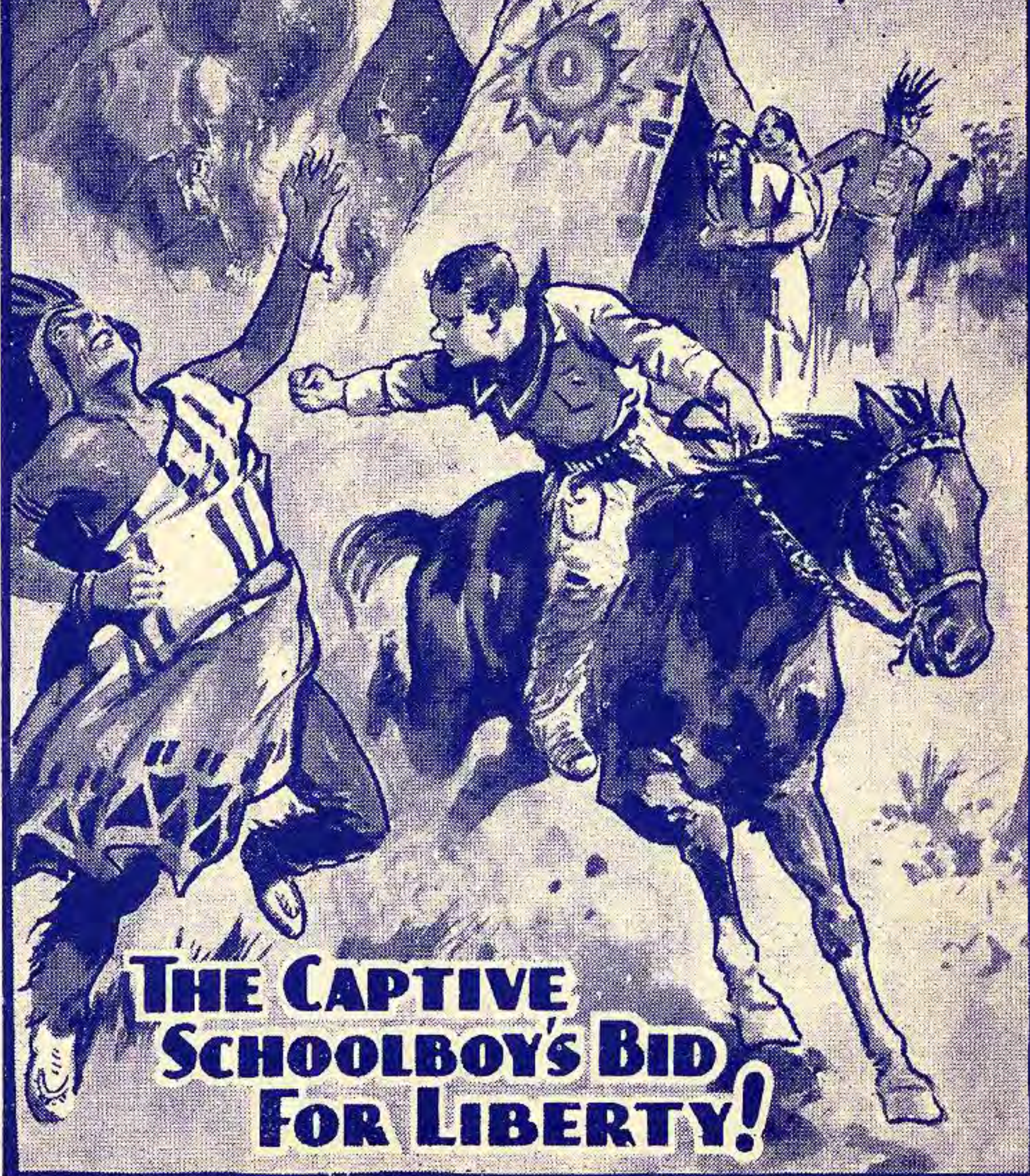


PRIZES WELL WORTH WINNING—SEE
INSIDE!

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



**THE CAPTIVE
SCHOOLBOY'S BID
FOR LIBERTY!**

THE GREAT "ARMAMENTS" RACE

PRIZE NEWS

15 First Prizes of Hercules Bikes

HAVE you heard the GREAT NEWS? It's PRIZE NEWS! Fifteen spanking new Bikes, and Thousands and THOUSANDS of other prizes going FREE. Read on—

Each week in MAGNET I am printing Armaments Stamps—BOMBERS, GUNS, SEARCHLIGHTS, and so on—8 kinds altogether—and all you do is just CUT 'EM OUT AND COLLECT 'EM. Some were given last week, but even if you missed them you can start collecting TO-DAY—there are TWENTY-FOUR more stamps in this issue: twelve are on this page, while there are twelve more on Page 28—including Four BONUS Bombers! If you also take other popular boys' papers like "Modern Boy" and "Gem," you'll find more stamps in them to swell your total.

At the end of this month I shall ask you how many of one or more kinds of stamps you've collected. It may be Bombers, or Battleships, or perhaps Tanks and Destroyers together. Which? Well, that's my secret!

So keep at it! Go on collecting all the stamps you can so as to be right in front for the first prize-giving of Five Bicycles and 2,000 of the other Prizes. I shall ask you which prize you want, too—the highest collections of the stamps I call for will win. But don't send any yet! I'll tell you how, and where, when the time comes. There you are—and Nothing to Pay! Isn't it great?—THE EDITOR.

RULES: Five First Prizes of £4 7s. 6d. "Hercules" Cycles and up to 2,000 other prizes will be awarded in order of merit each month during the contest to the readers declaring and sending the largest collections of the stamps called for. Cash value of any of the first prizes may be divided in case of a tie or ties for such prizes. Ties for any other prizes will be decided by the Editor.

All claims for prizes to be sent on the proper coupon (to be given later): no allowance made

for any coupon or stamps mutilated or lost or delayed in the post or otherwise. No correspondence. No one connected with this paper may enter, and the Editor's decision will be final and legally binding throughout.

N.B.—You can also collect or swap Armaments Stamps with pals who read "Gem," "Modern Boy," "Triumph," "Sports Budget," "Champion," "Detective Weekly," "Boy's Cinema," and "Thriller."

FOR COLLECTING ARMAMENTS STAMPS



Overseas Readers, Too! You pals who are far away—you're in this great scheme, also, and special awards will be given for the best collections from overseas readers. There will be a special closing date for you as well, of course!

KIDNAPPED AND CARRIED OFF BY A GANG OF INDIANS! A few weeks ago Herbert Vernon-Smith was at Greyfriars School, in Kent, working diligently under the eagle eye of his Form-master. Now he's in far-away Texas—

A PRISONER *in the* DESERT!



"Running Water!" panted Vernon-Smith, as he was dragged and hustled by dusky hands. "Help me! I am a prisoner here—for the love of mercy, help me!" Only a stony, unrecognising stare answered him.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

The Sosses That Squeaked!

"CHICK!" roared Billy Bunter. No reply. "Chick!" bawled Bunter. "Chick!"

Echo answered "Chick!" But other answer there was none.

Really, it seemed as if Chick, the choreman of Kicking Cayuse Ranch, must be deaf.

He was, at all events, turning a deaf ear.

Billy Bunter, sitting at the table in the living-room in the Texas rancho, roared and bawled in vain.

Bunter was sitting there on his own. Harry Wharton & Co. had gone out long ago with Smithy, leaving the fat Owl of Greyfriars to his own devices, which, of course, was just like the beasts.

Chick, the choreman, was the whole household staff. The Greyfriars party, on their holiday in Texas, had to rough it a little, and look after themselves a lot.

Neither agreed with Bunter. He did not want to rough it even a little, or look after himself at all.

He would have rung for Chick, had there been a bell to ring. But bells were an unknown luxury on the ranch in the valley of the Rio Frio. So he shouted; but he shouted in vain.

Bunter was at dinner. Chick had landed a cargo on the table and left it there. Bunter had now shipped that cargo. But he had eaten hardly more than enough for three. Naturally he wanted more.

"Chick!" bellowed Bunter. The choreman, of course, could hear. His kitchen was at the end of the hall-way, and the door was open. But, like the celebrated Dying Gladiator, he heard, but he heeded not.

Chick had long been fed-up with Billy Bunter's many wants. He had stated, more than once, that he was a choreman, and not a doggoned waiter, or a goldarned butler. Chick was plump and good-natured, and to the other fellows he was generally civil and obliging. But the fat Owl had worn out his civility. Not only did

HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS, in more thrilling WILD WEST AD- VENTURES.

Chick decline to come at Bunter's call, he did not even answer. Billy Bunter's roars passed him by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter. "Cheeky beast!"

He rose from the table at last.

Mahomed, of old, finding that the mountain would not come to him, sagely went to the mountain. Bunter followed the example of Mahomed.

He rolled out of the living-room, across the hall-way, and blinked in at the open doorway of the kitchen

through his big spectacles, with an angry and indignant blink.

A delightful scent of cooking greeted him.

Chick, in his shirtsleeves at the stove, was frying sausages. He was turning them over with a fork in the frying-pan as Billy Bunter blinked in. Billy Bunter's frowning brow relaxed. The sausages smelt delightful, and looked lovely.

"Look here, Chick, I called you!" yapped Bunter. "You jolly well heard me!"

Chick glanced over a plump shoulder.

"Sure!" he agreed. "I'll say the guys could have heard you as far as Packsaddle. And then some."

"I'm hungry!" hooted Bunter.

"Ain't I toted in the eats?" demanded Chick. "You mosey along and pack them eats, and give a guy a rest."

"I've finished that lot."

"Aw! Search me!" gasped Chick. "Where'd you pack it? I'll say there ain't room in a yooman being for all them eats."

"Aren't those sosses done?" demanded Bunter. "You ought to have got them ready before, Chick. Still, I'll wait if they're not finished."

"I guess you can wait," agreed Chick. "I ain't no objection to your waiting, buddy. You can wait there, and watch me eat them, if you like. Them sosses is my dinner, feller."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

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The fat Owl had taken it for granted that the sausages were a further supply for his important self. Evidently they were not. Chick wanted his own dinner, which, of course, was sheer cheek on Chick's part.

"Look here——" hooted Bunter.

"How can I look at you, buddy, when I got to watch them sausages?" asked Chick. "Besides, you ain't pretty to look at. I'll tell all Texas that frontispiece of yourn ain't a sight for sore eyes."

Billy Bunter breathed wrath.

This was how a guest—Smithy's most distinguished guest—was treated on the ranch. Smithy's father had bought in Texas. Check from a choreman.

"If I were Smithy, I'd sack you!" snapped Bunter.

"Well, you ain't Mr. Vernon-Smith, you ain't," remarked Chick. "You're jest a fat gink, of no account."

"You cheeky beast!" roared Bunter.

Chick made no reply to that in words. He had a sausage on the fork. With a skilful swing of the fork, he whizzed the sausage at Bunter.

Plop!

It landed on a fat little nose. It splattered gravy over a fat face. And it elicited a yell from William George Bunter that woke all the echoes of the rancho, and reached the punchers at the bunkhouse, and the cook at the chuckhouse, and Barney Stone, the foreman of the ranch, who was riding in from the prairie.

"Yaroooooh!"

Chick chuckled.

"Have another?" he inquired.

"Beast!"

Bunter backed into the hall-way. He did not want another—not in the same way. He wanted the lot, but not in the form of missiles.

He dabbed grease from a fat face, and gasped with wrath.

There was, apparently, no more dinner for Bunter—and he had had only three dinners, so far. That inexpressible beast was going to sit down to a stack of delightful sausages, leaving Bunter blinking on hungrily, like a podgy Peri at the gate of Paradise.

Chick, grinning, continued to turn the sausages in the pan.

He heard the fat junior gasping and spluttering in the hall-way, and it seemed to amuse him. Then he heard him give a little fat cough.

That fat cough conveyed nothing to Chick, who, of course, did not know that Billy Bunter was a ventriloquist, and that that was his usual preliminary to ventriloquial tricks.

Bunter blinked into the kitchen again.

He would have liked to walk in and boot Chick, as he richly deserved, for his cheek. But booting Chick was not practical politics. Chick could have picked up Bunter, weighty as he was, in one hand, and pitched him across the kitchen, and undoubtedly would have done so.

But there were other ways. Ventriloquism was one of them.

Chick had now turned the sausages out on a large dish. They looked more enticing than ever. He was stabbing them with the fork. Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big, round spectacles.

Squeak!

Chick jumped.

Having stabbed a sausage with his fork, the last thing Chick would have

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expected was a squeak from the sausage, as if it was hurt. Chick had never heard a sausage squeak before. Now he did, or, at all events, he fancied that he did.

"Search me!" gasped Chick.

He stood, fork in hand, staring at the squeaking sausage as if it mesmerised him. Billy Bunter grinned. Never had a choreman, on any ranch in Texas, been so utterly astonished.

For a long, long moment Chick stood dumbfounded. Then, concluding that his ears must have deceived him, he stabbed another sausage.

Squeak!

"Aw, carry me home to Jane!" gasped Chick.

He backed away from the dish of sausages, in amazement and alarm.

Squeaking sausages were quite outside all Chick's previous experiences.

Chick, probably, had never even heard of ventriloquism. Certainly he had no suspicion that a ventriloquist was grinning in at the doorway! He looked round at Bunter.

"Did you hear that?" he gasped.

"I heard something," said Bunter cheerfully. "What was it?"

"That doggoned sausage—I'm telling you!—it squeaked, when I stuck the fork in it!" gasped Chick. "I'll say this is the opossum's eyelids, and then some!"

"Tell me another!" grinned Bunter.

"I'm telling you, it surely did!" gasped Chick. "Them sausages is haunted! Look here, you fat geek, see for yourself!"

He stabbed another sausage.

Squeak!

Chick jumped back, his ruddy face quite pale.

He wiped a clot of perspiration from his brow.

"You—you—you yeared that?" he stuttered.

"I say, that's jolly queer!" said Bunter. "Think they're alive?"

"How could they be alive, you big stiff, when I've jest fried 'em in grease? It's got me guessing! I sure must be dreaming this!" gasped Chick. "Them sosses was all right—best sosses from Wash's store in Packsaddle. How come? I guess this beats me to a frazzle."

"Let me try!" said Bunter.

He took the fork from Chick's nerveless hand and stabbed a sausage. From that sausage came, apparently at least, a squeal of agony.

Squeal!

"Search me!" stuttered Chick.

Bunter stabbed the sausage again.

"Oh, don't!" came from the sausage.

Chick staggered as far as the wall, and stood leaning weakly on it. His jaw dropped, and he gazed at that dish of succulent sausages in horror and dismay.

"I say, I wouldn't eat those sosses!" said Bunter.

"Ketch me!" gasped Chick. "Mebbe you wouldn't mind chucking them away for me, Mr. Bunter, sir! I sure don't want to tetch 'em."

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Bunter.

He didn't—not at all! He lifted the dish of sausages from the kitchen table and carried it out of the kitchen. Chick watched it go with starting eyes. He was deeply relieved to see the last of it. Chick was left wiping his perspiring brow as the sausages were carried away.

Billy Bunter did not carry them far—only as far as the living-room! He set the dish on the table and sat down to it! And there were no more squeaks from the sausages as Bunter's fork dealt with them!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

One Man Missing!

BARNEY STONE, foreman of the Kicking Cayuse, stood near the bunkhouse, giving orders to some of the outfit.

Barney had recently ridden in from the prairie, and the dust was still thick on his riding boots. Panhandle had led his bronco away to the corral—making, as he did so, a gesture with a horny thumb in the direction of five distant figures coming up the trail to the ranch.

And the foreman, as he talked to the punchers at the bunkhouse, had the corner of his eye on those five figures. There was a flicker of a grim, sarcastic smile on his lean, brown face.

Barney Stone took no open heed of them, however. He seemed to be thinking only of the business of the ranch as he talked to Yuba Dick, Frio Pete, Cactus, and the other punchers.

Five dusty and tired schoolboys drew nearer and nearer—on foot. Nobody in the Packsaddle country went on foot if he could help it, but on the present occasion Harry Wharton & Co. had not been able to help it. Miles of rugged prairie had tired them, and they showed it plainly enough as they tramped towards the ranch in the hot Texas sunshine.

"Say, there's them young ginks!" remarked Yuba Dick, staring at the approaching five. "They've sure lost one of the bunch."

Barney Stone looked round as the cowman called his attention to the Greyfriars juniors.

He fixed his eyes on them, and recognised Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Rain Singh—as he expected! He had the best of reasons for not expecting to see Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, returning with his friends.

"They done lost the owner's son, 'pears like!" remarked Cactus.

Barney shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I warned them young geeks agin going out on the prairie while Injuns was around," he said. "The whole bunch heard me, I reckon. They was safe at the ranch when I lit out for Hatchet. If they've been out hunting for trouble I guess it's their own business."

"You said it!" agreed Yuba.

Harry Wharton & Co. tramped in at the gate—hot, perspiring, dusty from the rugged prairie trail. In the veranda of the rancho Billy Bunter blinked at them through his big spectacles and waved a fat hand. But they did not turn in the direction of the ranch-house. They came across to the bunkhouse, sighting Barney Stone and the punchers there.

Barney had resumed giving instructions to the punchers, and did not seem to want to be interrupted.

"Mr. Stone——" began Harry Wharton quietly.

"Say, I guess I'm busy!" said Barney over his shoulder. "I guess a ranch foreman ain't got a whole heap of time for chewing the rag."

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove compressed his lips.

"You'd better listen!" he said sharply. "We've come back without Vernon-Smith——"

"Left him limping home?" asked Barney, with a sneer. "I guess you sure was boneheads to go hoofing it on the prairie."

"We had no choice about that, as you ordered the outfit not to let us have the horses!" said Bob Cherry.

"I guess you should have stayed on

the ranch!" snapped Barney. "Didn't I warn you that Rainy Face and his gang of thief Apaches was loose on the prairie? Didn't I allow that schoolboys wasn't safe out of sight of the ranch while them Reds was cavorting around? Then I had to hit for Hatchet, and you go hoofing it while my back is turned! Sure, I wouldn't let you have the hosses to go riding into mischief—and I guess if I'd been around you wouldn't have hoofed it, either! I reckon I'd have taken my quirt to you."

"We needn't go into that, Mr. Stone!" said Harry. "Vernon-Smith was lassoed and has been kidnapped by the Apaches—"

"Aw, carry me home to die!" exclaimed Barney in a tone of great exasperation. "You telling me that the owner's son has landed in trouble that-a-way?"

"Yes! And he's got to be found and got away from the Indians," said Harry. "And there's no time to lose."

Barney Stone gave an angry snort. There was a buzz from the half-dozen punchers standing before the bunkhouse.

"Them Injuns has roped in Mr. Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed Yuba Dick.

"What'd they want him for?" said Cactus. "I guess if he'd been on a cayuse they'd sure have lifted it, them Injuns being born hoss thieves. But what'd they want the owner's son for?"

The Famous Five of Greyfriars made no reply to that question.

Their strong suspicion was that the gang of thief Apaches had roped in the Bouncer at the secret order of Barney Stone, the foreman of the ranch, who had powerful reasons of his own for getting rid of the owner's son.

But it was useless to say so to the Kicking Cayuse bunch.

One or two of that bunch, they had no doubt, were in league with the double-dealing foreman. But most of them were honest, though rough-and-ready, punchers, and would never have dreamed of standing for the foreman's treacherous game.

Neither would they have believed such a charge against their foreman, unless it were strongly proved. And definite proof was lacking.

Vernon-Smith was sure of it—his friends were as good as sure of it—but the Kicking Cayuse outfit would probably have laughed at the idea.

Barney, at the moment, certainly did not look like a guilty man! He looked angry and annoyed, as any ranch foreman might have looked and felt on hearing that one of the schoolboys staying at the ranch had fallen foul of a gang of outcast Indians—through disregarding a warning.

"Look here, you ain't stringing me along?" he demanded, scowling at the Famous Five of Greyfriars. "You giving me the goods?"

"We're telling you what's happened!" growled Johnny Bull.

"How come, then?" snapped Barney.

"We'd got about a third of the way to Packsaddle when the Indians turned up," said Harry Wharton. "The same gang that attacked us once before, when we drove them off with our rifles—"

"Didn't you wade in with your fancy shootin' agin?" sneered Barney. "You sure did allow that you could take care of yourselves when I told you to keep to the ranch while Injuns was about."

"We did—and we could have handled that gang of Indians quite easily," answered Harry. "But in the timber island one of them was in cover, and he lassoed Smithy from behind, and got him away. We got after him, but, being on foot, we had no chance. We got back here as fast as we could for help."

"I'll tell the world!" exclaimed Barney. "Mebbe you'll own up now that I was right in warning you to keep to the ranch while them Reds was cavorting around the Kicking Cayuse ranges."

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, his anger breaking out. "You knew that we couldn't, and shouldn't, keep to the ranch when Smithy was determined to get over to the railroad town and send a cable to his father in England. If we'd had our horses they'd never have got Smithy—at least, we should have got him back if we'd been able to get after the brute who lassoed him. It's your fault from beginning to end, Barney Stone."

The Kicking Cayuse foreman bent his brows grimly at Bob Cherry.

"I guess that's the lot!" he snapped. "Don't spill any more, you young geek, or you may get a spot of my quirt."

"Better not try it on!" said Bob, his eyes gleaming.

"Aw, you pack it up, kid!" said Yuba Dick. "I guess we got to get after them Injuns, Mr. Stone, if they reely got the boss' son."

"I guess they'll let him go when they been through his pockets," growled Barney Stone. "What'd they want to keep him for? But we sure got to get after him—Mr. Vernon-Smith, over the pond, sent his son out here in my care, and I sure don't want to have to cable him that he's come to some harm. You guys saddle up, and you, Panhandle, get me a fresh horse."

He gave Harry Wharton a grim scowl.

"I got to let the work slide to go into this!" he rapped. "Where'd you say they got that young gink?"

"At the big timber island, half-way to Packsaddle," answered Harry. "They rode away to the north-west, towards Squaw Mountain, taking Smithy with them."

