you, Pete Corcoran!"

"You ain't saying that that kid from school has got your goat, Barney?" said Corcoran. "Say, where is he now?"

"Aw, I guess he's gone riding on the prairie!" drawled Barney. "He's got a temper, of his own, and his friends was glad to get off without him—so he went off alone—down by the Squaw—"

"Down by the Squaw?" repeated Corcoran.

"Yop!"

"Search me!" said Corcoran.

"I guess," said Barney, "that I ain't run this here ranch for years on end, old-timer, to be bulldozed by a schoolboy! Not so's you'd notice it!"

There was a short silence.

Billy Bunter, behind the roll-top, was puzzled. That Barney Stone disliked the presence of the owner's son

at Kicking Cayuse was clear; but Bunter had guessed that long ago. He could not see Corcoran; but he knew, from the man's tone, that he was startled when Barney told him that the owner's son had gone riding "down by the Squaw."

Why Bunter could not guess.

The silence was brief. Barney Stone's voice came sharply:

"Get down to it, Corcoran! I reckon you've got the dust!"

"Sure! Four hundred dollars for the bunch!" said the cattle-buyer, with a laugh. "I guess you can count the greenbacks, Barney."

Barney grunted again.

"You sure do drive a bargain, Pete! There's two hundred head in that bunch, and Kicking Cayuse cows are well known, I reckon."

"We got the trouble of driving them, Barney!" said Corcoran, and he laughed again; and, to Bunter's surprise, the saturnine foreman of Kicking Cayuse laughed, too.

Bunter could see nothing to laugh about in the idea of the cattle-buyer driving the cows he bought from the ranch foreman.

Bunter was more and more puzzled.

He knew little, or nothing, about ranching; neither was he keen to learn anything about it, like the other fellows. But even Bunter wondered at hearing that a herd of two hundred cows was sold for four hundred dollars. He would have supposed them to be worth twice or thrice that sum, at least.

He heard a rustling sound of the foreman counting notes. Then a drawer of the roll-top opened and snapped shut again.

"You got the cows ready, Barney?"

"Sure! Bill Buck's driving them this very minute to the Squaw range."

"Riding herd there?"

"Nopel! I guess you'll pick up the bunch easy, Pete. About sundown to-morrow I reckon will be the time."

"You said it! I guess there won't be no Kicking Cayuse punchers cavorting around on that range to-morrow!" chuckled Corcoran. "Nor the owner's son won't be asking a heap of questions about them cows—if he's gone riding by the Squaw River. I guess—"

"Aw, can it!" grunted Barney. "I guess you want to hit the trail, Pete, afore that bunch of young ginks come back with Buck!"

Bunter heard the inner door unlocked; and the two men left the office, and crossed the hallway into the living-room. He heard a clink of bottle and glasses.

The coast was clear now, for Bunter. What Barney would have done, if he had spotted him hidden there, Bunter did not know—but he thought that it would probably have been something painful. Bunter greatly preferred the grim-faced foreman not to spot him there!

As he had heard Barney mention that the Bounder had gone riding by the Squaw—a good many miles from the ranch—he was safe from Smithy and the avenging quirt.

He tiptoed from behind the roll-top and cut out of the office, by the door on the veranda.

Ten minutes or so later, lounging by the ranch gate, he saw Mr. Corcoran come down from the ranch-house and mount his horse.

He blinked at him curiously.

Some of the punchers, too, glanced at Mr. Corcoran, as if with interest, and Lariat, the horse-wrangler, and

winked at Panhandle, and Panhandle laughed.

Barney Stone, who had come down to the gate with the cattle-buyer, glanced round, and Panhandle's face immediately became serious.

Barney took no notice of the fat schoolboy blinking at Pete Corcoran through his big spectacles. He was not interested in Billy Bunter; though it was possible that he would have been interested had he been aware that the fat Owl of Greyfriars had overheard every word of that "deal" in cows.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Friend or Foe?

"HELP!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith shouted hoarsely.

He had shouted, again and again, till his voice was dry in his throat. He had little or no hope of being heard.

The sinking sand was welling round him, up to his shoulders now. His vain struggles had only driven him deeper.

It was impossible to struggle further. He was embedded in the quicksand, held as if in a giant's grip; only his head and arms emerged, and his arms rested on the treacherous surface.

They were outstretched, to offer as much resistance as possible; but the sand was sucking at them. There was no hope—and the bitterness of death was in the heart of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

On either side, as his wild eyes looked round, rose the steep, muddy, clayey banks, high above the trickle of water, shutting off the view of the plains north and south of the river.

A cowman might have ridden by, hardly more than a lasso's length away, without seeing him in the death-bed of sinking sand.

Either bank was edged with thickets, here and there a tree. That was all that he could see beyond the muddy slopes.

One faint hope had lingered in his heart. According to what Barney Stone had told him, the cattle-buyer from Hatchet was coming that way, to ford the Squaw. The man might be within hearing, hidden by the fringes of scrub on the southern bank. But that hope died away after he had shouted, and shouted, and shouted again, answered only by the echo of his own desperate voice.

No one was coming! The cattle-buyer had, perhaps, taken a different route. Anyhow, he was not on the banks of the Squaw.

Unless some horseman, by sheer chance, rode down to the river, Vernon-Smith had no hope of seeing a human face again.

Despair was in his heart.

Where were his friends? But for that outbreak of temper which had driven them away from him, they might have been with him on that ride. But it was useless to think of that.

He was alone—and he was doomed. Somehow he had missed the ford and driven into the quicksand, and only by the veriest chance could help come before he was engulfed.

"Help!" he shouted again, desperately.

From the bank, near the tall cottonwood he had passed, a rustling sound came to his ears. It was a stirring in the thickets, and his wild, despairing eyes turned on the spot with a flash of

hope. It was probably only a prairie rabbit that stirred in the brush.

But his heart gave a great leap as he saw a head and shoulders emerge from the thickets and a face turned towards him.

His cries had been heard. Someone was in hearing—some man who had, apparently, camped in the brush beside the river. It was a dark, coppery face that stared at the Bounder from the high bank—the face of an Indian!

It was wrinkled in a cruel grin!

Peering from the brush, down the steep slope of the bank, the Indian watched the schoolboy, buried to the neck in the sinking sand, but made no movement to come to his aid.

The Bounder stared at him. He contrived to lift one arm; to wave his hand.

"Help, help!" he shouted.

The Indian, grinning evilly, did not stir.

Watching the coppery face, on which the sunshine gleamed, the Bounder recognised it as that of the Wolf-Apache who had been so roughly handled by the Kicking Cayuse punchers that afternoon.

He remembered that the Indian outcast had fled away to the south. He had camped by the river, and he had heard the Bounder's cries and approached the spot—not to render aid. There was no mistaking the evil, gloating enjoyment in the coppery face. The Wolf-Apache was there to watch one of the white race that he hated sinking to death, with no thought of stretching out a hand to save him.

The Bounder's brief hope died.

The ruthless savage would not help him. He saw the glitter in the black eyes of savage satisfaction. This dreadful scene was an entertainment to the Redskin outcast.

Vernon-Smith groaned. The last hope was gone. The welling quicksand was over his shoulders now—his left arm was under it—his right was lifted above the oozing surface, but it was following. Slowly, slowly, but surely, he was sinking down to terrible death, and it was a matter now of only a few more minutes.

His haggard eyes were fixed, from under the shady brim of his stetson, on the cruel, grinning face. His cries had brought that wretch there, only to afford him a malicious enjoyment, in watching the fearful fate of a "pale-face."

And that Indian he had saved from the rough handling of the punchers—saved him from having his pony, his only possession, taken from him. This was the gratitude of the red outcast! Surely, even a cruel, tattered, embittered outcast of a dispossessed race might have helped the fellow who had done that for him! But the Indian, grinning cruelly, did not stir.

Then suddenly it flashed into Smithy's mind that, although he could see that coppery face clearly in the sunlight over the bank, the Indian could not see him—not, at least, to recognise it. The wide brim of the stetson shut off his features from view—to the Indian's eyes, from above, his face could only have been a dark shadow, so far as he could see it at all. To the eyes of the Wolf-Apache he was simply a white man—one of the hated race, in whose destruction his savage heart rejoiced. But if he knew—

It was a last, a faint chance, of life! With his free hand Vernon-Smith grasped the stetson and dragged it from his head.

The sunlight streamed on his face.

(Continued on page 12.)



THE ADVENTURES of **HARRY** and his **HERCULES CYCLE**

Episode 1.

FILM FAME

OH BOY! WHAT A LOVELY DAY! I'LL GO FOR A RIDE ON MY 'HERC'...

MY LUCK'S IN. A FILM COMPANY ON LOCATION. THIS IS WHERE I GET OFF.

I'M VERY SORRY, MR HEATHCOT BUT THE REVOLVER GOT LEFT BEHIND AND...

WELL SOMEONE'S GOT TO GET IT... AND QUICKLY!

DIRECTOR

I'M CERTAINLY MAD TO HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT GUN - NOW WHO ON EARTH CAN I SEND BACK FOR IT? WE'VE LOST AN HOUR AS IT IS.

PLEASE CAN I HELP? I'VE GOT A FAST BIKE - IT'S A HERCULES

BY HERCULES! THATS AN IDEA DO YOU KNOW WHERE OUR STUDIOS ARE? WELL...

5 MILES AWAY...

HERE IN TWENTY MINUTES BY HERCULES! THATS GOING SOME

AS HARRY ARRIVES BACK, DIRECTOR HEATHCOT IS TAKING ANOTHER SHOT FROM THE FILM. HARRY DOES NOT KNOW THIS AND DASHES ON TO THE SET.

DRAT THAT BOY! HE'S RUINED THE WHOLE SHOT. CUT... CUT!

I'VE GOT THE GUN!

SO HARRY WANDERS OFF DISGRUNTLED. HE'S DONE TEN MILES IN RECORD TIME AND DOESN'T EVEN GET THANKED FOR HIS TROUBLE!

BUT AT THE SHOWING OF 'RUSHES' THAT NIGHT

BY HERCULES THAT KID'S GOT PERSONALITY GET HOLD OF HIM FOR ME!

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By Hercules

IT'S THE BIKE TO BUY!

The Indian would know him now—could not fail to recognise him as the fellow who had intervened at the ranch gate. Would it make any difference?

He watched, with haggard, despairing eyes.

He saw the Wolf-Apache give a sudden start. The figure in the tattered blanket emerged wholly from the brush, and the Indian stood revealed, staring down the steep slope of the bank at the sinking schoolboy.

Hopo flushed in the Bounder's face again. He waved his hand, in a last wild appeal to the Indian.

He saw the Wolf-Apache make a swift step forward. His heart beat almost to suffocation.

Then the Indian stopped again, and leaped back into the brush from which he had emerged.

The Redskin had vanished from his sight. He knew who he was, he had had a momentary impulse to help him; but he had turned his back on him and gone. It was the end!

He was sinking—sinking! Both his arms were under the quicksand now; only his right arm, from the elbow, was above it, and the choking sand was up to his chin. Death was engulfing the doomed schoolboy.

A tattered figure leaped from the brush again. The Bounder looked dully at it. Had the wretch returned to mock him?

He saw the Indian's arm swing up—and then he understood. There was a lasso in his coppery hand.

That was why the Wolf-Apache had rushed back into the brush—to get the lasso from the saddle on his pony. He could not tread the fatal path the Bounder had ridden without being engulfed, like the schoolboy who was sinking to his death. Only the rope could save the victim of the quicksand—and it was for the lasso that the Indian had gone.

The Bounder understood. But it was too late—too late! He was under to his chin. It was too late!

The uncoiling rope flew. The Indian was not trying to lasso him—that was impossible, when he was sunk so deep. But the aim of the red man was as accurate as a rifle-shot. The loop of the lasso dropped over the Bounder's right hand.

He grasped the rope.

Holding on to it with his right hand, he struggled, and with a desperate effort, dragged his left loose from the quicksand and grasped the lasso with his left also.

The Indian, from the high bank, thirty feet away, watched him anxiously. There was no grinning, cruel malice in the coppery face now. There was a keen and tense anxiety.

A guttural voice cried:

"You hold! Running Water save you."

The Bounder did not understand, for a moment; then he realised that Running Water was the Indian's name. He held on to the lasso with both hands, in a grip for life or death, and shut his teeth as the Redskin threw his weight on the rope and dragged.

The tattered outcast was strong and muscular. The pull on the rope was like that of a cow-pony holding a lassoed steer. It seemed to Vernon-Smith that his arms were being dragged out of his body, between the pull on the rope and the deadly grip of the quicksand that held him back.

The strain was almost more than he could bear. But he bore it with shut teeth. It was his last chance of life;

if he let go of the rope he had to sink back to terrible death.

Slowly, slowly, as the steady pull dragged and dragged, he felt himself loosening from the grip of the quicksand.

His shoulders came up, clear of the sand, he was free to his armpits. But even as he felt that the strain was beyond bearing, the rope slackened.

The Indian waved a coppery hand. White teeth flashed from his dark face as he gave the boy a grin of encouragement.

The rest was an immense relief to the Bounder. He was sinking again, as soon as the drag ceased; but he had time to rest, and time to slip the loop of the lasso over his head and drop it under his arms. The Indian nodded and grinned as he watched him from the top of the bank.

Then he resumed dragging on the rope.

It was round Smithy now; he did not need to hold. The strain was over. But the circling rope seemed to bite into flesh and bone, so hard was the pull, so deadly and persistent the grip of the quicksand. But he bore it without a sound, knowing now that he was saved, that it was only a matter of time before he was dragged from the grasp of death.

He was clear, at length, to his waist. Slanting over the bed of sand, he was dragged nearer and nearer to the bank, till at length he was freed down to his boots and dragging along the sand, leaving a deep furrow as he went—a furrow that filled up behind him with oozing sand and mud. He rolled on the sloping bank and scrambled to his feet, and in a minute or more he was safe on the high bank, the Indian's hand grasping him to hold him steady.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Where is Smithy?

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

Billy Bunter, leaning on the post at the open gateway, blinked at the Famous Five as they rode in.

He blinked at them sourly.

Bill Buck, still looking worried and thoughtful, turned his horse in at the corral. The Famous Five, tired after their first experience of cow-punching, but bright and cheery, reined in their broncos and smiled cheerily at the frowning fat Owl.

"Had your whopping?" asked Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Did Smithy get you, after all?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

"The cad's gone out," said Bunter. "You needn't think I was keeping doggo till the cad went out. I'd knock him down as soon as look at him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter morosely. "This is how Smithy treats a guest, after pressing him to come out here with him—"

"Was the pressfulness terrific?" inquired Hurrce Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yah! I don't think I can stand much more of Smithy," grunted Bunter. "I say, you fellows, where have you been—clearing off, and never taking the trouble to think about a chap who's done so much for you."

"We've been cattle-driving, old fat man," said Frank Nugent. "Punching cows, old podgy bean! I don't think you'd have cared for the job. We've helped Bill drive two hundred jolly old

cows to the Squaw range, miles and miles away—"

"The Squaw range!" repeated Bunter. He remembered what he had heard in Barney Stone's office. "Oh, I know. I've seen the man who bought them."

"You've whatted the which?" ejaculated Bob Cherry, staring at the fat junior.

All the Famous Five stared at Bunter. They knew nothing about the herd on the Squaw range having been sold, and certainly Bill had known nothing about it. So far as they knew, that "bunch" of cows had simply been driven to a distant pasture and left there.

"The man came here while you were gone," explained Bunter. "He's bought that lot of cows from the foreman."

"And how do you know?" asked Bob.

"Oh! I—you see—I mean—"

"Barney told you all about it—what?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically. "Did he ask your advice about selling cows?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"But where's Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five had rather hoped to find Smithy recovered from his "tantrums" when they got back to the ranch. In which case, they were prepared to wash out the recollection of offences.

"He's gone out—I told you!" grunted Bunter. "And when I looked for you fellows you were gone out, too. If you think that's the way to treat a pal—after all I've done for you—"

"Smithy been gone long?"

"Oh, hours and hours! If he's not back for supper I jolly well shan't wait for him, for one. I say, you fellows, if Smithy cuts up rusty when he comes in—"

"Oh, Smithy will be all right, now he's had time to cool down!" said Bob. "If he hasn't quirted you already you're O.K."

"I should hardly allow a fellow to quirt me!" said Bunter, with dignity. "Still, it's a bit awkward knocking a fellow down when you're staying with him."

