

COLLECT OUR STAMPS AND WIN A PRIZE!

The Magnet 2^D

Billy
Bunter's
Own
Paper



"STEP ON
IT, COOKIE!"

THE GREAT "ARMAMENTS" RACE!

15 First Prizes of Hercules Bikes **6,000 Other TIP-TOP PRIZES**

Our Wonderful FREE Gift Scheme!

ARE you collecting the Armaments Stamps I am giving away every week? You must, pals, because they will put you in the running for a super prize. There are Fifteen spanking new Bikes, and THOUSANDS of other prizes all going FREE. The Armaments Stamps consist of BOMBERS, GUNS, SEARCHLIGHTS, and so on—eight kinds altogether—and all you do is just cut them out and keep them safely. Some were given in our last two issues, but even if you missed them you can start collecting TO-DAY—there are TWENTY more stamps to collect on this page. If you also take other popular boys' papers like "Modern Boy" and "Gem," you'll find more stamps in them to swell your total. And here's a good tip, pals—there are Four BONUS BATTLESHIP Stamps in this week's "Gem" (dated May 21st), making twenty-four stamps altogether! Next week 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! Make a special effort to collect 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, next week.—THE EDITOR.

(The rules of the offer have already appeared and will be repeated next week.)

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!

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."

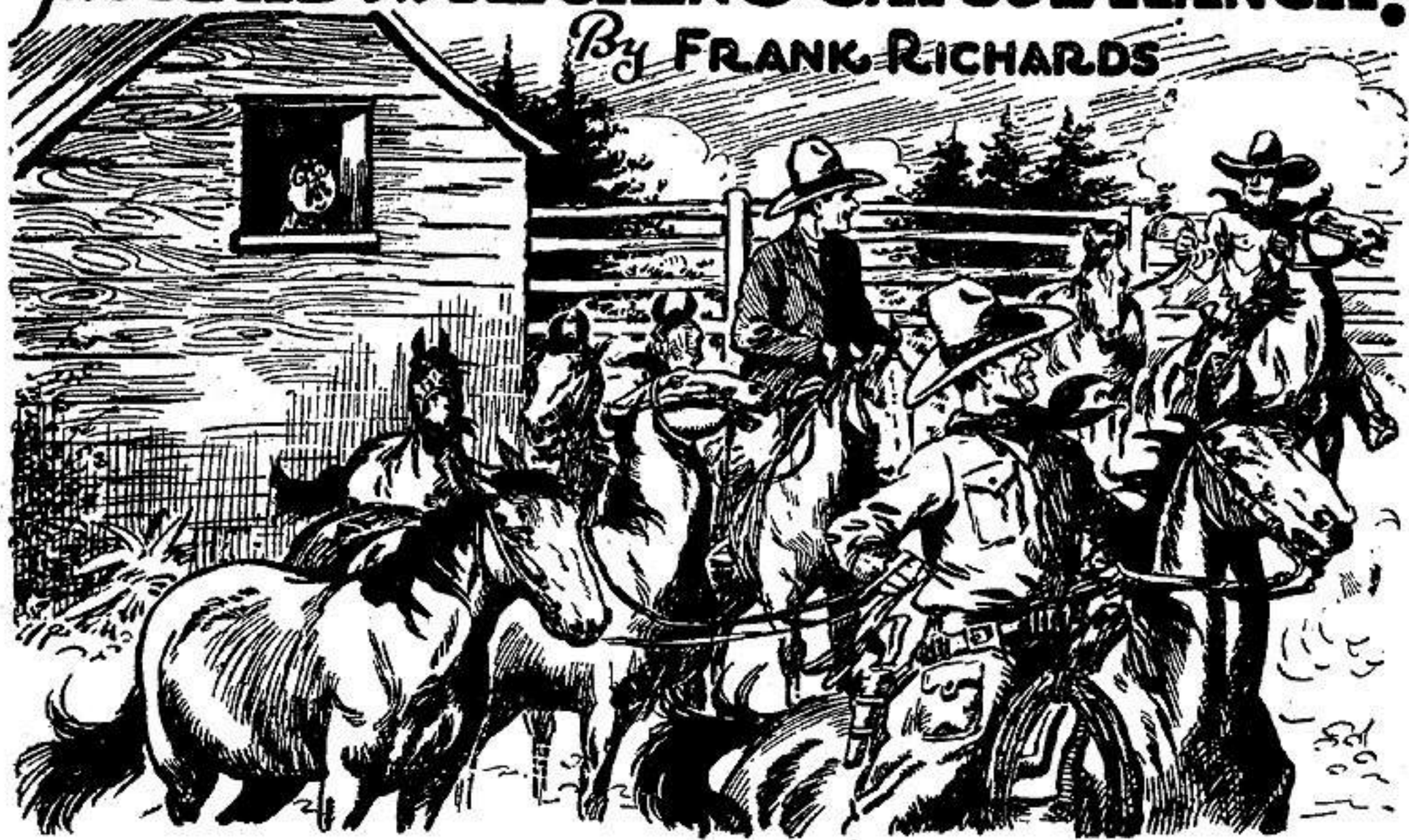


GET READY TO SEND IN NEXT WEEK!

ON VENGEANCE BENT! Having escaped from the calaboose at Packsaddle, Barney Stone's one thought is revenge against Vernon-Smith and his schoolfellows from Greyfriars who have brought about his downfall and ruin—richly deserved as it was!

The RAID on KICKING CAYUSE RANCH!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Billy Bunter blinked through his big spectacles at the gang of rustlers as they rode off with the stolen horses!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

On and Off!

"RACE you fellows!" said Billy Bunter.

That was Bunter all over!

Billy Bunter was in the saddle, riding the grassy ranges of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch, in the Frio valley of Texas.

He was riding a Texas bronco, sitting in the saddle with the ease and grace of a sack of coke.

Bunter was full of beans, that bright and sunny morning on the prairie.

Harry Wharton & Co., in a cheery bunch, were riding at an easy trot along the bank of the Squaw River, a good many miles from the ranch.

The chums of the Greyfriars Remove were enjoying every minute of their holiday in the cow country of Texas. They agreed unanimously that riding the ranges was ever so much more attractive than Latin in the Form-room with Mr. Quelch. Like the Kicking Cayuse punchers, they almost lived in the saddle, and were in the open air from early morn till dewy eve.

Only one member of the party had not taken kindly to horseback, which was the only means of locomotion in the cow country.

That one was Billy Bunter.

Bunter's experiences with Texas "cayuses" had not been happy or fortunate. But since Bill Buck had been foreman of the ranch, he had picked out, with great care, a quiet and tractable steed for Bunter. So here was Bunter, riding with the Famous Five, sticking on his horse mile after mile, with growing confidence, and feeling

that if there ever was a fellow born to witch the world with noble horsemanship, that fellow's name was William George Bunter.

It was like Billy Bunter to pass, almost at a bound, from anxious doubt to over-weening self-confidence!

Having sat that bronc at a trot for six miles, Bunter had no doubt that he could sit him at a gallop for sixteen, or sixty!

But Harry Wharton & Co. doubted it very much.

They would, in fact, have preferred to stretch their broncos to a gallop, but

**Breathless Adventures of
HARRY WHARTON & CO.,
of GREYFRIARS, 'Way Out
in the Wild West.**

they kept to a moderate pace, to save the trouble of picking Bunter up when he fell off.

"Don't be slackers!" added Bunter. "What's the good of crawling like this? I'll race you fellows—what?"

"Fathead!" answered Bob Cherry.

"Better not ask for it," advised Frank Nugent.

"Texas is hard, if you hit it suddenly!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Better keep where you are, old fat man."

Snort, from Bunter.

"If you fellows are afraid to ride you'd better get down and walk!" he

suggested sarcastically. "I'm going to gallop on."

"More likely off!" said Bob.

"The off-fulness will probably be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"Now, look here, you fellows," said Bunter, "we've come out this morning to round up a bunch of cows that have wandered up river. At least, I have—and you fellows are going to help; not that you'll be much good. They may be a dozen miles away, or more. Put on a spot of speed."

"You howling ass!" said Harry Wharton. "We're going slow because you can't ride. Now dry up!"

"Why, you cheeky fathead!" exclaimed Bunter wrathfully. "Who can't ride? I could ride your heads off! If you'd seen me backing the bunters at Hunter Court—I mean, the hunters at Bunter Court—you'd have seen some riding! I'll jolly well show you!"

"Hold in that horse, you fathead!"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter proceeded to "show" them. He gave his bronco a scrape with the spurs, and a terrific whop with the quirt. He burst into sudden speed.

The speed was so sudden, and so speedy, that Billy Bunter hardly knew what happened next.