"I guess they never hit Squaw Mountain," grunted Barney. "Horsemen don't ride them rocks, if they can help it. More likely hit for the upper waters of the Rio Frio."

"We saw them——" said Frank Nugent.

"You didn't see them arter they was out of sight, I reckon!" snapped the foreman. "Mebbe we can pick up their trail. You boys stick in the ranch while I'm gone—I want no more trouble with young ginks getting lost!"

"We're riding after Smithy!" exclaimed Bob hotly.

Barney Stone gave a snort of anger. "You ain't riding a lasso's length off'n this ranch!" he roared. "Ain't I got enough trouble on my hands, without more of you getting lost? Panhandle, you see that them young stiffs don't git no hosses while I'm gone."

"Sure!" said Panhandle.

"Look here——" roared Johnny Bull. "My esteemed, idiotic Stone——" exclaimed Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

Barney Stone turned his back on the Greyfriars fellows and strode away to the corral.

The Famous Five stood in an exasperated group, watching the punchers saddle up for the ride.

They were tired and weary from long tramping in the dust and sun, but they were ready and eager to join in the ride to the rescue of Herbert Vernon-Smith, carried off into the unknown spaces by the gang of Apaches.

But Barney Stone's word was law on the Kicking Cayuse.

Most of the outfit were out on the ranges; only half a dozen men were available, and they all saddled up to follow the foreman. Only Panhandle, the new horse-wrangler, remained

behind, and he was left with orders to see that the juniors did not get horses from the corral.

Barney and his men mounted and rode away from the corral. They passed the group of juniors with a clatter of hoofs and a jingle of bridles, and galloped down the trail in the direction of the timber island, seven or eight miles away, where Herbert Vernon-Smith had fallen into the hands of the Redskins. And the Famous Five of Greyfriars, with deep feelings, watched them disappear in a cloud of dust across the prairie.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Rough Stuff!

"I SAY, you fellows!" Billy Bunter joined the group of juniors as they stood staring after the disappearing riders.

Barney Stone was losing no time—though whether he was going to lead the punchers to the rescue of Herbert Vernon-Smith was another matter.

Harry Wharton & Co. were fairly well convinced that the foreman was going to lead the rescue party anywhere but in the direction of the kidnapped Bouncer.

Barney had appearances to keep up, but certainly he was not likely to let the punchers get a sight of the owner's son, if he was indeed at the bottom of the scheme, as the juniors believed.

In their worry and anxiety, the chums of the Greyfriars Remove did not heed Billy Bunter. They stood staring after the disappearing riders, who very soon disappeared from view on the Packsaddle trail.

Billy Bunter blinked from one face to another through his big spectacles in surprise and annoyance.

"I say, you fellows——" he squeaked.

"Oh, blow away, bluebottle!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Don't bother now, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, as patiently as he could.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I say, where's Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"The Apaches have got him, fathead! Now dry up!"

"Pity I wasn't with you!" said Bunter, shaking his head. "Mean to say you've come back without Smithy and let those putrid Indians hike him off? Not the sort of thing I should have done!"

"You fat, frabjous owl!" roared Bob. "Would you have followed galloping mustangs on foot?"

"You shouldn't have gone out on foot!" retorted Bunter. "Nobody does here."

"How could we help it, idiot, when Barney Stone ordered Panhandle to keep the horses in the corral, dummy, and half a dozen punchers were ready to handle us if we tried to shove him out of the way?" bawled Johnny Bull.

"You needn't yell at me, Bull! Smithy ought to have been giving orders on his father's ranch!" said Bunter contemptuously. "Catch me taking cheek from a foreman like that! I'd have cabled home to my father to sack the cheeky beast, if I'd been Smithy!"

"Exactly what Smithy was going to do, idiot, and that's why Stone wouldn't let us have the horses, fathead, so shut up, dummy!"

"Beast! Are you fellows coming in to tea?" asked Bunter.

"Tea!" repeated Harry.

"Yes; it's nearly tea-time. They don't seem to have tea here, as a rule, and that lazy beast Chick doesn't do as he's

told—he's sitting at the kitchen window, smoking, now, instead of getting my tea, though I've told him twice! He may do it for you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Don't you want your tea?" asked Bunter, puzzled. "You've had only a few sandwiches for lunch, haven't you? I should have thought you'd have come in pretty sharp set."

"You howling ass, we're thinking about Smithy—not about tea!"

"Oh, I shouldn't worry about Smithy! I don't suppose those Indians will hurt him—why should they? They'll pick his pockets and turn him loose, I expect! Anyhow, it won't help Smithy to miss tea, will it?" asked Bunter, still puzzled. "How will it help Smithy for you fellows to miss your tea?"

"Oh, boot him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Shut up, Bunter, for goodness' sake!" said Harry. "We've got to think this out. Roll away, old barrel!"

"Well, look here! You fellows come into the house and get that lazy beast to get tea, and then you can think about Smithy as much as you like!" suggested Bunter. "Important things first, you know!"

"Buzz off!" roared Bob.

"But, I say—Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as Johnny Bull, losing patience, planted a boot on the tightest trousers in Texas. "Ow! Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled back to the rancho.

For reasons incomprehensible to Bunter, the Famous Five did not seem to want their tea! Bunter, on the other hand, did! So the fat Owl of the Remove rolled off to make another attempt to induce the choreman to play up.

"Look here, you fellows," said Harry Wharton, unheeding the indignant fat Owl, "those men who have gone after Smithy would help him if they could—but Barney Stone will take jolly good care that they don't have a chance!"

"No doubt about that!" said Nugent.

"We know quite well that the Indians headed for Squaw Mountains—and Barney will lead them in any direction but that!" went on Harry. "He's left us here to make sure that we don't get a chance of putting them on the right trail. We've got to get help somewhere else—and that means the sheriff at Packsaddle."

"Bill Buck—if we knew where he was——" said Bob.

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Yes—Bill would be useful now, and that's why that villain fired him off the ranch," he said. "We may find Bill in Packsaddle. Anyhow, we can claim help from the sheriff, Mr. Lick."

"But how are we to get to Packsaddle?" asked Frank Nugent hopelessly. "It's fifteen miles—and we've walked our legs off already!"

"We're going to ride!" said Harry, between his teeth. "We couldn't handle the whole crowd when Stone ordered them to see that we did not get horses—but we can handle one man, and we're going to!"

"Oh!" said Bob. His eyes gleamed. "Good egg! That fellow Panhandle is pretty hefty, but the five of us can handle him all right, now that the others are off the scene. Let's!"

"The goodfulness of the egg is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "If the excellent and execrable Panhandle raises ridiculous objections, we will tie him up with his own absurd lariat!"

"That's settled!" said Johnny Bull.

"Come on!"

"Having made up their minds to it, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1.578.

the Famous Five walked across to the corral.

Panhandle, big and long-limbed and hefty, grinned at them as they came. He knew what they wanted—but he did not guess that they were going to get what they wanted.

The Famous Five were reluctant to hand out the "rough stuff" on Mr. Vernon-Smith's Texas ranch, where they were Smithy's guests. But all other considerations had to take second place to Smithy's danger. Without horses, they were helpless, and they were going to have the horses. And the fact that only one man was left to guard the corral gave them the chance.

Smithy, as they knew, suspected that the cowman Panhandle was Barney's confederate on the ranch in his dealings with the cattle thieves of Squaw Mountain. The Famous Five shared that suspicion. Panhandle was, therefore, the member of the Kicking Cayuse bunch whom they were least reluctant to handle. Anyhow, they were going to handle him if he stood in their way.

The big cowman waved his quirt as they came up to the corral gate.

"I guess you want to beat it?" he remarked.

"We're taking out our horses, Panhandle," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Please stand aside from that gate!"

"I guess you heard Barney Stone's orders?" grinned Panhandle.

"We're taking no notice of them! Will you stand aside?"

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

"We don't want to lay hands on you!" said Harry, breathing hard. "But if you don't get out of the way, Panhandle, we shall pitch you out of it!"

"I guess I'll give you a few with this here quirt, big boy!" chuckled Panhandle. "And I sure reckon I'll have you running like you was gophers, with a dog arter you!"

"Get aside!" snapped Wharton.

"Aw, can it!"

"Shift him!" said Harry.

Panhandle ceased to grin, his jaw jutted, and he slashed with the quirt as the Famous Five rushed at him.

Harry Wharton received the slash, and staggered under it.

But Panhandle had no time for a second slash.

Even as the blow fell, Bob Cherry's clenched fist crashed into his rugged, bearded face, and he staggered, and Johnny Bull and Nugent grasped him. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the next moment, grabbed the quirt from his hand.

The cowman gave a roar of rage.

Probably it had not even occurred to him that the schoolboys would attempt to handle him by force. And five to one, as they were, it was no easy task. Panhandle was big and strong and heavy-fisted, and by no means easy for schoolboys to deal with.

He struggled in the grasp of five pairs of hands. Some of the juniors were dragged off their feet, clinging to him. But they clung on, and Harry Wharton got his arm round the cowman's neck from behind, and dragged him over on his back.

Panhandle crashed, and the juniors crashed over him. They pinned him down by sheer weight, and the burly cowman heaved and rocked under them, howling with rage.

Every one of the five had some hard knocks before the infuriated puncher was reduced to helplessness. But Panhandle had some, too; the juniors did not stand on ceremony with him. He hit out savagely, and they hit as hard

in return, and, after a desperate and breathless struggle, the cowman lay sprawling, pinned down, and gurgling for breath.

"Got the brute!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Now fix him!"

"I'll sure get you for this!" gasped Panhandle.

"We've got you at present, old bean," said Bob, "and we're keeping you safe now we've got you! Get that belt round his arms!"

Panhandle still resisted, but his own belt was buckled round his arms, pinning them to his sides. Then the breathless juniors were able to take breath. Frank Nugent cut off to the bunkhouse and came back with a lasso. Panhandle, wriggling and howling threats, was tied up in the lasso, arms and legs, and then tied to the corral gate.

He streamed out remarks that almost turned the atmosphere blue as the juniors proceeded to lead out their horses and saddle and bridle them. But they were done with Panhandle now, and they took no further heed of him. He was still raging and glaring when they mounted to ride away from the ranch.

"I say, you fellows," came a yell from the veranda—"I say, you ain't going out without your tea, are you?"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not answer that question, urgent and important as the matter was. They dashed away in a bunch and galloped off by the Packsaddle trail, leaving Billy Bunter blinking after them through his big spectacles in a state of great astonishment.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

No Help!

"SHOOT!" said Mr. Lick.

The Sheriff of Packsaddle was a man of few words.

It was dusky evening in the cow town. Naphtha lamps outside the Red Flare glowed across the plaza and dimmed the starlight. Mr. Lick, the long-limbed and raw-boned sheriff, was sitting in a rocker in his office doorway after supper when five riders came into town and drew rein.

Five dusty schoolboys hitched their horses at the post and came over to Mr. Lick, who, seeing that they had something to say to him, made a hospitable motion to a bench.

Harry Wharton & Co. were glad to sit down.

They had had a hard day, and were tired to the bone. That, however, would not have prevented them from riding to the Bounder's rescue if they had a chance.

"We want your help, Mr. Lick," said Harry.

"Shoot!"

"You've heard, of course, that the Kicking Cayuse Ranch was sold, some time ago, to Mr. Vernon-Smith, in England," said Harry. "His son came out here to see the ranch, and we came with him for our school holidays. Ever since Smithy arrived in Texas he has been in danger, Mr. Lick, and now he has been kidnapped and carried off by a gang of Indians."

Rather to the surprise of the juniors, a faint grin flickered over the tanned face of the Packsaddle sheriff. But he was serious again at once, and he gave the captain of the Greyfriars Remove a nod as a sign to continue to "shoot."

But all the Famous Five could guess was that Mr. Lick was not surprised to hear that something had happened to the



Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles as Chick stabbed a sausage with a fork. Squeak! The choreman jumped. Having stabbed the sausage with a fork, the last thing Chick would have expected was a squeak from the sausage. "Aw, carry me home to Jane!" he gasped.

son of the Kicking Cayuse's new owner. "We know quite well that Vernon-Smith has an enemy here, and that he has put up the Indians to collar our pal," went on Harry. "They tried it on before and failed; now they've got away with it. We want help to get him back, Mr. Lick."

"Ain't you put Barney Stone wise?" asked Mr. Lick, and again that ghost of a grin flickered over his face.

"That's no good," said Harry. "Mr. Stone has gone with some of the outfit, but we feel sure that he won't hit the right trail."

Mr. Lick, who was staring at the moving crowd in the cow town plaza and at the glaring lights of the Red Flare saloon across the way, turned sharply towards Harry and fixed keen eyes on him.

"How come?" he rapped.

Wharton exchanged a glance with his friends. They nodded. During the ride to Packsaddle the chums of Greyfriars had made up their minds to tell the sheriff what they knew or suspected of the foreman of the ranch, otherwise it was only too likely that a busy cow town sheriff would leave the quest for the missing junior to the Kicking Cayuse outfit, led by their foreman—which, in the belief of the Famous Five, amounted to exactly the same thing as not looking for Smithy at all.

"I'm going to speak out, Mr. Lick," said Harry slowly. "I'm speaking to you now as an officer of the law. We suspect Barney Stone of being at the bottom of it."

"Search me!" said Mr. Lick. But they noticed that he did not seem surprised. "How come?" he repeated.

"We've spotted some things since we've been at the ranch," said Harry. "When we came out here a lot of attempts were made to keep the owner's son away, and he was in danger more than once; but we thought it was all right as soon as we got to Kicking Cayuse under Mr. Stone's protection. Instead of that, we found that Smithy was in more danger than ever, and the reason was—"

Harry Wharton paused.

"Spill it!" said the sheriff.

"There's been cattle-stealing on the ranch, and, from what we hear, it's been going on for years—in fact, all the time that Barney Stone has been foreman. We stopped a gang of rustlers from driving off a herd of cows into Squaw Mountain—a herd that had been left unguarded by Mr. Stone's orders. One of the gang was a man who had called on Stone at the ranch. Smithy was certain, and we agreed with him, that Barney Stone was acting in league with the rustlers, and had been doing so for years on end—robbing the owner of the ranch."

Mr. Lick grunted.

"That's a pretty serious accusation!" he said. "What about proving it?"

"We can't," said Harry. "It's clear enough to all of us, from what's happened, but we can't accuse the man. I'm telling you this, Mr. Lick, so that you will know why we can't trust Barney Stone to follow the Indians and get Smithy back. But it was so clear—to us, at least—that Smithy decided to put it up to his father in England by cable."

For the third time Mr. Lick had that ghost of a grin on his face. It was plain

enough that Mr. Lick had his own ideas about the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, and was not surprised that something had happened to prevent Herbert Vernon-Smith from sending off that cable.

"You know Bill Buck," went on Harry. "He was the best man in the Kicking Cayuse bunch, and Barney sacked him, and we're quite sure that it was because Bill helped to keep Smithy out of danger. That was why Smithy finally made up his mind to send that cable. We all knew that Stone would stop him if he could. Well, now he's stopped him."

Grunt! from Mr. Lick.

"He refused to let us have horses to leave the ranch," said Bob, "because there was a gang of Redskins about. We all knew he had brought them here to get after Smithy. But he made them the excuse; and it was because we were on foot that the Redskins got away with Smithy."

Grunt!

"I don't think that all this is news to you, Mr. Lick," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We've been keeping our eyes and ears open since we've been on the ranch, and we know that a lot of people hereabouts know that something is going on at the ranch against the owner's interests."

"There's rumours!" murmured Mr. Lick.

He grinned again.

"Owners of that ranch have been unlucky," he said. "Last owner came to this quarter, looking into things, and was lost in quicksand in the Squaw river. I'll say Kicking Cayuse never brought him luck. I guess the nog

owner is safer in the old country than he would be in Texas; if he was thinking of horning into Barney Stone's game. He sure should have kept his boy safe at home."

Wharton compressed his lips.

"That means that you knew already what I've told you, Mr. Lick!" he said.

Another grunt from Mr. Lick.

"A guy might suspicion things!" he said. "All Packsaddle knows that Barney Stone runs that ranch, and hasn't a heap of use for owners horning in. Guys chew the rag about that ranch a whole lot. Mebbe Barney raises more cows than he ever accounts for to his owner. It ain't for me to say! I guess rustlers have run off a heap of cows from that ranch. I'll say I ain't never been able to put salt on their tails—Barney Stone never was able to hand over much help in getting after them. Sure thing! But I guess a cow town sheriff ain't got any call to lorn into what don't concern him."

"Perhaps not!" said Harry. "But now it's come to this—the owner's son has been kidnapped by Indians, and it's perfectly plain, Mr. Lick, that you know as well as I do that Barney Stone will never get him back. What are you going to do?"

Mr. Lick was silent for several long minutes.

"I guess," he said at last, "that I'm going to look for that young guy, if he's missing! That's up to me, as sheriff! But if them Injuns has gone outside Packsaddle County, they're out of my jurisdiction."

"They're most likely sixty miles away by this time, on the other side of Squaw Mountain!" said Harry.

"That let's me out!" said the sheriff.

"Do you mean to say that you can do nothing?" exclaimed Bob.

Mr. Lick gave him a glare.

"What'll a guy do?" he demanded.

"How does it stand? A gang of Reds mosey along here from the Staked Plain, or some other doggoned spot off the map. Barney warns you to keep on the ranch while they're around—you snap your fingers at him, and get out and run into the Injuns—they rope in one of you. That sees Barney as clear as a guy could be, don't it? You figure that I can call up my deputies and ride into the desert hunting for a bunch of Reds, like a dorg hunting for fleas?"

The juniors were silent.

"If you're right about Barney, you've played into his hands, and you had it coming!" said Mr. Lick. "Prove it, and I'll cinch that galoot so quick it will make his head swim! But I guess a sheriff can't act on chin-wag—same kind of chin-wag that has been going on, up and down Packsaddle, for years on end. What have you got on Barney? What have I got on him? Nix!"

"But Smithy—" exclaimed Nugent.

"That young gink should have stayed where he was safe!" grunted Mr. Lick. "I guess this here location wasn't exactly healthy for a young guy horning into Barney's business. I'll say I'll do what I can—and I'll mention that it don't amounts to shucks. You take my advice you'll hit the horizon before any more of you disappear."

"No fear!" said Bob.

"If we can't get help, we shall follow on our own and do what we can," said Harry Wharton. "Bill Buck will help, if we can find him. Can you tell us where to get in touch with him, Mr. Lick?"

The sheriff nodded.

"Sure thing! Bill Buck's looking for

a job in another bunch, since Barney fired him off the Kicking Cayuse. He's down to Hard Tack now—but he sure let on to me that he would be in Packsaddle to-morrow. You hang around the burg, and you'll see Bill."

And the sheriff, as a hint that the interview was at an end, went into his office, and shut the door after him.

The juniors looked at one another. There was, evidently, little or no help to come from the sheriff of Packsaddle. Their only hope was in Bill!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Wolf Apache!

BRIGHT morning dawned on the cow town of Packsaddle.

Harry Wharton & Co. were up soon after dawn.

They had not returned to the Kicking Cayuse. They put up for the night at the Pack Hotel, in the cow town.

All their hopes were centred now in Buckskin Bill.

Big, honest Bill had "ridden herd" over the Greyfriars party till Barney "fired" him and he had to leave the ranch. That he would join them at once, in an effort to rescue the Bounder, they had no doubt whatever. And on such a trail, they could have had no more useful help than Bill's.

If Bill failed them, they had to do the best they could, unhelped. But the most hopeful members of the famous Co. could hardly fancy that success was likely on their own. Rainy Face and his gang had disappeared, beyond Squaw Mountain, far from the Packsaddle country. Trailing them in the desert was a task likely to tax the woodcraft and prairie-craft of an old hand like Bill—it was as good as hopeless for the schoolboys.

That was a last, desperate resource. So long as there was a chance of enlisting Bill's help, it was evidently worth waiting for. The time they lost in waiting for Bill would be more than recovered with Bill's help on the trail—with a chance of success thrown in.

It was weary waiting; while every hour the kidnapped Bounder was being taken farther and farther from his friends, deeper into the uninhabited desert where the gang of outcast Wolf-Apaches had their den.

But the juniors had to bite on it. The sheriff had said that Bill Buck would be back in Packsaddle that day; and they could only wait.

During the long morning they strolled about Packsaddle, with their eyes open for Bill. Nothing was seen of him, however, and they returned to the Pack for the midday dinner there.

In the afternoon, among the horse-men who came into the cow town, they recognised Yuba Dick, of the Kicking Cayuse outfit.

The puncher caught sight of them and grinned, and pulled in his bronco.

"Say, you here, you young ginks!" he exclaimed. "I'll say you made a good guess, not going back to the ranch."

"How come?" asked Bob, in the language of the country.

"I'm telling you, Barney was hopping mad when he rode in and found Pan-handle roped to the corral gate!" chuckled Yuba. "I'm sure telling you 'uns! I guess if you'd been around you'd have found out just how heavy Barney's quirt was."

"Forget it!" said Bob.

"Barney never found Smithy yesterday?" asked Harry, his lip curling.

"Sure nope!" answered Yuba. "I guess them Injuns have hit the horizon."

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Don't you worry—they'll let him loose—I guess he's hoofin' it on the prairie this very minute! What'd they want to keep him for?"

"Better ask Barney that!" said Harry.

Yuba stared.

"What'd Barney know?" he asked.

"More than he's likely to tell you!" answered Harry.

Yuba gave him a rather curious look, and, without saying more, rode on to Wash's store.

The Famous Five walked on to the end of the rugged street, and looked out on the prairie trail for Bill. But there was no sign of Bill yet, and they walked back into the cow town.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as they were passing through the plaza. "Look!"

A figure in a tattered blanket came along the plaza and stopped at the Red Flare. The coppery complexion, the raven-black hair, the aquiline features, told that it was an Indian. And the juniors, at first glance, recognised the Indian—they had seen him before.

"Running Water!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Come on!" said Nugent; and they started quickly towards the Indian. But before they could reach him he disappeared into the saloon.