"Not done in the best circles," agreed Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Know where Smithy's gone?" asked Nugent.

"Yes; he went riding by the Squaw. I expect he cleared off in a rotten temper; you know him! I'm glad to get a rest from him, anyhow. I say, you fellows, now that that ill-tempered cad Smithy ain't about, like me to show you how to manage a lasso?"

"Oh crikey!"

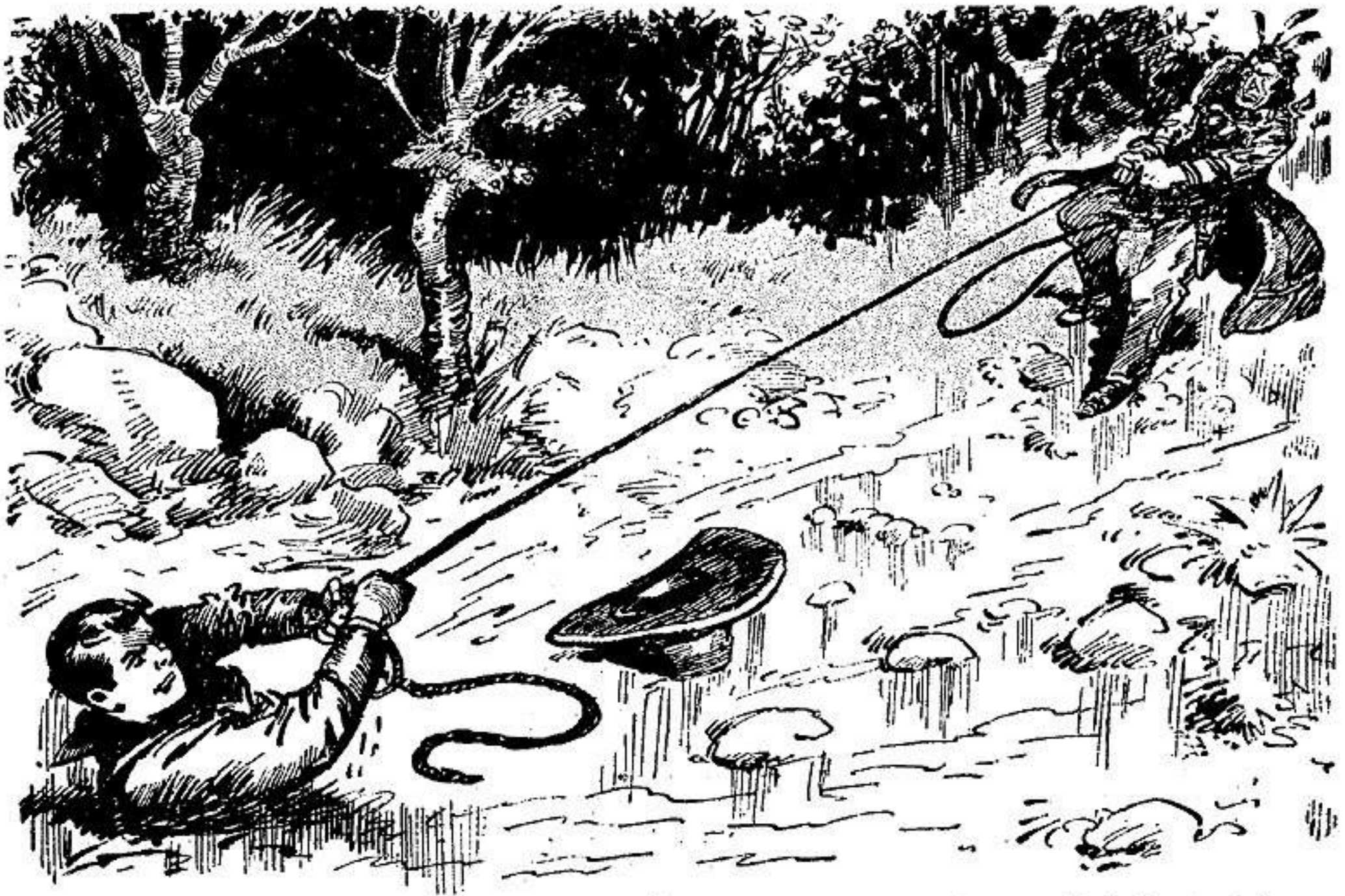
"We might get ill-tempered like Smithy!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "I know I should if you roped me in as you did him."

"Yah!"

Leaving Billy Bunter adorning the gatepost with his fat person, the Famous Five led their horses into the corral. They found Bill Buck there, rubbing down his bronco, still with a puzzled and thoughtful wrinkle in his rugged bronzed brow.

The juniors followed his example. They had soon fallen into the way of caring for their horses themselves.

"I'll tell a man!" said Bill, and the juniors grinned. Bill, it was clear, was still worried by Barney's order to leave that bunch of cows on the lonely range at the foot of Squaw Mountain. "I'll say it gets my goat! It ain't no use talking to Barney. He ain't got any use for chewing the rag, Barney ain't.



"You hold!" said the Indian in a guttural voice. "Running Water save you!" Vernon-Smith held on to the lasso with both hands, then he shut his teeth as the Redskin threw his weight on the rope and dragged. Slowly, slowly, the Bounder felt himself loosening from the grip of the quicksand!

But I'll tell a man, them rustlers will lift them cows—"

"But Barney Stone wouldn't leave a herd where it was in danger of being lifted by cattle thieves, Bill," said Bob Cherry.

"Nope! Not if he knowed it," admitted Bill. "Mebbe he's forgot what came to the last bunch on that range. Mebbe! But I don't get it."

"Perhaps they've been driven there to be taken away by a man who's bought the bunch!" suggested Bob.

Bill stared at him.

"That ain't sense!" he answered.

"Bunter's got hold of the idea from somewhere that that bunch of cows was sold to a man who came here this afternoon," said Bob.

"Guff!" grunted Bill. "That fat gink! How'd he know? Besides, it ain't sense! Cattle buyers come from Packsaddle and Hard Tack and Hatchet. They'd want to drive cows that-a-way if they bought them. There ain't no cattle trail over Squaw Mountain, you young gink. If them cows was sold to a cattle buyer they would have to be drove back to the ranch to be tuck away. Is that sense?"

"Well, no," admitted Bob. "Bunter must have got it wrong. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Barney!"

The foreman looked in at the gate of the corral. He called to Bill.

"You got them cows to the Squaw range, Bill?"

"Sure!" answered Bill. "Say, Barney, I guess—"

Perhaps the foreman guessed what was coming, for he waved an impatient hand at the puncher.

"Pack it up, Buck! I guess I want you to ride to Hatchet after supper. You'll take Yuba Dick, and hit Hatchet

by sun-up, to bring back a string of horses."

"Yep!" grunted Bill.

The juniors left the corral, leaving Bill receiving instructions from Barney. They went back to the gate and looked out over the prairie, in the westerling sunlight, wondering when the Bounder was coming in.

They were rather anxious to see him, and to ascertain exactly how matters stood. If the disagreement of that day was going on they were going to cut short their stay at Kicking Cayuse. In these matters they were rather more particular than Billy Bunter.

On the other hand they were ready to wash out offences if Smithy extended the olive-branch. They did not want to part on ill terms with a fellow with whom they had travelled three or four thousand miles from home.

Chick, the choreman, appeared in the veranda of the rancho, and called out "Supper!"

Billy Bunter detached himself immediately from the gatepost. There were times when Bunter could move quickly.

"I say, you fellows, come on!" he exclaimed.

"Waiting for Smithy," said Harry.

"But supper's ready—"

"Waiting for Smithy, all the same!" chuckled Bob.

"Well, you must be silly asses!" said Bunter, and he rolled off, leaving the Famous Five watching the plain. Bunter, at all events, was not going to wait for Smithy when supper was waiting for Bunter.

Barney Stone came away from the corral and stopped to glance curiously at the juniors. He could guess why they were waiting there. A faint grin flickered over his hard, lean face.

"Ain't the young boss come in yet?" he asked.

"No," answered Harry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob. "What the dickens—"

From a fold of the prairie, in the distance, a horseman came into view. The horse was a rough, bony, shaggy Indian pony. The rider was caked with mud from head to heel, and the juniors did not for the moment recognise him. Beside the pony walked a copper-skinned Indian, leading it by a rawhide bridle. The juniors stared in surprise, and from behind them came a sharp, startled gasp from Barney Stone.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Suspicion!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH sagged in the saddle of the Indian pony.

The Bounder was tough, and he was hard; but his terrible experience in the quicksand in the Squaw river had told heavily on him.

Running Water, the Wolf-Apache, had saved his life; but he would have been helpless without the further care of the Indian.

The Redskin had placed him on his pony, and led him, by long, weary miles of rugged prairie, back to the ranch. It was weary work for Running Water; but, with the dogged patience of his race, he tramped on beside the horse, never speaking a word, and answering only with a guttural grunt if the Bounder spoke to him. But the Bounder said little. He was utterly weary and spent, and only anxious to

(Continued on page 16.)

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THE SCHOOLBOY RANGE-RIDERS!



(Continued from page 13.)

get in at the ranch and rest his aching limbs.

He was glad when he sighted the ranch buildings in the distance. The Indian's face darkened at the sight of them. He had not forgotten the rough horseplay of the Kicking Cayuse punchers. But he shambled on, leading the horse, and they entered the trail that ran to the gate. And then Smithy spotted the juniors in the gateway and waved his hand.

They ran out to meet him.

Barney Stone did not follow. He stood as if rooted to the earth, staring.

Had they looked at him they could scarcely have failed to read in his face at that moment that he had not expected to see the Bounder at Kicking Cayuse again.

But they were not looking at Barney, or thinking of him. As it dawned on their minds that that muddy, weary rider was Vernon-Smith, they dashed out to meet him as he came.

"Smithy!" shouted Bob.

"What on earth's happened?"

"Where's your horse?"

"Smithy, old man—"

The Indian halted with the pony, and the Famous Five surrounded the Bounder. Evidently some mischance had happened to him, and they quite forgot that there had been any offences given and taken that day.

"My esteemed, idiotic Smithy—" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder slipped from the pony's back and stood in the trail. He grinned faintly at his friends.

"Glad to see you fellows!" he said, his voice not quite steady. "Not long ago I never thought I should see you again."

"Smithy!"

"I've been through it," said the Bounder quietly.

"I can see that, old chap!" said Harry. "You've lost your horse."

"My horse is at the bottom of a quicksand in the Squaw river."

"Oh!"

"I should be there with him, but for this Indian," said Smithy.

"Smithy, old man—"

"I'll tell you later. I'm a bit knocked out now." Smithy turned to the Indian, who was standing like a bronze statue. "Running Water, you saved my life. Come in with me, and stick at the ranch as long as you like."

The Indian shook his head.

"Injun go!" he answered briefly.

"It's all right," urged the Bounder. "That is my father's ranch. You'll be O.K. there, I tell you—"

"Injun go!" repeated the Wolf-Apache stolidly, and he drew the pony round to mount. Evidently the outcast of the prairie did not care to trust himself again within reach of the Kicking Cayuse bunch.

"Look here, you've saved my life," said the Bounder. "You've hooped it miles and miles to lend me your pony."

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You've got to let me reward you, at least."

He slid a muddy hand into a muddy pocket, and drew out a handful of money.

The Indian's black eyes glistened.

"Wah!" he said. "It is good!"

The Bounder smiled, and dropped a fistful of silver dollars into a coppery palm.

Money was little to the Bounder of Greyfriars, who had more than he needed, but it was probably rare with the tattered, dusty outcast of the prairie.

The hard, hawkish face of the Wolf-Apache brightened over that handful of money.

"It is good!" he repeated in his guttural voice.

And he threw himself into the ragged saddle and rode away to the south, the juniors staring after him curiously as he went.

"How on earth did you pick up that chap, Smithy?" asked Bob, as they turned back towards the ranch.

"The punchers were ragging him, and I stopped them," answered Vernon-Smith. "Lucky I did. He got me out of the Squaw river with his lasso when I was right at the finish." He shivered. "By gad, I'd rather not go through that again!"

He walked in silence to the gate, the Famous Five with him.

In the gateway they came face to face with Barney Stone.

If the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse had had a shock at the sight of the owner's son, he had recovered from it now. There was only a careless curiosity in his face as he scanned the Bounder.

"You sure look as if you'd taken a tumble, sir!" he said. "Lost your cayuse?"

Vernon-Smith came to a stop, and looked at him fixedly.

"I lost my horse in the quicksand in the river," he said in a low and very distinct voice. "I saw nothing of the man you sent me to meet, and I followed your directions exactly and rode into a quicksand."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him, struck by something in his tone and in his face.

"Search me!" said Barney. "That guy from Hatchet came by the other trail, as it turned out—that's why he got in late; he went round by Pack-saddle, not knowing the ford. But how come you got into the quicksand, sir? I guess I don't get that! There sure is a quicksand in the Squaw, but it's a dozen lassoes' length from the ford."

"I've said that I followed your directions exactly!" said Vernon-Smith; and the significance in his tone made the Famous Five exchange glances.

Barney shook his head.

"I'll say you couldn't have, sir," he answered. "You saw that big cotton-wood that I described to you?"

"I did, and I kept to the left of it, as you told me."

"I guess I told you to leave it to the left, Mr. Vernon-Smith," said the foreman, snaking his head. "Every guy on the ranch knows that you leave that tree to the left to ride the ford."

"You told me to keep to the left."

"I reckon you disremembered what I said, sir," said Barney. "I sure said leave it to the left. Maybe I said keep it to the left, and you figured that I said keep to the left."

"Oh!" said the Bounder. "Well, either you made a mistake or else I

did, and it came near being the finish for me!"

"I'm sure powerful sorry for that, sir!" said Barney, with an air of great frankness. "I'll tell all Texas! You sure did mistake me, sir!"

The Bounder nodded, and walked on to the ranch with the Famous Five. They were looking and feeling extremely uncomfortable.

From the way Smithy had spoken, he had seemed to imply that the foreman had deliberately sent him into the danger of a terrible death.

That was a suspicion that might have come into the Bounder's mind in the clutch of the quicksand; but it seemed wild enough to the other fellows. And the mistake, too, was easy to make, if Barney had said "Keep it to the left," and the Bounder had supposed that he had said "Keep to the left." They were glad and relieved by the change in Smithy's manner when the foreman had made his explanation.

"Smithy," murmured Bob, "you—you couldn't have thought—"

"Oh, it was a mistake—plain enough now!" said the Bounder in a voice loud enough to reach Barney Stone's ears.

They entered the rancho, and Smithy went at once to his room to clean and change.

Harry Wharton & Co. waited for him in the hall, in a rather perturbed and uneasy frame of mind.

They could not help having an impression that that black suspicion lingered in the Bounder's mind, in spite of what he had said.

But he made no allusion to it when he joined them, and they went into the living-room, where Billy Bunter had long been busy at supper.

The fat Owl paused, with a well-laden fork half-way to his mouth, as he saw Vernon-Smith.

"I—I—I say, Smithy, if—if you're going to be a beast—" he began.

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Idiot!"

"If that's how you talk to a guest, Herbert Vernon-Smith—"

"Dummy!"

"Yah!" said Bunter

Evidently the Bounder had got over his "tantrums," and was not going to be a "beast." Relieved on that important point, Billy Bunter devoted his whole attention to the foodstuffs once more. And though the Bounder looked a little pale and tired, it was a very cheery party round the supper-table.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Wants to Know!

"FUNNY, ain't it?" said Billy Bunter.

"What?"

After supper the Greyfriars fellows had gone out into the veranda, where they were seated, looking out over the plains in the glimmering light of the moon. From the bunkhouse, at a little distance, they could hear cheery voices—a puncher's chorus, sung, with more vigour than tunefulness, by the "bunch." From the direction of the kitchen came an occasional clink, of Chick washing dishes and pots and pans.

Smithy had related what had happened after the Famous Five had left the ranch on the cattle-drive with Bill. Billy Bunter lent a fat ear, and after the Bounder had finished he contributed his remark—which caused all the juniors to stare round at the fat face and big

spectacles that glimmered in the gleam of the Texas moon.

"Funny?" repeated Harry Wharton. "You benighted ass—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What is there funny in being sucked into a quicksand, you blithering owl?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Kick him!"

"Beast! I didn't mean that was funny," explained Bunter. "I meant it was funny Smithy being the owner's son, you know—"

"What does the fat ass mean, if he means anything?" asked Frank.