That carefully selected bronc had been, hitherto, as quiet as a lamb. But a sudden jab with the spurs, and a sudden fearful swipe with the whip banished its quietness on the spot.

It flew!

Greased lightning had nothing on that startled and angry bronc, at the moment.

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Bunter had been going to gallop onward, waving a hand to the other fellows in sarcastic encouragement to them at the same reckless speed.

Instead of which, Bunter lost his stirrups, lost his reins, and rolled backwards over a whisking tail.

It was rather fortunate for that bold horseman that the grass was thick on the bank of the Squaw. Thick grass helped to break the fall.

Nevertheless, Bunter seemed hurt.

The bronco, riderless, tossed up its heels and galloped away into the prairie. Billy Bunter sat up on the State of Texas and roared, with a roar that might almost have been heard in Mexico on the south, and Oklahoma on the north.

"Yooo-hooooo-hooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Oooooop!"

Harry Wharton & Co. reined in their horses. They circled round Bunter as he sat in the grass and roared.

Far away, going strong, galloped the bronco. It did not look as if Billy Bunter was likely to mount that steed again in a hurry. Probably the bronco was glad to have done with his rider. The fat Owl's weight was no light matter, even to a hefty and wiry Texas bronco.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows—wow! I say, I'm killed—I mean, fearfully injured! Both my legs are—wow! Yow!—broken! Ow!"

"You silly ass!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Beast! Ow! Wow!"

The Famous Five dismounted. Looping their reins over their arms, they gathered round the fat Owl of the Remove.

They heaved him to his feet. Bunter was able to stand on his legs, in spite of the fact that they were broken. Perhaps they were not quite so fearfully injured as the fat Owl fancied. Anyhow, he stood on them—still roaring!

"Ow! Ow! Wow! Where's that beastly horse? Ow! Wow! Wow!"

"You blithering idiot—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

"Lucky you're not hurt—" said Bob Cherry.

"Why, you beast, I'm hurt all over!" roared Bunter. "I've got a million aches and pains, at least! I'm bumped, and bruised, and—"

"You haven't damaged your jaw, at any rate."

"Beast! Ow!"

"Well, this is a go!" said Harry Wharton, staring after the galloping horse, already far distant in the waving grass. "We shall have to catch that bronco somehow. Bunter can't walk back to the ranch."

"Catch me walking!" gasped Bunter. "Go and get that horse, you silly asses! Haven't you sense enough to catch a horse? I'll sit down here and wait for you. Don't be long!"

"You burbling ass!"

"You pernicious owl!"

"You footling fathead!"

"Oh, come on!" said Harry. "We've got to get the horse. Don't wander away while we're gone, Bunter."

The Famous Five remounted their broncos. All of them carried lassoes at their saddles, and they had acquired some skill in the use of the "rope" during their stay on the ranch. It was not likely to be an easy task to catch the runaway bronco, however.

Still, it was the only thing to be done. Bunter could not walk six miles over rugged prairie; six yards would have

been enough for Bunter. The chums of Greyfriars dashed away at a gallop after the bronco, Billy Bunter sitting under the shade of a tree by the river and watching them through his big spectacles as they went.

But he was not able to watch them for long. Bunter's bronco was going at full gallop towards Squaw Mountain, in the west, and the Famous Five went at full gallop after it, and in a few minutes they disappeared from Bunter's sight.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bill Handles the Quirt!

"I'll tell a man!" snorted Bill Buck. The foreman of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch stood in the gateway, staring out over the prairie trail with knitted brows.

At the end of that trail, fifteen rugged miles away, was the cow town of Packsaddle, on the banks of the Rio Frio.

From the direction of the distant cow town a horseman came riding in the morning sunshine—a puncher in stetson and chaps.

It was upon that puncher that Bill's eyes were fixed with a wrathful glare.

Bill Buck, or "Buckskin Bill," was a good-tempered guy. All the Kicking Cayuse bunch liked the change now that Bill was foreman in place of the late foreman, Barney Stone. Bill was, in fact, so good-natured that some of the bunch figured that they could take things uncommonly easy under the new reign—which they had never ventured to do with the hard-fisted Barney.

But they found that that was an error. Bill's good-nature stopped short of allowing any guy in the bunch to slack around. Bill had a keen regard for his duty to his employer—the owner of the ranch—in which he differed very widely from the late foreman. Bill could be wrathful at times—and he was wrathful now.

Two or three punchers glanced at him and grinned. They did not envy the man who was coming up the trail, when he arrived.

"I'll sure tell a man!" growled Bill.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, coming out of the foreman's office in the rancho, glanced at him from the veranda.

Then he came down the steps and came across to Bill.

Smithy had been putting in a couple of hours that morning in the foreman's office dealing with business papers. The millionaire's son was rather a chip of the old block, and he had a head for such things. Mr. Vernon-Smith had sent his son out to Texas, to the ranch he had purchased in the Packsaddle country, for a holiday, but business was combined with pleasure. Schoolboy as he was, the Bounder of Greyfriars was getting a grip on the business side of ranching.

"What's the trouble, old hoss?" he asked as he joined the foreman of Kicking Cayuse in the gateway.

Bill made a gesture with his quirt towards the horseman who was riding up the trail.

"That pesky piecan Panhandle!" he snorted.

Smithy glanced out at the burly, tanned, long-limbed puncher, now close at hand—Panhandle, as he was called on the ranch, from the district he originally came from. The Bounder of Greyfriars had had a rather keen eye on that particular member of the bunch.

He more than suspected Panhandle of having been the confederate of the late

foreman, Barney Stone, in his dealings with the cattle-lifters.

Barney Stone had left the ranch for the calaboose at Packsaddle, and was under lock and key, to stand his trial. Smithy had thought more than once of "firing" his suspected confederate from the ranch; but there was no actual proof against the man, and he had said nothing to Bill on the subject so far.

But Bill, it seemed, was now deeply incensed against Panhandle on his own account.

"That big stiff!" said Bill. "Here he is, coming back from town at nearly noon! And wasn't he told to hit Kicking Cayuse at sundown last night? He surely was! I give him leave to ride into town if he was back at sundown; and I guess he's been making whoopee at the Red Flare and forgot that he belongs to this here bunch! I'll sure talk to that guy a few!"

The cowman came up with a clatter of hoofs and pulled in his bronco in the gateway.

Bill turned to him.

Vernon-Smith stepped back. The Bounder of Greyfriars, headstrong and selfwilled as he was, was always careful to avoid any appearance of interfering with the foreman's authority. He would have been glad to see the last of Barney Stone's "side-kicker" on the ranch, but the matter was one for Bill to deal with.

Bill, however, was quite able to deal with it efficiently.

"Say, you pesky big stiff!" he snorted, as Panhandle dropped from his dusty bronco. "Say, you pie-faced piecan!"

Panhandle gave him a sullen look.

In Barney Stone's time he had done a good deal as he liked on the ranch, which was one reason why he had come under the Bounder's suspicion; he had not taken at all kindly to the change of foreman.

"Aw, what's hitting you, Bill Buck?" he grunted.

"Where you been?" roared Bill. "Didn't I tell you that I couldn't spare a man this morning? Ain't them school kids lending a hand herding cows because the whole bunch has got work on hand? You was to be back at sundown, and you come humping in at near midday! What you mean by stopping over the night at Packsaddle, you scallawag?"

"Mebbe I was keeping it up a piece at the Red Flare," grunted Panhandle. "I guess Barney Stone never used to go off on his ear if a guy stopped the night in town."

"Barney Stone ain't running this here ranch now!" rapped Bill. "And I guess when Barney was around he would have jumped on any guy that wasn't a favourite of his'n. Don't sling Barney Stone at me, you big stiff! I ain't got no use for backchat from you, Panhandle."

"You sure have growed to be a big noise, Bill Buck, since the owner's son got his popper to make you foreman!" sneered Panhandle. "But if you figure you can bulldoze me, you got another guess coming."

Bill's jaw squared.

"That's the whole heap!" he said. "You're fired, Panhandle. I guess I never was satisfied with you, but I wouldn't fire one of the bunch if I could help it. But you can't forget that you was Barney's favourite on this here ranch; and you've handed over just as much lip as I've got any use for. You got to pack your grip and beat it."

"I guess—"

"Pack it up!" said Bill. "You can

take your pay—which I reckon you've never earned—and pack your grip and git off'n this ranch pronto. I give you ten minutes to get clear."

Panhandle gave the new foreman of the Kicking Cayuse an evil look.

"I guess I'll suit myself about that!" he retorted. "You ain't Lord High Emperor of Texas that I know of, Bill Buck! You're jest a moss-headed cow-puncher that fancies himself a big chief because a school kid has got him made foreman—"

"I said pack it up!" roared Bill. "You spill any more, you geck, and you get my quirt!"