The juniors stopped. They did not care to enter such a place as the Red Flare—the lowest and most uproarious resort in the cow-town. The Indian, evidently, had gone in for drink; he could have gone in for nothing else. The tattered outcast was a slave to the vile liquor which had been the chief cause of the almost total extermination of his race.

But, wretched, drunken, tattered, unwashed outcast as he was, the juniors were glad to see him. Whether he was of the same tribe as Rainy Face and his gang, they did not know; but it was very probable. He had not been with them—he had been alone when the juniors had seen him. But the sight of him raised new hopes in their hearts.

"That's the Indian who hooked Smithy out of the quicksand in the Squaw river, with his lasso!" said Harry Wharton. "You fellows remember—Smithy told us he had stopped the punchers ragging him, and he did that for Smithy when he found him in danger. If he could help us now——"

"Wait here for him!" said Nugent.

The juniors waited, with an eye on the doorway of the saloon.

They hardly knew whether to feel hopeful.

Running Water, the outcast Wolf-Apache, was no better than the gang who had roped in the Bouncer, for Barney Stone's pay. He was as like them as one pea was like another in the same pod; and he had the same suspicion and hatred for the white race.

But there was a difference. Smithy had saved him from rough handling by the Kicking Cayuse outfit; and that his wild, savage heart was capable of gratitude, was proved by the fact that he had rescued the Bouncer from the quicksand.

If he still remembered that debt of gratitude: if he still remembered Smithy, there was a chance of help for him—especially if he was in touch with Rainy Face's gang, as he was more likely than not.

The juniors waited doubtfully, but eagerly.

They had not long to wait.

There was a sudden uproar in the Red Flare. A shrill, angry yell was heard—they guessed it was from the Apache.

Then he appeared in the doorway

again—in the grip of a gigantic man with a red shaggy beard. The juniors knew Red Kelly, the proprietor of the Red Flare, by sight. Kelly heaved the struggling, enraged Indian out of the doorway, from within.

"Git!" roared Kelly. "No Injuns wanted here! I'm telling you! Git, you copper-faced piecan!"

A heavy boot was planted on the Indian's tattered deerskin trousers, and he flew out of the doorway.

He crashed on the earth, almost at the feet of the schoolboys, yelling and gasping. Red Kelly, with a grin, turned back into the saloon. Running Water, the Wolf-Apache, sprawled and panted.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bill Loses His Cayuse!

HARRY WHARTON stooped over the Indian, to give him a hand up.

At his touch, the Indian snarled like a panther, and leaped to his feet. The rage in his coppery face was far from pleasant to see.

But his look changed, as he saw the schoolboys. He recognised them as the friends of the fellow who had done him an act of kindness—probably the only act of kindness the wretched outcast had ever received from a white man.

He gave them a stare: and gathered his tattered blanket around him, to stalk away to some "joint" where the proprietor was less particular.

Harry Wharton put a detaining hand on his arm. He was not pleasant to touch: but anxiety for the missing Bouncer banished all other considerations.

"Stop a minute, Running Water!" said Harry. "You remember us—we are the friends of Vernon-Smith——"

"Injun sabbey!" grunted Running Water.

"You saved Smithy's life once," said Harry.

The hard, hawkish, coppery face softened. The mention of the Bouncer seemed enough to banish the Indian's evil temper.

"He is in danger now!" went on Harry.

The juniors scanned the coppery face, anxiously. They could see that they had Running Water's attention, at least. He remained where he was, instead of going along the plaza in search of what had been denied him at the Red Flare. His black eyes glinted inquiry.

"Do you know an Indian named Rainy Face?" asked Harry.

"Sabbey Rainy Face," answered the Indian. "Him chief!"

"He has taken Vernon-Smith away! He and his gang! They've taken him away into the desert!"

Running Water stared at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. This, evidently, was news to him, and surprising news.

"Why take?" he asked. "Injun no want white boy! Why Rainy Face take?"

"A bad white man has paid him to keep Smithy a prisoner, away from his friends and his home!" said Harry. "They have taken him away past Squaw Mountain."

The Indian stood silent.

"Smithy was a friend to you," said Harry. "Now that he is in danger, you can help him, Running Water."

Still the Indian did not speak; and his coppery face was hard to read.

That he had not forgotten Vernon-Smith, that he remembered him with kindness, they were sure. But all his

feelings and sympathies were naturally on the side of his own people. The outcast Apaches were quite unlike the "tame" Indians of the reservations. Vengeance and hatred were their feelings towards the race that had taken away their hunting-grounds.

There was no doubt that Running Water would have joined, willingly, in such a raid as Rainy Face's: against any victim except the schoolboy who had treated him kindly, and that schoolboy's friends. He would have had no scruple whatever in such a matter.

But he would not have lifted his coppery hand against Vernon-Smith. The doubt was, whether he would lift it against his own people, for Vernon-Smith's sake. That was putting his gratitude to the Bouncer to a very searching test.

"We're going after Smithy!" said Harry, after waiting in vain for the Indian to speak.

A faint smile glided over the coppery face.

"No find!" said Running Water.

"We shall try hard!" said Harry.

"We shall hunt down Rainy Face and his gang, if we can."

The Indian gave him a keen and curious look.

"No can!" he said. "No find Injun in desert! S'pose you find Rainy Face in desert, he kill. Here heap white men—in desert no white man—Injun kill, in desert!"

"We shall lose our lives, if we must!" said Harry quietly. "But we cannot desert our friend, Running Water. But if you would help us——"

A bitter sardonic look came over the Indian's face.

"Help white man hunt red man!" he said. "No can!"

With that, the Apache gathered his blanket round him again, and stalked away, leaving the juniors staring.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

He had hoped, or half hoped, for help from the outcast Apache. But it was clear that the Indian had no idea of turning on his own people. Only an armed force could have dealt with Rainy Face and his gang, in the desert, and rescued the Bouncer. To lead an armed force on the trail of his fellow-outcasts, was asking a great deal—more, evidently, than the Indian thought of granting.

"Nothing doing!" said Bob dismally.

"Well, I suppose it was a lot to ask!" said Harry, slowly. "I'm sure he would not have harmed Smithy himself, but—after all, he's an Indian, and Rainy Face's gang are Indians—his friends, perhaps his relations. I—I suppose we couldn't expect him to take a hand against them."

It was a disappointment to the juniors, though their hopes had not been high. They stood watching the Apache, as he stalked along the plaza.

He stopped at the door of the Silver Spoon—evidently to go in for the "fire-water" that had been denied him at the Red Flare. But he stopped there, without entering—and, after a long pause, stalked away down the rugged street, and disappeared, on the prairie trail out of Packsaddle.

The juniors saw no more of him.

They had had a brief hope: and it had died. They dismissed Running Water from their minds: and resumed watching for Bill. A long hour passed.

Once more they walked down the street of Packsaddle, to stare out on the dusty trail that ran down the river. Far down the trail, a stetson hat appeared in sight.

But as it was on the head of a man on foot, they did not suppose that it was Bill coming. Like all cowpunchers, Bill never went afoot: besides, the distance from Hard Tack was much too long for walking.

There was, however, something familiar in the tall, bulky figure that came tramping up the trail: and as it came nearer, the juniors realised that it was Bill Buck—otherwise "Buckskin Bill!"

Why he was on foot, was a mystery—he could not have left Hard Tack afoot, neither was he the man to lose his cayuse. But there he was—on foot: tramping in the sun and dust: and his rugged face, as he came into closer view, was seen to be red with rage. Something, seemingly, had happened to Bill.

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

The Greyfriars fellows waved their hats, and ran down the trail to meet the big puncher. They had always been glad to see Bill: but never so glad as now.

Bill stared at them, and came to a halt, fanning his heated face with his stetson.

"Say, you young geeks, you seed anything of an Injun?" he asked, before the juniors had time to say anything.

"An Indian!" repeated Harry. "Yes, about an hour ago, in the town—he left Packsaddle by this trail—"

"You ain't seed him since, on a hoss?"

"No: he was on foot when he came into the town, and he left on foot," answered Harry. "But what—"

"By the great horned toad!" said Bill. "I guess I got it packed ready for that Injun, next time I raise his copper-coloured frontispiece! I'll tell a man."

The juniors looked rather dismayed. Indians were few and far between at Packsaddle: and they had no doubt that the Indian of whom Bill was speaking, was Running Water, the Apache. Certainly the red outcast had left the cow town, an hour ago, by the trail up which Bill was coming. Apparently there had been some trouble on that trail, between Bill and the Indian.

"The doggoned hoss-thief!" said Bill.

"The goldarned red scallawag! The pesky piccan! I'll surely tell a man!"

"But what—" asked Harry.

"Where's your horse?" asked Bob Cherry.

Bill Buck gave an angry snort.

"You better ask that Injun, if you ever eet eyes on him agin!" he growled. "I'll say that Injun has corralled my cayuse!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The doggoned piccan!" breathed Bill. "I saro will trail that Injun all over Texas, and let daylight through his red carcass! I'll tell a man! You want to believe me! I'm telling you! I'm shouting out that he got me with a rock from ahind a tree, that red-skinned cuss did, and afore I was on my feet, afore I could pull a gun on him, he was on that hoss, sir, and hittin' the high spots! I'm telling you! That doggoned hoss-stealin' Redskin—and I'll tell a man, he's half-way to Squaw Mountain by this time, and mo hoofing it!"

Bill, snorting with rage, tramped on, the juniors going back into the cow town with him.

Bill had probably been rather hurt when the Indian felled him by "heaving a rock" from cover; but he was not so much hurt as enraged by the loss of his cayuse. There was no doubt that, had Running Water been within range of

a six-gun just then, Bill would have "shot him up" without a moment's hesitation. Any guy in Packsaddle would have pulled a gun on a horse-thief.

It was dismaying to the juniors. The theft of a white man's horse, so close to the cow town, made it evidently necessary for Running Water to clear out of the vicinity; and they had no doubt that he had cleared as fast as Bill's horse could carry him. And it was exceedingly improbable that he would ever be seen in that part of Texas again.

Any hope the juniors might still have had of help from the outcast Apache, had to be abandoned now. Running Water was gone—on Bill Buck's horse—and that was the last they expected ever to hear of him.

Bill, as they walked along to the Pack Hotel, was eloquent on the subject of Injuns and hoss-thieves. It was not till they reached the timber hotel, that the juniors had a chance of telling him what had happened to Herbert Vernon-Smith, and what they wanted him to do.

Bill's answer, as soon as he got it clear, was prompt and to the point:

"Five minutes for oats, five minutes to rustle me a hoss—that's ten minutes for you young geeks to get saddled up and ready!"

And the tenth minute had not elapsed when Bill was riding out of Packsaddle on a borrowed horse, with the Famous Five, heading at a gallop for Squaw Mountain, to pick up the trail of Rainy Face and his gang.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

No Escape!

HERBERT VERNON - SMITH stood in the doorway of the jacal, and looked out at sunshine and dust at the rim of a distant horizon, and could almost have wondered whether this was not an evil dream.

Far away—far beyond the horizon—lay the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain; and beyond it, the Kicking Cayuse Ranch and the cow town of Packsaddle, and the Rio Frio flowing away to roll into the Pecos.

Where he was, the Bounder of Greyfriars had not the remotest idea—except that he was in what he had heard the punchers call "the desert."

Far from the grass-lands—far from the cow country—mile on mile of sage and cactus and dust, had the Indian mustangs covered since they had parted with Barney Stone on the rugged side of Squaw Mountain.

The Bounder, tied to his mustang, had wondered whether that weary, dreary journey would ever end.

It had ended at last—here! Here, in an encampment in the most remote and inhospitable recess of the Staked Plain; endless miles from the nearest habitation of a white man.

This was the den of the Wolf-Apaches, where they lived like wolves in the desert, rather than keep to the Indian reservations like tamer Indians. They led wild, savage lives—only the fear of pursuit and merciless punishment prevented them from raiding, burning, scalping, as their forefathers had done in the old days.

But though Indian raids, burnings, and scalplings were almost forgotten things of a distant past, Rainy Face and his tribe were as predatory as they dared to be—lonely riders who missed trails did not always return; horses and cows were stolen from ranches, and in the way of robbery and thievery, all was

grist that came to the mill of the outcast gang.

Looking from the jacal—a miserable hut of stakes and branches—the Greyfriars junior scanned the encampment.

There were twenty to thirty similar huts scattered about. There were at least two score of Indians in the camp, as well as a number of squaws, and a few papooses. Unkempt, dirty, tattered, the gang of Wolf-Apaches preserved their freedom, but little else, in their hidden den in the desert.

There was a spring of water bubbling by a clump of trees—doubtless the reason why the Indians had pitched their encampment in that spot—for water was rare and priceless in the desert. Three or four tall cottonwoods shaded the spring, which flowed a short distance, and then was lost in the desert dust.

Beyond the limits of the camp, stretched the dusty plain, broken only by dry sage-brush and gaunt cactus.

Like a dream—an evil dream—it seemed to the boy who, only a few weeks ago, had been in the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars School.

It was hard to believe that this den of outcast Redskins existed on the same planet as Greyfriars.

Escape had been in Smithy's thoughts ever since he had fallen into this deadly trap. But though it was still in his thoughts, there was despair in his heart.

For escape was impossible, or next to impossible.

He was allowed to wander about the camp as he liked! But if he moved beyond it, he had a blow to expect—and if he ran, a whizzing tomahawk to stretch him on the earth. That had been made plain enough to him; but it would not have prevented him from making the attempt, had there been a glimpse of hope.

But there was none! Clear of the Indian camp, he could only have tramped in the desert till he fell exhausted from hunger and thirst. Even with a horse, he could never have found his way out of the desert, unless by a miracle—though he would gladly have taken the chance!

Yet it seemed impossible, unthinkable, that he was to remain here—a prisoner in the hands of these savages.

That was Barney Stone's game.

Unscrupulous and double-dealing rascal as he was, Barney shrank from taking the life of the owner's son, if he could avoid it. So long as Vernon-Smith was safe out of his way, safe from "spilling" what he had discovered of Barney's game at the ranch, the foreman of Kicking Cayuse was satisfied.

And he was safe here! To the outcast Indians, in want of the barest necessities of life, little was needed in the way of bribery. It did not cost Barney much to enlist their services—less, probably, than the profit he made on a single bunch of Kicking Cayuse cows run off by his confederates the rustlers.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth when he thought of Barney.

He had waited for proof before he could denounce the double-dealing foreman, the ally of rustlers, the confederate of cow-thieves and horse-thieves. Now he had the proof and could not use it!

Face to face, Barney had told him what he had to expect—and ridden back to Kicking Cayuse, while the Apaches carried off the schoolboy into the desert. Barney had thrown aside all disguise that day, because it could no longer serve his turn.

But what he knew, what he could now prove, was useless to Smithy—a

prisoner doomed never to see a white face again, so long as his enemy paid the outcasts of the desert to keep him safe—and Barney was not likely to fail in that!

Escape? He looked round the dreary desert of sage and dust, and groaned at the thought of it.

Rainy Face, the chief of the outcast tribe, stalked past the jacal where the Bounder stood, and Smithy gave him a black and bitter look—but the Indian did not deign to glance at him.

Wrapped in his blanket, with feathers nodding in his black, matted hair, the Indian chief stalked by, a dignified figure, dirty, and tattered as he was.

Indians came and went in the camp. Sometimes there would be not more than five or six of them there, with the squaws and children. Sometimes there were as many as sixty. When they were absent, sometimes, no doubt, they were hunting—such game as was to be found in the desert; more often, the Bounder could guess, they were on thieving expeditions among the ranches.

Every time he saw a new face, the Bounder scanned it eagerly.

He had one hope.

The tribe were the Wolf-Apache—the last remnant of that once numerous tribe that in old days had ridden over hundreds of miles of prairie, and waged war with Comanche and Navajo and Yaqui, Mexican and American. Running Water, the Indian outcast with whom he had made friends, was a Wolf-Apache. He belonged to the same tribe—it was possible, even probable, that he consorted with the others at times, if not constantly; it was possible that Smithy might see him some day in the encampment in the desert. And if he came, surely he would stand between the hapless schoolboy and the terrible fate to which the foreman of Kicking Cayuse had doomed him!

Escape was still in Smithy's thoughts, but that was his one real hope. But it was a frail reed on which to lean.

Running Water might come—but, even if he came, it might not be for weeks, or months, that he would have occasion to return to the camp in the desert. He was not likely to hear of the Bounder's fate, for it was certain that he would never go near Kicking Cayuse again—where he had been "fanned" with bullets, the first time that Vernon-Smith had seen him.

Escape—escape! That word hammered in the Bounder's mind. Somehow, anyhow, even if it cost him his life, he would escape from this dirty, dingy crew of savage outcasts. Somehow, he would find his way out of the desert, and then—then a bitter reckoning for Barney Stone—the calaboose at Packsaddle for the treacherous foreman.

His eyes followed Rainy Face. One of the Indians had brought the chief his mustang; he was about to mount and ride from the encampment.

The Bounder, at the doorway of the jacal, was not a dozen yards from the horse, and his eyes fixed on it with longing.

Hunger and thirst in the desert; death among the sage and the cactus; he would risk everything, if he could but feel a horse between his knees, and see the faintest chance of getting away.

He gave a start, and his eyes gleamed.

Rainy Face, instead of mounting the mustang, had gone into one of the jacals, leaving the Indian holding the horse by the rawhide rein.

The Bounder's heart beat.

With an air of assumed carelessness,

though his heart was thumping, he stepped out of the jacal, and moved along towards the man holding the horse.

The Indian did not even look at him.

Vernon-Smith passed him—so close that he could have touched him. Still the Indian gave him no heed.

Was it a chance? Whether it was or not, the Bounder of Greyfriars was taking it. Suddenly, swiftly, he turned on the Indian, and struck him on the chest, sending him toppling backwards.

With a startled, angry yell the Apache staggered, and fell, letting go the rawhide rein.

The startled mustang reared; but at the same moment the Bounder leaped on its back. He grabbed the reins, kicked the horse's flanks with his heels, and burst into a sudden gallop.

Rainy Face came out of the jacal with a bound. There was a yell from a dozen Indians, all running to the spot. Five or six of them rushed for their horses.

The Bounder, with set teeth, urged on the mustang.

The open desert was before him, and he rode like a madman. In the thunder of hoofs, he did not hear the whiz of a rope in the air.

Suddenly it seemed as if a giant's hand plucked him from the saddle and flung him, bruised and breathless, on the hard, sun-baked earth.

He sprawled there, half-stunned, while the horse clattered on.

A few moments more, and angry, coppery faces were round him, and the Indian who had lassoed him hooked off the gripping rope. He staggered to his feet, with coppery hands grasping him on all sides.

Some of the Apaches rode after the mustang, galloping riderless. Others grasping the Bounder, dragged him back into the camp. With his brain reeling from the crash on the earth, he staggered in their grasping hands.

That desperate attempt had failed—as it had been almost certain to fail. In the grasp of the Apaches, he stood before Rainy Face—and the hand of the Apache chief was on the knife in his buckskin belt. It seemed as if the end had come; and in his bitter disappointment and despair, he cared little.

But Rainy Face did not draw the knife. He snapped out words in his own guttural tongue. And the Indians knotted a lasso round the schoolboy, binding him hand and foot, and tossed him back like a log in the jacal. And the Bounder of Greyfriars, as he lay dizzy and aching on the earthen floor, gave up all hope.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Desert Trail!

"SIGN?" asked Harry Wharton hopefully.

It was morning, on the rugged slopes of Squaw Mountain.

Bill Buck and the Greyfriars juniors had camped for the night on Squaw Mountain, and they had been up at the earliest gleam of dawn. Since then long hours had passed, and the sun was high in the blue heavens.

Bill was searching for sign.

Of what had become of Rainy Face and his gang the juniors knew nothing, except that, after seizing the Bounder, they had ridden away in the direction

of Squaw Mountain. That they had not stopped on the hither side of the mountain was certain, for the ranges of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch extended as far, along the head-waters of the Squaw river.

But whether the gang had taken refuge in the lonely, untrodden canyons and gulches—the haunt of rustlers and cow-thieves—or whether they had gone farther, the juniors did not know, though they had little doubt that the Apaches had ridden on into the desert without drawing rein.

Bill had no doubt of it. Squaw Mountain, wild and solitary and extensive as it was, could be combed for the Redskins; and they would not have ventured to remain so near the cow country, with a prisoner in their hands.

But picking up the trail was a problem.

Hard, sun-baked rocks gave no clue. The Famous Five were keen and determined, and they were quite resolved not to turn back without having found Vernon-Smith; but, at the same time, they realised their helplessness. Without Bill they had no chance at all, and they knew it. It was a question whether they had any chance, with Bill's help. But it was their only hope.

With his bronco's reins looped over his arm, the big cowpuncher stood now, staring over the alkali desert that stretched north-westward from the mountain. His bronzed face was grave and grim.

He turned to the juniors at last.

He shook his head in answer to Wharton's question.

"I guess these here rocks don't stack no sign, feller," said Bill. "And I'll say it will want some picking up in the plain, yonder. But—"

He paused.

"Them Reds have got young Vernon-Smith," he said. "I don't rightly know whether you got it square what you've been telling me of Barney, though I'll say it does look a whole heap suspicious about that guy. But that ain't the p'int. Whether Barney's at the bottom of it or not they got him, and they got some reason for cinching him. And they don't dare to hang on where a six-gun could talk to them. They've hit the desert, and I'll say they're freezing on to the desert, so long's they've got that duck, surest thing, you know."

"We've got to follow them," said Bob.

"Mebbe," said Bill. "Lissen, you 'uns! Texas is a big State, but it ain't like what it was in the old Injun days. Too many ranches, and too many nesters, even in the Frio country, to give them a chance of hiding this side of the Staked Plain. Even the Staked Plain ain't what it was in the old days, but there's spots and corners where a guy can hide close. There ain't no two ways about it. Them Injuns locate in some corner of the Staked Plain, and I guess they hit for their hideout, when they got young Vernon-Smith."

"Then that's as good as sign," said Harry. "If we know the direction to take—"

Bill's rugged face wrinkled into a faint grin.