"Oh, really, Nugent, I mean it would be funny if the new owner's son had got lost in the quicksand like the last owner!" explained Bunter.

"Like the last owner?" repeated Vernon-Smith, with a sharp look at the fat Owl. "What do you know about the last owner? Talking out of the back of your silly neck, as usual?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"The fat ass can't know anything about the last owner," said Bob. "Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You fat ass, Smithy's father must have bought the ranch from the last owner!" said Harry.

"He jolly well didn't, if the chap was at the bottom of that quicksand," said Bunter.

"Hold on a minute!" said the Bounder quietly. "My father bought the ranch from a firm of lawyers and estate agents, who had it to sell for the heirs of a man who had gone west."

"And that's how he went!" explained Bunter. "That's why I said it would be funny if Smithy had gone the same way, being the new owner's son, you know."

"Bunter's got his own ideas of what is funny," remarked the Bounder. "But if you've heard anything of the kind, Bunter, how did you hear it?"

"Oh, I—I happened to hear Stone mention it!" said Bunter. "I wasn't listening to what he said to that man Corcoran, of course."

"Who on earth's Corcoran?" asked Bob Cherry blankly.

"Goodness knows, unless it's that cattle-buyer who seems to have blown in this afternoon!" said Vernon-Smith.

"That's the man," said Bunter. "Chap with a beaky nose. I saw him when he went afterwards."

"And you heard Stone tell him that the last owner of the ranch had gone down in that quicksand?" asked the Bounder, his eyes steadily on Bunter's fat face.

"He didn't exactly tell him," answered Bunter. "He just mentioned it. I fancy the other man knew. Anyhow, he said that something had happened to the last owner when he came horning in, and then Stone said he was supposed to have got lost in that quicksand."

"You fat villain!" said Johnny Bull. "Are you playing your keyhole stunts here, the same as at Greyfriars?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Carry on, old fat rabbit," said the Bounder.

There was quite a peculiar expression on Smithy's face. It was clear to him that Bunter had heard something talked between the foreman and the cattle-buyer. In view of his own narrow escape that afternoon and the spot of suspicion in his mind, it certainly was a very singular coincidence if the last owner of the Kicking Cayuse had gone to his death in that quicksand in the Squaw river.

"Well, that's what they said," went on Bunter.

"And how do you know what they said?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"How could I help hearing what they said when they weren't ten feet from me?" demanded Bunter. "Think I'd listen?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course I couldn't help hearing," said Bunter warmly. "Why, Stone was leaning against the desk while he was talking, and he put the money in the desk. Of course, I heard every word—without wanting to, naturally. I hope I'm not inquisitive—like some fellows I could name," added Bunter, with a touch of scorn. "I'd have told them I was there, only Stone would have turned me out, and then that beast Smithy—"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed the Bounder. "Mean to say that you parked yourself in Stone's office when I was rooting after you?"

"Well, what was a fellow to do?" argued Bunter. "I didn't want to knock you down—"

"Eh?"

"Being your guest, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Being Smithy's guest, I didn't want to have to handle him, so I thought the most dignified course was to keep out of his way till he had got over his silly temper," explained Bunter. "That's why I was behind that roll-top. Not that Smithy had anything to be waxy about—getting in a fellow's way when he was handling the lasso, like a clumsy ass—"

"Never mind that," said Vernon-Smith. "Let's have it all. It seems that that cattle-buyer whom Barney sent to meet me, with a mistake in the directions, came another way—came and went while all of us were away from the ranch. Only Bunter's seen him—"

"I saw him when he went," said Bunter. "Chap with a beaky nose. I didn't see him while he was in the office. Stone might have cut up rusty if he'd found me there—"

"Not much doubt about that!" grinned Bob.

"Well, I didn't want any trouble with him," said Bunter. "I haven't come here to thrash the foreman—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle! I just sat it out, and cleared when they went away to get a drink," said Bunter. "I knew Smithy was out, as Barney said so—I mean, I didn't care a straw whether he was out or not—"

"So that's how you picked up that fatheaded idea about the bunch of cows being sold?" asked Bob.

"Eh? So they are sold," said Bunter. "I heard Barney counting the money, and then he put it in the desk."

"Fathead! I asked Bill, and he said that the cows would have to be driven back to the ranch from the Squaw range if they were sold," said Bob. "Think Mr. Stone would have them driven ten miles just to have them driven back again?"

"Corcoran said he was going to drive them himself," retorted Bunter. "Barney Stone told him the time to pick them up would be sundown tomorrow on the Squaw range. He sold them for four hundred dollars."

"He sold a herd of two hundred cows for four hundred dollars!" repeated Bob.

"Yes. I thought it was jolly cheap," said Bunter.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Cheap isn't the word," he said. "I don't know what a cow fetches in Texas, but that works out at about ten bob each. I should recommend Smithy's pater to get a new foreman if Barney sells off his cows at ten bob a time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, there's nothing to cackle at!" yapped Bunter. "I tell you I heard them—"

"Fathead! You heard it all wrong, as you usually do!" said Bob. "Bill thinks that herd is in danger from rustlers, left on that range without a man in charge—but they might as well be rustled as sold if they fetch only ten bob each. And they're not sold, anyhow—Bill said they couldn't be."

"I tell you—" roared Bunter.

"Rats!"

"The ratfulness is terrific."

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

Billy Bunter knew what he had heard while he was parked behind the roll-top in the ranch office. But the Famous Five had little doubt that the fat and fatuous Owl had made one of his usual fatuous mistakes.

Smithy did not express an opinion; he seemed deep in thought.

Bob Cherry rose from his rocker.

"What about a stroll round before bed?" he asked.

"No jolly fear!" said Bunter promptly.

"Not you, old fat man; I don't suppose you could carry that supper about!" chuckled Bob. "Come on, you slackers!"

The Famous Five went to the steps.

Harry Wharton glanced round at Smithy.

"I'll stick here," said the Bounder. "I'm a bit tired. Besides, I want to enjoy Bunter's conversation."

"Eh?"

"I never realised before what an entertaining chap he was," explained the Bounder.

"Well, I can talk, you know," remarked Bunter complacently. "I was always a pretty good conversationalist—witty and entertaining and all that, you know."

"Oh crikey!"

Harry Wharton laughed and followed his friends down the steps.

Billy Bunter beamed on the Bounder. This, really, was the first time that Smithy had ever done him justice. He was fully prepared to bestow the delights of his fascinating conversation on the Bounder.

Smithy, however, kept him to one topic—what he had overheard in the ranch office. Why Smithy was so keenly interested in that Bunter did not know, but the Bounder certainly was. He listened to Bunter's conversation till he had extracted from him every word that he had heard.

When he was satisfied that that was the case Smithy realised that he was not too tired to join the Famous Five in a stroll round—and he did so, leaving Bunter snorting.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

"BILL'S gone to Hatchet?"

"Sure!"

"Far from here?"

"Thirty miles," said Barney Stone.

"What do you fellows think?" asked the Bounder, glancing round at his friends. "Feel up to a sixty-mile ride?"

The Famous Five smiled.

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It was early the next morning. The six juniors had turned out bright and early and breakfasted while Billy Bunter was still asleep and snoring. The fat Owl was not likely to turn out for a good three hours yet.

Vernon-Smith had a very cheerful expression on his face that morning. His terrible adventure of the previous day seemed to have left no trace on him whatever, as the chums of the Remove were glad to see.

They were glad also to see that his manner to the ranch foreman was as cordial as it had ever been. That looked as if Smithy realised that there was nothing in the suspicion which, they felt sure, had come into his mind on the subject of his adventure in the quicksand in the Squaw river.

Barney was gruffly civil, as usual, that morning. If he wondered what the owner's son was thinking, he did not reveal any of his thoughts in his lean, brown face.

The idea of a sixty-mile ride—thirty miles out and thirty miles back—was rather startling to the Famous Five. They were aware that a Texas cowboy would frequently put in a sixty-mile ride in a day—the tough cow-ponies being equal to it, like their riders. But the schoolboys, though in good condition and as fit as fiddles, thought it rather a "tall" order.

"I guess you'd hardly make the grade," remarked Barney Stone, with a faint grin.

"That does it!" said the Bouncer. "We're going!"

"Oh, all right!" said Harry Wharton. "We can take grub in our saddle-bags, and camp for lunch. May meet Bill on the way, too, if he's coming back to-day with a string of horses."

"We'll try it on, at any rate," said Bob.

"Give us some points about the trail, Mr. Stone," said Vernon-Smith, "and particularly about the ford. I don't want to miss it again as I did yesterday."

"Sure!" said Barney.

The juniors listened very attentively as Barney gave them "points" about the ford over the Squaw river and the trail that ran beyond to the distant cow town of Hatchet. Then Barney went about the business of the ranch—the foreman of Kicking Cayuse was a busy man—and the Greyfriars fellows were left to make their preparations for the trip.

"What about Bunter?" asked Bob.

The Bouncer laughed.

"Oh, let Bunter come, by all means! I'm sure he'll jump at the idea! Go and tell him we're riding sixty miles, and see him jump at it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The jumpfulness will probably not be terrific!" chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Well, we'll give him a chance!" said Bob, and he went into the rancho to call Bunter.

It was far from probable that the fat Owl of the Remove would jump at that ride—sixty yards being more in Billy Bunter's line than sixty miles! Still, it was only fair to give him the chance to join up, if so disposed.

A snore greeted Bob, as he put his cheery face into Bunter's room.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

Snore!

"Wake up, old fat man!"

Snore!

Bob tramped in and gave the fat junior a shake.

Billy Bunter's eyes opened, and he blinked at him.

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"Wharrer marrer?" he mumbled, drowsily. "'Tain't rising-bell."

Bob chuckled.

"'Tain't!" he agreed. "We're going for a sixty-mile ride, old fat bean! Like to come?"

Bunter gazed at him. For a moment or two he seemed speechless.

"You—you idiot!" he gasped at last. "I was dreaming about a feed in Mauly's study at Greyfriars, and you've woke me up to tell me that!"

"Won't you come?"

"Beast!"

"Does that mean yes or no?" inquired Bob.

"Beast! Rotter! Swab! Gerrou!" howled Bunter. "Waking a fellow up out of a lovely dream to talk rot like that! Gerrou, or I'll buzz my pillow at you! Fathead! Ass! Beast!"

Having thus rendered thanks for being called, Billy Bunter dropped his fat head on the pillow again, with an indignant snort. He closed his eyes to woo slumber and a return of that lovely vision of a feed in Lord Mauleverer's study at Greyfriars.

Bob, grinning, left him to it!

Bunter was snoring again by the time he shut the door.

Leaving the fat Owl to snore, the six juniors saddled their broncos, and packed their rifles in the leather cases to be strapped on. The Bouncer packed a six-gun also.

Chick, the chore-man, packed what the Famous Five thought they were more likely to need: a plentiful supply of what Chick called "eats," to be carried in their saddle-bags.

Barney Stone glanced after them, as they led their horses down to the gate, and they were aware of a sarcastic grin on his face. Lariat, the horse wrangler, was grinning widely.

Neither of them, probably, fancied that the Greyfriars fellows were good for a sixty-mile ride.

That did not worry the cheery juniors.

They rode away southward from the ranch, heading for the Squaw river: the way the Bouncer had ridden the previous day: and the ranch dropped out of sight behind.

It was still bright and early in the morning when they sighted the tall cottonwood on the bank of the Squaw and rode on to the river—a good many miles from Kicking Cayuse.

They halted on the high bank, and the Bouncer, with his quirt, pointed out the spot where he had been sucked into the sinking sand, and where Running Water, the Wolf-Apache, had dragged him back from death.

His face was grim as he did so: and the juniors shivered a little, as they looked down on the treacherous surface of the sinking sand.

"We'll take jolly good care not to miss the ford, you fellows!" remarked Bob Cherry. "We can pick it out all right, from what Mr. Stone has told us—but we can't be too careful."

"Hardly—if we rode the ford at all!" remarked the Bouncer. "But, as it happens, my beloved 'earers, we're not going to ride it!"

"Eh?" Bob stared at him. "We've got to cross the river, to get to Hatchet, Smithy—it's south of the Squaw."

"Oh, quite! But you see," drawled the Bouncer, "we're not going to Hatchet—so we don't need to cross the river!"

"We're not?" exclaimed Bob, mystified. "But—"

"We're riding up the river, old bean!"

"That will take us to Squaw Mountain!" said Harry, as mystified as Bob.

"You said it!" agreed Smithy.

"But aren't we going to Hatchet?" asked Frank Nugent, quite puzzled. "What was the use of asking Barney Stone for all those directions, if we're not going to Hatchet to meet Bill?"

"Oh, a lot of good!" said the Bouncer, coolly. "It left Barney believing that we're gone to a cow-town thirty miles away, south of the Squaw river—so he naturally won't guess that we're riding west to the Squaw range, where Bill left that herd yesterday."

"You were pulling Barney Stone's leg?" exclaimed Bob.

"Sort of!"

"But why?" asked Johnny Bull, blankly.

The Bouncer laughed.

"Lots of reasons! Come on—we can get to the Squaw range, where you fellows went with Bill yesterday, by riding up the river. It's a few miles longer this way than the way you went with Bill and the herd, but that won't hurt us. The chief thing is, that we're miles out of sight of the ranch here, and Barney Stone thinks we're gone across the river. Come on!"

Quite mystified, but realising that the Bouncer must have some reason for this strange and unexpected game, the Famous Five wheeled their horses and followed him.

Leaving the tall cottonwood behind them, they rode up the rugged bank of the Squaw, heading for Squaw Mountain in the distant west.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

At the Stockman's Hut!

HARRY WHARTON & Co, rode at an easy gallop, in a cheery bunch.

It was a bright and sunny morning, the air was clear and fresh, and a light breeze came down from the slopes of Squaw Mountain.

The way, by the river bank, was rugged: and it was a good deal longer than the way they had ridden with Bill and the herd. But the river was an unfailing guide: and they had only to keep on to reach the cattle-range at the foot of Squaw Mountain, where the stockman's hut stood and the herd had been left.

The chums of the Remove were perplexed: but they were quite willing to follow the Bouncer's lead, and to wait till he enlightened them.

There was a thoughtful shade on the Bouncer's face as he rode; and at times, a mocking glimmer in his eyes. But he uttered no word of explanation as they rode up the river.

Miles of rugged ground slipped under the clattering hoofs of the broncos.

The juniors reached, at last, the loop of the river, which shut in the "range" against the slopes of the mountain. They rode round the loop and soon sighted the herd that had been left on the range the previous afternoon.

By the way Bill had driven the cattle the previous day, it was ten miles from Kicking Cayuse to the Squaw range. By way of the winding river, it was more than fifteen; and as they had ridden five or six miles from the ranch to reach the Squaw, before turning westward, they had done well over twenty miles by the time they reached the stockman's hut.

All the party, therefore, were ready for a rest and for a meal, when at length they rode up to the hut and drew rein.

Scattered over the range between the loop of the river and the rugged slopes of Squaw Mountain, were two hundred cows. Unless there was danger from "rustlers," as Bill had believed, the herd did not need watching—there was



"We're range-riding here, Mr. Corcoran," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "We've no use for cattle-lifters. Hit the trail for the hills and get off Kicking Cayuse ranges!" "You—a tenderfoot—giving me that!" rapped the rustler. "Exactly! Get going!"

plenty of pasture and plenty of water for the cows on the Squaw range, and they were not tempted to wander.

"We stop here?" asked Harry Wharton, quite puzzled as to what the Bounder's plans might be.

"Sure!" grinned Smithy, jumping from his horse. "There's a hut like this on every range on the ranch, and generally a man, or a couple of men, posted in it, to watch the herds. We're going to do duty here—see?"

"We've come to watch the herd?" asked Nugent.

"Don't you like cowpunching?"

"Oh, yes; all right! Any old thing," said Frank. "But I don't make you out, Smithy! Your foreman would have left Bill here if he supposed that the herd needed watching."

"Perhaps!" said Smithy. "On the other hand, he might have sent Bill over to Hatchet, simply to keep him clear of the Kicking Cayuse, while this herd is on the Squaw range."

"Eh—why?"

"I fancy some of the outfit are in Barney's confidence—but Bill isn't," said Smithy. "Bill's as honest as the day."

"And isn't Barney?" asked Johnny Bull, looking very hard at the Bounder.