"Not s'long's I pack a gun!" jeered Panhandle.

"Carry me home to Hanner!" exclaimed Bill. "I'll jest put you wise how much I give for your gun!"

And, gripping his quirt, the new foreman of Kicking Cayuse strode at the cowman.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, standing by the gate, watched Panhandle keenly and curiously.

Panhandle was a gunman—little liked in the bunch from too great a readiness to pull a gun in a dispute. It seemed to Smithy that the man was "honing" for gunplay now, and that he was glad of a pretext for it.

A few civil words would have placated Bill, angry as he was; instead of which, the cowman seemed to be deliberately provoking trouble.

More than ever the Bounder was convinced that Panhandle was a confederate of the double-dealing foreman who had left Kicking Cayuse for the town gaol, and that he was still playing Barney's game.

The puncher's hand was very near the butt of his Colt as he talked to Bill; and as the foreman of the ranch strode at him that gun came out, whipped from the holster with the swiftness of lightning.

"Look out, Bill!" gasped Smithy.

But Bill was looking out.

Bill, big and burly and brawny as he was, was quick on the draw, but he did not touch a gun. The quirt in his hand whipped up as swift as the Colt in Panhandle's grip, and it twirled the revolver out of the cowman's hand before he knew what was happening.

Crash! went the six-gun on the hard, sun-baked earth. Crash! the next moment went Bill's quirt on Panhandle.

"Oh, good man, Bill!" gasped the Bounder.

Panhandle staggered back yelling. His gun was on the ground, and he had no chance of reaching it.

Bill's quirt fairly flashed as he laid it on, and every swipe of the lash brought a yell from Panhandle.

"You doggoned big stiff!" roared Bill. "You figure you'll pull a gun on the foreman who fires you off'n a ranch, you goldarned geck? I'll tell a man! You got another guess coming, you pesky piecan!"

"Aw, let up!" yelled Panhandle, vainly striving to dodge the swipes of the quirt. "You doggoned piecan, let up!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

There was a roar of laughter from the punchers looking on as Panhandle dodged and jumped and bounded under the swipes of the quirt.

"You sure got it coming, Panhandle!" yelled Yuba Dick.

"Say, that hombre can dance a few!" roared Chick, the choreman, from the door of the rancho. "I'll say he sure can dance a few!"

Panhandle dodged round his bronco. The quirt followed him round.

In sheer desperation he flung himself on the horse's back, and, without waiting to get his feet in the stirrups, dashed out of the gateway.

A last lick of the quirt elicited a last howl from him, and then he went galloping wildly across the prairie, sprawling on his horse, followed by a yell of laughter from the punchers of Kicking Cayuse.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets A Lift!

"**B**EASTS!" remarked Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl of Greyfriars heaved himself to his feet and blinked through his spectacles across the shimmering grass in the direction taken by the Famous Five.

A whole hour had elapsed since they had left Billy Bunter sitting under the tree by the bank of the Squaw. They had not returned with the runaway bronc. And now that he blinked over the prairie in search of them there was not a sign of them to be seen.

Evidently the chase of the runaway had led the juniors far afield. That was not surprising, as the runaway had a long start, and was probably very unwilling to come to the rope.

Sooner or later, no doubt, they would succeed in roping in that bronco and come back for Bunter; but it looked like being later rather than sooner.

"Beasts!" repeated Bunter.

It was hot on the banks of the Squaw. There were innumerable flies in the thickets along the swampy banks of the river, which flowed in a deep channel ten or twelve feet below the level of the prairie. Many of those flies, if not most of them, seemed to take a strong fancy to Bunter's fat, perspiring face. He smacked and smacked at them, and, like Samson of old, he slew his thousands, if not his tens of thousands, but still they came.

"Beasts!" said Bunter, for the third time.

Bunter was not comfortable. When Bunter was not comfortable matters were serious. It was, indeed, time for the universe to sit up and take notice.

But it was not merely discomfort that worried Bunter. It was getting towards noon, and at noon the schoolboy cow-punchers had intended to halt in the shade and eat. Chick, the choreman, had packed "eats" for them, and Billy Bunter had kept a keen eye on the packing, and ascertained that the "eats" were ample. But—alas!—the "eats" were packed in the saddlebags, and the saddlebags, of course, were as far from Bunter as the horses that carried them.

Chasing that elusive bronco across the prairie, it was quite likely that the Famous Five had not given a single thought to the possibility that Bunter might get hungry while they were gone. It would be, as Bunter bitterly reflected, like them!

Anyhow, there were no "eats," and no prospect, at present, of the Famous Five coming back with the horse and the "eats."

The fat Owl almost made up his mind to attempt to walk back to the ranch. But he knew that it was at least six miles distant, and six miles of rugged, rolling prairie was a large order for a good walker—much too large an order for Billy Bunter.

He blinked round almost desperately in the hope of sighting some puncher belonging to Kicking Cayuse riding range. There was a chance, at least, that a range-rider might have given him a lift on his horse to the ranch.

But there was no stetson hat to be seen nodding over the grass. Billy Bunter seemed to have the grasslands of Texas all to himself.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

He turned his eyes and his spectacles in the opposite direction—towards the river.

The Squaw was the boundary of the Kicking Cayuse ranges in the south. Any rider seen on the farther side of the river was not likely to belong to Kicking Cayuse. But there was no rider to be seen.

Southward, as well as northward and eastward, the rolling prairie extended, apparently to the edge of the blue sky. Westward, far away, Squaw Mountain shut off the view.

Then all of a sudden Billy Bunter spotted a stetson hat.

It had been within range of his spectacles for some time if he had happened to look in its direction. But he had never thought of looking down into the deep river channel for a rider, and it was in the shallow waters of the Squaw that the horseman was riding.

Bunter stared at him in astonishment.

He could make out the rider—a cow-puncher by his garb—in stetson hat, neck-scarf, and goat-skin chaps and high-hooped riding-boots. The stetson was decorated with a band of silver nuggets—an adornment that Bunter had never seen on a stetson before. The face under the brim of the hat was sun-burnt, handsome, and boyish. There were two guns in low-slung holsters. The puncher, if he was a puncher, was a "two-gun" man.

Why any man should be riding in the water instead of on the upper plain was a mystery to Billy Bunter.

But that was what the young puncher was doing—riding down the river, in the middle of the shallow stream, the water up to his spurs.

He did not glance towards Bunter.

His eyes, dark-blue and keen as an eagle's, shot sharp glances towards the southern bank every moment or two, as if he expected to see riders appear in sight over the high bank, which was above the level of his head as he rode in the water.

Unless he was deliberately keeping out of sight of riders on the plain, Bunter could not imagine what he was up to.

But whatever he was up to, Bunter was glad to see him. There was a chance, at least, that he might give the fat Owl a lift on his horse to Kicking Cayuse.

Bunter waved his fat hand and shouted.

"Hi!"

The result surprised him. The rider in the river gave a sudden start. His eyes, which were fixed on the southern bank, shot round to the northern side, where Bunter stood. To Bunter's alarm and horror, one of the guns fairly leaped into his hand at the same moment, and was aimed at Bunter's fat face.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

His fat knees knocked together, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

The young puncher pulled in his horse—a grey Indian mustang with a black muzzle—and sat in the saddle, facing Bunter, the revolver at a level.

a pair of keen blue eyes gleaming over it.

But it was only for a moment that the glimmering barrel of the six-gun was aimed at Bunter. Then, as the young puncher scanned him, he slipped it back into the holster. One glance at Bunter was sufficient to show that he was not dangerous.

The rider drew his horse closer under the high, steep bank, on the summit of which Bunter stood. His handsome, sunburnt face broke into a grin.

"Say, big boy, you sure startled me some!" he drawled, in a pleasant voice. "But don't you be afeared, feller; I ain't hurting you none."

Bunter was glad to hear it! He blinked very uneasily at the stranger, who was scanning him curiously.

"I—I say—" stammered Bunter.

"Shoot!"

"I—I've lost my horse! I can't walk back to the ranch—six miles or more."

"That sure is tough!" said the rider of the grey mustang. "I'll say it's sure tough to lose your cayuse on the llano."

"If—if you're going near Kicking Cayuse Ranch, will you—you give me a lift on your hoss?" asked Bunter hopefully.

"Ain't there any other guy in sight that you could ask for a lift, hombre?"

"Nobody," said Bunter.

"Not on the south side of this here river?" asked the rider.

Bunter blinked across the Squaw at the farther bank and the rolling plains stretching away to the sky.

"Nobody at all," he answered.