"Mebbe," he repeated. "I'm going arter that young duck. His popper, over the pond, handed him over to me to ride herd; and I guess this here would never have happened to him if Barney hadn't fired me off the ranch."

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"That's why," grunted Johnny Bull. "Mebbe," admitted Bill. "I'll say I do give suspicion of that guy Barney a whole heap now. But like I was saying, I got to get arter that young duck. But you school kids—" Bill shook his head. "This ain't a trail for you 'uns. It's tough going in the desert, and I guess there's more'n a healthy chance of never coming out of it alive."

"We know that, Bill," said Frank Nugent. "That won't stop us."

"And them Reds," went on Bill, unheeding. "They ain't the Injuns of the old days—tomahawks and scalping-knives, and the old bag of tricks—but if they get a holt on a white man out of sight in the desert, I'll say that only the turkey-buzzards will ever know what became of that white man. You get me?"

"Quite!" said Harry. "Is that all?"

"Well, I guess I've spilled a hatful," said Bill. "I guess you 'uns had better hit for the ranch and sit it out, while I mosey after them Reds."

"Forget it," said Bob.

"The forgetfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Bill," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We're useful in a scrap," said Johnny Bull. "We can handle our rifles, Bill, and we shall handle them fast enough if we get up to that gang who've got Smithy. We're not going back, at any price, so the sooner we get on with it, the better."

Bill paused, giving them a long and dubious look.

He knew—much better than the schoolboys could know—the difficulties and dangers ahead—the grim hardships of the desert trail.

"I better put it plain," he said. "On this here trail, there ain't any turning back for lame ducks. Once we're in the desert, you're for it! I got to keep on the trail; and you couldn't get back on your own. More'n that, if I get rubbed out, that leaves you flummoxed. You want to chew on that."

"Get on, Bill!" said Harry.

"We're wasting time," said Johnny Bull.

Bill paused again, but he said no more. He mounted his bronco, and the juniors followed his example. He had given them warning that if they entered the desert, they went with their lives in their hands. Leaving it at that the puncher led the way, and the Famous Five rode after him.

Squaw Mountain dropped from sight behind them as they rode through the hot hours. Ahead of them loomed a dark line over the plain, the edge of the high tableland called the Staked Plain—the "Llano Estacado" of the old Spanish days.

Like a wall it fronted the lower country, and the juniors, as they approached it, wondered how they were going to make the ascent to the top of the tableland, high above their heads.

But as they drew nearer they discerned that the wall was split and riven by deep gullies, and in the sunset they found themselves leading their horses up a stony gully, winding a way up to the upland.

When they stood at last on the summit of the Staked Plain the toughest member of the Famous Five was tired to the bone. But Bill swung himself into the saddle again, and the juniors rode with him. Bill had doubted whether they were able to follow such a

trail, and they were going to prove to him that they could.

To their eyes the dreary plain showed no "sign" of any kind, but Bill rode like one who knew or guessed the way; till at last he drew rein, in the sinking sunset, and gave a nod that indicated satisfaction.

"I guess they camped here!" he said.

The juniors looked round them in the glare of the red sunset.

There was a tiny patch of vegetation round a welling spring. It was a water-hole of the desert.

In the dusty earth were innumerable tracks of wild animals that had come to drink, and among them a keen eye could pick up traces of horses' hoofs. Bill dismounted and searched round the water-hole, the juniors watching him.

Water was scarce on the desert trails, and the Famous Five could guess—as Bill had guessed—that that was a likely spot for the Indian camp. And Bill's careful scrutiny soon revealed sign of a recent camp—traces of Indian moccasins in the mud near the water, a dragged feather from an Indian headdress in a dusty crevice, and—most exciting of all—the track of a pair of riding boots. Other Indians might have camped at the water-hole, but they would not have been likely to have a white man with them, and the boot-track was that of a boy—from the size! With deep feelings the Famous Five gazed at that silent but telltale sign of their missing comrade.

"Smithy was here!" said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath.

"Surest thing you know!" said Bill.

"Right so far, then!" said Bob.

"Yep! Mebbe we'll pick up sign in the morning!" said Bill.

They camped for the night, as the sun dipped, beside the waterhole. But at the first glimmer of light they turned out of blankets and slickers. Hopefully, after a hurried breakfast, the Famous Five watched Bill hunting for sign.

But the dust of the desert had hidden sign.

It was high morning before Bill gave it up. Bill had ridden the Staked Plain before and knew many of its secrets. Sign there was none, but he knew of a waterhole at a distance of many miles, and there was a chance at least that the Indians had stopped there to water their mustangs.

Harry Wharton & Co., as they rode on with Bill, realised, much more clearly than before, the almost hopeless difficulty of the task before them. They knew now for a certainty that Rainy Face and his gang had taken Vernon-Smith into the desert solitude of the Staked Plain; but that was all they knew. The rest was chance and hope!

In the blazing noon they reached the new waterhole. There was sign in plenty of animals that came to drink; a bunch of startled coyotes fled at their approach. But there was no sign of horses, no sign of camping.

A careful search only revealed the certainty that the Apaches had not passed that way.

Bill scanned the desert with a grim face.

Harry Wharton & Co., resolute as ever, had heavy hearts. There was no sign, and they had all the desert to choose from.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Beastly For Bunter!

"I SAY, Mr. Stone!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Barney Stone, coming out of his office at Kicking Cayuse, glanced at the fat junior in the rocker on the veranda.

Barney's grim, saturnine face had the most cheerful expression on it that Billy Bunter had ever seen there.

Matters were, in fact, going quite well for the foreman of Kicking Cayuse—better, indeed, than he had planned.

The owner's son, who had discovered his double-dealing, had disappeared—and was going to stay disappeared. Whether he had confided his suspicions to his friends Barney did not know; but he knew that it was likely. So the news that Harry Wharton & Co. had ridden away on the desert trail, in search of their missing comrade, was good news to Barney.

He did not fear what they might suspect, and if they disappeared into the desert, and remained there, it was all the safer for him. And after a few days there was no doubt about it.

As they did not return to the ranch, Barney asked a few questions in the cow town, and learned that they had ridden away with Bill Buck for Squaw Mountain, since when none of the party had been seen or heard of.

Barney, unscrupulous and hard-fisted rascal as he was, had had no thought of doing them harm, unless they appeared dangerous—and he had not considered them dangerous. But if they chose to rush on their fate, he certainly had no kick coming.

That they had gone into the desert was certain by this time, and that they would ever emerge from it alive appeared very improbable to Barney. Even Bill, tough and hardy plainsman as he was, was quite likely to leave his bones on the desert trail; and as for the schoolboys, they had no chance at all, in Barney's belief. The turkey-buzzards alone would know their fate. It was their own funeral, Barney reckoned, and they could take what was coming to them.

Of the Greyfriars party, only Billy Bunter remained at Kicking Cayuse, and Barney was quite indifferent to Billy Bunter—and, indeed, almost forgot that the fat Owl was there at all.

The owner's son had spelled danger for him, and Barney had ruthlessly put "paid" to the owner's son. His friends, dangerous or not, were as good as done with. All that Barney had to do now was to let Mr. Vernon-Smith, in far-off England, know what had happened.

He was in no hurry to do that.

Certainly he did not fear trouble with the owner. His case was good enough. Vernon-Smith had persisted in leaving the ranch during the foreman's absence, disregarding warnings, and even orders. A gang of wandering Indians were supposed to have taken him—only supposed, for Barney could produce no evidence of it! His friends—without even informing Barney—had gone in search of him, and lost themselves in the desert! Mr. Vernon-Smith could hardly consider that Mr. Stone was to blame for these happenings!

Still, he was in no hurry to inform the distant millionaire. He had the pretext that he was exhausting every effort to find the lost schoolboys before sending on such bad news.

And the more time that elapsed, the less possible it would be for Mr. Vernon-Smith to take any useful steps in the matter. Barney intended to keep the information back till the latest possible date.

Having forgotten Billy Bunter's fat existence, he was reminded of it by the fat junior's squeak as he came out of his office into the veranda.

He stopped, staring down at Bunter.

"Shoot!" he said tersely.

"I say, what about my friends?" asked Bunter, blinking at the foreman



Vernon-Smith dodged quickly as the tomahawk flew through the air. But for his quickness, the keen edge of the axe would have struck him. As it was, it whizzed by within a foot of him and stuck in the wall of the jacal!

through his big spectacles. "Do you know where they are, Mr. Stone?"

"I guess I'd be plumb glad to know," said Barney. He did not forget that, when Billy Bunter returned home, Mr. Vernon-Smith would doubtless question him as to the happenings on the Texas ranch. "I got men hunting for them young geeks, but there ain't any noos so far."

"Well, it's pretty thick!" said Bunter, frowning.

"Eh?"

"I mean to say, I came out here for a holiday with Vernon-Smith and the other fellows!" said Bunter. "I didn't expect to be stuck on this ranch all by myself, with nobody to speak to but a disrespectful choreman."

"Oh!" gasped Barney.

He had supposed that Bunter was thinking anxiously about his absent friends. Evidently that had been an error on his part. Billy Bunter, as usual, was thinking wholly and solely of William George Bunter.

"I call it thick!" said Bunter warmly. "Of course, I'm sorry about Smithy. Still, it's his own fault. I heard you warn him about the Indians, and he went out all the same, taking no notice. He jolly well asked for it."

Barney smiled faintly.

"Sure thing!" he agreed.

"He was always an obstinate ass!" went on Bunter. "Every chap in the Remove at Greyfriars knew what an obstinate ass he was. Still, of course, I'm sorry. But I'd like to know what the other fellows mean by clearing off like this and leaving a fellow entirely on his own! They haven't been kidnapped by wild Indians, they've gone off of their own accord. It's not the sort of thing a fellow expects from his friends."

Barney looked at him curiously.

"Gallivanting about and leaving a fellow on his own!" said Bunter indignantly. "I suppose they think Smithy

matters more than I do! It would be just like them—I must say that! That's about it."

"Search me!" said Barney.

"Well, if they don't turn up pretty soon they jolly well won't find me here when they do come back!" said Bunter darkly. "It will be entirely their own fault."

"I guess if you're honing for home I'll sure fix up the trip to the railroad," said Barney Stone.

Barney did not care much whether Bunter stayed or went; but, like most people who came into contact with William George Bunter, he anticipated a certain amount of satisfaction in seeing the last of him!

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Well, I can't very well let them down, even if they let me down. I'll stick it out a bit longer. I'm a bit more particular than some chaps. Play the game has always been my motto. But look here, Mr. Stone, I'd like you to speak to the choreman! He's getting worse and worse since the other fellows have been gone! He was absolutely insolent this morning."

"You don't say!" remarked Barney.

"I jolly well do!" said Bunter warmly. "He made a fuss because I went into the kitchen and ate a pie! He said the pie was for you—making out that that mattered, you know."

"Oh!" gasped Barney.

"And that wasn't all!" said the aggrieved Owl. "He actually had the cheek to say he wondered how I could keep on stuffing, with my friends missing. Me stuffing, you know! It's not much I eat, as every fellow who knows me knows jolly well! Besides, I suppose it wouldn't do those silly asses any good if I missed my meals! It was sheer cheek—and I want you to speak to him. Tell him you'll sack him if he doesn't behave himself, see? You

might give him a lick with your quirt, too."

"Search me!"

"The fact is, Mr. Stone, that if that choreman didn't mend his manners, I shan't stay on here!" declared Bunter. "It's not the sort of thing I'm accustomed to. Cheek from the servants is a thing I never could stand. I say, Mr. Stone, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!" roared Bunter.

But Mr. Stone did walk away. He seemed to have had enough of Billy Bunter's agreeable conversation.

"I say—" howled Bunter.

Barney clattered down the steps and strode away to the bunkhouse.

Bunter blinked after him with a wrathful blink.

"Beast!" he hissed.

He rolled into the doorway of the living-room. It was tea-time—or, at least, would have been tea-time, only for the circumstance that "tea" seemed to be an unknown meal on Kicking Cayuse. Breakfast, dinner, and supper were the only meals provided by Chick: and as Chick was the entire household staff, he was not keen on providing more. Which was a great grievance with Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. had easily accommodated themselves to it—and Smithy, though the owner's son, had not cared a straw. Moreover, Chick had always had a big cake in the kitchen to be sliced as required, if the juniors happened to be indoors—Chick was a good-natured guy, and quite obliging to fellows who did not expect too much.

The trouble was that Bunter did expect too much—much too much! Neither did he hesitate about making his wants known.

For which reason, that afternoon cake had stopped, like a clock that was run

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A PRISONER in the DESERT!



(Continued from page 13.)

down, since the other fellows had been absent from the ranch.

Chick did not take the trouble to bake a cake for Bunker—ignorant of the fact that Bunker was one of the fellows that mattered.

Blinking in from the veranda, Billy Bunker spotted Chick at his chores. He was mopping the plank floor of the living-room with bucket and a mop.

He glanced at the fat figure in the doorway, grunted, and went on mopping.

"Look here, what about tea, Chick?" demanded Bunker; which was his daily question in the afternoon.

Grunt!

"If you're too lazy to get tea, I can do with a cake!" said Bunker, with dignity. "What about a cake?"

Grunt!

"Look here, you cheeky beast!" hooted Bunker. "I'm talking to you! Hear that? I've just spoken to Stone about you, and he's going to sack you if you don't behave yourself, see? He said so."

Chick took notice at last! He did not speak; he withdrew the mop from the bucket, and stepped towards Bunker, with a gleam in his eye.

"You're the guy to ask for it, ain't you?" said Chick. "Waal, I ain't the hombra to say nope if you ask for it, mister."

Chick made a lunge with the mop! It landed on a fat little nose!

"Gurrgh!" gurgled Bunker.

He went backwards over into the veranda.

"Urrgh!"

"Mosey in and have another!" snorted Chick.

"Oooooogh!"

Bunker sat up, clawing at a dripping fat face.

"Urrgh! Beast! Ooogh! Grooogh!" he gurgled. "Oh crikey! Ooooh! You cheeky beast—w o o o o o g h ! Oooooogh!"

There was a splash as Chick shoved the mop into the bucket again. Then he stepped through the doorway with it.

His intention was easily to be read in his face. Billy Bunker did not stay for him to carry out that intention. He bounced up, like an india-rubber ball, and scuttled.

"Beast!" he howled, as he went.

And Chick grinned, and went back to his chores.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Blow for the Bunker!

THUD, thud, thud!

Vernon-Smith heard the sound of hoof-beats approaching the Apache encampment, but he did not heed.

He was lying under the shade of the tall cottonwoods, beside the spring.

It was a blazing-hot day—the desert shimmering with heat. Six or seven Indians were to be seen loafing about

the place—and occasionally a squaw came down to the spring for water, and glanced at the hapless schoolboy lying there; sometimes with compassion.

The Bunker's face was dark and gloomy.

Since his first—and last—attempt at escape, he had given his captors no trouble. After that reckless and futile attempt he had lain bound in the jacal for a day and night—and was released, with stiff and aching limbs, the following morning. It was an experience that he did not want to repeat, if he could help it.

Not that another such chance had come his way—if he made a motion towards any of the Indian horses, a blow drove him away.

There was no more chance by night than by day. In that remote and inaccessible corner of the desert, the Indians did not keep watch at night—but there were a score of half-starved, savage dogs about the camp, who set up a howling at a sound or a movement.

Twice, at night, the Bunker had put his head out of the jacal, in the faint hope of stealing away in the dark and getting hold of a horse. But the howling dogs gathered round him at once.

He had not tried again. Indeed, he knew that it was useless, or he would not have been left the chance to try it on.

The Indians seemed quite indifferent to him; but had there been the least chance of his escape, he would have been bound.

As one endless day followed another, hope sank and sank and died—or almost died. He had almost ceased to think of Running Water—he doubted now whether the outcast belonged to this gang of Indians, or whether, even if he belonged to it, he would ever come to that remote encampment. For days he had watched every new face in the camp, in the hope of seeing the face he knew—but that hope had died, at last, like the rest.

As for his friends finding him, he did not count on that in the least. He knew that they would do all they could—they were not the fellows to desert him. But they could do nothing—nothing! Even his father, when he knew, could do nothing.

When the millionaire knew, he would leave no stone unturned. But even if Mr. Vernon-Smith threw everything aside and came out to Texas and instituted a search, what would, and could, come of it?

He was hidden from all human knowledge in the remote desert; and he knew—knew from Barney Stone's own lips—that the Indians had orders to keep him, dead or alive; orders that Rainy Face would not hesitate for a moment to carry out.

Lying beside the spring in the shadows of the great cottonwood branches, the Bunker was plunged in gloom almost in despair. He did not lift his head as he heard the sound of the galloping horse.

Some Indian was coming back to the camp—they came and went often enough. He had ceased to hope for the sight of the Indian he knew.

He heard the horseman clatter up to the encampment, and a sound of guttural voices as others gathered round and greeted him as he dismounted. Of the tongue they spoke Vernon-Smith did not understand a single word.

But he heard the voices, they were quite near to him; and suddenly it seemed to him that one of the voices had a familiar note. Then, with a sudden beating of the heart, he lifted his head and looked.

The newcomer had dismounted, and

he could not pick him out among the crowd of seven or eight tattered braves. But he saw the horse—not a shaggy Indian mustang, but a handsome bronco, with good trappings and a good saddle; a brown horse with white splashes on the forelegs. He had seen that horse before, or one very like it—it was twin to Bill Buck's bronco.

Likely enough it was Bill's bronco; stolen by an Indian horse-thief. Some of the Indians were admiring it, and handling its trappings, as it stood, flecked with the dust of the desert.

Then, as they moved, he had a view of the man who held the bridle—the man who had ridden in on the bronco. And his heart leaped again; and he dared hardly believe his eyes as he saw Running Water.

It was the outcast—the man he had saved from the rough handling of the punchers, and who had come to his rescue when he was caught in the quicksand of the Squaw river. It was Running Water; the Indian he had longed to see, whom he had despaired of seeing.

He almost tottered to his feet.

The Indian holding the bronco glanced at him; but there was no recognition in his glance.

Surely the man knew him again! Surely he had not forgotten him! Vernon-Smith's heart beat painfully. He was chilled by that hard, cold, unrecognising stare.

But if the Indian knew him he gave no sign of it.

He spoke in his own tongue to the others, his tone and his look indicating that he was asking who the paleface was, and what a paleface was doing in the hidden camp of the Wolf-Apaches.

Smithy could hear him, and, though he could not follow the Indian's words, he could follow his meaning.

One of the other Indians answered.

Then Running Water, as if utterly indifferent on the subject, turned to lead the bronco away.

Vernon-Smith looked at him—gazed at him with fixed eyes—but Running Water did not give him another glance. He had forgotten him—forgotten him utterly—and the Bunker, in utter misery, realised that he might have expected as much. What was he, after all, to this savage Indian outcast?

But this destruction of all his hopes was more than he could bear. He ran forward as the Indian was turning away with the bronco.

"Running Water!" he panted.

The Indian did not even turn his head.

Two or three of the others, staring at Vernon-Smith, pushed him back. But the Bunker was desperate.

He thrust his way savagely through them, and, grasping Running Water by his tattered blanket, he dragged at him.

"Stop!" he gasped. "Running Water, a word—one word! Don't you know me? Don't you remember me? For mercy's sake, a word!"

There was an angry gabble from the group of Redskins, puzzled and irritated by the Bunker's actions, evidently quite ignorant of his acquaintance with the man who had just arrived at the camp.

Running Water glanced round and jerked his blanket away from the Bunker's hand; there was only a cold surprise and annoyance in his coppery face.

Two or three dusky hands were laid on Vernon-Smith to push him away. He struggled wildly. He could not part with this last hope; he would make the Indian somehow understand.

"Running Water," he panted

hoarsely, "help me! I am a prisoner here! For the love of mercy, help me! I thought that you might come; I've waited and watched for you! Don't you know me? Don't you remember?" Only a stony, unrecognising stare answered him.

Running Water did not speak a word to the Bounder, but he muttered in his own guttural tongue to the other Indians, and they grasped the Bounder and dragged him away.

Dragged and hustled, and struck by several angry hands, the schoolboy was driven away; and Running Water, taking no further heed of him, led away the bronco and disappeared from his sight.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a haggard face, flung himself down by the spring again. Utter despair was in his heart.

This was the man upon whom he had founded his hope—all the hope that was left to him. And the man had forgotten him. Either he did not know him at all, or he would not admit that he knew him among the other Indians. The Bounder had hardly dared to hope that Running Water would come to the camp; he had come, and this was the result.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Fighting the Apaches!

"I'll tell a man!" grunted Bill. "Cover! Jump for it!"

The stetson spun on his head, and following the bullet came the ring of the rifle.

Bill was big and he was bulky, but he was off his horse in the twinkling of an eye as the rifle shot echoed over the desert—and the Greyfriars juniors were as swift as Bill.

They were riding, under the hot sunlight, through a dusty valley between two wide ridges of sunbaked earth dotted with tall cactus. On either side the dusty ridges shut off the view, and ahead of them was the bare, hot plain. Save for a vulture wheeling high against the blue, there was no sign of life; they might have fancied themselves in a world alone.

But that sudden shot told that there were others at hand—and that the others were enemies. From the cover of some ridge or cactus clump it had come, and it had gone close.

Swiftly the Famous Five were on the ground, and their horses were lying down, the juniors behind them, rifles resting over saddles. Another and another shot came out of the dusty distance, whizzing over them as they lay.

The schoolboys felt their hearts beat quicker. It was an attack—and they knew that it must be by Indians, though as yet they could see no one.

It was a week since they had ridden into the Staked Plain. Camping by night, hunting for sign by day, that week had passed, and, though their determination was as strong as ever, their hope had grown fainter and fainter.

Somewhere in the trackless desert was the den of the outcast Apaches, and there was their comrade. But there was no sign, no clue; the desert dust told them nothing. They would not give in, yet they knew that little short of a miracle was needed to guide them to the fellow they sought.

Only by chance—only if fortune favoured them—could they hope to see Herbert Vernon-Smith again.

Barney Stone had been too cunning for them. If he knew—as doubtless he did—that they were hunting for their

lost comrade he did not fear the outcome—he had no need to fear it.