"I don't know! But I'm going to know—and we're here to find out."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"As Alice remarked in Wonderland, this is getting curiousest and curiousest," he said. "But I suppose you mean something, Smithy—you're not just talking out of your stetson?"

"Quite! I'll tell you while we feed."

There was a fenced corral attached to the stockman's hut. The juniors took off saddles and bridles, and turned the horses into the corral. Then they entered the hut.

The door was on the latch. It had no fastening from outside; but within, was a thick wooden bar, with iron sockets,

which could be used to secure the door in case of need.

The hut had clearly not been used for a long time. From what Bill had told them, the Squaw range had not been used for pasture since the last herd there had been run off by cattle-thieves into the passes of Squaw Mountain; and that was a good many weeks ago.

But there were plenty of signs of the last occupation. The rusty iron stove was half full of dead embers, and a greasy frying-pan lay on it. Muddy boot-marks were visible on the earthen floor. Cigarette-ends lay about, and burnt matches.

There were two wooden bunks, bare of any kind of bedding. When a cowman was posted there, he brought his own blankets with him.

Saddles and bridles were brought into the hut and pitched into the bunks out of the way. The Bounder collected firewood from a stack behind the hut, and set the fire going in the stove.

It was not needed for warmth, for it was now past noon, and the sun was blazing down on the river and the prairie, and baking the rocks of Squaw Mountain. But it was wanted for cooking.

An iron kettle was filled at the river, and set on the stove, to make coffee after the meal. Bob Cherry cleaned out the frying-pan, and food was sorted out of the liberal supply Chick had packed for the party; and soon a very welcome smell of cooking pervaded the lonely hut—grateful and comforting to a bunch of schoolboys, who, by this time, were very hungry.

There were two wooden benches and a trestle table in the hut. Tin crockery was on a shelf, and it required some cleaning before use. But many hands made light work; and the Greyfriars fellows were soon sitting down to a meal.

There was no window to the hut; but the wide-open doorway gave them an extensive view of the grassy plains, the slumbering, or feeding cattle, and the mighty slopes of Squaw Mountain barring the sky to the west.

Apart from the slow-moving cattle, the solitude was unbroken; the juniors might have fancied themselves a hundred miles from anywhere, instead of only ten miles from a busy ranch. On all sides, except to the west, the grassy plains seemed to meet the sky.

Bob Cherry brewed coffee after a substantial lunch, and the juniors took the tin cups outside, to sit on the bench by the door in the open air. It was hot; a haze of heat hung over Squaw Mountain. The cows were at rest in the grass—here and there a hairy back showing—occasionally a long-horned head rising and shaking, to shake off flies.

Vernon-Smith sipped his coffee, and glanced round at his friends, with a faint grin on his face.

"I've got you guessing!" he remarked.

"The guessfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy!" admitted Harroo Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, all serene!" said Bob, laughing. "I'm blessed if I know what you're up to, Smithy, but we're all right here! Those cows don't seem to want a lot of punching; but we'll give 'em all they want!"

"Those cows," said Smithy, "belong to my father's herds. I'm here to see that they're not run off into the hills. I think you fellows will back me up—but if you choose to ride back to the ranch and keep clear of gun-play I shan't blame you. You came out here for a holiday—not to scrap with gunmen; and I don't want to drag you into danger. I'm seeing it through—but I'm quite

prepared to do it alone, if you fellows don't care for it."

"You're talking rot!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The rotfulness is preposterous."

"We're here to keep an eye open for rustlers?" asked Frank Nugent.

"That's it!"

"I don't seem to see any about, at the moment!" murmured Bob.

"You won't see them till sundown," answered the Bounder coolly. "But when the sun dips behind Squaw Mountain, I fancy the trouble's going to start. I'm not sure that I ought to have landed you fellows in it—"

"Rubbish!" said Harry Wharton. "If there's any trouble, Smithy, we're going to back you up, and see you through. But I don't see—"

"It's rot, old chap!" said Bob. "You don't fancy that Mr. Stone would have sent the herd here to be picked up by a gang of cattle-thieves?"

"That's what I want to know!" answered Vernon-Smith grimly. "If nothing happens, all right; but if any attempt is made to run off this herd, I shall know what I only suspect at the present moment—that Barney Stone sent this herd here to be picked up by cattle-thieves."

"Smithy!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Now you've got it!" said the Bounder.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob.

The Famous Five stared at Smithy. They knew now what was in the Bounder's mind, and it startled them.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Smithy Suspected!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH grinned at the surprise and incredulity in the faces of the Famous Five. But he became serious again at once.

"You think—" exclaimed Harry, with a deep breath.

"Exactly!" assented the Bounder. "I think—but I'm not sure! I want to be sure. That's why we're here."

"But why—"

"And how—"

"I've been thinking this out pretty hard since what happened yesterday," said the Bounder quietly. "You fellows haven't forgotten that somebody—at present unknown—was very keen to keep the owner's son away from the Kicking Cayuse. He put up that gunman, Sanders, to play his game for him. We haven't spotted him, or his motive—till now! Now I fancy I've got both spotted."

"Barney Stone—"

"Just Barney Stone!" said the Bounder. "We've known all along that something is going on at the ranch, that the owner's son is not wanted to spot. I've talked it over with Barney himself more than once." He laughed. "Must have amused him. I've no doubt. My idea was that if anything was going on underhand, the foreman of the ranch ought to be able to spot it. But Barney never knew a thing!" He laughed again. "Naturally, he wouldn't—if he's the nigger in the woodpile!"

"I suppose you've got some reason?" said Harry slowly.

"Oh, lots! Barney's run this ranch for donkey's years, while it's changed owners more than once. He's had a pretty free hand—an immense distance from nowhere, and no eye on him. If matters are as I suspect, he's made a good thing out of it—for every dollar that the distant owner ever made, I

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fancy that Barney made half a dozen—over and above his salary as foreman."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"I fancy there's a good many in the Packsaddle country who know, or guess, what's been going on," went on Vernon-Smith. "I had a talk with the stage-driver on the Packsaddle hack coming here, and I fancy he knew—like a good many others. Some of the outfit are hand-in-glove with Barney—I fancy that Lariat Jenkins is one—and others, I think, suspect a good deal, but mind their own business so long as they draw their pay. Some of them—like Bill—don't know anything about it!"

"Bill's all right, anyhow," said Bob Cherry.

"Right as rain! So are a good many of the others, I've no doubt. Barney wouldn't spread his secret farther than he could help. The more honest men he has in the outfit, the less likely he is to be called to order."

"But—" said Harry.

"So long as Barney has an owner who lives at a distance, and doesn't ask too many questions, Barney is satisfied," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "But when an owner visits the ranch, inquires into figures, goes through accounts, tots up the inventories, numbers the herds, and so on, that owner misses the ford at the Squaw River, and is never seen again."

"Good heavens!" gasped Wharton. "Smithy, you can't suppose—"

"That's what happened to the last owner," said Vernon-Smith, "and that's what very nearly happened to the son of the present owner."

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bob.

"Barney's a pretty hard case," went on Smithy. "But this country isn't what it was fifty years ago, or even twenty years ago—he wants to keep clear of the open, if he can. I've no doubt that the quicksand in the Squaw river was his last resource in dealing with the last man. As for me, he would have preferred to frighten me away—and as I wasn't to be scared away, he would have been satisfied with kidnapping, if it had come off. After we got to the ranch, I think he would have made the best of it, let us run on through our holiday here, and go at the end of it—if I'd let him rip."

He laughed.

"But I've made it clear that I'm going to do what my father sent me here for—give the pater an exact report of the place he's bought, with every detail from A to Z. That means showing up Barney's game—if it really is his game to run the ranch for himself instead of his owner. I'm doing, in fact, exactly what Barney was afraid the owner's son might do, when he put up that gunman to keep me away."

"If you're right—" said Harry slowly.

"That's what we're going to know. It's all bunk about my mistaking Barney's directions yesterday at the ford. Mind, I admit the possibility of a mistake—I'm not sure. I've let Barney believe I'm satisfied. But I was not satisfied, my beloved 'earers—and after what Bunter told us, I was less satisfied than ever. It's rather too much of a coincidence, the last owner having made the same mistake at the ford—with nobody on hand to help him out with a lasso."

The juniors were silent.

"If I hadn't stopped the punchers ragging that Indian, and if he hadn't recognised me as the fellow who did him a good turn, where should I be now?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Barney couldn't foresee a chance like that, of course. We've been here a week—

and he's decided that I'm dangerous—and that was his way out."

"If that's the case, Smithy, the man's no better than a murderer!" muttered Bob Cherry.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"Life is pretty cheap out here," he said. "Barney's not the man to stick at trifles. But, to do him justice, he did his best to keep me away—he'd rather not go to that length, with a schoolboy, if he could help it. Only when he was sure that I was going to know all that went on, before I left, he made up his mind to it."

"It sounds pretty steep, Smithy!" said Harry. "I can't say I like Stone much—or that I'd trust him very far—but—"

"I've said I'm not sure!" said the Bounder. "It all works out pretty clear—but I'm giving him the benefit of the doubt until I know for certain. If this herd is run off to-day, I shall be certain."

"Oh!"

"The game, as I see it, is this," went on Smithy, "and it's the only way of accounting for what Bunter heard when he was parked in Barney's office yesterday. He works in cahoots, as they would call it here, with that man Corcoran—in partnership with a gang of cattle-thieves."

He waved a hand towards the lonely range in front of the hut.

"What did Bill think of Barney sending that herd here, and leaving it unguarded?" he asked. "What happened to the last herd in the same spot? That's the game, as I've worked it out. If Barney sold that herd, the books in the office are open to inspection. There's a limit to what he can do in the way of false entries in books when they're open to inspection by an accountant at any time. But when a herd is run off by rustlers, who's going to blame Barney? The blame's more likely to be put on Sheriff Lick, at Packsaddle. That herd is put here to be run off into the canyons of Squaw Mountain—and Barney's whack in the spoil is four hundred dollars, which Corcoran paid him in his office yesterday."

"Oh crumbs!"

"There's been a lot of rustling on the ranges of the Kicking Cayuse," said Vernon-Smith. "I know why and how, now! With the foreman hand in glove with the rustlers, it's an easy and paying game. Barney takes his whack, and leaves a bunch of cows to be picked up by his friends."

"Blessed if it doesn't look—" said Bob.

"The lookfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But—"

"I screwed out of Bunter, last night, all he heard behind Barney's desk," said the Bounder. "If I've got the scheme right, this herd is to be driven at sundown. Barney Stone was paid four hundred dollars to send it here, leaving the rest to Corcoran & Co. That's the game he's been playing on this ranch for years on end—and that he doesn't want spotted."

"But—" said Bob.

"You're not convinced!" grinned the Bounder. "I've told you I'm not banking on it yet, as a cert. But if a bunch of roughnecks come out of the gulches yonder at sundown to drive the herd, what then?"

"Well, that would like like a cert!" said Harry. "At least, it would look jolly suspicious."

"Well, they won't drive the herd so long as I pack a gun!" said Vernon-Smith. "If that's the game, it will

go on—Barney thinks we're safe away at Hatchet, and he certainly doesn't dream that we're here watching for his friends on the Squaw range. I'm seeing this through—I'm here to look after my father's interests, on my father's property. But you fellows—"

"Fathead! We're seeing it through, too!" said Harry. "It sounds pretty convincing, the way you've worked it out, Smithy, but—I don't think I shall be quite convinced till I see the rustlers."

"Same here!" said Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The Bounder laughed.

"Leave it at that!" he said. "We'll let the fire out, so that the smoke won't warn them when they turn up—and we'll wait. But I'll bet you fellows ten to one in doughnuts that we shall see them before the sun dips behind that mountain."

And the Famous Five could only wonder whether the Bounder was

right; and whether, before the sun set that golden afternoon, they would be mixed up in a wild affray with the rustlers of Squaw Mountain.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Rustlers of Squaw Mountain!

CRACK, crack!
It was the cracking of a cattle-whip that rang like a pistol-shot across the prairie.

Herbert Vernon-Smith leaped to his feet.

Smithy was sitting on the bench outside the stockman's hut, with his rifle across his knees, as the sun sank deeper, in a glow of crimson-and-gold, in the west, and the shadow of Squaw Mountain grew longer on the plain.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was by his side, leaning back against the wall of the hut, basking in the sunshine that streamed on his dusky face.

The other four fellows were strolling about the river-bank. Every now and

then they glanced towards the distant mountain, wondering whether they would see riders emerge from the shadowy gulches that split the mighty mass.

Smithy, leaping to his feet at the crack of the whip, gripped his rifle. Hurree Singh was on his feet the next second. The Co. came up at a run.

Even the Bounder's keen and watchful eye had not seen horsemen approaching from the mountain. But the distance was considerable, the prairie was rugged, and there were fringes of thicket and small timber. That, at least, one horseman had arrived on the spot was certain from the crack of the whip—and he had not come from the east, the direction of the ranch, or the juniors must have observed him.

"Look!" said the Bounder, with a gleam in his eyes.

Far away on the range a stetson hat showed above the grass. The horseman had ridden from beyond a fringe of post-oaks.

(Continued on next page.)

SCHOOLBOYS WHO HAVE WON INTERNATIONAL FAME!

An Eve of Cup-Final Article.

By OUR INTERNATIONAL COACH.

THOSE of my readers who have been learning to play football with me through these columns are now nearing the end of their first football season. If I have managed to get you really interested in this great game there is not much doubt that most of you will by now be having ambitions to become really good footballers, and eventually to play for a first-class club.

You will have noticed during my "lessons" in past weeks that I have repeatedly talked about the first-class game, and the way it is played, when I have been explaining a point to you. For those who might like later on to become first-class footballers, let me tell you about some players who are at present famous in Football League teams, who can trace their success back to the time when they were schoolboys, just as you are now.

The stories of these players will show you that, if you want to do well in football, the time to start is now. It is no use waiting till you are getting on in years, and then start taking the game seriously. Start right now by always playing at your best, practising hard and playing hard. Don't be content just to stand still; the more progress that is made now, the less there will be to be made later on. When you've gained a place in your school side, try to get into the district team. Then have a shot at playing for your county. When you have reached that far it is not many more stages before you are chosen to play in a schoolboys' International match. You think that all sounds impossible, don't you? But if you are keen enough, nothing is impossible.

CATCHING THE SCOUT'S EYE

LISTEN to the story of Albert Geldard, the Everton outside-right who has played for England this season. When he was only nine Geldard gained a regular place in his school team. For three years he didn't miss a match played by

the team which represented his native county of Yorkshire. At twelve years old, he was selected to play for England. He did so well in the International matches that when he was still twelve years old he was invited to go and train with the professionals of the Bradford club. Two years later, he played for Bradford Reserves, and the following year he got a place in their League team, the youngest player ever to appear in a Football League match.

You see the point? Geldard wasn't content to stand still. He was always anxious to go one better, until he reached the very top. I once asked him how he managed it. He said he thought his success was due partly to the way he practised when he was a schoolboy, and partly to the coaching he received from his schoolmaster. Those things were important for Geldard; they are important for you if you want to get anywhere in football.

When a schoolboy starts playing for his county, and for his country, he immediately comes under the eye of people connected with the big football clubs. They send their "scouts" out to these schoolboy matches, and the scouts come back to report on any players who have shown promise. This fact is amply proved by the number of schoolboy Internationals who have found their way, before long, to the big League clubs. Geldard's partner in several of his International matches was a lad named Carter—Horatio Carter, who grew up to be Sunderland's captain when they won the League and the Cup in successive seasons, and who has played several times for England.

THE WILL TO GET THERE

ALL followers of football have heard of and probably seen Cliff Bastin, of Arsenal, Len Goulden, of West Ham, and Les Howe and Arthur Rowe of the Spurs. Do you know that these four played in the same schoolboys' International side when they were lads? Doesn't that prove that a young player

can do a lot while he is still at school to make sure that his ability is recognised when he grows up? Eric Houghton, who played a big part in Aston Villa's fight to the Cup Semi-Final this season, is another International player who came to the notice of the big clubs while he was still at school. And I could go on, and on, and on.

Don't think that I am trying to suggest that it is possible for all young players to become well known as schoolboy footballers if they try hard enough. It isn't. And it isn't only the fellows who are tip-top footballers at school who reach the first-class standard when they grow up. Luck plays a big part. I think particularly of the case of "Pat" Beasley, the Huddersfield Town outside-left.