The boyish rider of the grey mustang smiled. It did not occur to Bunter that the rider in the river might have reasons of his own for desiring to know whether horsemen were in sight on the plains.

He seemed to consider for a few moments, then he gave a nod.

"I guess I'll oblige you, feller," he said. "I sure would be pleased to horn in at a chuckhouse and stop for eats. It's a cinch, big boy."

He set his mustang in motion again, and the animal trampled and clambered up the steep bank.

Once on the summit, the rider shot a rapid glance across the river, and then his keen eyes circled round, searching the whole plain. Even the Owl of the Remore could see how searching that intent look was.

"Looking for your friends?" asked Bunter.

The rider of the grey mustang grinned.

"Sure!" he assented. "Some friends—very old friends of mine—are looking for me this very minute; but I guess they've missed me. You ain't seen a bunch of riders cavorting around—six guns, and one of them a little cuss with bow legs and a face like leather?"

"I haven't seen anybody," answered Bunter.

"Nope, I guess they sure missed me," murmured the boyish-looking puncher. "Mebbe they're combing Squaw Mountain—mebbe. Git on!"

Bunter blinked at the rider and blinked at the horse. Getting on was a rather difficult proposition to Bunter. Bunter generally mounted a steed as if he were climbing the wall of a house; but that was not practicable with the saddle already occupied.

The young puncher grinned and stooped to him. He took a grip on the fat junior's collar, and, with a strength that was surprising considering Bunter's weight, hooked him up.

"Ooooh!" gasped Bunter.

He was landed on the horse in front

of the puncher. He sat there spluttering—not falling off again, because a strong hand was still holding him. The strong-limbed mustang, heedless of the double weight, started at a trot away from the river.

Bunter was not comfortable. He was far from comfortable. But he was on his way to dinner, and in that, at least, there was comfort!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Rangers at the Ranch!

"RANGERS!" said Bill Buck.

Bill was busy this morning. There was plenty of work to be done on the ranch; and he had been quite pleased when Harry Wharton & Co. offered to ride out and round up the bunch of cows that had wandered away up the river. But busy as he was, he found time to give his attention to three riders who came up the trail about half an hour after the sudden departure of Panhandle.

"Rangers?" repeated Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder was keenly interested. He had heard, and read, of the Texas Rangers, but had never seen any of that famous body of men.

"Yep!" said Bill. "That's Hall."

"Hall? Who's Hall?"

Bill grinned.

"I guess you're noo to Texas!" he said. "Every guy in the State has heard of Jim Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers. I guess they're after some scallawag—mebbe that rustling gang in Squaw Mountain."

"Which one is Hall?" asked Smithy.

"The little cuss riding ahead, with a face like saddle-leather and eyes like sparks!" grinned Bill.

He strode down to the gateway, the Bounder following him. The three riders, covered with dust from the prairie, looked weary, and it was plain that they had ridden long and hard.

The man whom Bill had named as Jim Hall was small in stature, bow-legged from incessant riding, and looked as hard as iron, his eyes as keen and penetrating as an eagle's.

"Morning!" said Bill.

"Morning!" grunted Hall. "Foreman at home?"

"Sure!" said Bill. "Talking to you now."

"You Barney Stone?"

"Not by a jugful."

"I guess I heard at Hard Tack that Barney Stone was foreman of Kicking Cayuse," said Hall.

"He sure was," agreed Bill. "But that pesky son-of-a-gun is sticking inside the calaboose at Packsaddle now, if you want him."

Hall stared at him.

"How come?" he asked briefly.

"That guy sure was in cahoots with the rustlers, and he had the owner's son kidnapped, because that young guy spotted his game!" said Bill. "Sheriff Lick, along to Packsaddle, has got him by the short hairs. Me, I'm the noo foreman of this ranch, and this here is the owner's son, Mr. Vernon-Smith."

Hall gave the Bounder a glance and a brief nod.

The Bounder was regarding him with interest and curiosity. He had never seen Jim Hall before, but he had heard him spoken of—a famous man in the West. He had heard that he was nicknamed "Mule-Kick," and had the reputation of never failing to get his man. He looked, to Smithy's eyes,

like a man who lived up to his reputation.

"You arter the rustlers?" asked Bill. "I'll say they've been busy on the Kicking Cayuse ranges."

"Nix on the rustlers!" answered Hall. "I guess I'd rope them in, if they came my way, in the way of duty; but I'm after a guy I've been after a long time. I'm asking you for news of him. This is new country for that hombre, and I wouldn't put it past him to horn into a ranch and ask for eats at the chuckhouse, jest like he was a puncher. Any strangers around?"

"Ain't seen any!" answered Bill. "Strangers ain't thick in these parts. What's the guy called?"

"I guess he's been called by as many names as he's got fingers and toes," grunted Hall. "But he's known all over Texas, from the Rio Grande to the Staked Plain, as the Rio Kid."

Bill whistled.

"That firebug around here?" he ejaculated.

"He was sure seen in Hard Tack a few days ago," said Hall, "and I reckon he was heading for a hide-out in Squaw Mountain. I got three men picking up sign, other side of the Squaw, now. But that kid sure does know how to hide in a hole and pull it in after him. No noos here?"

"Nunk!" answered Bill. "I guess I won't forget to pack my gun, if that firebug from the Rio Grande is around. You lighting down for eats, Captain Hall?"

"Sure!"

The Ranger captain dismounted, and his two men followed his example.

Cactus, the new horse-wrangler of Kicking Cayuse, came to take the horses for water and fodder. His manner to Hall was one of great respect—and two or three punchers, who were in sight, looked across at him with something like awe. The Bounder could see that Mule-Kick Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers, was a "big noise" in the cow country.

Cactus led the horses away, and the two Rangers went with Bill to the chuckhouse to share the midday meal of the outfit.

Hall was left with the Bounder, who, as the owner's son, had to do the honours of the ranch.

"Please come in, Captain Hall!" said Vernon-Smith politely; and Hall, who was a man of few words, gave him a nod and followed him to the rancho.

Chick, the choreman, looking out of the doorway of the living-room saluted the ranger captain with great respect. Then he hurried away to the kitchen to get busy with the "cats"—the best and amplest "eats" that Chick could provide for so distinguished a visitor.

Hall dropped into a rocker in the veranda. His keen eyes swept over the fenced garden in front and the prairie beyond, and fixed for a moment on a distant speck—a stetson hat far away on the plain, in the direction of Squaw River. Then he looked at the Bounder. Laconic as he was, he seemed to feel impelled to speak a few words of civility:

"Owner's son?"

"Yes," answered Smithy. "My father bought this ranch and sent me out here to give it the once-over. We've got leave to prolong the school holiday a bit—I wish my friends were here to meet you, Captain Hall. They've gone out after cows."

Hall nodded, and his eyes turned on the distant stetson again, which was coming nearer.



The quirt in Bill Buck's hand whipped up as swift as the Colt in Panhandle's grip, and it twirled the revolver out of the cowman's hand before he knew what was happening. "Oh, good man, Bill!" gasped Vernon-Smith.

He rose from the chair, leaned on the rail, and stared hard across the sunny plain. He seemed puzzled.

The Bounder, following his glance, was puzzled, too.

All sorts of riders came and went at Kicking Cayuse; but this was something a little out of the usual run.

Two hats were to be seen, and under one of them something that flashed back the rays of the sun.

The Bounder stared and burst into a laugh as he discerned what it was—a fat rider mounted in front of another rider, who was almost hidden by his ample form, but whose hat showed over his hat. It was a pair of big spectacles that flashed in the sunlight.

"Bunter!" ejaculated the Bounder.

He chuckled.

"That's one of the party here," he explained. "He went out with the other fellows after the cows this morning—I wondered how long he would stick on the horse."

Hall's hard leathery face broke into something like a grin.

"Looks like he's lost his cayuse," he remarked.

"That's it—and one of the punchers has picked him up and is giving him a lift back to the ranch," said Vernon-Smith.

Jim Hall sat down again. Of the rider behind Bunter little could be seen but the stetson, and he had no doubt that it was, as the Bounder supposed, one of the Kicking Cayuse outfit who had picked up the fat schoolboy stranded on the prairie.

But he looked at the approaching rider—and looked again. The Bounder saw his hard face harden, and an alert glint come into his eyes. Those eyes were fixed on the double-laden horse.

"That's a grey Injun mustang!" said Hall suddenly. He wrinkled his brow

in a concentrated stare. "I guess he's got black on his muzzle."

He breathed hard.

"I reckon you'll know the ranch cayuses by sight, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he said. "You know that critter?"

"No, I can't say I do," answered Vernon-Smith. "But there may be dozens of horses here that I haven't seen. What does it matter?"