Hardships they had faced without a thought of complaint—weary riding, weary tramping, blazing heat, and tormenting dust, and burning thirst many times till they found waterholes to fill their cans again; but so far there had been no danger—and danger now had come suddenly.

But it was more a relief than anything else to the juniors to know that they were in touch with their enemies.

"We've found them at last, Bill!" breathed Harry Wharton, as he crouched behind his bronco and watched over his rifle.

"Nope!" grunted Bill. "Not by a jugful—we ain't found them; they've sure found us!"

"Oh!" said Harry.

"Watch out, you 'uns!" muttered Bill. "I guess when they come they'll come quick. You want to shoot straight, I'm telling you."

The juniors were watching keenly enough.

But they could see nothing so far of the enemy. After a spatter of rifle shots there was no more fire.

The shots had come from a hollow in the ridge ahead of them to their right, where there was a stragglo of dry bushes; but they could see nothing of the Indians.

Bill had warned them that the outcast Redskins, who did not venture to handle rifle or knife in the cow country, would be very different if they were found in the remote desert, where there was no eye to see what passed. The Famous Five realised that they were up against a fight for their lives.

Whether the unseen Indians belonged to the same gang that had kidnapped Vernon-Smith they did not know. There were other gangs of other tribes in the desert, and any of them would have attacked a lonely party for the sake of their horses and their rifles.

This encounter did not mean, as they had hoped for a moment, that they had run down the gang they sought; it only meant that some wandering gang of savage braves had sighted them and looked upon them as a possible prey.

There was a sudden stirring in the fringe of dry, dusty bushes hardly a hundred yards away; shaggy mustangs and feathered dark heads shot into view.

"Watch out!" rapped Bill.

He was firing as he rapped out the words.

"Shoot!" breathed Harry Wharton, and he pulled trigger as he spoke.

Crack, crack, crack, crack!

There were about fifteen Indians in the bunch of horsemen that suddenly, swiftly, with lightning swiftness, swept down on the Greyfriars party. Some of them carried rifles, others spears or tomahawks. Riding at their head was a copper-faced chief whom the juniors had seen before.

"Rainy Face," breathed Bob, and he fired point blank at the chief; and the shot was answered by a wild yell as the Indian lurched on his galloping mustang.

Crack, crack, crack!

Bill had doubted whether the schoolboys were the "hombres" to take such a trail and to face the deadly perils of the desert, but he had no doubt now. As coolly as if they were firing on the rifle range at Greyfriars the Famous Five faced up to the charge of the Redskins and pumped out bullets. The reports of the rifles made a continuous roar as they fired and fired again.

It was well for them that they faced

the wild charge coolly and steadily; for had nerve failed, the savage riders would have been on them and riding over them in less than a minute.

But the tearing volleys from the rifles met the charging Indians with a hail of whizzing lead. Riders and horses rolled right and left under it; shaggy mustangs went plunging down, flinging their yelling riders; man after man rolled, struck from the saddle. Rainy Face, the chief, was huddled over his horse's neck, struck by Bob Cherry's bullet and by another from Bill.

Fast and fatal as the steady fire was, it seemed to the juniors that the wild charge must reach them and overwhelm them, that spears and tomahawks would be hacking at them in a few seconds. But their nerve did not falter, and they fired as fast as they could pull trigger; and under that deadly hail the charge broke and scattered.

Six copper-skinned riders lay prone; as many, hard hit, clung to their horses; and all who were still mounted swerved from the deadly rifle fire and galloped away.

The moment they turned from the attack the juniors held their fire; but Bill Buck was on his feet, a six-gun in his hand, and he blazed away at the Redskins as they rode, and more than one of them reeled in his saddle before they were out of range.

He gave a grunt of satisfaction as he lowered the empty revolver.

"I guess they got theirs, and got it where they live," grunted Bill. "I'll say there's six of that bunch that will never lift a cowman's hoss again!"

The juniors watched the fleeing Indians, disappearing into the dust of the desert. The last nodding feather vanished from sight.

"That was Rainy Face's gang, Bill," said Harry, with a deep breath. "I knew him at once. It's the same gang that's got Smithy—"

Bill nodded.

"Sure thing!" he agreed. "And mebbe we ain't fur from their camp—and mebbe agin, they was out on a thievin' raid, and a day's ride from home. I guess there ain't no telling."

"But—" said Bob.

"Spill it!" said Bill, as he paused.

"Well, nearly all that lot were hit, and I know I got Rainy Face himself," said Bob. "If they're out on a raid, they're in no state to carry on with it, Bill. They'll make for home."

Bill nodded again.

"You said it!" he agreed. "It's a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent that they make for their tepees after that handling, young Cherry."

"And if we can pick up their trail we—" said Bob hopefully.

"You don't figger that if we foller that trail we may horn into a bunch big enough to eat us, body and boots!" said Bill, with a grin.

"We're ready to chance that, Bill."

"Prezactly!" said Bill. "That's what we've got to chance, feller—that's what we've moseyed along here to chance! You said it! I reckon that trail will peter out in the dust afore we've raised it fur, but if they head for home it will sure give us a line on their hide-out afore we lose it. We got to ride arter them rods."

"But—those—"

Frank Nugent made a gesture towards the fallen Redskins.

Bill snorted.

"I guess the buzzards is hungry, as usual!" he answered. "I'm telling you we got to ride."

And Bill mounted and rode, and the

juniors, saying no more on the subject, rode after him. And as they rode away from the scene of the brief, but fatal encounter, vulture after vulture came swooping out of the blue.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Beans For Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER gave a little, fat cough.

It was supper-time at Kicking Cayuse, and Barney Stone came tramping into the living-room at the rancho.

Since the Greyfriars fellows had been no longer there, Barney had resumed his old quarters in the rancho. During their stay he had bunked in the bunk-house with the outfit, leaving the rancho to Vernon-Smith and his guests. Now he was back in his old quarters, and settling down, as before the Greyfriars party came—from which Billy Bunter, if he had thought about the matter at all, might have guessed that Barney did not expect to see any of the party at Kicking Cayuse again.

Bunter, however, did not think about it, and so did not draw any conclusions. It did not even occur to his fat brain that the Famous Five were gone for good, though Barney Stone and the outfit had little or no doubt of it.

More than a week had elapsed since they had started on the desert trail, and Barney Stone had very little doubt that their bones were already bleaching in the burning sun of the desert. They had come—and gone—and he was through with them—at least, so he believed.

Bunter was still there; but the fat and fatuous Owl was no danger to Barney. He did not even know, or care, that another herd was missing from Kicking Cayuse ranges, driven off by the rustlers of Squaw Mountain. Certainly, had he known, he would never have thought of guessing that Barney Stone shared the profits with the cattle-thieves.

Bunter thought it rather a cheek for Barney to bung himself back in the rancho. But he did not venture to give Barney a hint to that effect.

He would, indeed, have welcomed him if he would have kept that cheeky choreman, Chick, in order. But Barney did not seem to care whether Chick cheeked Bunter or not. Once or twice, when Bunter raised the subject, he told him briefly to "can" it. Billy Bunter indignantly "canned" it.

But his wrath was growing. Barney, as often happened, was late for supper. He had been out on the ranges, possibly in connection with the recent loss of cattle from the ranch. Anyhow, he was late, and Chick declined to serve supper till he came. As if a measly foreman mattered, and Bunter did not!

As Billy Bunter was always hungry a long time before a meal, waiting for the meal was very disagreeable to him. But when he blinked into the kitchen to tell Chick to hurry up, Chick simply "heaved" a potato at him—and Bunter departed with a loud howl!

Now, at last, Barney came clattering in, and sat down to supper, still in his stetson, and without wasting a word on Bunter. And Chick—in that erroneous belief that Barney mattered and Bunter didn't—brought in supper promptly enough as soon as Barney was present.

Even then, he served Barney first, while Bunter eyed him hungrily and malevolently. That cheeky choreman

really seemed to find a sort of fiendish satisfaction in inflicting the tortures of Tantalus on the fat Owl of Greyfriars. Wherefore did the Greyfriars ventriloquist give his fat little cough.

"Gurrrrrrrh!"

Barney Stone gave a sudden jump at that savage growl of a dog from under the table. He drew his legs back so suddenly that he almost overturned his chair, and a chunk of beef, on the end of his fork, dropped in at the open neck of his shirt, instead of going to its intended destination.

"Aw, search me!" snapped Barney angrily. "You Chick, you doggoned big stiff, what you got a dog under the table for, you bonehead?"

Chick, who was going out of the doorway, turned round.

"I'll say there ain't no dorg in this rancho, Barney!" he answered, staring.

"You pesky bonehead!" roared Barney. "He was jest at my legs! Turn that dog out, you mosshead!"

"I'm telling you there ain't no dorg!"

"I heard him growl!" said Bunter.

"Aw, pack it up, you fat stiff!" snapped Chick. "You blow off that mouth of yours a whole heap too much."

"Gurrrrrrrh!"

"Hear that?" roared Barney.

"Waal, carry me home to Hanner!" exclaimed the astonished Chick. "I sure heered it, and I ain't wise to it how a dorg got in here. I ain't seen no dorg cavorting around, I'll tell the world."

"Drive it out, you bonehead!"

"You said it!" agreed Chick.

He came back into the room, picked up Barney's quirt, which the foreman had thrown on a chair, and stooped, to drive the dog from under the table. His eyes fairly popped as he scanned a space tenanted only by Billy Bunter's fat legs! There was no sign of a dog.

"Search me!" gasped Chick.

"Get on with it, you boob!" snapped Barney. "You figure that I want that dog chewing my laigs while I'm chewing my beef!"

"There ain't no dorg!" gasped Chick. "I sure heered him, but I'll tell a one-eyed man from Missouri I can't see no dorg!"

"Gurrrrrrrh!" came a sudden hideous growl behind Chick.

He spun round so suddenly that he nearly lost his footing, and staggered against the table.

"Say, where's that dorg?" gasped the amazed choreman.

"Find it and drive it out, you bonehead!" snapped Barney, and he sat down to his supper again.

"Find it yourself, if you want!" came the answer, in a voice so exactly like Chick's that Barney Stone had no doubt on the subject.

He leapt to his feet.

"What's that?" he roared.

Barney did not care a boiled bean if Chick cheeked Billy Bunter. But, evidently, he cared many boiled beans if Chick checked himself! The foreman of Kicking Cayuse was not the man to take lip from a choreman.

Chick just goggled at him. He had heard the words; but who had spoken was a mystery to Chick. Certainly, he did not dream that it was a fat junior, who was sitting at the table helping himself to boiled beef.

"Say, this here rancho is haunted!" stuttered Chick.

"You goldarned dish-washer, you giving me back-chat!" roared Barney.

"You want me to break you up, you pesky piccan, and throw what's left out of the winder?"

"Aw, you can can it!" retorted Chick. "I guess there ain't a guy in Texas that could throw me out of a winder. What you getting your mad up about, Barney Stone? What's a guy done, I'm asking you?"

"You been down to Red Flare, and come back boiled?" snorted Barney. "You know what you said, I reckon! Pack it up, and bring in the eats!"

"Aw, you go and fetch your eats, if you want eats, you long-nosed scallawag!" answered the twin to Chick's voice.

Barney, who was sitting down again, jumped up suddenly. He swung round at the choreman with a face of fury.

"What'd I pay you for?" he roared. "By the great horned toad, you got it coming!"

"Say——" gasped Chick, as Barney grasped him.

"He, he, he!" from Billy Bunter.

There was a roar of angry voices, a wild trampling of feet, as the angry foreman grappled with the equally angry choreman.

Barney swung Chick towards the open doorway on the veranda. Chick resisted manfully. Billy Bunter, leaving them to it, helped himself to the supper Chick had brought in for Barney. Bunter did not believe in wasting time in these important matters.

With his large mouth full of boiled beef and beans, the Greyfriars ventriloquist had no more leisure for ventriloquism.

But he had done enough—more than enough!

Barney Stone, in the fixed belief that Chick had handed him the most unheard-of insolence, was grappling with Chick, to throw him out of the rancho. Chick, as a free and independent citizen of the United States, was not going to be handled by any guy, foreman or not, if he could help it. So there was a terrific tussle.

Chick went staggering to the doorway in Barney's powerful grip—but, plump as he was, Chick was a hefty man, and he rallied, and came back at Barney. They reeled across the room, knocking over a couple of chairs. Then Chick went to the door again, whirling—and this time he went out into the veranda flying.

He crashed there with a heavy thud. Barney stood panting.

But Chick was up like a jack-in-the-box, and hurtling in. He hurtled at Barney Stone, grabbed him, and bore him back. Barney, with a roar of rage, closed with him again, and they struggled wildly.

Crash!

Losing their footing in that terrific struggle, they crashed into the table. It was a fairly strong table, but it was not built to resist the crash of two big and heavy bodies. It rocked, and went over—on Bunter!

"Yaroop!" howled Bunter.

He went backwards over his chair. The dish of boiled beef and beans shot off the table, and landed on his fat face. The table rocked over on his fat legs. Bunter roared wildly.

The struggle went on—unheeded by Bunter! Like the man in the poem, the subsequent proceedings interested him no more!

The boiled beef was hot! The boiled beans were hot! And they were all heaped on Billy Bunter's fat face! Billy Bunter spluttered, and gurgled, and howled, and roared—he squirmed and he wriggled. Bunter liked boiled beef—he liked boiled beans—and now he had the whole lot. But he was not

(Continued on page 20.)



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satisfied. The wild howls and squeals that emanated from William George Bunter indicated anything but satisfaction.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Friend Among Foes!

THE sun was sinking in a blaze of crimson and gold, behind the mountains of New Mexico.

Herbert Vernon-Smith leaned on the post at the doorway of the jacal, which was his quarters in the Indian encampment, looking out dully and gloomily—his brow clouded, his heart heavy.

There was some excitement in the Indian camp; but he did not heed it.

Since the previous day he had seen Running Water, the Bounder's heart had been like lead in his breast.

He had not seen the outcast since. He did not know whether the Indian was still in the camp. He did not care. The hope he had founded on the man was gone—he had nothing to hope or expect from him. Another weary, dreary day had almost passed.

A squaw had brought the prisoner his supper of Indian corncake and water. It lay unheeded in the jacal.

The Bounder was plunged in gloomy thought. A crowd of braves and squaws and papooses had gathered, watching some party ride in—but he did not heed. But the growing excitement, the loud exclamations, drew his attention at last, and he stepped out of the jacal to look.

A bunch of horsemen rode in from the desert—and as he looked at them, he saw at once that they had found trouble.

He had seen them ride out a couple of days ago without heeding—on some trail of theft or pilfering, he supposed. Now they were returning—in hard case.

More than a dozen had ridden out—only eight rode in, and some of them were wounded. Rainy Face, the chief, was as pale as his coppery complexion allowed him to be, and was hardly able to sit his mustang.

A grim look of satisfaction came over the Bounder's face as he looked. In his bitterness and despair, any disaster to his enemies was welcome to his eyes. And it was plain that the Indian band had had a bad disaster.

The whole population of the encampment gathered round, and many hands helped the wounded chief from his mustang.

As he dismounted, Rainy Face's eyes fell on the Bounder at a little distance, and they flashed with fury.

His hand went to the tomahawk in his girdle.

The Bounder looked at him, not understanding for a moment. Hitherto Rainy Face had been his gaoler—a harsh and unfeeling gaoler, but, except on the occasion when he had tried to escape, the chief had taken no special notice of him, and had not ill-used him in any way. Now there was murderous rage in the coppery, ghastly face of the wounded Indian.

He swung the tomahawk into the air, his black eyes glittering at the Bounder. Then it flashed into Vernon-Smith's mind what was in the mind of the savage Redskin. He had encountered white men in the desert, he had fled defeated and wounded, and the sight of a "paleface" roused the revenge and ferocity of his savage nature.

Vernon-Smith dodged quickly as the tomahawk flew through the air.

But for his quickness, and for the fact

that his wounds had unsteadied the arm of the Indian chief, the keen edge of the axe would have crashed into his brain.

As it was, it whizzed by within a foot of him, and struck the wall of a jacal, crashing through.

The Bounder's heart beat hard. His life was in danger now—in deadly danger from the rage of the defeated Apaches.

A tall and muscular Apache ran towards him, a spear in his hand. It was Running Water—the first time Smithy had seen him that day.

Rainy Face, who was evidently severely wounded, leaned on another Indian, exhausted by his effort in hurling the tomahawk. He was helped away to his lodge.

Vernon-Smith leaped back from the thrust of the spear in the hand of Running Water.

The Indian followed him up, thrusting again.

This was the man upon whom his hopes had been pinned! With ferocity in his coppery face, he was thrusting with the spear at the white boy who had hoped that he would save him!

Vernon-Smith leaped back into the doorway of the jacal.

A few minutes ago it had seemed to him that life was worthless; a hopeless prisoner in the hands of savages in the heart of the desert. But the terrible nearness of death made all the difference. Again the Indian thrust, and the keen point of the spear grazed his arm as it passed.

He backed into the jacal, looking round him desperately for anything that he could use as a weapon.

But there was nothing—and he expected death.

Running Water was glaring in at the doorway of the jacal. But he did not enter—and he did not thrust again.

He turned from the doorway, spear in hand: though he remained quite near. The Bounder leaned on the farther wall, panting.

Three or four Indians gathered outside the doorway, and he heard their guttural voices, and the answering grunt of Running Water. They did not enter.

But he knew that it was the finish.

Hitherto he had been a prisoner. The Indians had been harsh and unfeeling, but they had not treated him with cruelty, except when he had attempted to escape. But he realised now that his life hung on a thread; once the wild, unthinking ferocity of the savages was aroused, they were likely to forget everything except that he was one of the hated white race, and at their mercy.

He had barely escaped the whirling tomahawk from the hand of Rainy Face. He could not understand how he had escaped the thrusts of Running Water's spear. Thrice the Indian had thrust at him, and missed by hardly an inch.

But slowly the truth dawned on his mind, and with the realisation of it, came a gleam of renewed hope.

Running Water had not intended to impale him on the spear. Had he intended it, the Bounder could never have escaped the deadly thrusts at close quarters.

The Indian had been driving him back into the jacal, out of sight of the excited and enraged Apaches.

He was safer out of sight—indeed, had he foreseen what was going to happen, he would have remained out of sight when Rainy Face and his defeated crew rode in. Running Water had driven him out of sight of the Indians, and that was what he had intended to do!

Smithy understood that at last

The savage ferocity in the face of Running Water was assumed for the deception of the other Apaches. It dawned on Smithy's mind that, if the Indian retained any concern for him, he would not venture to let the others guess that it was the case. He dare not, for his life.

Hope, long dead in the Bounder's heart, revived as he thought over it.

Running Water, driving him back with his spear into the jacal, had saved his life—Rainy Face's tomahawk was not the only one that would have been lifted against him. The Indian outcast was, after all, his friend.

Now he was standing outside the open doorway of the jacal—and whatever it was that he was grunting in speech to the other Indians, it had the effect of keeping them from entering. Running Water had saved him, and was standing between him and death.

He knew that now.

And with that knowledge, came understanding—and hope! He understood now why Running Water had given him that blank unrecognising stare the previous day, and had affected to know nothing of him, and had not come near him since. If he had friendly intentions, he dared not let the other Indians suspect them. They would have turned on him like wolves.

He was not a chief. Rainy Face was the chief of the tattered crew—Running Water was only one of the tribe, with no power in his hands to intervene on behalf of the prisoner. If he thought of helping him, it could only be by cunning and stealth, when an opportunity came. In the meantime, he had to throw dust in the eyes of the rest of the tribe.

Was that how the matter stood?

He believed that it was—otherwise, why had not that thrusting spear transfixed him—why was Running Water keeping the others away? The Apaches had no suspicion of it—but the Bounder was certain—almost certain! If he could only be sure—

Darkness fell on the Indian encampment and the surrounding desert. The cackle of excited voices had died away.

The Bounder did not venture to look out of the jacal. He realised that it was only prudent to avoid catching the eyes of the Indians. Out of sight was out of mind.

Dimly, he could see the figure in the tattered blanket outside. Suddenly it stirred, approaching closer to the opening of the jacal. A whispering voice reached the Bounder's intent ears.

"Little paleface hear?"

"Yes!" whispered the Bounder, his heart thumping.

"Injun no forget!" came the scarcely audible whisper. "Running Water remember! No can talk!"

The dim figure disappeared. The Bounder of Greyfriars was left alone in the jacal, in the darkness.

But he was left with beating heart and shining eyes—hope strong and certain now! He had a friend among foes—one friend among so many foes: and he knew that the tattered Indian outcast would save him if he could.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Riders In The Dark!

LOST?" "I'll tell a man!" The Famous Five of Greyfriars stood holding their horses. For some time they had been

watching Bill in the red glare of the sunset.

Bill, with his reins looped over his arm, had been moving, slowly; but he had come to a halt at last. The juniors knew the result, before he spoke. The trail was lost.

They had feared it—expected it! But it was a heavy blow, all the same. For miles, long and weary miles, Bill had picked up the trail of Rainy Face, after the flight of the survivors of the desperate fight in the desert. But it had grown dimmer and more difficult: and now, at length, the last doubtful sign had petered out.

A single hoof-print, a trampled straggle of juniper, a broken cactus or yucca, was enough for Bill. But the last dim and doubtful sign was gone, and he was at a total loss.

Round them, as they held their horses, stretched the desert, red in the glare of the sinking sun. Few signs had been left by the galloping mustangs: stony ridges and sandy hollows had hidden the fleeing Indians from sight: the "sign," such as it was, would never have been picked up by the schoolboys: but it had led Bill on for many miles—till the end came. The dust of the desert had obliterated all traces.

The Greyfriars party might have been within a mile of the unknown den of the Wolf-Apaches. They might have been sixty miles from it. There was no clue. And night was falling.

They had no doubt that Rainy Face, wounded and defeated, was heading back to his den. Had the trail held, they might have followed him there. But they had hardly dared to hope that it would hold—and now it had failed them.