When he was at school at Brierley Hill, Pat couldn't even get a regular place in his school side. That wasn't so much because he wasn't good enough, but because the inside-left of that team—inside-left was Beasley's position in those days—was a bit better than Beasley was. And that inside-left was Ray Westwood, the Bolton Wanderers forward, who some people consider to be the best inside forward in the game to-day. So with Westwood there, Beasley didn't get much of a showing. All credit to him that he didn't worry. He kept hard at it, taking every chance to improve. Now he is rewarded by being a member of the Huddersfield Town team to play in the Cup Final at Wembley.

So you see that there are numerous players in the first-class game who, when they were young and only starting as footballers, had the same ideas as you have. They wanted to be professional footballers. Right from the start they set out with a will to get there. There is no reason why many of you should not do what they have done. Practise hard and play hard, and you stand a good chance of reaching the top.

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Now he was in full view, cracking his whip, the sharp crack ringing for a great distance in the clear air, and as the juniors, grouped before the stockman's hut, stared at him, two more horsemen pushed into view.

They, too, began cracking their whips, with what object the juniors easily saw. The lazy cattle in the thick grass stirred and grunted, and got into motion. Hairy backs heaved up from the grass.

The Bounder's eyes glittered.

"What do you fellows think now?" he grinned.

"By gum!" said Bob.

The three horsemen were beginning to drive the cattle—shepherding the scattered cows together, with cracks of their whips, to bunch them in a herd for driving.

At the distance it was not easy to make out the faces under the "tengallon" hats, but one of them, the juniors could see, was dark and swarthy—the face of a Mexican. The other two looked like punchers native to the country.

None of the three even glanced towards the stockman's hut. If they were, as it seemed, cattle-thieves, they knew that there was no cowman at the hut, and believed that the isolated herd was unguarded.

Obviously, they were quite unaware of the group of schoolboys in front of the hut.

"That settles it, I think!" remarked the Bounder. "Get out the horses, you fellows."

"I—I suppose they can't be Kicking Cayuse men, Smithy," said Frank Nugent dubiously. "Barney might have sent men to drive the herd in—"

"One of them's a Mexican," said Johnny Bull. "I haven't seen any Mexicans in the ranch outfit, Franky."

"But I've seen that Mexican before," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "That's Mexican Joe, who was with Two-gun Sanders when he got me, the day we came here."

"Oh, yes, I know him now!" said Harry Wharton, looking intently at the distant, swarthy face. "We saw him at Prairie Bend, you fellows—"

"That's the man!" agreed Bob. "One of the gang that was after Smithy! They're pinching those cows, you men, whether Barney Stone's at the back of it or not!"

"And we're going to stop them!" said Vernon-Smith. "Get mounted!"

He went into the corral, followed by the Famous Five.

In a few minutes the broncos were saddled and bridled and led out.

The juniors mounted. Every one of them had taken his rifle from the leather case and seen that it was fully loaded.

Smithy started, riding towards the horsemen in the distance, and the others followed him.

Their hearts were beating rather quickly; but they were quite cool and ready for what might come. The Bounder, hard as nails, and absolutely unacquainted with fear, was determined to stop the cattle-raid, even if he had been left alone; and the Famous Five were not likely to leave him to it.

But they felt a deep thrill at the thought of actual fighting—and they knew now that it might very likely come to gun-play. Cattle-thieves were not likely to yield up their booty at the order of a schoolboy.

The risk was one that was taken, as a part of the day's work, by punchers on

the ranches in the Packsaddle country. But it was a new and thrilling experience to fellows who only a few weeks ago had been at school.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! They've seen us!" breathed Bob.

The Mexican was the first to spot the schoolboy riders, coming at a gallop from the stockman's hut. He stared at them under the brim of his great hat and waved his quirt, shouting to his companions.

"Vaya, vaya! El señorito!"

The juniors heard his shout as well as the other two cattle-lifters. Both the latter swung round in their saddles, staring.

Evidently all three of the raiders were surprised by the sight of the approaching bunch of riders.

The Mexican pulled in his horse and sat staring. One of the others dropped a hand to a butt in his belt.

But the third man made a gesture to him, and he released it again. The juniors heard him call out:

"Forget that, Euchre."

Then the man who had called, and seemed to be the leader, wheeled his horse and rode towards the juniors.

"Notice his boko?" grinned the Bounder. "Bunter told us that that cattle-buyer yesterday had a beaky nose."

The beaky nose on a hard, thin, foxy face with narrow eyes was a prominent feature. The juniors had little doubt that this was the man Bunter had seen at the ranch and whom he had heard in talk with Barney Stone.

He was, in that case, the man who had paid over four hundred dollars to the ranch foreman, and it was scarcely possible to doubt now that the money had been paid as part of an arrangement for Barney Stone to permit the running-off of two hundred head of cattle.

"Pull in!" said Smithy. "Let's hear what he's got to spill."

The Greyfriars fellows reined in their broncos and waited for the man with the beaky nose to come up.

He rode up to them, his sharp eyes scanning them as he came, and pulled in his horse. He had never seen the juniors before, but he must have guessed at once who they were, and the Mexican's words had warned him that Vernon-Smith was one of the party.

"Say, you boys out for a ride?" he asked, sitting his horse in the high grass and scanning them—and the rifles which were obviously ready for use.

"We're range-riding!" said Vernon-Smith coolly.

"Range-riding!" repeated the man with the beaky nose, staring. "You!"

"Just that!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "We're riding this range and looking after the herd."

"Say, has Barney Stone asked a schoolmarm to send him new guys for his bunch?" asked the beaky man sarcastically. "Your best guess is to ride back to Kicking Cayuse afore you get lost on the prairie."

"Thanks for your advice, Mr. Corcoran!" said Vernon-Smith. "We're not taking it, but thanks all the same."

The man gave a start.

"I don't reckon I've ever met up with you afore," he said. "How'd you know my name, young feller?"

"Oh, a little bird told me!" said the Bounder airily. "My name, if it interests you, is Vernon-Smith!"

"Yep—I guessed that from your gall!" said Corcoran. "Well, Mr. Vernon-Smith, I'm advising you to ride back to the ranch."

"Thanks again!"

"You hitting the trail?" asked Cor-

coran, with a threatening note in his voice, his chin jutting.

"Hardly."

Corcoran sat his horse, looking at him. The Mexican and the man he had called Euchre were riding nearer.

"I've told you," went on the Bounder coolly, "that we're range-riding here, Mr. Corcoran. We've no use for cattle-lifters. You've given me your advice—now I'll give you mine! Hit the trail for the hills and get off Kicking Cayuse ranges. And do it quick!"

Corcoran breathed hard and deep.

"You're giving me that—and you a tenderfoot, fresh from a school in the old country!" he said.

"Exactly! Get going!"

"I guess," said Pete Corcoran grimly, "that you're new to the ways of this country, Mr. Vernon-Smith. I'm advising you to beat it while you're safe. I ain't waiting long to see your back, either."

The Famous Five sat their broncos, silent—but watchful and wary. The Bounder had his rifle across his saddle, his finger on the trigger. He was watching the beaky man like a hawk.

"You hear me yaup?" rapped Corcoran.

"I think I've mentioned that we're range-riding here, and we've no use for cattle thieves!" said the Bounder coolly. "You're here to drive Kicking Cayuse cows—I'm here to stop you! Got that?"

Corcoran set his lips.

"I'm here to drive them cows," he said, "and I guess a bunch of Kicking Cayuse punchers wouldn't stop me, let alone a bunch of schoolboys. I ain't honing to spill your juice, Mr. Vernon-Smith, but you got to beat it, and you got to beat it quick. You going?"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" drawled the Bounder.

"I guess—"

"That's enough from you! Get off this range before I drive you off with my quirt!" snapped the Bounder.

The rustler's eyes gleamed, and he whipped out the revolver from his belt.

It was well for the Bounder of Greyfriars that he was watchful. His rifle roared even as the cattle raider was lifting the revolver; the Colt went with a crash into the grass, and Corcoran's right arm dropped to his side, streaming with blood, broken by the bullet.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Gun-Fighting!

THERE was a yell of agony from the rustler as he swayed in his saddle. The startled bronco pranced, and Corcoran hardly held him in with his left hand.

His right arm hung useless. From the other two rustlers, still at a distance, came a shout, and both of them whipped out revolvers.

"Shoot!" yelled the Bounder.

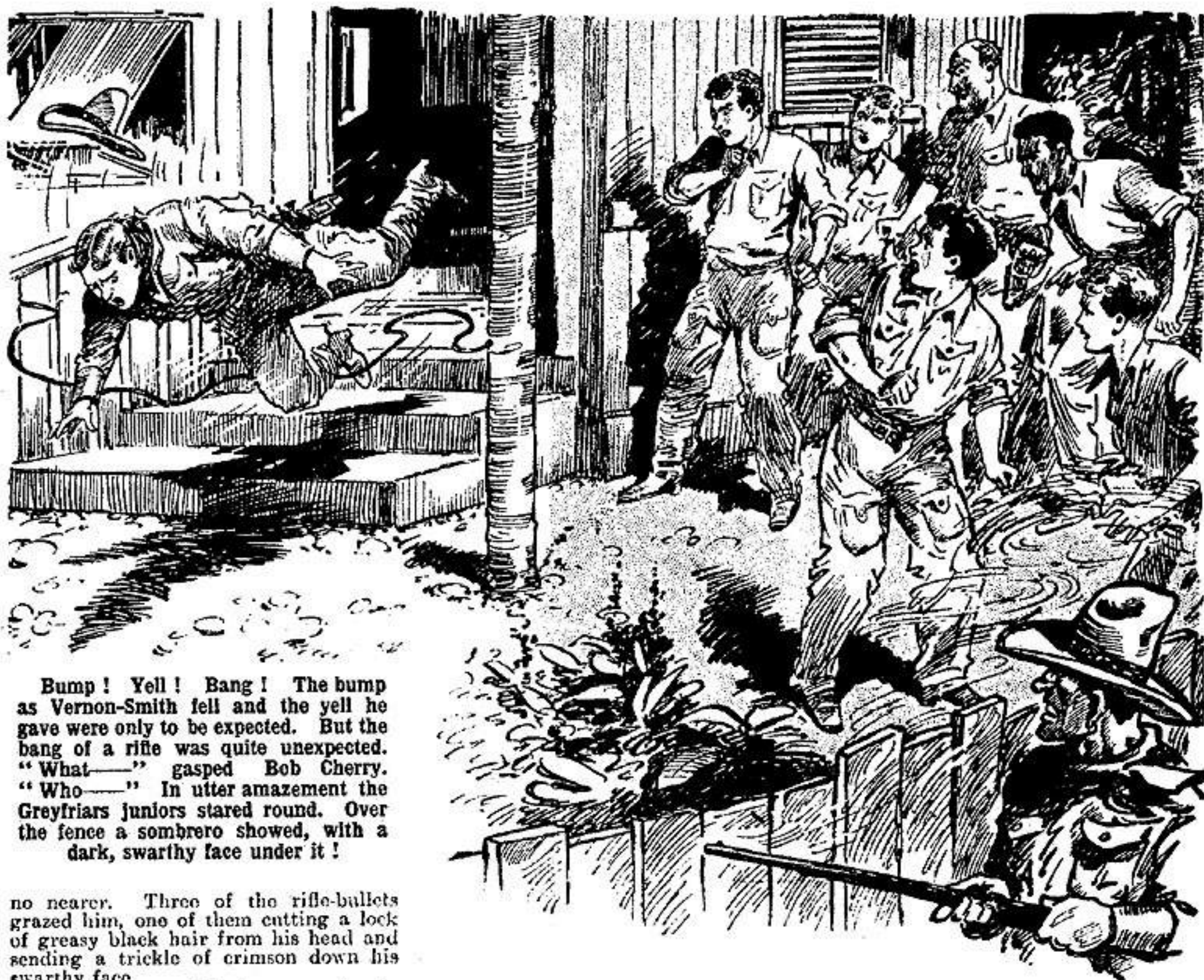
His Winchester cracked a second time as he shouted. The stetson spun on Euchre's head.

Harry Wharton & Co. felt their hearts leap. Almost before they knew what was happening they were in a gun-fight.

There was no choice in the matter; the time for choice was past. Range-riding in the Packsaddle country included readiness to handle a gun. They had to pull trigger, and there was no time for hesitation. The Mexican was already firing as he rode towards them, and the rifles roared out together.

"Carambo!" came a howl from Mexican Joe.

He had fired twice, hasty shots that, at a distance, came hardly near the juniors—but he did not fire again, and he came



Bump! Yell! Bang! The bump as Vernon-Smith fell and the yell he gave were only to be expected. But the bang of a rifle was quite unexpected. "What—" gasped Bob Cherry. "Who—" In utter amazement the Greyfriars juniors stared round. Over the fence a sombrero showed, with a dark, swarthy face under it!

no nearer. Three of the rifle-bullets grazed him, one of them cutting a lock of greasy black hair from his head and sending a trickle of crimson down his swarthy face.

He whirled round his bronco and rode away at a gallop through the startled herd, trampling wildly among the cows.

Smithy, at the same moment, was firing at Euchre. He felt the wind of a bullet by his head without heeding it. The Winchester pumped bullets at the rustler, and Euchre roared as hot lead scored along his upraised arm, gashing it from wrist to shoulder.

His hand dropped, the six-gun in it. The Bounder—as ruthless at that moment, with life at stake, as any gunman in the Packsaddle country—fired again, but missed, as the ruffian swung his horse round and rode away as the Mexican had done.

There was a booming from the startled herd as the two horsemen rode madly among the cows. Lumbering forms were in wild motion, the cows plunging on all sides.

Corcoran had succeeded in getting his bronco in hand. His hard face was white as chalk with pain and loss of blood. But he did not follow the example of his men. He had a second gun, and he got it out in his left hand, letting the reins fall on his horse's neck.

"Hold on, Smithy!" panted Harry Wharton, as the Bounder's rifle bore on the rustler. "Corcoran, drop that Colt!"

"Drop it, you fool!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Give him a chance, Smithy!"

Pete Corcoran hesitated a moment. Mexican Joe and Euchre were already far, spurring towards Squaw Mountain. Half a dozen rifles were ready to shoot him down—and Vernon-Smith's eye was gleaming along a levelled barrel. The

wounded rustler spat out an oath and let the revolver fall into the grass.

"Just in time, you scoundrel!" said Vernon-Smith savagely. "Now get out! Ride after your men, you rascal, or take what's coming to you!"

"I guess I'll get you for this!" breathed the rustler hoarsely. "I guess I'll sure—"

"Get out!" snapped the Bounder. "By gum, I'll fan you with bullets till you're out of range!"

Crack, crack!

He fired twice and both bullets cut through the top of the "ten-gallon" hat on the rustler's head. A yell from Corcoran told that one of them had grazed the head inside the hat.

"Smithy!" gasped Bob.

"The next knocks him off that bronco, if he isn't beating it!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Your last chance, you scoundrel!"

Corcoran, panting with rage, grasped his reins with his left hand and dragged his horse away. He dashed spurs to the bronco and galloped after his men, riding recklessly through the plunging cows.

Smithy's eyes gleamed after him. He seemed more than half-inclined to send lead whizzing after the rustler as he rode.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" exclaimed Bob anxiously.

The Bounder laughed.

"You're too soft for this country, you fellows!" he said. "Any Kicking Cayuse puncher would have let daylight through those rascals, instead of scratching them and driving them off.

Greyfriars ways won't go in the Packsaddle country."

"We'll stick to Greyfriars ways all we can, all the same!" said Bob. "We haven't come here to learn to be gunmen, Smithy."

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, we've pulled through all right, at any rate!" said Frank Nugent breathlessly. "We've had some luck."

"The luckfulness was terrific."

"Rot!" said the Bounder. "We had everything on our side—odds of two to one, rifles against six-guns. They hadn't an earthly if we stood up to them; but that's what they didn't expect." He burst into a laugh. "I'll bet they're the most surprised gang of rustlers in the valley of the Frio. And Barney Stone is going to be surprised when he hears of it."

Far in the distance Mexican Joe was already disappearing into a shadowy gulch in Squaw Mountain. Euchre was not far behind him, and he disappeared, too, as the juniors watched. Corcoran was riding more slowly, and was still in sight, winding his neck-scarf round his wounded arm as he rode.