The ranger captain did not answer that question; but his fixed gaze became more intent and intense. He breathed harder.

"It sure does look like the cayuse!" Smithy heard him mutter. "But he sure would not be riding into the rope like that! Sure not! But I guess he don't know that there's rangers this side of the Squaw, nohow!" His eyes gleamed round at Vernon-Smith. "Say, you sure that guy is one of the bunch here?"

"I can't see his face," answered the wondering Bounder. "But I suppose it's one of the punchers, as he's bringing that chap in."

"Mebbe," muttered Hall. "Mebbe! But I guess the Kid's the guy to help a lame dog over a stile—I'll say that for the cuss! And that sure is a grey Injun mustang with black on his muzzle."

The Bounder stared.

"The Kid!" he repeated. "Oh, my hat! Do you mean the man you're after?"

"The Kid!" breathed Hall. "The Rio Kid! I guess—"

The rider, who had been coming directly towards the ranch, swerved a little, heading for the gate. This gave the two watchers in the veranda a glimpse of him, no longer hidden by the fat figure of Billy Bunter. The Bounder of Greyfriars glimpsed a handsome, sunburnt, boyish face, hardly a few years older than his own

—a face that he would never have dreamed was that of a "fire-bug"—an outlaw hunted by the Texas Rangers. But one glimpse of it was enough for the ranger captain.

"The Rio Kid!" came gritting through his teeth.

And Mule-Kick Hall tore the revolver from his belt as he leaped down the steps of the veranda, shouting to his men.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Cornered in Squaw Mountain!

BOB CHERRY gave a whoop of triumph.

"Got him!"

The lasso flew. The loop settled over the tossing head of the runaway bronc. It was caught at last.

The chase of Bunter's bronc had led the juniors far afield. Miles had slipped under the galloping hoofs.

But it could not be helped—Bunter had to have his horse, and the Famous Five had to capture it for him.

They were more than three miles from the spot where they had left Bunter when they got the bronc at last.

Even then, probably, they might not have got him, for they were far as yet from having acquired the skill of the Texas punchers with the "rope." Throw after throw had missed, and the runaway had led them a long dance. But at last, inadvertently, the bronc played into the hands of his pursuers.

With the juniors circling round him on the prairie, he had dashed into an opening of Squaw Mountain—a deep and narrow canyon that split the side of the great mountain.

There they had him cornered, as they followed; for, at a distance from the plain, the way became too steep and

rocky for further progress, and the runaway had to turn.

That brought him within an easy cast of the rope; and Bob Cherry, to his great satisfaction, landed the loop over his head.

"Got him at last!" exclaimed Harry Wharton breathlessly. "Thank goodness for that!"

"The gotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Better tie Bunter on when we get back!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Looks like rounding up those cows at this rate—I don't think!"

"Come on!" said Bob cheerily. "We've wasted an hour—but what's the odds, so long as you're 'appy!"

With the captured bronco on the end of the rope, Bob wheeled, and the Co. followed his example, to ride back down the narrow, winding canyon to the plain at the foot of the mountain.

As they did so, something whizzed past Harry Wharton's ear, like a swift insect, and made him start.

The ringing report of a firearm followed.

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

"What the thump—" exclaimed Harry, in amazement, staring round him.

"Look out!" roared Johnny Bull. "Cover—quick!"

Crack! rang on the clear air, like the crack of a whip, and a bullet smashed on the rocks a yard away from him.

"Cover!" gasped Wharton.

Harry Wharton & Co. had learned to take cover, and to take it quick, trailing with Bill. They were quick on the uptake; and, sudden and unexpected as the attack was, they were swiftly on their guard.

The firing came from some point on the rocky canyon wall, between them and the plain. They could not, for the moment, see who fired; but they knew that the marksman was posted on the rocks in front of them, firing from a height.

They leaped from their horses and dragged the animals by the bridles into the nearest cover—a mass of rocky boulders in the middle of the canyon, round which they had ridden in chase of the bronco.

Quick as they were, a third shot came, spinning the hat on Bob Cherry's head as he jumped for cover.

Panting for breath, the five juniors backed behind the boulders; safe, for the time at least, from the fire, sheltered by the high rocks; and they lost no time in taking the rifles from the leather cases strapped on the horses.

"Who the thump—" breathed Frank Nugent.

"And what the thump—" gasped Bob.

"One of the rustling gang!" said Harry.

The juniors were well aware that the lonely canyons and gulches of Squaw Mountain were the haunt of rustlers; and it was not long since they had had a brush with the cattle-thieves, driving off a Kicking Cayuse herd.

They had had the best of that encounter with the confederates of Barney Stone, the double-dealing foreman of the ranch. But, though the rustlers certainly bore them no goodwill, they would never have expected a murderous attack like this. The unseen man on the rocky canyon wall had been firing on them, to shoot them down.

"Some pal of Barney Stone's!" said Bob.

"I suppose so!" said Harry slowly.

"But blessed if I quite make it out! There's not a lot of law in the Packsaddle country; but Sheriff Lick would get after the brute fast enough if he got by with this!"

"Careful!" murmured Bob, as Harry moved to look out from beyond the edge of the great rocky boulder that screened the juniors.

Wharton nodded, and placed his stetson hat on the end of his rifle, pushing it out into view.

Crack!

A bullet spun the hat on the muzzle of the rifle! Evidently the man in the canyon was watching like a hawk.

Even as the shot rang, Wharton took a hasty look round the rock. He had a glimpse of a man in a stetson hat, on a ledge, about thirty feet up the rugged canyon wall, and about fifty yards in advance of the juniors' position.

Under the brim of the stetson was a hard, lean, brown face—a face that Harry Wharton knew only too well; and one that astounded him to see in that canyon on the rugged side of Squaw Mountain.

"Barney Stone!" he gasped, as he popped back his head.

Another bullet clipped by the rock as he did so.

"Wha-a-t?" exclaimed Bob.

"Barney Stone!" repeated Harry blankly. "It's Barney Stone!"

"But he's in the calaboose at Packsaddle!" exclaimed Nugent.

"He was—but he isn't now!" said Harry, with a deep breath. "He must have got away—I tell you, it's Barney Stone!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

"But—" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Hark!" interrupted Wharton.

A shouting voice came up the canyon. Only too well the juniors knew that harsh voice.

"Say, you young geeks! I guess I got you by the short hairs! By the great horned toad, I sure got you! You can come out of it, you young skunks! You got it coming!"

There was a gloating note in the hard, harsh voice.

Evidently Barney was in great feather at having cornered the Greyfriars fellows in that remote, rocky recess of the mountain, where there was no escape for them except by passing under his gun.

"That's Barney's toot!" said Bob, in a low voice.

"The esteemed and execrable Barney!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

He understood now that savage, ruthless, murderous attack. Barney Stone's feud with Herbert Vernon-Smith and his friends was implacable.

Barney had been foreman of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch for years on end—and during those years he had robbed and cheated owner after owner—piling up dollars that did not belong to him. Most of the "guys" in the Packsaddle country knew, or guessed, that Barney was making a good thing for himself out of the ranch; and Sheriff Lick had even suspected that he knew more about the rustling of cows on the ranch than he ever admitted. But it was not till the Greyfriars party came that the "goods" had been got on Barney.

Now he had lost everything.

From being boss of the ranch, lining his pockets with another man's dollars, he had gone to the calaboose at Packsaddle, to be sent away to take his trial.

Evidently he had escaped—for here he was, though it was a puzzle how he had done so—certainly not without help from outside. But if he had his free-



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dom, he had nothing else—except to seek his outlawed associates and throw in his lot with them, an outlaw and cattle-rustler himself!

It was no wonder, perhaps, that his savage thoughts concentrated on the fellows who had brought about his downfall and ruin; no wonder that he had fired on sight when he spotted them in the lonely mountain.

"By gum!" said Bob, after a long silence. "That rotter's got us by the short hairs, you fellows! We're stuck here—"

"The stickfulness is terrific."

"There's no way out up the canyon—that's how we collared that fat owl's brone," said Bob, "and if we leave this cover—"

Harry Wharton nodded.

To leave cover and ride down the canyon to the plain was to pass under the high ledge, where Barney Stone watched with a six-gun in his hand. That was asking to be shot down from above like so many rabbits; and they knew well enough that there was no more mercy in the heart of the outlawed foreman than in that of a prairie wolf.

"We've got to stick it here," said Harry.

"Till dark," said Bob.

"Phew!" murmured Nugent.

"Nothing else for it," said Harry. "We can't get at the brute, perched up there on the canyon wall. And we can't show ourselves without being riddled with bullets. If he loses patience, and comes for us, we'll put paid to the scoundrel fast enough. Only—"

He broke off. But he did not need to finish—the other fellows guessed what was in his mind.