To the desperate danger that awaited them, if they succeeded in reaching the Indian encampment in the desert, the juniors gave little or no thought. They were going to save Smithy, if they could—and danger would not deter them.

That was not the immediate problem—the immediate problem was to track down the outcasts of the desert to their hidden den. But the trail was lost, and that was that.

Bill stared round grimly over the parched desert.

"I guess we got a line on them!" he said, at length. "I'll say we're nearer than we was! But—"

"But—" said Bob, glumly.

Bill grinned faintly.

"We got to chew on it!" he said. "I ain't going back without that young hombre, seeing as his popper, over the pond, handed him to me to ride herd over. This here is a long trail, fellers."

"Long or short, we're sticking it out!" said Harry Wharton. "We're not going back without Smithy!"

"The stickfulness is going to be terrific!" declared Hurree Janset Ram Singh, emphatically.

Buckskin Bill nodded.

"I'll say that's a cinch!" he agreed. "We've got to camp here! Mebbe we'll have some luck in the morning. Quien sabe, as the Greasers say. Stake out them hosses, and camp."

In the falling night, the juniors staked out the broncos, and camped. They ate their frugal supper, washed down with brackish water from their cans. Hardship had become a daily experience, and they gave it no thought.

As the darkness closed in, they rolled themselves in their blankets, wrapped the waterproof slickers round, and lay down to sleep—on dusty, stony sand, their heads pillowed on their arms, beside their weary horses.

They had almost forgotten what comfort was like, after a week on the

desert trail. But they slept soundly—as soundly as they had ever slept in the old dormitory at Greyfriars School. Their eyes closed the moment they laid down their heads.

Bill was keeping watch. The juniors were to take their turn. Every night in the desert it was necessary for watch and ward to be kept. Every shadow in the darkness might have hidden a creeping foe.

But soundly as they slept, a whisper was enough to wake them. On the desert trail, they seemed to develop a sixth sense—the sense of danger.

A whisper came from the gloom: and the Famous Five were awake, sitting up in their blankets, and grasping their rifles.

"Park it!" came Bill's whisper.

They were careful to make no sound.

It was a late hour of the night. Bill had been going to call one of the juniors to take his turn at watching, at midnight. It was close on midnight now.

Staring round them, the juniors could see only the dark of the night, which seemed to be made more baffling and impenetrable by the glimmer of the stars overhead.

But though they could see nothing, they could hear. Faintly, from the open spaces, came a sound. They could guess that it was the sound that had alarmed Bill, and caused him to wake them.

They strained their ears to listen. The sound was faint, but they were sure that it was made by the hoofs of a horse.

"A horseman, Bill!" breathed Harry.

"Yep!"

"An Indian—"

"Surest thing you know."

The sound came clearer. It was the unmistakable sound of hoofs, now: and it seemed to the schoolboys that it proceeded from more than one horse.

They had camped under the lee of a stony ridge. The sound came from the other side of the ridge, which jutted to a height of perhaps a dozen feet from the level of the plain.

"Two of the red skunks, I guess!" muttered Bill. He was on his feet now, staring towards the dark ridge, and listening intently. He could pick out the sounds of two horses.

"They'll pass without seeing anything of us!" whispered Bob. "They're passing the other side of the ridge, Bill!"

"Sure!" grunted Bill. "If they was on this side of the ridge, I guess they'd spot us—I'll say them Reds can see in the dark like pesky cats. They ain't spotted us—but we sure are going to spot them."

The juniors peered at him, in the dim starlight, inquiringly. They had supposed that, as the riders of the night were missing their camp, Bill's game would be to keep quiet till they were gone. But that, it seemed, was not Bill's game.

"Saddle up—pronto!" muttered Bill.

"But what—" whispered Nugent.

"You young geek, I guess this here is luck!" said Bill. "Ain't we lost the trail of them Reds? Mebbe them two bucks is hittin' the trail for the cow country to steal hosses, and if that's so, they ain't no doggoned use to us. But mebbe they're hittin' for camp."

"Oh!" breathed Bob.

"I guess we ain't losing chances!" said Bill. "How'd we know they ain't a couple of Rainy Face's bucks hittin' for camp? And if they was, ain't they going to give us pointers on the trail? I guess we don't know—but we sure are going to know—and if they're heading for Rainy Face's hide-out, we're after

them, like a lobo-wolf after an antelope. Pronto, you young ginks!"

The juniors said no more; but swiftly saddled and bridled their broncos.

Who the two riders on the farther side of the stony ridge were, and for what destination they were heading, was unknown: but there was, at least, a good chance that they were a couple of Rainy Face's gang heading for home. In that case, the lost trail was found again.

The sound of the hoof-beats was nearer and clearer now. The two horses were going at a gallop, and in a few minutes they would be passing the end of the ridge that hid them from the Greyfriars party.

Bill and the Famous Five mounted in haste, and rode along their side of the ridge in the same direction as the riders on the other side. As soon as they passed the end of it they would see the Indians in the starlight.

Swift as they were, the unseen galloping horses were almost past the end of the stony ridge when they got going. But once in the saddle they urged the broncos to a furious gallop. The thunder of hoofs rang far in the silent desert, and must have reached at once the ears of the unseen riders.

The sound of a cracking quirt came back. The unseen riders had heard, and were urging on their horses to greater speed. And with quirt and spur, the Greyfriars party drove on their broncos and swept round the end of the stony ridge in hot pursuit.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Escape I

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stirred.

He was not sleeping.

He was not likely to sleep that night.

He lay on his bed of tattered skins on the earthen floor of the jacal, sleepless, watching, listening.

The Indian encampment was buried in slumber. Only from the horse corral came occasional sounds of stirring horses, and sometimes a scuttling of the hungry, half-wild Indian dogs, rooting among the huts for garbage.

The doorway of the jacal was still open. The prisoner of the desert was not guarded at night. There was nothing to prevent him from leaving the jacal if he wished. The howling of the prowling dogs would have started an alarm at once had he done so. Twice when the Bouncer had stirred out at night the clamour of the dogs had awakened Indians sleeping in the huts, and he had hurried in again. Lying on the bed of tattered and dirty skins, the Bouncer listened and stirred.

There was a growl of a savage dog, a guttural mutter, and the dog was silent. It was an Indian's voice that had soothed him.

The Bouncer sat up.

He had hoped and prayed that Running Water might come. Was he coming?

He had allowed the previous night to pass, but that, perhaps, was for caution's sake. But surely the time for such caution was past, when, in the present mood of the savages, the prisoner's life hung on the merest thread!

Indeed, the Bouncer almost wondered that he was still living. Rainy Face, perhaps, was overcome by his wounds. He knew that the chief was sorely wounded. He had given free rein to his

ferocity at the sight of a white face, but Smithy had seen nothing more of him. And since Running Water had turned the other Indians away from the jacal, none had come. Possibly their fit of fury and ferocity had passed; or possibly their savage vengeance was only postponed. He knew, at all events, that while he remained in the Indian camp he remained in the very shadow of death.

Would Running Water come?

He heard no sound after that mutter that soothed the prowling dog; but he suddenly became aware that he was no longer alone in the hut. There was a soft and subdued breathing in the darkness.

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet, his heart beating almost to suffocation.

He made hardly a sound; but, slight as his movement was, it caught the keen ear listening in the dark.

"Little paleface no sleep!" came a whisper.

"No!" breathed Vernon-Smith. It was the voice of Running Water, though in the darkness he could see nothing of the Indian.

"Let my little brother's tongue be still!" came the whisper. "Injun hear, Injun kill—kill little paleface, kill Running Water."

Only too well the Bounder knew that the Indian was risking his life. Had he been discovered helping the prisoner to escape, death by torture would have been his inevitable fate.

The Bounder stood silent. A groping hand touched his arm.

"Injun no forget!" came the almost inaudible whisper. "Injun wait, help little white brother! No can wait now—new day, Injun kill."

The Bounder shuddered.

He understood that Running Water had planned to delay to choose the most favourable moment, perhaps when most of the tribe were absent from the camp. But what had happened that day had forced his hand. He had to save the Bounder that night, or see him fall a victim to Indian vengeance on the morrow.

"You come with Running Water!" whispered the unseen Indian.

In silence the Bounder went.

All was densely dark and silent in the straggle of huts and skin tepees that made up the Indian encampment—silent but for the prowling savage dogs.

A pair of greenish eyes glared from the gloom, with a glitter of teeth, and there was a growl; but a muttered word from the Indian, and a gesture, drove the slinking brute away. Had the Bounder been alone the brute would have sprung on him with snapping teeth, but he slunk away from the Indian.

Running Water made no sound as he moved; the Bounder made hardly a sound. Another and another dog snuffed round them, to slink away at a menacing gesture from the Indian.

Then they were out of the straggle of flimsy buildings. The glimmer of the stars did not help the Bounder. He was bewildered by the darkness round him. But the Indian, grasping his arm, moved on without a pause.

The encampment by the spring under the cottonwood-trees was left behind. The horse corral was left behind with the encampment, and Smithy wondered. Surely the Indian was not dreaming of penetrating the desert on foot? There would be pursuit as soon as the prisoner was missed, and on foot it was hopeless to think of escape from the desert.

Then, at a distance from the encamp-

ment, he heard a faint sound of stirring horses.

He understood. The Indian had taken the horses out of the camp before coming to the jacal for him. He had left them tethered in readiness at a distance.

Running Water stopped. Two dim forms loomed in the dark—a pair of horses tethered to a peg driven in the earth.

One of them was the brown bronco with white splashes on its legs—the horse that Running Water had ridden into camp, and which looked to Smithy's eyes like Bill's bronco. The other was a wild-looking, shaggy Indian mustang.

Both were saddled and bridled.

The Indian made a gesture, and Vernon-Smith mounted the bronco. His heart leaped and thumped as he sat in the saddle and took the reins in his hands. Free—free again, after so many weary days; free, and mounted on a swift horse, with the open desert before him! His breath came thick and fast, and his eyes danced.

The Indian stood by the mustang, his head bent to listen, his dark eyes gleaming back at the encampment, hidden in the night. The Bounder knew that he was listening for a sound of alarm, of pursuit; but there was no sound. He heard the Wolf-Apache draw a deep breath.

Running Water turned to mount the mustang. The Bounder had a glimpse of his face in the stars—hard, hawkish, grim, but with an expression on it that he had not seen before. It came into his mind how different the Indian's feelings must be from his own. What was hope and freedom for him was exile for the Apache—exile from the lodges of his tribe if he escaped; death by cruel torments if he did not. Vernon-Smith set his lips.

"Hold on!" he muttered. "Listen to me, Running Water!"

"You ride!" said the Indian briefly.

"Hold on, I tell you! You've done all I could have asked—more," said the Bounder earnestly. "Tell me—what will they do if—if they find out?"

"Kill!" said the Indian quietly. "Running Water must ride far from the lodges of his people."

The Bounder shook his head.

"It's not good enough," he said. "Look here, go back to the camp, and they will never know. Leave me to take my chance. If they see you, let them think that you saw me escaping and followed. Leave me to take my chance."

The Indian looked at him quietly. His expression told that he was considering it; but he made a sign in the negative.

"My little white brother does not know the desert," he said. "He will never find his way back to the lodges of the palefaces. Running Water must be his guide."

"I tell you I'll chance it!"

The Indian did not speak again. He mounted the mustang and signed to the Bounder to ride after him.

Vernon-Smith set the bronco in motion. The Indian had decided, and he could only follow.

He knew that the Apache was right. Unguided, he could never have found his way out of the trackless desert, and when the hunt was up recapture would have been very nearly a certainty. He would have taken the chance rather than have made the Indian an outcast from his own people. But the matter was decided now, and he could only

ride after the Indian into the dark shadows of the desert.

They rode in silence, under the glimmer of the stars. How the Indian found his way the Bounder could not begin to guess, and he could not help feeling that, left to himself, he would have been as likely as not to ride back in sight of the encampment. But the Redskin never paused. At a steady gallop they rode on, mile after mile slipping beneath the galloping hoofs.

Save for the beat of the hoofs and the echoes that came back from the silence of the desert, there was no sound in the night.

But suddenly it seemed to Vernon-Smith that the echoing of the galloping hoofs came louder and sharper, and multiplied in sound.

Running Water's dark eyes shot a suspicious, alarmed glance towards a long, low, stony ridge, the length of which they were following.

Then Smithy knew what the Indian had known at once—that it was not a louder and sharper echo that came sounding over the ridge, but the beat of other hoofs—the sound of other riders.

Separated from them only by that stony ridge on their left, there were other riders in the night.

Was it pursuit? Who but pursuers could be riding in the darkness of midnight in the desert?

Running Water made a rapid sign to him and swerved away from the ridge. The Bounder followed fast. At the same time, a bunch of riders came galloping round the end of the stony ridge in hot chase.

Vernon-Smith cast a quick look over his shoulder.

In the dimness of the stars, he picked out shifting shadows—one, two—four—six; he picked out six, but they were merely dim spots of shadow, impossible to distinguish. But they were riding in fierce pursuit, there was no doubt about that, and the Bounder urged on the bronco to maddest speed beside the galloping mustang of the Indian.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fallen Among Friends!

GALLOP, gallop, gallop!

Sharp and clear rang the beat of hoofs on the stony soil. The Bounder looked back again, and saw nothing in the dimness.

But he knew that the pursuers were following fast—he could hear the thunder of the hoofs; and from that he knew that the pursuers could also hear, and were guided by the hoofbeats of the fugitives.

That, in the dimness of the desert, amid the hollows and ridges, was their only guide, unless they had an occasional glimpse by chance.

So when the Indian suddenly drew in his mustang, Vernon-Smith did not need telling the reason why. He pulled in at once.

Running Water dropped to the ground, and the Bounder, without waiting for a word or a sign, dismounted.

The Indian, staring back, listened with the intentness of a prairie wolf.

Sharp, clear came the ring of galloping hoofs from the dark.

The Indian, taking his mustang by the bridle, led the animal swiftly into a deep hollow between two stony hillocks which Smithy had not observed. The Bounder followed him instantly.

Deep in the darkness, Running Water made his mustang lie down; the Bounder followed his example. He



Crack! rang Vernon-Smith's six-gun. The range was not long, but the motion of the horses made shooting difficult. Barney Stone gave a hoarse yell as the bullet clipped by his elbow. But he rode furiously on. Crack! The Bounder fired again, and the foreman's horse gave a sudden squeal and pitched headlong over!

placed his hand on the animal's muzzle, and Vernon-Smith did the same with his bronco. A whinny from either horse would have guided pursuit.

But there was now no sound to guide the riders in the dark. Already their ears told them the rapid gallop had slackened.

Hidden in the darkness, the Bounder crouched by his horse, listening, with bated breath, by the side of the silent Indian.

He did not need telling Running Water's thoughts. Only the sound of their horses had guided the enemy, and that sound was stilled. The pursuers were left guessing.

A trail would have been hard to pick up on the stony ground even in the daylight. In the darkness it was impossible. Only by chance could the pursuers come on them in the darkness.

That the pursuers were "wise" to the Indian's game was soon clear—they were no longer galloping. They knew that the fugitives had stopped, but they knew no more than that.

Smithy could still hear the horses, but they were no longer going at speed. The pursuers were riding in the darkness, in the hope of picking up sight or sound of the halted fugitives.

The sound receded. They were riding on in vain search, coming nowhere near the dark hollow where the fugitives crouched.

The hoofbeats faded. Then again they grew clearer. The Bounder's mind, strung to tense keenness, could follow the thoughts of the pursuing horsemen. They guessed that they had passed the fugitives, and were trying back.

Only by the blindest chance could they fall upon the two dismounted fugitives crouching in the hollow. The Bounder had little fear of it.

It was long hours yet to daylight.

Long before the dawn came to betray them to searching eyes they would be gone.

Smithy could guess the Indian's intention—to wait in hiding till it was safe to stir, then to creep away on foot, leading the horses in silence, not to mount again until they were safe out of hearing. The hunters might pass on from the spot; but even if they lingered in the vicinity, it needed only stealthy caution and cunning to escape them.

The Bounder breathed more freely.

He could still hear the sound of horses—farther off again. Then there was a clatter of hoofs, so near at hand that it made him start.

But he made no sound.

Crouching by his horse, his hand on the bronco's muzzle to assure its silence, he peered through the dark, and had a dim glimpse of a passing horseman—not ten feet away.

But the horseman might as well have been ten miles away for any chance that he had of seeing or hearing the two crouching in the hollow.

He passed on. At a little distance they heard him pull in his horse. There was a trampling of hoofs, a jingling of stirrups.

Then a voice called.

And Herbert Vernon-Smith wondered whether he was dreaming. He felt the Indian at his side give a convulsive start.

"Hold in your hosses, you 'uns!" came the call in a deep voice that was familiar to the ears of Herbert Vernon-Smith. "I'll say we've lost them dog-goned Reds, durn their hides!"

The Bounder did not stir.

He was dumbfounded.

Unless he was dreaming, or unless his senses had forsaken him, it was the voice of Bill Buck—Buckskin Bill, of Kicking Cayuse.

It could not be. How could it? Up to that moment no doubt had entered his mind that the riders of the night were a gang of Wolf-Apaches, hunting for the prisoner who had escaped. Dumbfounded, doubting his ears and his senses, the Bounder of Greyfriars remained still, as if petrified.

There was a clattering of hoofs as other riders gathered at the call. Another voice came, but the Bounder could not believe that it was the voice of Harry Wharton, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. Wharton was at the ranch, and he was at least a hundred miles from the ranch.

"They're gone, Bill?"

"Aw, how'd a guy know?" came an angry growl. "Mebbe them Injuns is leading their doggoned cayuses along without spilling a sound, or mebbe they're in cover, and near enough to hear me yaup! How'd a guy guess?"

"If they're in cover, we'll spot them at dawn, Bill."

If the Bounder was not dreaming, the speaker was Bob Cherry.

"Aw, forget it, you young gink! You figger that they'll wait till dawn? We lost them Injuns."

"Rotten luck!" came the voice of Johnny Bull. "But there'll be a trail, Bill. We'll find sign of them at daylight."

"You're talking! I guess I'll pick up sign at sun-up! I'll tell a man! And I guess it will peter out, like the trail of Rainy Face yesterday! Surest thing you know."

"Every little helps!" came Frank Nugent's voice. "We know at least that we've got nearer to Smithy, Bill, since we fell in with Rainy Face, and this may bring us a little nearer."

"Every absurd little is a terrific help, my esteemed Bill!"

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Grunt:

"If we'd got 'em, or got one of 'em! If a guy had had a chance with a rope! I guess if I had cinched one of them Reds, he would have put us wise, or else I'd have kyarved him a few! But—"

"Well, we've lost them, Bill!"

"You're shouting!"

Vernon-Smith could not believe it; he could not believe that he heard the voice of Bill, the voices of the Famous Five of Greyfriars, coming from the darkness of the desert. But he knew that it was true, amazing, unexpected, seemingly miraculous as it was. He made a movement, and a coppery hand touched his arm. The dark eyes of the Indian glinted.

"Little white brother find his friends!" breathed the Indian. "No want Running Water! Sabe?"

"They're my friends!" muttered the Bounder. "They must have come after me, and I thought—"

"No want Running Water! Injun go back to the lodges of his people!" said the Apache quietly. A faint grin glided over his coppery face. "S'pose Injun sleep in jacal, Rainy Face no sabbey; other Injun no sabbey. Little white brother understand?"

The Bounder understood.

There was ample time for the Apache to return to the Indian encampment before dawn, to affect to be asleep in his hut when morning came, and, if he were not missing, the Wolf-Apaches could not suspect him of having had a hand in the escape of the white prisoner.

It would have needed a long absence to guide the Bounder to safety, but now that he had, so unexpectedly, found his friends it was not needed.

"Sabbey?" whispered the Indian.

"Yes, yes!" said the Bounder. "Wait till I have spoken to them. Bill Buck might pull a gun at the sight of an Indian—until I've warned him! Wait!"

He rose to his feet, leaving the Indian with the two horses, and stepped out of the hollow.

The slightest sound of a footstep was enough for Bill. He whirled his bronco round, and his revolver glinted in the stars.

"Bill!" shouted the Bounder.

He ran forward.

"Bill, old man! O.K., you fellows! It's Smithy!"

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hitting the Home Trail!

"SMITHY!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Smithy!"

"I'll tell a man!"

The bunch of riders could see only a shadow, but they knew the familiar voice. They scrambled down headlong from their horses.

"Smithy!"

"Are we dreaming this?"

"The dreamfulness seems terrific!"

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill Buck, gazing at the Bounder with distended eyes as the Famous Five surrounded him, shaking his hands, thumping him on the back, fairly crowing over him in their amazement and delight.

"Smithy, is it you?"

"Oh, Smithy, old chap!"

"I'll tell a man—I'll tell a man from Texas!" gasped Bill. "I'll tell the world! And then some! Mean to say that's you, young Vernon-Smith?"

"Sort of!" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh, what a surprise!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Oh, Smithy, old pippin! How the merry thunder did you get here?"

"We've just been after a couple of Indians!" gasped Harry Wharton. "They rode near our camp, and we got after them. Bill reckoned that they might help us sort out Rainy Face's den, but they got away—"

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

"I'll tell a man!" said Bill dazedly.

"Yep, I'll surely tell a man!"

The Bounder laughed loud and long.

"Glad you didn't get near enough for Bill to draw a bead on those Indians!" he chuckled. "You see, I was one of them."

"What?"

"You!"

"How—"

"And Running Water was the other!" chortled the Bounder. "You remember

Running Water—the Indian I made friends with—"

"Oh, my hat! Yes, rather! We saw him at Packsaddle, and told him—"

"We thought he might help—"

"But—"

"He pinched Bill's horse, and we saw nothing of him afterwards—"

"But what—"

"He got me away this very night," said Vernon-Smith. "When you got after us we thought it was pursuit from Rainy Face's gang! We were in hiding, when I heard your voices—"

"Oh crikey!"

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill. "That doggoned Injun that lifted my bronco and—"

"I thought I knew that bronco!" chuckled Smithy. "O.K., Bill! Running Water had to have a horse to get after me, and if he'd lost his own I'm jolly glad he pinched yours. I've been riding it to-night, Bill!"