The Bounder was right; the advantage had been on the side of the schoolboy range-riders—if they had the courage and nerve to stand up to gunplay. And that, evidently, they had.

But the Famous Five, at the same time, were feeling that they had been lucky to pull through without damage, and as lucky to have driven off the rustlers without "letting daylight"

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through them, as Smithy expressed it. Corcoran was nard hit, the other two scratched. That was the extent of the damage; and though Bill Buck would have thought little or nothing of leaving all three of the rustlers in the grass for the turkey-buzzards, the Greyfriars fellows were glad enough to see them ride away. Probably the Bounder was as glad as the other fellows.

"Well, we're through!" said Vernon-Smith. "Now pack your guns, you fellows and get hold of your quirts. The herd's going to give trouble."

Till that moment the Famous Five had hardly noticed the herd; but the Bounder's eye was on them. But they could see, now, that the cows were going to give trouble.

The rustlers had already got the animals in motion when the gun-fight began. The firing, and the galloping of the retreating rustlers had added to the excitement of the startled herd. The whole two hundred head of cattle were in motion now, trampling through the grass, careering away in various directions.

The juniors had heard of stampedes," though they had never seen one. They knew that nothing is easier to start than a stampede of cattle—and nothing harder to stop.

"Get them together!" rapped Vernon-Smith.

He packed his rifle and grasped his squirt, and the Famous Five quickly followed his example.

Corcoran was not yet out of sight, but the rustlers were dismissed from mind now. The schoolboy range-riders had a heavy task on hand—to control the excited herd and keep it from scattering in all directions over the wide prairies—a task that would not have been easy for experienced cow-punchers. And they set to it at once.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Stampede!

THE thunder of hoofs, the bellowing of excited, maddened cattle, filled the air with echoing din.

Wild heads tossed, and wild hoofs trampled. The six juniors scattered, with cracking whips, striving hard to keep the herd together. Stragglers, in ones and twos, broke away on all sides; but bunches of a dozen or more were headed off and driven back to the main herd, with the cracking quirts.

It was hard and heavy work, in the glare of the sunset. It was dangerous work, too, for a fall amongst the countless trampling hoofs meant death to a luckless rider.

"Stampede" had set in, and the whole Kicking Cayuse bunch, had they been there, could not have stopped it. Not till the wild fit passed, and the cattle tired and slowed down of their own accord, would the mad rush cease.

It was impossible to bring the rushing herd to a standstill. But it was possible, with luck and pluck, to give direction to the rush. Northward from the bank of the Squaw the wild herd went thundering, the juniors riding with it, keeping it together as well as they could. But the Kicking Cayuse ranch lay to the east, and the Bounder shouted to his comrades to ride on the left of the stampede and head it off.

Northward lay the ranges of other ranches, and once the herd were scattered over them it was the work of days and days of hard riding to shepherd them in again. That was certainly

not what the schoolboy punchers wanted to be the outcome of their range-riding.

Vernon-Smith spurred his bronco on the left flank of the herd, cracking his squirt, lashing at the thundering cattle, striving to edge them off to the right. And the Famous Five, strung out behind him, backed up his efforts manfully.

They were a good two miles from the Squaw before they saw any signs of success. But at length, it was clear that the mob of mad cattle were swinging round. Galloping riders and cracking quirts on the left urged them more and more to the right, and, so long as they thundered on and on, the unthinking beasts cared nothing for the direction.

But it was an hour of hard, sweating labour before the schoolboy punchers had the stampede headed east.

But it headed eastward at last; the cows thundering on the juniors riding with them, keeping them together.

Stragglers had scattered—thirty or forty of the animals were already missing, and would have to be rounded up later. But so long as the main herd was kept together, that was all that the juniors could expect—and it was all that experienced punchers could have done.

Mile after mile raced under the thundering hoofs, and the juniors rode in clouds of dust, kicked up by the rushing cattle. Behind them, the sun was sinking beyond Squaw Mountain.

The herd was returning now, the way Bill had driven it the day before, but instead of a leisurely cattle drive, it was a wild stampede, the cattle bellowing and thundering, covering the ground at a great rate.

Round the herd the schoolboy punchers rode. Bunches breaking herd, stragglers charging off, were continually driven back. On and on they swept, mile after mile.

But fatigue told its tale at last, and the cows slackened speed when Kicking Cayuse ranch was still at two or three miles distance.

Glad enough were the weary juniors to see a sign of the maddened herd coming back to its senses. The pace slackened, the mad rush was over. The schoolboy punchers were able to take it easy now.

"By gum, that was hot while it lasted!" said the Bounder, grinning at Harry Wharton, his face caked with dust and sweat. "But we've got them in hand now, old bean!"

"And getting them back to the ranch!" said Harry. "Barney Stone will be surprised to see the herd home again, Smithy."

The Bounder chuckled breathlessly. "I'll tell a man, as Bill says!" he said. "Barney will be surprised a whole heap. He fancies that the herd, by this time, is being driven off through the gulches of Squaw Mountain."

"I—I suppose there's no doubt about that, now!" said Harry.

"Hardly!" grinned the Bounder.

"But there's no actual proof, if you come to that, Smithy!" said Wharton slowly, and a little uneasily. "I've no doubt you've got it right, but—"

"But there's going to be proof!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm saying nothing to Barney at present. What we know we're keeping to ourselves. I've got it clear enough in my own mind—and I'm keeping it packed there till I get the goods on Barney. My father will know how to deal with him when I let him know how the matter stands. I've got to leave it till I get it clear."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Here's Bill!"

The ranch was in sight now, in the distance, in the sinking sunset. From

the direction of Kicking Cayuse a horseman came at a gallop. Evidently the returning herd had been sighted.

The juniors waved their quirts in greeting to Bill. By this time the herd were at a walk, and the schoolboy punchers had no more trouble with them.

"Say, you 'uns!" roared Bill Buck, as he came clattering up and reined in his horse. "What you call this game? What you doing with that bunch of cows?"

"Herding it home, old bean!" answered the Bounder. "That bunch wasn't safe on the Squaw range, Bill."

"I'll tell a man!" exclaimed Bill. "Say, Barney Stone allowed that you young geeks had started out for Hatchet this morning. He sure told me so when I hit the ranch with that string of hosses from Hatchet."

"We changed our minds, and started for the Squaw range instead," explained the Bounder. "We've been range-riding, Bill."

"I'll tell a man! Barney will sure get his mad up when he sees that bunch come in," said Bill. "Barney's foreman of this here ranch, and what he says goes, young Vernon-Smith."

"Oh, Barney will be pleased!" said the Bounder. "Sure to be, when he hears that the herd was nearly run off by rustlers, and we put paid to them."

"The pleasuredness will be terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky wink at Bob, who gave a chuckle.

Bill stared at them.

"You're telling me!" he ejaculated.

"I sure am, and then some!" grinned the Bounder. "We've been gun-fighting with rustlers, Bill, and I'll tell a man from Texas they came out at the little end of the horn, and a few over."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we've driven the herd in to a safer range," said Smithy. "They're all right now, Bill. You can take them over, and we'll get on to the ranch. I sure do want, a whole heap, to please Barney by telling him how we saved that bunch of cows from the rustlers."

"Search me!" gasped Bill.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Smithy.

And, leaving the lumbering cows to the astonished Bill, the Greyfriars fellows rode on to the ranch—thick with dust, tired to the bone, but happy and satisfied with their day's work, and wondering considerably what the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse would think of it.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Getting Barney's Goat!

BARNEY STONE stood looking at the bunch of riders as they came, his hard, lean face set, his eyes glittering under knitted brows.

A dozen or more punchers stood staring also, and as they saw Barney's face they exchanged glances. There was no mistaking the bitter, concentrated fury in the face of the foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

Out on the plain, a dusty mass in the red sunset, lumbered the herd from the Squaw range.

They had been sighted far in the distance, and Bill Buck had galloped out to meet them. Barney stood watching them as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes.

He had supposed that the schoolboys had ridden on the Hatchet trail that day. As Bill had returned without having met them, he concluded that they had lost themselves on the prairie, and

was grimly amused by the idea. Then Lariat brought him word that a herd was coming up from the direction of the Squaw range, driven by the bunch of schoolboys, and Barney had rushed out of the rancho to look; and he had been standing ever since, as if rooted to the ground, staring, with a bitter rage in his lean, brown face that startled the punchers.

Any foreman might have been irritated and intensely angered by matters being taken out of his hands by a bunch of schoolboys, even if one of them was his employer's son. Barney had stationed that herd on the range, and given orders for it to remain there; now it was being driven in. It was more than enough to "get the goat" of a ranch foreman.

But it was clear that that was not all; that did not wholly account for the deadly rage in Barney's looks. There were some of the bunch who understood what he was thinking—Lariat and Panhandle among them. That herd now driven in by the schoolboys should have been in the hands of Corcoran and his gang, whose bribe the foreman had pocketed. It should have been winding away by the gulches of Squaw Mountain instead of trampling back to the Kicking Cayuse.

Barney's hand slid, as if unconsciously, towards the butt of a Colt as the schoolboys dashed up, after leaving the herd to Bill. In his rage he almost forgot the necessity of caution, and of keeping up appearances.

But he remembered in time, and did not touch the six-gun. He breathed hard, and he breathed deep, as the riders clattered to a halt. Then he strode towards them, and the punchers looked on, in the full expectation of trouble to follow. Barney had a quirt under his arm, and they would not have been surprised to see him handle it on the schoolboys.

"What's this?" Barney's voice came, husky with anger. "You've driven in the cows from the Squaw range—that's the herd I sent out yesterday with Buck. You've driven them in. What you mean?"

"Yes, we've driven them in," assented the Bounder. "You see—"

"You figure you've come here to run this ranch, Mr. Vernon-Smith?" the foreman almost choked. "You figure you've come here to put it across the foreman of the ranch? You reckon you can cut across my orders to the bunch because you're the boss' son? You better forget it!"

He did not wait for an answer. It was plain that he could barely restrain himself from lashing at the boss' son with the quirt!

He turned to the staring crowd of punchers.

"You, Panhandle!" he rapped.

"Yep?"

"Git on your cayuse, and go with Bill Buck, and drive that herd back to their range!" snapped Barney.

"You said it!" said Panhandle.

"Hold on!" rapped Vernon-Smith.

Barney Stone gave him a glare.

"Pack it up, you!" he snapped. "You ain't here to run this ranch. Chew on that! If your popper over the pond wants a new foreman for the Kicking Cayuse, I guess he can cable. You ain't giving orders here, you young piccan!"

The Bounder eyed him coolly; Harry Wharton & Co. curiously. Barney made a gesture to Panhandle, who started towards the corral for his horse.

"Hold on!" repeated the Bounder. "We've got that herd away from the

rustlers of Squaw Mountain, Mr. Stone. If we hadn't happened to ride out to the Squaw range, instead of going to Hatchet, that herd would have been driven off—"

"Aw! Can it!" snarled Barney.

"I tell you—"

"You've spilled more'n enough! Can it!"

"That is the case, Mr. Stone," said Harry Wharton. "We drove off the rustlers, or they would have driven the herd."

Barney gave a start.

"What you telling me?" he exclaimed.

"You'd better listen to what's happened, Mr. Stone!" drawled the Bounder. "A gang of rustlers tried to run off that herd—one of them was Mexican Joe, who's wanted by the sheriff of Packsaddle for a hold-up—and we had to fire on them—"

"You been burning powder?" exclaimed Barney Stone, staring at him.

"Just a few!" said Vernon-Smith coolly. "There were three of the gang, and they've all stopped lead—"

"Search me!" gasped Barney.

"One of them was pretty hard hit; the other two got off with scratches," went on the Bounder. "But they were all three glad to hit the horizon, Mr. Stone. You'll be glad to hear that we beat them to it."

"A bunch of schoolboys like you 'uns beat a gang of rustlers in a gun-fight!" said Barney Stone, almost dazedly. "What you giving me?"

"The goods!" said Vernon-Smith.

"You are sure trying to string me along!" muttered Barney. His deep-set eyes glittered at the Bounder. "Tell me what's happened on the Squaw range—if anything has."

The crowd of punchers, as well as the foreman, listened with breathful attention, as the Bounder told.

Harry Wharton & Co. eyed the foreman keenly, while Vernon-Smith was speaking. They were as good as sure that Smithy had put his finger on the truth—that Barney Stone was the "nigger in the woodpile," the man behind the scenes, who had put up the gunman Sanders to keep the owner's son away from Kicking Cayuse, and that his motive was his partnership with the rustlers of Squaw Mountain.

If that was the truth—and they believed it was—this was the most unwelcome news that the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse could have heard.

At the same time he had to keep his secret and play his part. Apart from the two or three who were in the game with him, he dared not let his own outfit learn that he was in "cahoots" with a gang of cattle thieves.

The expression on Barney's lean, brown face, as he listened, was extraordinary. But he was plainly making efforts to control his rage, and to keep in mind that he had to play the part of a ranch foreman who was glad to hear that a valuable herd had been saved from the rustlers.

"By the great horned toad," said Barney, at last, and he was cool again by this time, "you sure do surprise me a whole lot, Mr. Vernon-Smith! I guess your popper over the pond wouldn't be best pleased to hear that you was mixed up in gun-fighting with a bunch of rustlers. He sure would expect me to keep you riding clear of that kind of rookus."

"We seem to have been able to take care of ourselves," answered the Bounder carelessly. "Now you know how the matter stands, Mr. Stone, you won't want to send that herd back to

the Squaw range. But, of course, it's in your hands. You're foreman of the ranch, and it's for you to give orders."

Barney gave him a look—a long, searching look. Then he nodded slowly.

"I guess I'm keeping that herd on the home ranges till them rustlers have been cinched," he said. "I guess it got my goat a few, Mr. Vernon-Smith, seeing that herd driven in agin my orders. But now you've put me wise, I'll say it's O.K., sir!"

"Right-ho!" said the Bounder cheerily; and he rode away to the corral with his friends, leaving the crowd of punchers in a buzz.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Ride Him, Cowboy!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles with alarm.

It was the following day.

Harry Wharton & Co., outside the bunkhouse, were getting some more instruction from Bill in the use of the lasso. Billy Bunter, leaning on the corral fence, was watching them, rather morosely, from a little distance. The outcome of Bunter's last essay in handling the "rope" had rather discouraged him, and he did not on this occasion offer to show the other fellows how it was done.

A heavy trampling almost at his fat elbow caused Bunter to blink round, and he jumped and gasped. A long-horned head was almost upon him.

A bunch of cows were being driven past the corral, and Billy Bunter was right in the way of that bunch of cows.

On a Texas ranch a guy was expected to keep his eyes open. The man who was driving the cows was behind the herd, cracking his quirt, and he did not ever see Bunter. Had he seen him, probably the puncher would have guessed that it was up to the fat tender-foot to jump clear. As it was, Bunter, having been looking in the other direction, did not see the cows till they were almost upon him, and he spluttered with alarm.

The huge, clumsy animals lumbered along close to the corral wall, some of them brushing it as they lumbered. There was no time for Bunter to cut across their path and get clear, and he huddled back against the corral fence to give them all the room he could.

He squeaked as a heavy shoulder butted him and almost pitched him over. He squeaked again as a long horn tilted the stetson on his fat head.

"Ow! I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. "Oh crikey! Oh jiminy! Keep away, you beasts! Oh lor'!"

Cow after cow lumbered by in a mass of heavy bodies, trampling hoofs, and tossing horns. Billy Bunter was really in danger of being knocked down and trampled over.

How he did it the fat junior never knew, but, with a desperate bound, he grabbed the top of the corral fence and dragged himself up.

He hung there by his fat hands, squeaking.

The cows lumbered under him, hairy backs knocking against his feet.

"Ow! Help!" yelled Bunter frantically.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came a roar of laughter from the man who was driving the herd.

He saw Bunter now, and seemed amused by the sight.

Perhaps there was something comic in the aspect of the fat junior clinging wild'y to the top of the fence over the plunging cows. But if it was comic to the cowman, it was not comic to Bunter.

He made frantic efforts to draw himself to the top of the fence and get a leg over. But he made those efforts in vain.

Any other fellow, no doubt, could have done it. But few other fellows had so much weight to lift.

Bunter heaved and pulled and dragged, and exerted all his strength—in vain. He hung to the fence by his fat hands, suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, between the heavens and the earth.

The cowman roared; Lariat looked out of the corral gate and roared; and Bill, over by the bunkhouse, ceased to whirl the rope, stared, and roared, too. They all seemed entertained by Bunter's antics. Harry Wharton & Co. looked round at him and grinned.