Barney Stone had escaped from the calaboose at Packsaddle, and struck westward, for a hideout in Squaw Mountain; but, more likely that not, some of his lawless associates were due to join up with him there. And if a gang of ruffianly rustlers were within sound of the firing, and were drawn to the spot, the outlook was serious for the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

But there was no choice in the matter.

They were cornered, and could not show a finger without getting a bullet. Every advantage was on the side of the ruffian posted high on the ledge, watching the rugged canyon below, ready to loose off lead on the instant.

The juniors had to wait, and watch. And they waited and watched, with grim faces, while the sun climbed higher in the blue sky of Texas, and poured down burning heat, turning the rocky canyon into an oven.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Kid!

BILLY BUNTER gave a startled squeak:

"Ow!"

The rider of the grey mustang with the black muzzle, pulled in so suddenly and sharply, that the fat junior nearly tumbled off.

Over Bunter's fat head the keen, blue eyes of that rider searched the ranch in front of him.

"Thunder!" he breathed.

"I say!" gasped Bunter.

"Light down, buddy! Pronto!" rapped the rider of the grey mustang.

His eyes were fixed in a keen stare—at a leather-faced man, who was leaping down the steps of the rancho veranda, gun in hand, shouting as he leaped.

From the direction of the chuckhouse, two rangers came running, also gun in hand, at the call of their captain.

After them came Bill Buck, staring as he ran, and two or three punchers, and Cactus from the horse corral.

"I—I—I say!" stuttered Bunter. "I say, ain't you coming into the ranch? Smithy will be glad to stand you lunch if you come in with me."

The rider of the grey mustang laughed.

"I guess not," he answered. "Pronto!"

He unhooked Bunter from the mustang, and dropped him on his feet on the earth, Bunter promptly stumbling over, and sitting down.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

The rider wheeled his horse, his reins bunched in his left hand, a six-gun in his right. The roar of Mule-Kick Hall could be heard from the ranch.

"Horses—horses! Where's my cayuse? Doggone you! Where's my cayuse? That's the Kid—the Rio Kid!"

Bang, bang! came a couple of shots, whizzing close as the rider of the grey mustang dashed away.

Billy Bunter was left sitting on the earth, blinking dizzily through his big spectacles, and wondering what was happening.

"The Kid!" came a roar.

"By the great horned toad, that dog-goned firebug!" roared Bill. "Cactus, you geek, git out them hosses!"

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Billy Bunter.

His unknown friend was already dashing away.

Forth from the gateway of the ranch came a horseman, spurting fiercely. It was Mule-Kick Hall, first in the saddle, riding like the wind, loosing off lead as he rode.

Crack, crack, crack! rang the revolver, in the hand of the ranger captain. He thundered past within a dozen feet of Bunter, sitting in the grass in a state of hopeless bewilderment and confusion.

After him, galloping, came his two men. After them, Bill Buck, and two or three punchers. The name of the Rio Kid, the celebrated outlaw of the Rio Grande, had been enough. Wild excitement reigned on the ranch, and every man who was on hand rushed for his horse.

Billy Bunter tottered to his feet as the riders thundered by.

He blinked after them dizzily through his spectacles.

Why the rider of the grey mustang was fleeing, why the others were dashing in pursuit of him, and firing as they pursued, Bunter could not guess.

His own impression of that young puncher, with the silver nuggets round his hat, was that he was a very decent sort of chap. He had given the fat Owl a lift that he badly needed, and landed him at the ranch in time for dinner. It had been his intention to "horn in" at the ranch for "eats," as any wandering puncher was welcome to do on a Texas ranch. Now he was riding at full gallop across the prairie, with panting horsemen in fierce pursuit. Bunter could only blink in dizzy astonishment.

Bang, bang, bang! roared the six guns.

The Rio Kid had seen his danger in time, and lost not a second, and he had a good start. But Mule-Kick Hall, well ahead of the others, was riding fast at the flying heels of the swift grey mustang.

Bunter saw the Kid half-turn in the

saddle; he saw the right arm thrown up, the revolver in the hand, and the roar of the six-gun came back to his ears.

Jim Hall's horse pitched forward, and the ranger captain was flung head-long into the grass.

A toss of the horse's head had saved him from the bullet; but the horse had gone down under it, and Hall was dismounted.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped the horrified Owl.

Hall was on his feet again in a couple of seconds. The crash on the prairie must have hurt him, but he was hard as hickory. He yelled madly for a horse, and Yuba Dick jumped down, and handed over his bronco.

The ranger captain threw himself into the saddle, and resumed the chase, spurring like a madman.

But he was at the tail of the pursuit now, instead of in the lead. And the Rio Kid was far ahead, and riding at a speed that seemed like lightning.

He vanished from Bunter's eyes and spectacles, and after him vanished the galloping pursuers.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

He tottered on to the ranch. In the gateway he found Vernon-Smith, staring after the wild pursuit of the outlaw.

"I say, Smithy!" gasped Bunter.

"They won't get him," said the Bounder. "By gad, that horse can move! They won't get him."

"I say, Smithy, who—what—Who is he?" gasped Bunter. "What are they after him for? He seemed to me a very nice chap."

The Bounder chuckled.

"Frightfully nice chap!" he answered. "He's an outlaw—wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas, from what I've heard."

"Oh crikey!" gasped the fat Owl. "An—an—an outlaw! Rot! He gave me a lift back, when I told him I'd lost my horse. He was coming in to dinner, only he changed his mind."

"Bet he never knew the rangers were here," grinned Smithy. "Where are the other fellows, Bunter?"

"They went after my horse, when I fell off—I mean, when I dismounted," answered Bunter. "I never fell off, Smithy. They kept me waiting hours and hours and hours, and then that chap turned up, and I asked him for a lift back. I say, is dinner ready?"

Bunter rolled into the rancho to see whether dinner was ready. Chick was standing in the veranda, staring after the distant chase with all his eyes, in breathless excitement.

"Dinner ready?" asked Bunter.

"The Rio Kid!" said Chick breathlessly. "That sure was the Rio Kid! I seen his picture up at Priarie Bend, with a thousand dollars reward! The Rio Kid!"

"Oh, yes—but is dinner ready?" asked Bunter. He grabbed hold of the choreman's arm. "I say, getting deaf? I'm hungry."

"Aw, can it, you fat gink!" roared Chick, and he gave the fat Owl a shove, which caused him to sit down in the veranda.

Dinner seemed to Chick a matter of small moment, in comparison with the chase of the Rio Kid. Hardly a glimpse of the distant stetsons could be seen now. The chase was vanishing across the prairie towards Squaw Mountain.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Beast!"

He picked himself up, and rolled

into the living-room. Dinner was not ready. Chick had been interrupted by the alarm, and at the name of the Rio Kid he had bolted out of his kitchen, forgetting all about eats.

Billy Bunter could not forget so important a matter so easily; but he had to wait. It was not till Vernon-Smith came in that Chick gave up watching the prairie, and remembered eats.

It was an hour or more later that Bill and the punchers came back. Billy Bunter by that time had packed his eats, and was taking his ease in a rocker in the veranda. Vernon-Smith shouted to Bill as he rode in, dusty and perspiring at the gate.

"Any luck, Bill?"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" granted Bill.

"He's got away!"

"Surest thing you know! That mustang of his'n is sure some cayuse!" said Bill. "We done lost him on the prairie. Hall and his guys are still on the trail, but I'll tell a man they won't put salt on his tail in a hurry! Nope!"

The Bouncer stared away to the west, where Squaw Mountain barred the blue horizon. Somewhere in that direction the Rio Kid was riding, hunted by Mule-Kick Hall and his men. But for the chance presence of the rangers at the ranch, the Kid would have been there, enjoying the free and easy hospitality of the cow country, unsuspected for what he was! The Bouncer whistled as he thought of it. This was going to be interesting news for the Famous Five when they came in with the cows at sundown.

He little guessed where the Famous Five were at that moment, and what was happening to them!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

CRACK, crack!

The bullets knocked splinters from the rock in the canyon in Squaw Mountain.

Hours had passed since the Famous Five of Greyfriars had been cornered there, and the hot afternoon was wearing on.

Bob Cherry had put his hat on his rifle beyond the edge of the rock, to make sure whether the gunman was still on the watch. The instant crack of the six-gun told that Barney Stone was still there, and still watching.

Bob pulled the hat back, with a hole through the crown, and grinned.

"Lucky my napper wasn't in it!" he remarked.

"The luckfulness was terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed villain is as watchful as an absurd cat."

"Blow him!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, he's got us, unless we stick it out till dark!" said Harry.