"Search me!" gurgled Bill.

"Well, this beats it!" said Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I can quite believe yet that it's really you, Smithy! That Indian must have meant to go after you when we told him what had happened—"

"Jolly glad you did—he might never have heard!" said Vernon-Smith. "So you told him, and he lifted Bill's horse and hit the desert after me!"

"And he got you away?"

"He did!"

"Good man!"

"I guess," said Bill, "that I sure won't shoot that Injun up for lifting my cayuse. I surely won't, if he got you away from them doggoned Reds, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir."

"But where is he?" asked Harry Wharton. "Where—"

"In sound of our voices," answered Vernon-Smith. "I thought I'd speak first in case Bill weighed in with a gun as soon as he saw an Indian. I'll call him!" He turned and called: "Running Water!"

There was no answer from the dark.

"All safe now," called out the Bounder. "Come here and see my friends, Running Water! All friends here."

But there was only silence, and the Bounder ran back into the dark hollow, his friends following him.

"Running Water!" he exclaimed. "By gum! He's gone!"

The bronco was there, but the Indian mustang was gone, and the Indian was gone with it. Evidently, while the Bounder was in talk with his friends, the Indian had led his horse away in the opposite direction and disappeared. Already he was on his way back to the Indian encampment.

"Gone!" said Harry blankly.

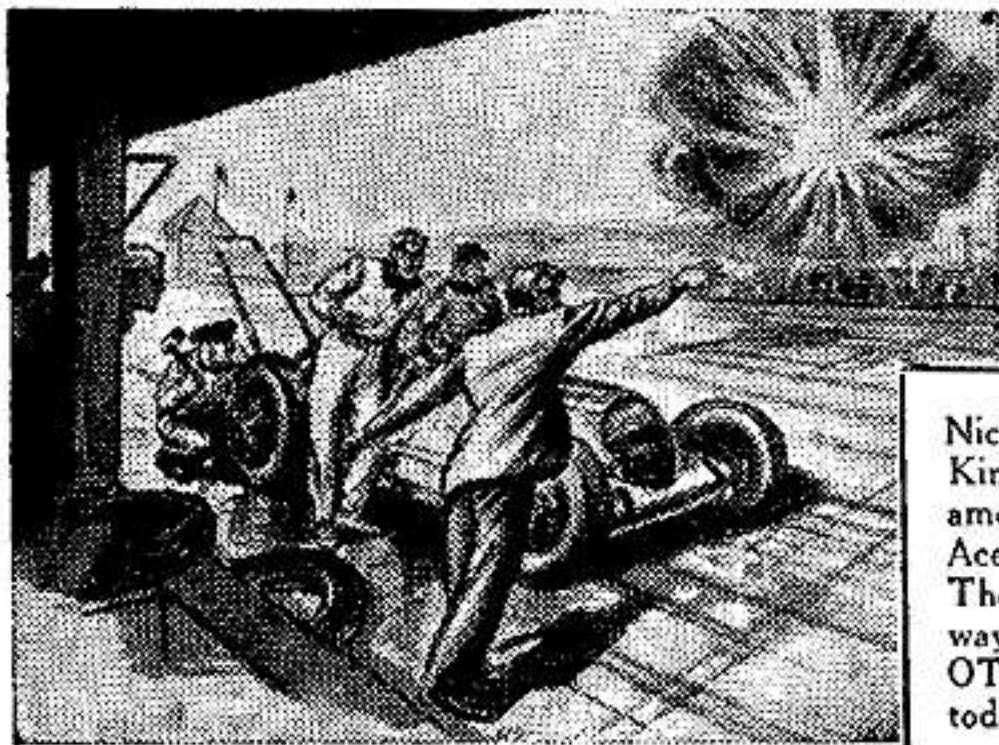
"The gonefulness is terrific."

The Bounder's brow clouded. He had had no time to give the Indian even his thanks for what he had done, and he would have been glad to reward him, to give him any reward that his untutored mind might fancy. But Running Water had vanished silently in the night and was gone.

Possibly he was dubious about a meeting with Bill, whom he had knocked over with a rock when he stole his horse. More likely he did not want thanks, and was only anxious to get back to his hut in the Indian camp before he could be missed and his part in the escape of the prisoner suspected.

That unexpected meeting in the heart of the desert was fortunate not only for the Bounder, but for the outcast Apache. It had saved him from discovery by the rest of the tribe and from becoming an exile from his people.

WHEELED DYNAMITE



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"Levanted!" said Bill. "Waal, he was a doggoned hoss thief, but I guess I'd have given him the glad hand."

"The gladfulness of the hand would have been terrific!" remarked Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"If the other Indians find out what he did for you, Smithy—"

"They won't, if he gets back before dawn!" said Vernon-Smith. "He was ready to risk it—but he know that I should be safe with Bill! Here's your brone, Bill; you'll have to lend him to me till we hit Packsaddle."

"Get on that cayuse!" said Bill. "We ain't camping no more to-night, you 'uns! I guess them Reds will be riding after young Vernon-Smith come sun-up—and I reckon it's us for the home trail! Now we're through I'll tell you that we had a big mouthful to chew, if we ever struck their hide-out, and mebbe we'd never have got it down! I guess we ain't looking for a rookus with a bunch of Wolf-Apaches, now we got the goods! Nope! We got to ride."

"You said it, Bill!" agreed the Bounder.

"What-ho!" said Bob.

No one was thinking of camping. A desperate affray with the Indians, to rescue the prisoner, had been the prospect before the Famous Five, and they had not shrunk from it. But now that the Bounder was with them they were only anxious to ride clear of the outcasts of the desert.

"Lead on, Bill!" said Harry Wharton.

"I guess we're going to ride, and ride hard!" said Bill. "You young ginks can chew the rag when we come to camp—which won't be afore noon! Get to it!"

Bill led the way, and the Famous Five and the Bounder followed him in a happy bunch.

How Running Water had found his way by night in the trackless desert had been a mystery to the Bounder, and it was equally a mystery how Bill found it. But the puncher never drew rein for a moment, and at a steady gallop they kept on through the remainder of the night, and when the stars paled in the dawn they had no doubt that they were out of reach of pursuit by Rainy Face and his braves.

But they did not draw rein.

Through the long, hot morning they rode on and on, mile after mile, and it was not till the sun was blazing at noon that Bill called a halt and the weary horses and weary riders were able to rest.

They halted at a waterhole in the shade of a clump of trees, almost too weary to eat, and after a snatched lunch they lay down to rest. But a few hours sleep restored them, and Bill brewed coffee when they sat up in the shade of the trees; and then, for the first time since they had met, the Bounder and the Famous Five were able to compare notes.

Bill had doubted what the chums of the Remove had told him—of Barney Stone's suspected treachery. But he could not doubt what the Bounder told him, for Smithy spoke of his own certain knowledge. He had, at last, the "goods" on Barney Stone, and now that he was hitting the home trail a reckoning was coming.

"The doggoned scallawag!" said Bill. "I'll tell a man! The pesky, pie-faced piccan! Carry me home to die! I'll tell a man, that hombre sure does get my goat!"

The Bounder gave him a cheery grin.

"That villain fired you, Bill!" he said. "He's going to be fired himself, now—fired into the calaboose at Pack-

saddle! You're coming back to the ranch, Bill?"

"I'll tell a man!" agreed Bill.

It was yet a long and weary trail to Packsaddle; but the Greyfriars fellows rode it with cheery faces and light hearts; faces growing cheerier and hearts lighter when they left the desert behind them, and rode once more girth-deep in the waving grass of the cow-country.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Sheriff Rides!

SHERIFF LICK broke off in the middle of a sentence and stared.

The sheriff of Packsaddle was sitting on his official desk in his office in the cow town; with his big boots resting on his office stool. He was talking to his deputy, Mike Hilligan; and the topic was a recent loss of cows from the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, run off by rustlers into the recesses of Squaw Mountains.

But Mr. Lick forgot the lost cows as a bunch of visitors tramped in through the open doorway from the sun-scorched street.

There were seven of them, and of the seven, he was not surprised to see six. But one surprised him very much; and that one was Herbert Vernon-Smith, the son of the latest owner of Kicking Cayuse Ranch.

The sheriff stared at him. Mike Hilligan stared at him.

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled. They were quite aware that Sheriff Lick had not had the slightest expectation of seeing them return from the desert with the kidnapped Bounder in their company. Probably he had not expected them to return at all, even without the Bounder.

Bill Buck grinned from ear to ear.

"Mornin', sheriff!" he roared.

"Search me!" said Mr. Lick. "Say, is that the young guy—"

"I'll tell a man!" chuckled Bill.

"You got him back!" gasped the sheriff.

"I should smile!" assented Bill.

"Then them Injuns never run him off into the Staked Plain, like them young ginks allowed!" said Mr. Lick.

"They sure did, sheriff," said Bill, "and I'm telling you that them young ginks have been through Injun fighting, in the desert, and it was the Injuns that come out at the little end of the horn."

"You're telling me!" gasped Mr. Lick.

"Surest thing you know!" said Bill.

The juniors could not help grinning at the astonishment of Mr. Lick and his deputy.

In point of fact they had been favoured by fortune. It was to Running Water that Smithy owed most. It was the gratitude of an outcast Indian for an act of kindness that had saved him. Still, there he was, safe and sound, with his friends—the schoolboys had come back, and they had come back successful, the rescued prisoner of the Wolf-Apaches with them.

"I'll say I'm glad to see you safe, Mr. Vernon-Smith!" said the sheriff. "I guess you are a lucky hombre."

"Sure," grinned the Bounder, "and now I'm back, Mr. Lick, I want you to deal with the man who handed me over to Rainy Face."

The sheriff's face became grave. His deputy looked very curiously at the Bounder. Both of them knew to whom Smithy alluded.

"Meaning—" asked Mr. Lick.

"Barney Stone!" said the Bounder quietly.

"You got the goods?"

"Quite! Any more cows missing from my father's ranch while I've been away?" added the Bounder sarcastically.

"You said it! Yuba rode in yesterday with a message from Barney that a herd had been run off!" said Mr. Lick. "I was jest chewing the rag about it with Mike here. But if you're going to tell me, like them young geeks, that Barney is behind the rustlers at their game, you got to prove it."

"If I can't prove the cattle-rustling on Barney, Mr. Lick, I can prove the kidnapping!" answered Vernon-Smith. "It was Barney Stone who handed me over to Rainy Face and his gang, a fortnight ago, on Squaw Mountain."

"You ready to swear that in an affy davy?" asked the sheriff.

"Sure thing!" said the Bounder.

The sheriff and his chief deputy exchanged glances. Both of them probably had a strong suspicion of Barney Stone's game at Kicking Cayuse. It was common gossip in the cow town that Barney ran Kicking Cayuse for himself, and had no use for owners.

The Bounder's statement was enough for the sheriff to act upon. It was the "goods" on Barney at last.

Mr. Lick heaved his bulky person off the desk.

"I guess," he remarked, "that I can cinch Barney on that! I'll mention that I always have suspicioned that guy a whole heap. I reckoned there was a nigger in the woodpile at Kicking Cayuse; and that his name was Barney! Say, Barney know you're back?"

"Not by a jugful! He's going to know when I ride in with you, Mr. Lick, and charge him with kidnapping."

"Git the cayuses, Mike."

"Sure!" said Hilligan, and he left the office.

"Now you spill the rest!" said Mr. Lick, and he leaned upon his desk and chewed a cigar while the Bounder told him the whole story.

"It's the goods on Barney!" he said at last. Mr. Lick pulled a six-gun out of its holster and examined it very carefully before he shoved it back again. Evidently he reckoned that it might be wanted when he hit Kicking Cayuse to take the foreman into official custody.

Bill Buck gave a nod.

"Barney'll kick!" he said.

"He sure will kick like he was a buck-jumping brone!" said Mr. Lick. "And Barney ain't no slouch with a gun. I guess you young geeks had better keep clear while I'm talking turkey to Barney."

"Forget it!" said Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton & Co. shook their heads. They had no intention of keeping clear when the double-dealing foreman of Kicking Cayuse was rounded up.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was quite determined to be "on" in the final scene at Kicking Cayuse; and his friends were going to be with him.

Hilligan came back with his own horse and the sheriff's. Mr. Lick tramped heavily out of his office.

The Greyfriars party had left their broncos hitched outside. They followed the sheriff out, and mounted.

A good many glances were turned on Herbert Vernon-Smith as he rode down the street.

All Packsaddle knew that the son of the new owner of Kicking Cayuse had mysteriously disappeared—and there was a good deal of surmise on the subject, in which the name of Barney Stone had been mentioned. So the sight of the owner's son riding in the street of the cow town attracted a good deal of attention.

The bunch of riders swept out of Pack-

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saddle, and took the trail for Kicking Cayuse.

They rode at a gallop. Mr. Lick was anxious to reach the ranch before the news of Vernon-Smith's escape could reach Barney Stone, and put him on his guard.

The miles flew under the galloping hoofs.

When at last the ranch buildings came in sight, in the distance, Herbert Vernon-Smith shifted his belt a little, to bring the butt of his six-gun nearer to his hand—quite in the manner of a Packsaddle gunman. The sheriff's office had not been Smithy's first call in the cow town. He had dropped into Wash's store, first of all, for a gun to pack.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton, as he noticed the action. "You're leaving this to Mr. Lick."

"Barney isn't getting away!" said the Bounder briefly.

They rode on towards the ranch.

But at a little distance Mr. Lick reined in his horse.

"You guys pull in here," he said. "I guess I'm seeing Barney fust. You ride on with me and my deputy, Bill Buck."

"Sure!" said Bill.

"Look here—" began Vernon-Smith.

The sheriff gave him a stare.

"I'm spilling the orders here!" he said. "You stick here, like I said, and wait till you're wanted."

The Bounder knitted his brows. But the Famous Five gathered round him, and Harry Wharton took hold of his reins. The sheriff was in authority, and orders were orders.

Leaving the Greyfriars fellows in a group on the trail at a distance from the ranch, the sheriff of Packsaddle rode on, with his deputy and Bill Buck. And the Bounder, frowning, watched them go—determined, sheriff or no sheriff, that he was going to be "in at the death."

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Goods on Barney!

BILLY BUNTER, sitting on the gate at Kicking Cayuse, blinked up the trail, through his big spectacles, at the approaching horsemen.

He blinked anxiously.

Even with the aid of his big spectacles, he could not make out who the riders were, but he hoped that it was the juniors coming back at last.

The fat Owl was quite tired of stopping at the ranch on his lonely own.

The shindy he had caused between the choreman and the foreman had been satisfactory in one way, but not in another. Chick was "fired," and that very day, he was to pack his grip and quit. But it dawned on Billy Bunter that, unsatisfactory as Chick was, matters would be still more unsatisfactory without a choreman at all—at least, till there was a new choreman!

This was rather a serious matter, and Billy Bunter was pondering over it very seriously when he spotted the riders coming up the trail.

"I say, Mr. Stone—" squeaked Bunter.

Barney Stone was standing by the corral speaking to Panhandle. He did not look round as Bunter squeaked; and the fat Owl gave him an irritated blink, and squeaked again.

"I say, is that those fellows coming back, Mr. Stone?"

"What?"

Barney Stone took notice at that. He

turned away from Panhandle, and came down with quick strides to the gate.

Standing in the open gateway he stared down the trail. Then he grunted.

"I can't make them out from here!" explained Bunter. "Is it Wharton?"

"Nope!" grunted Barney.

"Or Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"You young gink!" growled Barney.

Smithy, so far as the foreman knew, was a hundred miles away, a prisoner in a hidden den in the desert. If Bunter fancied that Smithy might be riding up to the ranch, Barney certainly did not.

But the foreman remained where he was, watching the horsemen as they came. He was not alarmed by the sight of Sheriff Lick and his deputy—likely enough, they were coming to the ranch about the news he had sent in the day before of the latest raid on Kicking Cayuse cows. But he wondered why Bill Buck was with them—the puncher he had "fired" from the bunch.

They came up with a clatter of hoofs in a cloud of dust; and Bunter gave an irritated snort. Now that they were close at hand, even the Owl of the Remove could see that they were not the Greyfriars juniors.

The three riders dismounted, throwing their reins over a post. Barney Stone gave them a nod in greeting, eyeing them curiously. He sensed at once something unusual, though he did not guess what it was.

"Mornin', sheriff!" he grunted. "You moseyed in about them cows?"

"Nope!" said Mr. Lick slowly. "I guess it ain't cows that I've hit this here trail to see you about, Barney."

A sort of quiver ran through the foreman of Kicking Cayuse, and his eyes became very alert. There was trouble in the air, and he knew it. The sheriff stood facing him—the deputy and Bill moved so as to be on either side of him. Barney's hand shifted, as if casually, closer to the butt of a gun.

"I guess," went on Mr. Lick, "that it's another matter I got to chew the rag with you about, Barney. I got a charge agin you."

Barney's eyes narrowed. His fingers were touching the butt of the gun now. He was ready to pull, and to pull with lightning swiftness, if it came to that. But he did not want trouble with the sheriff if he could help it. His game at Kicking Cayuse was a paying one, and had been a paying one for years; and he wanted to keep on the right side of the law—if he could!

"You sure do surprise me, sheriff!" he said. "What you got agin me, I'd like to know? You can spill it!"

"Kidnapping, Barney!" said Mr. Lick. "I guess I got to ask you to git on a cayuse and hit Packsaddle with me!"

Barney laughed.

"Guess agin, sheriff!" he drawled. "Make it plainer. Who—?"

"Young Vernon-Smith, the owner's son!" said Mr. Lick, his eyes on Barney's face. "He sure allows that you handed him over to the Reds what cinched him, and packed him away in the Staked Plain. He's got that on you, Barney."

Barney staggered.

The sheriff's words meant, and could only mean, that he had seen Vernon-Smith—and heard his statement; which meant that the owner's son had escaped! The sudden and unexpected shock of such news fairly staggered the foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

He stared at the sheriff with bulging

eyes. For a long moment he could not speak.

Then his voice came hoarsely.

"You seen him?"

"I sure seen him!" said the sheriff.

"When you seen him?"

"This mornin'!"

"This mornin'!" muttered Barney hoarsely.

"In my office at Packsaddle!" said the sheriff quietly. A swift look passed between him and his deputy. "He's waitin' on the trail now till wanted, Barney! I got to take you."

Barney scarcely breathed.

He knew now why the sheriff was at the ranch. It was to "cinch" him for the kidnapping of the owner's son!

The game was up!

He had played it long, and he had played it cunningly. But it was up at last!

Foreman of the ranch for years on end, secret confederate of the cattle-stealers of Squaw Mountain, he had run the ranch as if it were his own; and now he had to ride from it—to the calaboose at Packsaddle; to take his trial for what was known, and could be proved, with a heap more to come out, once he was in the grip of the law!

The end had come suddenly—and it had come with a crash!

But Barney was tough! For some moments he was overwhelmed—dumbfounded, haggard. But he pulled himself together.

Hilligan, the deputy, had stepped a little nearer to him, his gun out. The sheriff's hand was on a gun. Bill Buck had drawn a Colt.

He had no chance!

Gun-play, in the most desperate circumstances, rather than the calaboose, and what would follow! But he wanted a chance! And he had none!

Had he been warned—as he would have been, if the Bounder had ridden up to the ranch with the sheriff—he would not have been caught like this! Had he known—had he suspected—

But he had been caught napping! Never for an instant had he dreamed that Vernon-Smith could escape from the den of the Wolf-Apaches; or that, if he did, he would get out of the desert alive. It had come with the suddenness of a thunderclap.

"I guess," murmured Mr. Lick, "that I got to trouble you for your hardware, old-timer! Put 'em up, Barney."

Barney breathed hard and deep.

Bill's gun was out—the deputy's gun was almost touching him—the sheriff's was ready to pull. Yet he was tempted to draw and make a desperate fight for it.

He gave a glance round.

Panhandle was staring on—his hand near a gun. He was in the game with Barney, and ready to back his play at a sign.

Three or four punchers were staring from the bunkhouse. But he had no help to expect from the bunch. They were more likely to back the sheriff when they knew what he had done, than to help him out.

For a brief moment, Barney paused. But it was not good enough—it was sudden death to pull his gun. He nodded, and his hands went up over his stetson.

"I guess you got the goods on me, sheriff!" he drawled. "It's your game."

"That's hoss-sense, Barney!" said Mr. Lick, with a breath of relief. He was more than glad to avoid gun-play. "Cinch his hardware, Mike."

The deputy hooked Barney's gun from its holster and slipped it into his own pocket. Mr. Lick was glad to see it disappear. He knew how handy Barney Stone could be with that gun!

His gun taken, Barney dropped his hands. He was quite cool now. He called across to the staring Panhandle.

"Git my critter! The sheriff wants me to ride into town with him."

"Sure!" gasped Panhandle.

He went into the corral.

Six or seven punchers gathered, staring. Chick came out into the veranda at the rancho, to stare. Billy Bunter, sitting on the gate, sat with his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

Barney Stone stood between the sheriff and his deputy, disarmed, waiting for his horse. Bill Buck, leaving the prisoner to official hands, walked across to the bunkhouse, where a buzz of startled voices greeted him.

Panhandle led the bronco, saddled and bridled, to the gate.

Barney Stone waited for the sheriff and his deputy to mount, and then swung himself into the saddle. Mike Hilligan took his reins.

He rode out between the two—led by the deputy. They went down the trail at a trot—watched by a score of eyes from the ranch—and then, suddenly, with lightning swiftness, came Barney's action.

His right arm shot out, his fist, like a lump of iron, caught the deputy on one side of the jaw, sending him crashing off his horse. Barney's reins were released as the man went down; he grabbed them, and whirled the bronco round at the sheriff.

Lick's gun was out in a twinkling. But he had no time to use it—the desperate man was too quick for him. Barney's bronco crashed against the sheriff's horse and the sheriff was almost unseated—and even as he pulled his gun, the foreman struck him, and he went rolling from the saddle.

Before he had crashed on the earth Barney Stone was riding—riding like the wind.