"Hold on, Bunter!" shouted Bob.

It was impossible for the juniors to reach the fat Owl through the stream of passing cows—cows after cows in a seemingly endless stream.

"Stick to it, old fat man!" roared Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hang on, Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter was hanging on as hard as he could. But his fat fingers were slipping from their hold under the strain on his podgy arms. He could not clamber on top of the fence, and he could not hold on for long. He could only hope that the cows would be gone before he dropped. But the cows seemed innumerable.

"Ow!" squeaked Bunter, as one hand went and he held on by the other.

"By gum, if that fat ass drops among the cows——" exclaimed the Bounder. "The blithering idiot!"

"Hold on, Bunter!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Wow!"

Bunter's other hand slipped. He plunged down.

Bump!

It was upon a heaving, hairy back that he bumped. He sprawled on the back of a startled cow, and clutched wildly.

The cow heaved and plunged. Bunter, sprawling across its back, clutched desperately at the hairy hide, and was carried onward. He hardly knew what was happening to him.

He scrambled up, his fat little legs sliding down over the cow's flanks, holding on to the hairy neck, blinking wildly about him through his big spectacles.

"Ow! Help!" yelled Bunter, as he rode the cow.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came a roar from a dozen directions. The Kicking Cayuse outfit had seen all sorts of riding, but riding a cow was a new one on them, and they yelled with merriment. "Attaboy! Attaboy! Ride him!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Stick on, Bunter! You're all right so long as you stick on!"

"Ow! Help!" yelled Bunter.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the punchers. "Ride him, cowboy! Haw, haw, haw!"

"I say, you fellows—— Yaroooooh!"

Bunter clung on desperately. Heads and horns tossed round him. The cow on which he was mounted plunged, no doubt greatly surprised by the sudden landing of a rider on its back.

That cow cavorted and heaved and plunged, but it had no chance of unseating Bunter; the fat Owl clung to its back like a limpet to a rock.

"Yarooooh! Help!" roared Bunter. "I say—— Oh crikey!"

Harry Wharton caught Bill by the arm. The big puncher was doubled up with merriment.

"Rope in that cow, Bill, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Harry.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Bill. "I'll say that geek is some rider! He sure is a sight for sore eyes, and then some! I'll tell a man!"

"Rope him in before the fat ass tumbles off!" urged Harry.

"O.K.!" gasped Bill; and he strode towards the stream of cows, grasping his lariat for a cast, but laughing almost too much to handle the rope.

The Famous Five watched him rather anxiously. Bunter, as a cow-rider, might be funny; but a tumble off the back of the plunging, prancing cow was no joke.

That cow was excited, which was natural, with a yelling rider on its back, clutching madly at its neck.

It plunged and pranced and broke out of the stream of animals, trying to shake off the strange encumbrance on its back.

Finding that impossible, the animal broke into a wild gallop, heading for the open prairie.

Bill's rope flew as it went. But the wild rush of the cow carried it beyond the reach of the forty-foot rope. The loop of the lasso dropped a yard short, and the cow careered wildly on.

"Yarooooh!" roared Bunter. "Help! Oh jiminy! I say, you fellows—— Yoo-hoop!"

"After him!" gasped Bob.

The herd had lumbered on at last out of the way, and the juniors were able to get after Bunter.

But Bunter's cow had started for the prairie, and started as if for a race in a rodeo.

Bill rushed in pursuit, ahead of the juniors, and whirled his lasso again; but it dropped yards short of a whisking tail.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Yaroooooh!" floated back, as Billy Bunter tore on across the prairie on the back of the galloping cow.

"Oh, search me!" gasped Bill, coming to a breathless halt. "Aw, carry me home to Hanner! Haw, haw, haw! That gink sure does make me smile some! I guess you'uns want to get your cayuse to get after that cow! She sure won't stop this side of Packsaddle, with that geek clawing at her pesky neck! Haw, haw, haw!"

The juniors halted. There was obviously no chance of overtaking that runaway cow on foot. They ran back to the corral for their horses.

Far off on the rolling prairie, the wildly excited cow careered on, with trampling hoofs and tossing horns, and Billy Bunter's terrified squeals died away in the distance.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Roped In!

"TALLY-HO!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. dashed away from the ranch at a gallop. They had not been long in saddling-up, but Billy Bunter on the careering cow was only a speck in the distance when they started in pursuit. That cow was going strong.

They left Bill and the other punchers roaring with laughter behind them; but the juniors, though they could not help chuckling at Bunter's antics, were concerned for the fat Owl. They got after the runaway cow at top speed and gained fast, the galloping broncos stretching themselves to full speed.

They had their lassos in hand as they rode, ready to "rope in" the cow as soon as they got within distance for a throw.

Fast as the cow was going, they gained at every stride of the horses and drew nearer, and nearer to the fugitive. Once more Billy Bunter's terrified squeals floated back to their ears.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! Help! Stop, you beast! Oh crikey! Ow!"

"Hold on, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "We're coming!"

"Yarooooh!"

"Ride him, cowboy!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Bob Cherry spurred on ahead and drew near the wildly trampling cow; he whirled his lasso and let it fly.

The juniors had benefited by Bill's instructions in the use of the rope, but they were far from expert as yet. Bob's loop missed the tossing head by a yard and dropped in the grass, and he slackened speed to draw in the lariat.

The other fellows passed him; and Frank Nugent threw his lasso, missing by a wider margin than Bob.

Harry Wharton tried next, and his noose dropped over a long horn; but a toss of the head tossed it off again, and the frantic cow careered onward.

"Ow! Help!" yelled Bunter, clinging on convulsively. "Oh crikey! Help! I say, you fellows—— Yarooooh!"

Johnny Bull's lasso hit a whisking tail—and slid down. Hurree Janset Ram Singh's gave the cow a clump in the ribs. Both had the effect of urging it on to greater speed.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "Go it, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith galloped ahead.

All the Famous Five were engaged in coiling in their lassos, and it was left to the Bounder to make the successful shot.

Smithy dashed on, watching for a chance, and he was within twenty feet of the cow, riding nearly abreast, when his riata flew.

The loop settled over a long-horned head, and the Bounder instantly drew his bronco to a halt.

The end of the rope was fastened to the saddle, or the sudden drag on it would have wrenched it away, and the cow would have thundered on, with a trailing rope behind it.

The bronco, used to work with the rope, planted his forefeet firmly to take the strain, the lasso tautened, and the cow was dragged to a staggering halt.

"Got him!" gasped the Bounder.

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter. The cow struggled and pranced in the rope, and Bunter clung for his fat life. "I say, help! Yoo-hoop!"

"All right now, old fat man!" gasped Bob.

"Owl! Beast! Help!"

Vernon-Smith wheeled his horse; he rode back towards the ranch, and the pull on the lasso, fast to the long-horned head, forced the captured cow to follow. He rode at a trot, and the cow had to trot in the rear.

"Hold on, Smithy!" gasped Harry Wharton.

The Bounder laughed.

"That cow's got to be taken in," he answered; "so has Bunter. He's all right so long as he sticks on. Stick on, Bunter!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Stop! Hold this beastly cow! You catch hold of its tail, Bob. I say, you fellows, catch hold of its horns! I say—Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stick on, Bunter!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

He stuck on. The cow was in a more subdued state now, held by the rope; it lumbered on behind the Bounder's bronco, Billy Bunter sticking on its back. The Famous Five rode round it laughing.

A roar of merriment greeted their arrival at the ranch.

A dozen punchers gathered round to watch Billy Bunter come in on cow-back. Bill Buck doubled up with mirth.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Bill.

He strode up to the cow as the Bounder's rope led it in and grasped the fat junior. With a heave of his powerful arm he jerked Billy Bunter from the cow's back and landed him on his feet.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bill unhooked the lasso, and the cow lumbered away—probably as glad to be rid of Bunter as Bunter was to be rid of the cow.

Vernon-Smith dismounted and coiled up his rope, grinning.

Billy Bunter, gasping for breath, spluttering with rage, rolled up to the Bounder as he stood coiling the lasso and shook a fat fist at his grinning face.

"I've a jolly good mind to punch your head, you beast!" yelled Bunter, his little round eyes gleaming wrath behind his big round spectacles. "Why couldn't you stop that beastly cow and let me get off its beastly back, instead of dragging me back to this beastly ranch on the beastly beast, you beast?"

"Just my fun, old fat man."

Billy Bunter gurgled with wrath. Bunter was not keen on walking, especially over a mile of rugged prairie, but he would have preferred to walk back to the ranch, instead of returning on cowback. Bunter had no desire whatever to add to the merriment of the Kicking Cayuse outfit. Bunter liked the spotlight, but not the sort he was getting now.

"You—you beast!" he gasped. "I'll jolly well—"

"Look out, Bunter!" yelled Bob Cherry. "That cow's behind you!"

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter bolted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, keep it off!" howled Bunter, as he bolted for the ranch-house.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter bounded up the veranda steps. He did the veranda almost in a bound, dashed into the nearest doorway, and slammed the door behind him. He left the Kicking Cayuse punchers roaring and the Greyfriars fellows almost weeping.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Wallop!

"He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced round in the dusky moonlight at the sound of that familiar, unmusical cackle.

After supper that evening the Famous Five had gone down into the garden in front of the ranch-house veranda, and were talking to Bill Buck, who leaned on a fence, smoked his pipe, and told them a lot of things worth knowing about ranching. Billy Bunter had been left at supper—having eaten only enough for three when the other fellows finished. Vernon-Smith had gone along the veranda to Barney Stone's office, where he was with the foreman.

Whether Barney Stone knew or not that the Bounder suspected him the juniors could not tell; he gave no sign of such knowledge, at all events. Now he had asked Smithy to step into the office for a business talk over the affairs of the ranch, and the Bounder had winked at his friends as he went with Barney. He had no doubt that the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse aimed to pull the wool over his eyes—and the sardonic Bounder was quite willing to let Barney get on with it.

Smithy was still in the foreman's office, and Bunter still at supper, when the chums of Greyfriars joined Bill in the garden. But Bunter rolled out at last. He stood for a minute or two, in the light from the open doorway of the living-room, which was just opposite the steps of the veranda. There, the fat junior blinked about him, with a grin on his fat face. Then he rolled across to the broad wooden steps, and descended.

Had the juniors noticed him specially, they might have noticed that Bunter lingered on those steps for some minutes. But they did not notice him—and did not, in fact, remember his fat existence, till that cackle at their elbows reminded them of the same.

Then they looked round at him.

"He, he, he!" repeated Bunter.

His fat face was wreathed in grins. Something, evidently, amused Bunter—he was simply packed with merriment.

"Well, what's the jolly old joke?" asked Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"Thinking of your performance on cow-back this morning?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. "I fancy somebody's going to be sorry for playing rotten tricks on a fellow, and chance it! You wait!"

Bill, leaning on the fence, grinned at the fat junior, over his pipe. The Famous Five regarded him rather curiously.

"What have you been up to?" asked Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he!"

"Better not play any tricks on Smithy!" said Frank Nugent. "Smithy loses his temper, old fat bean—better give Smithy a miss!"

"He, he, he!" Smithy thought it was fearfully funny to yank me along a mile at the end of a rope, on that beastly cow!" chortled Bunter. "I might have

come down wallop! Perhaps he'll think it funny when he comes down wallop! He, he, he!"

"Is the esteemed Smithy coming down wallop?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I fancy so! He, he, he! You fellows wait!" said Bunter mysteriously. "You'll see him all right from here—the steps are right in the light from the doorway, see?"

The Famous Five could only stare.

From the fence where they stood, they certainly could see the veranda steps quite clearly in the light that streamed out of the open door and windows of the living-room of the rancho. Vernon-Smith, when he came down the steps, would be in full view across the garden. But why Bunter expected him to come down "wallop" was quite a mystery.

"You fat chump!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Have you fixed up something for Smithy to fall over?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob. "Is that it, you dangerous maniac?"

"Oh, no! Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "Don't you fellows get interfering. I haven't tied a rope across the steps—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Besides, you know what the beast did—leading me a dance on that beastly cow, to make all those beastly punchers snigger!" said Bunter warmly. "You fellows were sniggering too; you needn't deny it—sniggering like a lot of Cheshire cheeses—I mean Cheshire cats! Well, you can jolly well snigger when Smithy comes down a wallop on his boko—he, he, he!"

"You blithering owl!" gasped Harry Wharton. "You've tied a rope across the steps for Smithy to catch his feet in—"

"Search me!" ejaculated Bill, staring at the fat Owl. "I'll say that fat gink is sure the world's prize boob!"

"I say, you fellows, don't you get butting in!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, anxiously. "You know what that beast did—playing rotten jokes on a fellow. One good turn deserves another you know! Besides, I haven't done anything—it's all right! If there's a rope tied across the top of the steps, I don't know anything about it. There isn't so far as I know—I never had any rope, and I never went into the kitchen and asked Chick for one, and—"

"You dangerous maniac!" howled Bob, and he made a movement in the direction of the veranda.

"I say you fellows—" protested Bunter. "Don't you—"

"Oh, my hat! There's Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

A footstep was heard on the veranda, and the Bounder appeared at the top of the steps, full in the light of the room behind him.

Only for a second was he visible there.

The next, he was plunging headlong forward, with a startled howl, and coming head first down the steps! There was no time to warn him—even as the juniors sighted him, across the garden, he nose dived.

Bump!

Yell!

Bang!

The bump of the falling Bounder, the yell he gave as he bumped, were only to be expected. But the bang of a rifle was quite unexpected. It rang and roared, not a dozen yards from the juniors, and startled them so that they jumped almost clear of the ground.

"What—" gasped Bob.

"Who—"

"I say, you fellows—"

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A bullet had whizzed into the open doorway of the room, directly behind the spot where the Bouncer had been, a split second before. A crash rang loudly from within the room, and a sound of falling fragments.

In utter amazement the juniors stared round.

Bill's hand was on his gun as he stared. Over the fence, where it gave on the open prairie, a sombrero showed, with a dark, swarthy face under it.

Bang!

It was Bill's Colt that roared, like an echo of the rifle-shot!

There was a fearful yell, following the roar of the puncher's six-gun, and the sound of a heavy fall. The sombrero and the swarthy face vanished. A rifle was heard to clatter on the ground. A roar of groaning followed.

"I guess I got that greaser!" roared Bill Buck, and he rushed towards the fence behind which the sombrero had disappeared.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob.

"What—?"

"I—I—I say, you fellows, who—what—? Oh crikey! I say—"

stuttered Billy Bunter.

The juniors, utterly amazed by the sudden, startling happening, forgot the Bouncer and stared after Bill. They saw the cowboy swing himself over the fence. From the direction of the veranda came the Bouncer's angry yell.

He scrambled up at the foot of the steps. His face was furious as he stared round, spotted the juniors in the moonlight, and came cutting towards them.

"What silly idiot tied a cord across the steps?" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"Bunter, I suppose—"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"I'll smash him: I—I—I'll—"

"I say you fellows, keep him off!" yelled Bunter, dodging round the Famous Five. "I say, I never did it, Smithy, and only did it because you played that rotten trick— Keep him off!"

Harry Wharton grasped the Bouncer by the arm.

"Hold on, Smithy—"

"Let go, you silly ass!" roared the Bouncer. "I tell you I'll smash him! I've banged my knees, and barked my knuckles, and—"

"And thank goodness it's no worse!" gasped Wharton. "Thank goodness Bunter played that potty trick! Didn't you hear that shot, you ass? You've had the narrowest escape of your life."

"Good heavens!" breathed Nugent. "That villain was waiting for Smithy—and if he hadn't taken that tumble—"

"Bill got him!" gasped Bob.

"Got who?" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"What—?"

Chick appeared in the lighted doorway on the veranda. He started out with an angry, astonished face.

"Say, who's loosing off lead into this hero room?" he roared. "What dog-goned gink is gunning around this here doorway? The clock's smashed to pieces, you pesky piccans! What gol-darned stiff—"

"Oh!" gasped the Bouncer.

"Come on!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five ran towards the fence over which Bill had clambered. To Bunter's great relief, the Bouncer ran with them.

What had happened had not yet dawned on Bunter's fat brain; but the other fellows understood clearly enough.

The Mexican had been watching over the fence from the dark prairie, and as soon as Vernon-Smith appeared in the light at the top of the veranda steps he had fired.