The juniors had to make up their minds to that. What made them uneasy, chiefly, was the probability that others of the rustling gang might arrive on the spot, and they might have a gang of desperadoes to deal with. So far, however, Barney Stone had not been joined by any of his confederates.

They had eaten a meal, unpacked from their saddle-bags, washed down by tepid water from their cans. A meal naturally reminded them of Billy Bunter, and they wondered how the fat Owl was getting on.

Whether he was still sitting by the Squaw River, waiting for them hour after hour, or whether he had tried

walking to the ranch, they did not know, but certainly it never crossed their minds that the fat Owl had got a lift to Kicking Cayuse from a hunted outlaw.

Anyhow, there was no getting back to Bunter, and he had to take his chance. It was all the fault of the fatuous fat Owl that they were in this deadly trap, and it would have been rather a relief to have been within kicking distance of Bunter.

Crack! rang again, Barney pitching another bullet down from the high wall of the canyon. Then there was a long silence.

"If Smithy or Bill only knew!" murmured Nugent.

"They don't expect us back till sunset!" said Harry. "No chance of anyone coming this way, unless—"

"Unless it'd be some of Barney's gang of rustlers!" said Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hark!"

From the distance, down the canyon, came a sound of hoofbeats ringing on hard rock. The juniors exchanged quick glances.

A horseman was riding up from the canyon from the plains, the way they had come, hours since, in chase of the runaway bronc.

"Might be a puncher from Kicking Cayuse!" murmured Bob.

"Not likely!"

"Well, look out!" said Bob, grasping his rifle. "If the blighters try to rush us here we'll give them something for their trouble."

Loud and sharp, ringing on the hard rock, came the clatter of hoofs. Then it ceased suddenly. The horseman had halted.

There was hardly a chance that it was a man of the ranch outfit, wandering into the lonely mountain. But if it was not that, it seemed certain to the juniors that it was one of the rustlers, with whom the foreman of Kicking Cayuse had been in league, and in that case, they had more than one enemy to deal with.

They waited, and listened anxiously. Crack, crack, crack!

Three rapid shots rang out. They came from the high ledge up the canyon wall; the juniors could tell that by the sound. But the bullets did not crash round the boulders that screened them. The fire was in another direction.

Bang! came from down the canyon, and a splattering sound of a bullet smashing on rock.

"By gum!" breathed Bob.

"Not a rustler!" muttered Johnny Bull. "They're firing at one another—Barney Stone and that chap who's halted—"

"A Kicking Cayuse man, then!" said Nugent.

"Looks like it."

Crack, crack! Bang! came rapid shots, evidently exchanged between the man who had ridden into the canyon and the man on the high ledge.

The juniors dreaded to hear a cry, that would have told that the newcomer had fallen to the fire. But they heard nothing but the heavy echo of the firing, among the hollows of the mountain. The newcomer, whoever he was, had evidently got into prompt cover.

Harry Wharton pushed his hat out of cover again. But this time it drew no fire. Barney Stone, clearly, was watching in the other direction.

Assured of that, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove ventured to peer round the rock, along the rugged canyon.

High up on the canyon wall he glimpsed a stetson, which showed that Barney Stone was still in his place.

But he glimpsed something else, also, which made him start.

Higher still, up the rugged, broken wall of rock, where ledge rose above ledge to the top, was another figure.

It looked to Wharton like that of a cow-puncher, little more than a boy, in stetson and chaps. It was not one of the Kicking Cayuse outfit. He had never seen him before.

Evidently, Barney Stone did not see him now.

Barney was watching the canyon below—and the young puncher was coming from above.

"Oh!" breathed Wharton.

He could see what had happened, though Barney Stone could not. The horseman, fired on by the man on the ledge, had taken prompt cover, and fired back. Then he had left his horse in cover and crept away among the rocks, with the stealthy skill of a Red Indian. By a devious route he had gained a greater height up the canyon wall than the ledge where Barney crouched and watched, and Barney, had he looked, would have seen him.

But Barney, evidently, had no suspicion of it. He did not look up; he was watching the canyon below.

Wharton could see only the crown of his stetson, but he could see that the back of it was turned to him. With a new enemy on hand, Barney was not troubling about the schoolboys.

But his new enemy, if he had only known it, was no longer below; he was above, and from above he could, had he chosen, have shot Barney like a rabbit.

Wharton stared at him, spellbound. His friends joined him, peering round the boulder. They all stared at the young puncher, high up the canyon side, stepping with the agility of a mountain goat, and without making the slightest sound to warn Barney as he approached him.

"Oh!" breathed Bob. "Look!"

With a sudden leap from above, the young puncher landed on the rocky ledge where Barney Stone lay.

He landed just behind Barney, a six-gun in his hand.

The juniors held their breath.

Barney, startled by the clatter of riding-boots on the ledge behind him, scrambled round—and looked into the muzzle of a revolver.

The voice of the young puncher reached the ears of the schoolboys.

"Forget it, feller! Don't lift that gun! It sure will be the last thing you'll do this side of Jordan."

Barney Stone, in amazement and rage, scrambled to his feet. But he did not lift the gun in his hand.

"Doggone you!" he gasped.

"Drop that gun!"

For a moment Barney hesitated. Then his "gun" went clattering down the rocky side of the canyon.

"Hump it after your gun, hombre!"

His lean face convulsed with fury, Barney Stone tramped down the rugged slope from the ledge to the canyon below, followed by the boyish-looking puncher, gun in hand. And Harry Wharton & Co., in great relief, crowded out of their cover and came on the scene.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Friend or Foe?

"HANDS up!"

The Rio Kid rapped out the words.

Still keeping Barney Stone covered with the revolver in his right

hand, he whipped a second gun from his belt with the left; and that gun was aimed at the Famous Five, as they came out from the cover of the rocks.

With a gun in either hand, the Kid had both parties covered; much to the surprise of the Greyfriars fellows.

They had never seen that handsome young puncher before; but, as he had tackled Barney Stone, and saved them from peril, they naturally looked on him as an ally.

So his swift and sudden action was startling.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob Cherry. "What—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"We're friends—" gasped Nugent.

"Hands up!" came the sharp rap; and the Famous Five put up their hands. They realised that the young puncher now saw them for the first time, and could not know whether they were friends or foes.

So they put up their hands. This puncher, whoever he was, had proved a friend in need; and they certainly did not want any trouble with him.

"Keep 'em up, a few!" drawled the boyish-looking puncher. "I guess I want to know who you are, and what your game is around here in Squaw Mountain."

Barney Stone made a movement.

His revolver lay a few yards away. For a moment the late foreman of Kicking Cayuse hoped that this diversion would give him a chance of reaching it.

But a keen eye gleamed at him.

"You asking for it, hombre?" inquired the Rio Kid. "I'll say your best guess it to stick where you are, and reach for the sky. I'll mention that this gun might go off sudden, if you don't."

And Barney, gritting his teeth, stood where he was and "reached for the sky."

But he was as puzzled as the juniors. Like them, he concluded that the handsome young puncher belonged to some ranch outfit in the Frio valley; in which case, it must have been clear to him that he had nothing to fear from the schoolboys. But he was keeping them covered, as carefully as he was keeping Barney covered.

"It's all right, old bean!" said Bob Cherry, with a cheery grin. "We're not rustlers, like that rotter! You won't want that gun."

"Who are you?" asked the Kid, scanning them.

"Schoolboys from England, staying at Kicking Cayuse Ranch!" answered Harry Wharton. "We came here after a horse that chucked its rider and ran away."

The Kid gave a start.

"Aw! Carry me home to die!" he ejaculated. "You the side-kickers of that fat goob I picked up by the Squaw River."

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in astonishment. "Have you seen him?"

"A fat boob in blinkers!" said the Kid.

"That's jolly old Bunter!" said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "Yes, we're his friends—his horse chucked him, and we had to get after it and rope it in—and then that villain, Barney Stone, cornered us here."

The Kid seemed satisfied. His second gun went back to its holster; though he was still keeping Barney covered with the gun in his right.

"O.K.," he said. "I guess you'll find that goob at the ranch—I sure gave him a lift there on my cayuse. Now you jest put me wise what's the trouble here. This jay-faced guy burned pow-

der on me when I rode in from the plains, and I reckon if I hadn't been spry I'd have stopped some of his lead. That guy after your scalps?"

"That's it!" said Harry. "He was foreman of the ranch, up till a few days ago; in league with the rustlers who ran off cattle from the ranges. He has escaped from the calaboose at Packsaddle—he must have escaped last night—goodness knows how. We're going to take him back, now we've got him."

"A few minutes ago he'd got us!" grinned Bob. "Now we've got him! One good turn deserves another."

Barney Stone clenched his hands; his deep-set eyes glittering with rage.