Sheriff Lick crashed and roared. Mike Hilligan, staggering to his feet, threw lead after Barney Stone, pumping bullets. Bending low in the saddle, spurring the bronco to frantic speed, the foreman of Kicking Cayuse dashed away across the prairie.

Barney's game was up at Kicking Cayuse, but the law had not yet got Barney!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Cinched!

"CHUCK it, Smithy!"

"I tell you—"

"It's the sheriff's job, old man!"

Vernon-Smith gave an angry grunt.

The Greyfriars party, halted in the shade of a clump of trees by the trail, were looking towards the ranch. They were not far away, but the rugged folds of the prairie hid what was passing from their eyes. The Bounder was angry and impatient, and with every passing minute his impatience grew fiercer.

Harry Wharton & Co. were as keen as Smithy to lend a hand in "cinching" the foreman of Kicking Cayuse. But it was, as Wharton said, the sheriff's job, and Sheriff Lick had ordered them to wait on the trail.

"If he gets away—" muttered Vernon-Smith savagely.

"Not likely!" said Bob.

"The likeliness is not terrific, my esteemed Smithy."

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"I'm going on!" he snapped. "Sheriff or no sheriff, I'm going to see that that villain doesn't get clear. You can please yourselves."

And the Bounder struck spurs suddenly to his bronco and dashed up the trail.

"Smithy!" roared Bob.

The Bounder galloped on, and as the Famous Five stared after him, undecided what to do, there came a sudden roar of a six-gun from the direction of the ranch, and the echoing crash of galloping hoofs.

That settled it for the Famous Five. They dashed after the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith, already some distance ahead, turned in his saddle and waved to them, and then pointed across the prairie. A horseman was riding like the wind, and the Bounder swung his bronco in pursuit.

"Barney Stone!" gasped Bob.

Careless whether his comrades were following him or not, the Bounder dashed in pursuit of the fleeing foreman. But they followed him at once. Exactly what had happened they did not know, but they knew that Barney Stone was galloping away across the prairie, and they were after him at top speed.

The Bounder was well ahead of the Famous Five, but they spurred on after him at breakneck speed.

Smithy was getting every ounce of speed out of his horse. With his reins bunched in his left hand, he had his revolver in his right. Fast behind him came the Famous Five, and a glance back showed them the sheriff and his deputy in the saddle again, and riding, but a long way back.

They were in chase, but they had no chance of overhauling Barney. He had got too good a start for that. But for the fact that the Greyfriars fellows were on the trail, and that the Bounder had spotted him as he fled, the foreman would have got easily away. Now it was a race between them.

The flashing hoofs hardly seemed to touch the ground as they rode. Barney was in full sight of the juniors, and he did not draw farther off, fiercely as he rode; but they did not gain. A mile, and another mile, flashed under the whirling hoofs, and the distance was the same.

High in the west, Squaw Mountain rose against the blue sky. It was for Squaw Mountain that Barney was riding—the haunt of the rustlers who had been his confederates while he was foreman of Kicking Cayuse, and with whom now he had no choice but to cast in his lot, if he escaped. But he was not going to escape, if the Bounder of Greyfriars could prevent it.

Kicking Cayuse Ranch dropped out of sight behind. The stetsons of the sheriff and his deputy were merely dots on the prairie, far back. But there was a determined pursuer at Barney's heels, and five more riding fast behind him.

Crack, crack!

The Bounder was firing.

A bullet flicked the fugitive's bronco, but Barney rode on.

Crack!

The Bounder fired again, and Barney felt the wind of the bullet as it whipped by his ear. He spat out a curse.

He had escaped the sheriff and his deputy. They were following, but they were far behind, in hopeless pursuit. It was only the schoolboys—one of the schoolboys, that he had to fear—the boy he had doomed to a living death in an Indian camp in the desert, as ruthless, in these moments, as Barney himself.

Crack! rang the Bounder's six-gun again. The range was not long, but the motion of the horses made shooting difficult. But, difficult as it was, the Bounder was sending his lead close.

Barney Stone gave a hoarse yell as the bullet clipped by his elbow; but he rode furiously on.

Crack!

His horse gave a sudden bound and pitched headlong over. Flung from the saddle, the foreman of Kicking Cayuse rolled in the prairie grass, half-stunned by the sudden crash.

Dazed and dizzy, he was on his feet again, turning to his horse; but the bronco lay still in the grass.

Barney Stone panted.

That bullet had killed his horse. He was on foot, dismounted on the prairie, many miles yet from the refuge he sought, and his pursuers were coming on at a gallop.

He stood panting, almost foaming with rage, his eyes burning at the Greyfriars juniors as they rode up. The Bounder's revolver was lifted as he pulled in his horse a dozen feet from the enraged foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

Barney made a movement towards him.

"Hands up!" rapped the Bounder. There was a deadly gleam in his eyes, and his finger was on the trigger. "I've got you, you villain! Put up your hands, or I'll shoot you where you stand!"

Slowly Barney's hands went up over his head; his eyes burned at the Bounder of Greyfriars, but he obeyed.

He stood with his hands up, panting with rage. The Bounder sat his horse, keeping him covered. He was ready to fire on the instant; the deadly glint in his eyes made that only too clear to Barney Stone. Those glinting eyes did not leave the foreman's enraged face for a second.

"Keep them up!" said the Bounder grimly. "You know what's coming if you give trouble. I'd rather put a bullet through you than not, Barney Stone. Get down, one of you, and get him."

Bob Cherry slipped from his horse. He looped a trail rope over Barney's uplifted arms and knotted it; then Barney was allowed to put his hands down, and they were bound to his sides.

There was a thunder of hoofs from the prairie. Sheriff Lick and his deputy came rushing up at a breathless gallop, to find him standing a prisoner with his hands bound.

"You sure got him!" gasped the sheriff.

"I'll tell a man!" grinned the Bounder.

"By the great horned toad," came gritting through Barney's teeth, "I'll get you for this, you young geck—I'll sure get you!"

"Aw, pack it up, Barney!" rapped the sheriff. "We sure got you by the short hairs, and it's you for the calaboose. Stick that guy in front of you on your cayuse, Mike; and I guess you better rope him to the boss—he sure is mighty spry in making a getaway!"

"You said it, sheriff!"

Barney Stone gave the Bounder one look as he went—sitting in front of the sheriff's deputy, bound to the horse, followed by the sheriff. It was a look of bitter hate and vengeance, but it did not worry the Bounder of Greyfriars; he shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess," remarked Smithy, "that we've put paid to Barney."

"I'll tell a man!" agreed Bob.

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"Now for the ranch," said Smithy. "We'll get that cable off to my pater to-morrow, and I'm going to recommend a new foreman to him—and his name's going to be Bill."

"Hear, hear!" said the Famous Five in a chorus of approval.

And as Barney Stone, with the sheriff and his deputy, disappeared in the direction of Packsaddle the Greyfriars

"Well, yes," admitted Bunter, "I'm glad you're back again. You're not much in the way of company, you know, but the grub has been getting worse and worse while you've been away—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter peevishly. "It's not much I eat, as you fellows know; but that beast Chick doesn't care a boiled

never did any ventriloquism or anything of that sort—but they had a row—"

"You fat villain!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Chick!" shouted the Bounder.

Chick put a plump face out of the doorway of the living-room.

"I hear that Barney's sacked you—"

"Sure!" said Chick.

"Barney's sacked himself now and gone to the calaboose. Wash it out—and trot out supper."

"Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir, you're sure talking!" said Chick. "I'll mention that you're spilling a whole bibful! I won't keep you waiting, sir."

"You've kept me waiting often enough!" yapped Bunter.

"Aw, shucks!" said Chick, and he went back to his kitchen to get busy.

Snort!—from Bunter.

"That's the sort of cheek I've had while you fellows have been away!" he said. "It's rather a change from a butler and a host of menials at Bunter Court. I can hardly be expected to stand this sort of thing, Smithy."

"Hardly!" agreed the Bounder. "We're riding to the railroad to-morrow, old fat man; turn out early and ride with us, and we'll put you on the railroad for Bunter Court."

To which kind offer Billy Bunter replied only with another snort—and he did not turn out early in the morning for that ride!

But the other fellows did, and the cable—a lengthy and expensive one—was dispatched to Mr. Vernon-Smith, far away across the pond.

And when the millionaire's answer came back there was general satisfaction at Kicking Cayuse; and Harry Wharton & Co. rushed down to the bunkhouse to greet the new foreman of the ranch.

Bill opened his eyes wide when he was told.

"Me foreman!" he ejaculated.

"Just you!" said the Bounder.

"I'll tell a man!" said Bill. "O.K., hombre! But I'll surely tell a man!"

And that was that!

THE END.

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... AND FOUR "BONUS" BOMBERS!



fellows rode away in a cheery lurch to Kicking Cayuse.

Billy Bunter was in a rocker in the veranda of the rancho when the chums of the Remove came tramping cheerily in.

"Glad to see us again, old fat man?" asked the Bounder, laughing.

bean whether a fellow has enough to eat or not. He was always cheeky, and he's got worse. I'm rather glad Stone's sacked him. But, on the other hand, what are we going to do for supper? He's going to-day."

"What did Stone sack him for?"

"Oh, they had a row!" said Bunter.

"Nothing to do with me, of course—I

(With the rascally Barney Stone safe in the calaboose and popular Bill Buck acting as foreman at Kicking Cayuse, everything in the garden should be rosy for Vernon-Smith and his Greyfriars chums. But who knows? Be sure you read "The Raid on Kicking Cayuse Ranch," the next yarn in this magnificent Wild West series. There'll be more stamps for your collection, too, in next Saturday's MAGNET!)

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THE ST. SAM'S DONKEY DERBY!

Spasm No. 1 of a Side-Splitting New School Serial, starring Jack Jolly & Co.

By DICKY NUGENT

"Impossible!" "But it's true!" "Impossible!" repeated Jack Jolly, the genial kaptin of the St. Sam's Fourth. "I refuse to credit it! If you expect me to believe that Doctor Birchmell would demean himself by leading a donkey through the streets, you must be potty!" "But I've seen it for myself!" cried Frank Fearless. "I tell you the Head is leading a donkey along the lane towards the school. Come and see for yourself." "Oh, well, anything for a quiet life!" sighed Jack Jolly. "I suppose you're pulling our legs; but if you are, we shall be fourarmed. Come on, you fellows." "This way!" grinned Fearless. "You'll larf fit to bust when you see him." He led the way out of Jack Jolly's study, and Jolly and Merry and Bright followed, still feeling somewhat suspicious. But all their suspicions vanished when they reached the old gateway of St. Sam's.

YOUR EDITOR CALLING

Here we are again, back at the old spot and feeling like giants refreshed after the hols! At least, that's how I feel myself. There are exceptions, I know. Skinner arrived at Greyfriars yawning. Loder came in scowling. Coker, having tried to put some Remove chaps in their place, limped up groaning. Mauleverer staggered in, dozing. But most of us got rid of the holiday feeling on the way back, and are settling down already to a term that promises plenty of sport and fun. Of course, there's work to do, too, but chaps who keep fit in their leisure time ought to be able to take school work in their stride. We are starting the term with some notable absentees. Wharton & Co. and Vernon-Smith are still in Texas at the time of going to press. This, as I mentioned last week, makes a serious gap in our cricket team; but I have put forward

Coming up the lane towards them was Doctor Birchmell, the revered and majestic headmaster of St. Sam's; and, just as Fearless had said, he was leading a donkey. It would have been more correct to say that the donkey was leading him, for, as fast as the Head pulled one way, the donkey pulled the other; and only by the most terrific efforts was Doctor Birchmell able to make any progress at all. In a state of grate surprise, Jack Jolly & Co. strolled down the lane to investigate. They raised their caps respectfully, as they reached the Head. "Good-morning, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. "Want any help?" Doctor Birchmell paused in his efforts and turned a red and perspiring face towards the juniors. "Thank you, Jolly!" he panted. "As a matter of fact, I could do with some assistance. It looks rather undignified for a gentleman of my standing to be struggling with

a donkey on the public highway. I suppose I must look a bit of an ass?" "Yes, rather, sir!" chuckled Fearless. "It's a puzzle to know which is you and which is the moke! The only thing is, the moke looks more intelligent." "Ha, ha, ha!" "Silence!" snorted the Head. "How dare you say that I am not as intelligent-looking as a donkey, Fearless? Why, anybody with half an eye can see that I look as intelligent as a horse—let alone a donkey! Take this rope and lead



the beast. I will give him a push from behind." "All screen, sir!" Fearless took the rope and tugged from the front, while Jolly and Merry and Bright urged on the obstinate animal from the sides. Doctor Birchmell tried to push from the back. The next moment, the Head had the shock of his life. The donkey kicked out and his hind legs landed fairly and squarely in the Head's chest. "Biff!" "Yarooooo!" Doctor Birchmell went down like a nine-pin, yelling feendishly; and Jack Jolly & Co. yelled, too—on quite a different note! "Ha, ha, ha!" Merry and Bright lifted Doctor Birchmell all to his feet again. There was a savage look on his face as he rubbed his injured breadbasket. "Of all the stubborn beasts I ever met, this is the stubbornest!" he hissed. "How can I expect to win the Donkey Derby with a donkey,

that won't budge an inch?" "The — the what, sir?" The Head scoffed. "Ahem! I am rather letting the cat out of the bag, boys. You will hear all about it later on. Suffice it to say for the moment that I want a donkey that will gallop and this creature will not even—" The Head broke off. Without a word of warning, the donkey had suddenly broken loose and gone galloping off towards the school gates at a dickens of a speed! "Grate pip! Did you



say he couldn't gallop, sir?" asked Jolly. "Why, he's good enough to win the Derby itself—let alone a Donkey Derby!" Doctor Birchmell's frown vanished. A beam of smile took its place. "Bless my sole! I can hardly believe my eyes!" he cried. "Why, he goes like the wind! Whatever is the explanation?" "If you ask me, sir, it's the greengrocer's boy!" grinned Jolly. "Can't you see him walking across the quad with a basket of carrots on his arm? That's the attraction, I fancy!" The Fourth Form kaptin's forecast proved correct. The Head's donkey kept up a furious gallop till he reached the carrots; then he slowed down to a mere snail's pace and calmly followed the greengrocer's boy, munching away at the carrots as he trotted behind! The Head wissled softly, as he watched. "Few! So that's the way to make him gallop, is it? If only—"

Then the Head broke off and started marching briskly after his moke. "Come, boys!" he cried. "We will get the donkey into the stables with the aid of the greengrocer's boy. After that, you will all assemble in Big Hall and I will make a momentous announcement." Five minnits later, the donkey was safely tucked away in a stable, and the bell was ringing for a general assembly in Big Hall. When all the boys were sandwiched in, the roll was called. Then Doctor Birchmell loafed up on the raised dais. "Boys!" he cried. "I have much plezzure in announcing a sporting event without precedent in the annals of St. Sam's. One of our esteemed guvverners—to wit, Colonel de Creppit—has decided to present a valuable gold cup to the winner of a donkey race to be called the Donkey Derby!" "Grate pip!" "The race is open to all, and the prize goes to the jockey, regardless of who owns the donkey. It is distinctly understood that no animals other than donkeys are allowed to compete. Horses, camels, elephants, ostriches, and zebras will be disqualified. All that remains is for those who fancy their chance to beg, borrow or bag a donkey." The Head smirked. "I might mention, boys, that I have already purchased a promising mount for myself." "The dickens you have!" "But don't let that discourage you!" grinned Doctor Birchmell. "Secure your donkeys and enter them in the race with pleasure. That is all, my boys!" Burleigh of the Sixth led a cheer, and the school dismissed, fairly buzzing with excitement over the Donkey Derby. And Doctor Birchmell returned to his quarters, chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands with glee. "Ha, ha!" he gloated

"Already a hundred young upstarts are fondly imagining the gold cup in their greedy paws! Little do they know that with a few carrots dangling in front of him, my marvellous moke will win this race with ease!" (Don't miss next week's rib-tickling instalment of this thrilling drama of the turf!)

"I'M ALL OUT FOR FUN ON HOLIDAY!"

Bellows

BOLSOVER MAJOR

I'm all out for fun on holiday! When I arrive at my seaside hotel, they soon know I'm about, I can tell you!

The first thing I do is to go round the bedrooms scattering tinnacks on the floor. Then I put glue on some of the dining-room chairs and hairbrushes in some of the beds!

How I roar when I hear yells ringing out all over the place at bedtime! What a laugh I get when guests get stuck to their seats at meal-times!

I'm the life and soul of the hotel in no time. I lounge about the place, radiating gaiety and jollity wherever I go—giving a slap on the back here or a playful dig in the ribs there.

Down on the beach I'm just the same. I barge "to the other players at cricket, roll 'em about in the sand and occasionally jump on them."

But I'm not appreciated. I ought to be. They're such a miserable crew at most seaside hotels that my healthy joy of living often earns me nothing better than black looks and muttered threats.

Fortunately it all makes no difference to me.

More years than I care to remember have passed since I was a schoolboy at Greyfriars. Those years have seen tremendous alterations take place in every part of the world. Yet Greyfriars remains in essentials unchanged. What impresses me—yes, and delights me!—is the fact that it's just as it was years ago!

Like most Englishmen, I have an instinctive distrust of violent and sudden changes. Sound institutions take a long, long time to evolve. Once established, they should be content to make progress on the most gradual and orderly lines. This is, to my mind, true of all things. Especially is it true of such an institution as a school.

Greyfriars was a good school when I belonged to it. Its methods and traditions have stood the test of centuries.

Not everything is the same, of course. School hours are lighter, and Greek is no longer compulsory, for instance;

maths is regarded with greater respect than when I was in the Remove. But the importance of Latin in the formation of a clear and balanced mind is still recognised, and the old school customs are still faithfully observed. The Greyfriars code of honour is still as strict as of yore.

As an Old Boy, I get tremendous pleasure out of revisiting the school and seeing the old, familiar spots I knew just as they were years ago. The Form-rooms, the Studies, Hall, Masters' Passage, the Tuck-shop, and the Tower—all have memories for me! But more pleasurable still is it to me to know that the old spirit is still behind them all and that the Greyfriars boys of to-day will be the manly, public-minded citizens of to-morrow—just as Greyfriars has always made them!

cheery, hearty voices that Mauly fears so much. "On your own!" It was Larry Lascelles, waking up one of those

celles, maths' master at Greyfriars and champion athlete! Mauly opened his eyes and gasped. "Oh, gad! How do you do, sir? Yaas, I'm quite on my own." "Good!" beamed Larry. "I'm down here for a rest cure, but it won't hurt me to join you in a little tennis or walking or swimming. We might even put in a little horse-riding too, eh? And perhaps a spot of running, eh, what?" "Oh, gad!" gasped Mauly. He was in for it. He could see that. Nor was there any dodging it. Larry was obviously delighted to find somebody he knew, and Mauly was far too polite to let him down. That afternoon they played croquet. In the evening they had a walk. Tennis started before breakfast the

next day. Breakfast was followed by a gallop along the cliffs on horseback. After lunch they had a dip in the hotel swimming-pool, followed by a run round the grounds. Before dinner they squeezed in a round of croquet and an hour's tennis. We hear that a similar programme has been carried out every day since. Mauly himself expects to be carried out at any moment—on a stretcher!

Alternatively we believe he is planning to run away and get a job as a navvy or a docker somewhere where he is unlikely to meet friends. He says that a comparatively slack job of this kind is better suited to his sensitive constitution than being a companion to an athlete taking a rest cure at a quiet hotel. The life of a languid lord is not all honey!

The GREYFRIARS HERALD

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BLUNDELL'S TIP— "Control Your Feelings!" Fifth Favour Frozen Faces

When Blundell, of the Fifth, came across a crowd of Removees having a noisy argument near the gates, he frowned a lordly frown. What was more, he condescended to pause in his stately stroll for the purpose of administering a lofty rebuke. "Can't you kids behave with a little more decorum?" he asked. "Only barbarians give way to emotions like you're doing. You're supposed to be civilized human beings. Kindly learn to control your feelings like we do in the Fifth!" Having said this, Blundell passed on with his nose in the air. He left the Remove crowd in a state of stunned and humiliated silence. One of them, Tom Brown, was so impressed that he followed Blundell to see if he could pick up a few tips on how to control his feelings. Brownly tells us that from what he saw, it's not so terribly difficult as you might think. First, Blundell went to Gosling's lodge to borrow an evening paper for the cricket scores. On seeing that his country team had been beaten, he displayed no emotion whatever beyond uttering an anguished howl and tearing the paper to pieces. Returning to the House, he slipped on a banana-skin which was lying on the steps. But so well did he control his feelings that he merely gave a series of frenzied shrieks and raced up and down the steps for a minute or so, shaking his fists in the air. That was all. Going indoors, he stopped to look at the First Eleven list selected to play against St. Jim's. On discovering that his name had been omitted he showed no sign of disappointment except that he dropped to the floor in a slight faint. Finally, when he entered his study and walked right into a booby-trap, his self-control was simply amazing. A Remove chap would have whooped with annoyance. All that Blundell did was to fling himself on to the floor with a snarl and bite the leg of the table. So don't be downhearted, chaps. It's not easy to control your feelings in the Fifth Form way, we know, but with a certain amount of practice we feel sure you can learn to do it in time.

LANGUID LORD'S HECTIC HOLIDAY!

Mourn for Mauly! If you have tears, prepare to shed them now for the languid lord who went out in search of restfulness and peace and ran right into the most hectic time he had had for years!

When Lord Mauleverer arrived at Mauleverer Towers for the Easter vac., he found that his guardian had thoughtfully invited several bright young relatives for company. They were brimming over with vim and vigour, and one day in their company was enough for Mauly. He pleaded an engagement and fled to Bournemouth to an hotel

standing in acres of wooded grounds where none of the turmoil of the outer world ever penetrated. With a sigh of contentment, Mauly settled himself down in a luxurious armchair in the lounge and rapturously closed his eyes. About ten seconds later he jumped up with a yell, as somebody gave him a hefty dig in the ribs. "Why, Mauleverer, fancy seeing you here!" spoke up one of those