Only that sudden tumble over the stretched cord had saved Vernon-Smith from the bullet—it had whizzed over him as he fell, and smashed the clock in the living room within.

And the Bouncer, as he realised it, thought he could guess why Barney Stone had asked him to step into the office for that talk. That, at all events, had separated him from his friends, and caused him to appear in the light on the veranda steps, a single and easy mark for the bullet.

The juniors clambered over the fence after Bill. They found Bill, gun in hand, bending over a form that was stretched in the glimmering grass.

But his gun was not needed. The swarthy face, upturned to the moon, was white as chalk, the eyes closed. The Mexican was insensible.

The juniors knew that dark, swarthy face.

"Mexican Joe!" said the Bouncer grimly.

"Sure!" said Bill. "And I guess he's got his! That doggoned greaser won't be cavorting around with a gun again for a month of Sundays, and then some!" Bill grinned, as he holstered his gun. "I'll say he never knowed that a galoot about my size was around in the garden! I sure got him!"

The Bouncer set his lips.

"And but for that fat fool Bunter he would have got me!" he said.

"Surest thing you know!" agreed Bill.

THE END.

(Look out for: "RUCTIONS ON THE RANCH!" the next yarn in this exciting holiday series. You'll find it in next Saturday's special number of the MAGNET!)

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 Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

READ the headline on the cover of this week's MAGNET, chums? Perused the various announcements inside?

I'll bet you have! Now you're wondering what it's all about eh?

This week I intend only to whet your appetite. Next week, I will let you into the secret. And won't you be pleased when I've put you wise? I'll say you will. Just think of it:

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of cameras, roller skates, footballs, etc., waiting to be won by readers of the MAGNET and companion papers. There will also be special prizes for Overseas readers, too!

Take my tip and visit your newsagent right away and order next Saturday's MAGNET, in which you will find full particulars of this

OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME TO WIN SOMETHING REALLY USEFUL!

There's bound to be a great rush for this particular issue of the MAGNET, chums, so GET IN FIRST by ordering your copy at the earliest opportunity.

With so little space at my disposal, I am unable to say much about next week's programme. The long complete school yarn:

"RUCTIONS ON THE RANCH!"

By Frank Richards,

is one long thrill from beginning to end. Poor old Bunter! He gets in a proper jam next week! What misfortune befalls him I won't say. But "Billy" is more sorry than ever he joined up with Vernon-Smith's holiday party! The "Greyfriars Herald," as usual, will come well up to expectation. A final word, don't miss the chance of a lifetime of winning something really useful by failing to order next Saturday's MAGNET in good time!

YOUR EDITOR.

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BOWLED OUT!

Fast and Furious Fun in this Last

Instalment of:

"THE SWELL WHO HAD TO SWOT!"

By DICKY NUGENT

Corkingham, the stately butler at Fitzboodle Castle, stalked into Doctor Birchmall's bed-room and coiled respectively.

"Ahem! Beggin' your pardon, sir, will you be takin' breakfast in bed this mornin'?" he asked in his rich, fruity voice.

Doctor Birchmall sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. Then he woke up to his surroundings and a broad grin spread over his skollary face.

It was a plezzant change from St. Sam's to be staying at the ancestral home of the Honnerable Guy de Vere. True, the Head had had the dickens of a time the previous day, what with the trouble he had had with Lord Fitzboodle and the japes that Fearless and his pals had played on him afterwards. But the dawn of a new day saw the dawn of a new hoap

for the Head—a hoap that the Fourth Formers would grow tired of their joaks and allow him to enjoy the delites of Fitzboodle Castle in peace.

"Thanks for the offer, Corkingham, but I'll have breakfast downstairs this morning," he said in axcents as lordly as he could make them. Corkingham boughed and stalked out of the bed-room again.

All unaware that other eyes were watching him, Doctor Birchmall climbed out of bed and started to dress. While he did so, five grinning yungsters peered through the stately open doorway leading to the adjoining spare room.

The heroes of St. Sam's had been up with the lark—and out for a lark as well! While the Head had been sleeping the sleep of the unjust, they had been bizzily engaged in preparing a

really braney japo for him.

First they had caught a cupple of mice and sewn each of them up inside a tobacco-pouch; and after that they had sewn up the tobacco-pouches inside Doctor Birchmall's trowsis just over the neeze. It would take the mice some time to escape from the Head's trowsis; and the Fourth were hoping that by the time they did so, the Head would be wearing them!

Doctor Birchmall drew the trowsis on his lanky legs and the juniors watched breathlessly. It was a grate relief to them to see that he notissed nothing wrong.

dismount, he was off his bike and leaping on to the cart like a jack-in-the-box. He wrenched the whip away and planted his knuckles on the chap's scrubby chin with a smack that nearly knocked off his head.

"How dare you ill-treat that horse?" he yelled.

Then he proceeded to give that carter a lecture that would have made any ordinary being dissolve in tears. The

"Great pip!" was all I could say to that. The day after that I asked 'Lonzy' if he would like to come along to a boxing-show in the evening.

"Excuse me, my dear Peter, but I feel somewhat ill!" he murmured. "The more thought of human beings causing violence to each other is so abhorrent to me as to induce temporary faintness!"

"Ye gods!" I said. And yet—

A couple of days later we were cycling down a country lane when we spotted a carter walloping his horse with a whip. He was a tough-looking specimen such as I myself should have felt like approaching with a good deal of caution.

Guess what Lonzy did? Before I had time to

The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 290.

EDITED BY DICK RAKE.

April 30th, 1938.



YOUR EDITOR CALLING

A reader who signs himself "Boy Scout and Proud of it" asks: "Why don't you Greyfriars chaps join the Boy Scouts?" Well, chums, the answer to that question is very easy, and here it is right away:

Because we're in the Boy Scouts already! Although "Boy Scout and Proud of it" does not know it, there is a strong Boy Scout troop at Greyfriars, and some of its keenest members are Remove chaps. I can assure my correspondent that there is no more staunch supporter of the movement than myself.

Having said that, I must admit that I don't devote so much time to scouting as many Scouts I know. But the reason for that is that other school activities make heavy claims on my spare time.

Football and cricket, in their respective seasons, are naturally the most important of these activities. Most of my "halfers" are spent on the playing-fields, and an occasional hour in the evening, too. Then there are the paper-chases and boxing in the spring, training for the sports in the summer and, in the winter, amateur theatricals, debating, chess and many other indoor pastimes not directly linked up with scoutcraft. You can judge for yourselves from this little list that purely scouting pursuits have to take a back seat most of the time.

But when we do don our Scouts togs and get out into the woods and fields, I fancy that we at Greyfriars put up as good a show as many who devote much more of their time to the movement. We have as many badges to our credit as most troops, and I feel sure that we appreciate to the full the high ideals of the Boy Scout movement.

So how's that, "Boy Scout and Proud of it"? Satisfied? Good!

All the best, chums, till next week!

DICK RAKE.

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"EPICURE" (Upper Fourth). "Greengrocers are selling a marvellous new fruit. Do you know anyone who has tried eating ugli?"

No, but every time we see Bunter he seems to be eating uglier!

Wingate's capture of Snoop and Stott in the act of smoking cigarettes in the woodshed this week is stated to have been due to the coughing and spluttering they made over it.

Skinner has now stuck up a notice in the shed, reading "No Smoking ALOUD!"

GREYFRIARS FROM FRESH ANGLES

10. Ah! These English Garçons!

Sighs MONSIEUR CHARPENTIER

Ah! You ask me how I think of this so famous school of which I have the honour to be French master. I shall tell you it is the great puzzle to me just as it is when I first arrive!

I am here since long time now, but the more I see the more I puzzle, is it not?

When I myself am young garçon in Franco, I go to a French school for to learn, and, mon dieu, but how different! I begin my lessons so early in the morning and I finish so late in the evening. I study with the magnificent ardour and concentration. My classmates, too, they are all, how do you say it, such stupendous swoters, is it not?

But here at Greyfriars, if the young garçons wish not to swot, nobody care, as you say, three hoots! At the hour when in French schools all the boys work hard in class, everybody here is still in bed. When they wake, it is not for work, but for to eat porridge and bacon!

And the immense enthusiasm which they should give to the

beautiful French language, where is it? I find it is reserve for the sport! Everybody talk about the cricket and the football and nobody talk about French. But it is terrible!

When I take a class, I expect the garçons to follow me with the great seriousness and attention. But what happen? They make the laugh instead and, as they say, pull the leg. Some bad garçons like Skinner and Bolsover even throw some ink pellets through the air. Sometimes one hit me on the nose. I tear the hair, I beat the breast, I stamp the feet! I cry "Attend! Attention with you, or I lose the temper!" Then they laugh more!

I must be just, is it not? I have many pupils who study the beautiful French language and make good progress. In the Remove, I remember Wharton, Linley, Penfold, and others who work well.

But, hélas, even these seem amuse with themselves when they see me! It is great puzzle. Do you understand me, don't you?



"BOB CHERRY ILL WHEN BEATEN BY WHARTON!"

Linley's Sensational Revelation

Fellows who have maintained that Bob Cherry was not on the top of his form when beaten by Wharton for the Remove boxing championship have just received startling confirmation of their views. Here is a letter that reached us yesterday from Mark Linley:

"Dear Sports Editor, Ever since Bob Cherry lost the boxing championship to Wharton, a small but noisy section of the Form has thought fit to subject him to insults and abuse and libellous anonymous letters. It is a feeling of indignation over this unjust campaign that impels me to write and reveal something that brings it to a speedy end. That 'something' is this:

BOB CHERRY WAS ILL ON THE NIGHT HE FOUGHT WHARTON!

"As his study-mate and friend, I know a good deal about Bob and I can affirm without hesitation that his illness before the fight was a fact. He

had had a splitting headache all day and at tea-time came over very groggy and nearly fainted. Only by a great effort was he able to pull himself together sufficiently to go to the gym for the fight.

"Two days later he reported sick and after that he was in bed with flu. Nobody thought to connect this with the result of the scrap; but it explains the result all the same. In my opinion, and with all due respect to Wharton's ability in the ring, Bob lost simply and solely because he was too ill to fight. And if the two ever meet again, I'm downright certain that Bob will win!

Yours sincerely,
MARK LINLEY.

Immediately on receipt of this letter, we sent and asked Bob Cherry what he had to say about it. Bob blushed scarlet and said: "Mark's a chump; why did he do that?"

Wharton, on being informed of Linley's revelation, was much more concerned.

"To think that I beat him at a time like that!" he exclaimed. "But that's Bob all over; he'd die rather than make a fuss."

"But do you accept Linley's verdict that on level terms Bob would beat you?" asked the Sports Editor.

Wharton smiled faintly. "Well, I'm not going to say that till I'm actually beaten," he said. "But quite frankly I shouldn't be surprised."

So there you are, dear readers! It looks as if we're right back to where we were before the championship—with Bob Cherry as the probable best of the Form's boxers still and Wharton only the runner-up!

Later in the year perhaps we can arrange another scrap between these two and settle it finally. Meanwhile, in view of Linley's revelation, it would be unwise to look on Wharton as the undisputed champion of the Remove!

rapscallion told you to go easy with my son's lessons, what, what?"

"Exactly, your lordship!"

"Hah, hah, hah!" The jolly old aristocrat wiped the tears of merriment from his eyes with a crested silk handkerchief, while Doctor Birchmall skowled at the St. Sam's japers.

"Hah! Never mind, good fellow!" cried Lord Fitzboodle. "Boys will be boys; an' all's well that ends well. An' now that I am back again, I promise you that there will be no more trouble. Why not forgive an' forget, what, an' I'll make it my bizzness to see that you have a rippin' time for the rest of the holler-days?"

Slowly Doctor Birchmall's skowl vanished. "Well, of course, if your lordship wishes it, who is your humble servant to say him neigh?" he grinned. "I freely forgive and forget!"

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!" corussed Jack Jolly & Co.

"Bai Jove! It's frightfully toppin' of you, sir!" cried the Honnerable Guy. "Yaas wathah!"

"Haw! Then that's that!" beamed Lord Fitzboodle. "Now let's drive dull cars away an' all be merry an'

IS MY COUSIN A COWARD?

Asks PETER TODD

If any of you "Greyfriars Herald" readers happen to be psychologists, here's a problem to interest you. Personally, I'm floored!

I'm staying with Cousin Alonzo, and what I want to know is this: is my cousin a coward or not?

I've never looked on him as a funk in the past, but I had enough evidence in my first few days with him to have convinced most chaps that he was. In fact, I really began to fear the worst about him—and then something happened to prove him a giddy hero! And now I dunno where I am!

The first thing that made me blink was when Alonzo and I went out on our bikes and he calmly suggested taking a detour of five miles to avoid a main road. When I asked him why, he told me it was because the traffic on the main road gave him palpitation of the heart.

The next shock I had was when I asked him what the idea was in keeping a rope ladder under his bed.

"That, my dear Peter, is my provision against a possible fortuitous nocturnal conflagration," burbled Alonzo. (Yes, he still talks like that!)

"Great pip!" was all I could say to that. The day after that I asked 'Lonzy' if he would like to come along to a boxing-show in the evening.

"Excuse me, my dear Peter, but I feel somewhat ill!" he murmured. "The more thought of human beings causing violence to each other is so abhorrent to me as to induce temporary faintness!"

"Ye gods!" I said. And yet—

A couple of days later we were cycling down a country lane when we spotted a carter walloping his horse with a whip. He was a tough-looking specimen such as I myself should have felt like approaching with a good deal of caution.

Guess what Lonzy did? Before I had time to



carter, being excessively tough, didn't do that, but he rubbed his chin a good deal and eyed Alonzo with a very respectful eye. And he made no attempt whatever to retaliate!

So after all that, is 'Lonzy a funk or is he a hero?

"Come on, you fellows!" whispered Jack Jolly. "We'll go down to the breakfast-room now!"

"Yes, rather!" Farelly busting with suppressed larfter, the yung plotters went out by the door leading to the landing and hurried downstairs.

When the Head arrived in the breakfast-room five minnits later, nobody would ever have dreamed that they had been up to any larks; in fact, they all looked as solemn as boiled owls. Jack Jolly, of course, was still disguised as Lord Fitzboodle for the Head's bennyfit.

"Haw! Good-mornin', Birchmall, what, what?" cried the bogus lord, in his most refined voice.

"Good-morning, your lordship!" grinned the Head, dropping a curtsey.

Then, with serprizing suddenness, the grin faded from his face. A moment later, he leaped into the air with a wild yell of alarm.

"Yaroooooo! Ow-ow! Help! Yoooop!"

Jack Jolly eyed Doctor Birchmall in fained serprize through his monocle.

"Grato gad! What's the matter, my good man, what, what?"

"My neeze!" shrieked the Head. "They're wobbling! Something's gone wrong with my neeze! Help! Yaroo!"

Then Doctor Birchmall started leaping and dancing round the breakfast-room like a cat on hot bricks. Frank Fearless and his pals were simply dubbed up with larfter, as they notissed the wobbling and twisting going on inside the neeze of his trowsis; and it was all that Jack Jolly could do to keep a straight face.

All at once the neeze of the Head's trowsis came open, and at the same moment two mice flew out and raced across the room at top speed. That weird site was too much for the chums of the Fourth. They larfed till the tears ran down their cheeks.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Doctor Birchmall's

frenzied jumping came to an end, and he turned on the hysterical juniors. "You yung raskals!" he roared. "It was all your fault! You put those mice in my trowsis!"

"Go hon, sir!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "I'm not staying here another minnit now!" declared the Head, fiercely. "I've had enuff. I'm going!"

As he turned to go, something happened that caused the larfter to freeze on our heroes' lips.

The Honnerable Guy de Vere's pater—the real Lord Fitzboodle—walked into the room!

"Haw! By gad! How do, everybody, what, what!" he cried. "Doctor Birchmall, I presoom?"

"That, mo!" replied the lead, with his usual faultless grammar. "Who are you, mite I ask?"

"Me? Why, I'm Lord Fitzboodle, of course, what, what?" "Wha-a-at?" shrieked the Head.

"Oh, crums!" gasped Jack Jolly.

He was bowled out now and no mistake! The game was up with a vengenz! Slowly and sadly he removed his coronet and monocle and false mistosh. And the Head, staring at him, gave a violent spasmodic start.

"Jolly!" he gasped. "It's at a hoaks! I've been dished! Dished, ciddled, and done!"