The arrival of the Kid on the scene had completely turned the tables on Barney. He had had his liberty only for a matter of hours; now he had thrown it away, owing to that savage attempt at vengeance on the Greyfriars juniors. He was disarmed, covered by a revolver, and the Famous Five were very easily able to deal with him now.

"We'll stick him on Bunter's horse and ride him back to Packsaddle!" said Johnny Bull.

The Kid looked at them, and at Barney Stone.

Had he been, as the juniors still supposed, a puncher from one of the Frio ranches, he would have fallen in with that plan at once. But the hunted outlaw, who only an hour ago had narrowly escaped the pursuit of the Texas Rangers, had other ideas.

"Go slow!" said the Kid, with a grin. "I guess this here guy belongs to me, as I'm the baby that cinched him."

"Oh, yes, of course!" said Harry at once. "But surely you'll let us take him back to the calaboose. The sheriff of Packsaddle must be hunting for him now."

"Mebbe he ain't the only guy the sheriff of Packsaddle hones to put salt on the tail of!" grinned the Kid. "I guess I ain't come to the valley of the Frio to help no gol-darned sheriff to do his stuff."

The juniors stared at him.

"But that man's wanted by the Law!" exclaimed Nugent.

"You don't say!" ejaculated the Kid.

"I jolly well do! Surely you're not going to stand in the way of an escaped outlaw being rounded up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid.

"Well, where does the joke come in?" demanded Johnny Bull gruffly.

All the juniors stared in astonishment at the young puncher. They could see no reason whatever for that outburst of merriment.

Barney Stone was as surprised as the juniors. But he was hopeful now. He was utterly at the puncher's mercy; but he realised that the puncher, for some inexplicable reason, was going to be merciful.

"Look here, we're going to take that scoundrel back where he belongs," exclaimed Johnny Bull hotly.

"I got a gun here what says you ain't!" retorted the Kid.

"Hold on, Johnny!" said Harry pacifically. "It's for that chap to say—he got the rascal, and helped us out of a fix in getting him. But look here," he went on, addressing the young puncher, "we've told you who and what that man is—why don't you want us to round him up, now we've got the chance?"

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"Dog don't eat dog!" he said.

A keen, watchful look came into Barney Stone's eyes. He understood,

though the juniors as yet did not. That this handsome, pleasant-looking young puncher was on the wrong side of the law, was not easy for them to guess.

"I don't catch on!" said Harry. "Why—"

"Aw, I guess I'll put you wise, feller!" drawled the Kid. "I guess you'll hear enough about me when you hit the ranch again. You ever heard of the Rio Kid?"

"The Rio Kid!" repeated Harry. "Yes, I've seen the name up on a bill, offering a reward for some outlaw—"

"I'll say you got a healthy chance of cinching that reward if you figure that them rifles would help you a lot, agin my six-gun!" grinned the Kid.

"Wha-a-t?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"You!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"By the great horned toad!" breathed Barney Stone. "I reckoned I'd seen your face somewhere, you young geck; it sure was in the picture stuck up at Prairie Bend. And me figuring you was a puncher coming to help them young ginks! Say, Kid, you can pack that gun."

"Says you!" remarked the Kid.

"Aw, talk hoss-sense!" snapped Barney. "I'm telling you I was foreman of Kicking Cayuse, like them young scallawags allowed; now I'm an outlaw, jest like you are, Kid! I got a bunch to carry out my orders, and I guess I got room for a good man in the bunch—I'll sure take you in, Kid, and glad. I ain't foreman of Kicking Cayuse now, but that ranch ain't heard the last of me—I'll say I'm going to comb the ranges for the cows, and—"

"Pack it up, you pesky cow-thief!" said the Kid disdainfully. "You figure that I'd rustle a cow?"

Barney stared at him.

"I guess," went on the Kid, "that me being a hunted man, I ain't going to stand for handing over another guy what's hunted! Not by a jugful I ain't. You can beat it, and you better beat it pronto!"

"I guess—"

"Can it, and git!" snapped the Kid.

Barney Stone gave him a dark look. But he was glad to go. His eyes gleamed round at the Famous Five for a moment, and then he tramped away and disappeared into a gully in the side of the canyon.

The Kid holstered his revolver.

"You ain't got any kick coming, you young guys!" he said amiably. "I guess you'd never have roped in that lobo wolf; from the way you was fixed I'll say it would have been the other way round. So long! When you hit Kicking Cayuse, tell Mule-Kick Hall that the Rio Kid's waiting for him in Squaw Mountain, and will be powerful pleased to see him come."

Leaving the schoolboys staring, the Kid tramped away down the canyon to the rocks where he had left his mustang, in cover.

"Well, my only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

A few moments later the Kid passed the astonished group of schoolboys, mounted on a grey mustang, and riding up the canyon. He waved his stetson to them as he passed, with a cheery grin, and disappeared up the winding canyon.

From what the juniors had seen, there was no way out at the upper end of the canyon, shut in by inaccessible rocks. But the Kid, doubtless, found ways that were hidden from the eyes

of the schoolboys: for he did not return.

"Well, this beats it!" said Harry Wharton. "We owe that chap a good deal, whether he's an outlaw or not—Barney Stone had us cornered, and if he'd kept us cornered till his gang turned up, we should have been in a fearful scrape. The sooner we get out of this, the better."

"Come on!" said Bob.

The Famous Five mounted their broncos, and, leading Bunter's steed on the rope, rode down the canyon, and out on the plain.

As they had learned from the Kid that Bunter was back at the ranch, there was no need to return for the fat Owl and they pushed on up the river in search of the missing bunch of cows.

They were thinking, as they went, of that handsome, boyish puncher, whom they could hardly believe was the celebrated outlaw, the Rio Kid: and wondering whether they would ever see anything more of him. Outlaw or not, the Kid had helped them out of a bad scrape, and they had very kindly feelings towards the "fire-bug" who was hunted by the Texas Rangers.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Trail of the Kid!

BILL gave a nod of approval.

"They got 'em!" he said.

"They sure have, old-timer!" said Vernon-Smith.

The sun was setting behind Squaw Mountain, and shadows lengthening on the prairie, when a dusty bunch of cows came trampling up to the ranch: driven by five dusty and tired schoolboys, one of whom led a bronco on a rope.

There were twenty cows in the bunch: and as only twenty-two had been missing from their range, this was quite good work on the part of the schoolboy cow-punchers.

A slim, tanned man, of small stature standing by the ranch gate, glanced at the juniors as they came with the cows.

Bill went out to take them off the hands of the juniors and Harry Wharton & Co. were glad enough to ride in. They had had a hard day on the prairie trails, with their perilous adventure in Squaw Mountain thrown in.

"Your school friends?" asked Jim Hall, glancing at Vernon-Smith.

"Yes," answered the Bounder. "They've been lending a hand at punching the cows."

Hall watched the juniors as they came in and dismounted. He had not been long back at the ranch himself. He had come in weary from a long trail, and with knitted brows and set lips, having failed once more to "put salt on the tail" of that elusive "hombre," the Rio Kid.

He was not staying long at the ranch. After rest and refreshment, the rangers were to ride again that night. Whether Hall "got" the Rio Kid or not, he was, at all events, sticking grimly to his trail.

Harry Wharton & Co. dismounted, nodded to the Bounder, and handed their horses over to Cactus. They noticed at once the lean, grim-faced ranger, and wondered whether he was the "Mule-Kick Hall" for whom the Rio Kid had given them that mocking message.

"This is Captain Hall, of the Texas Rangers, you fellows!" said the Bounder, and Hall gave them a curt nod in acknowledgment.

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"You been up the Squaw River?" asked Hall.

"Yes, right up the river," answered Harry.

"You ain't seen any sign of a young guy on a grey mustang with a black muzzle?"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Yes, we've met him!" he answered.

Hall's face was swiftly alert. He had little expected such an answer when he asked the question.

"You've met the Rio Kid?" exclaimed the Bounder in astonishment.

"That very identical guy!" grinned Bob Cherry. "And jolly glad to meet him, too. Have you heard that Barney Stone has escaped from the calaboose, Smithy?"

"What?"

"Well, he has, and he had us cornered in Squaw Mountain, and that chap they call the Rio Kid got us out of it."

"Spill it!" snapped Hall.

He listened intently while the juniors told. The Bounder whistled in astonishment: Hall's face grew harder and grimmer.

While he had been hunting on the prairie, his quarry had disappeared into the inaccessible recesses of Squaw Mountain. But he was glad, at least, to get a "line" on the latest movements of the elusive Kid.

"Yep," he said slowly, "that's the Kid all over! It sure was the Kid—doggone him!"

"He did us a good turn!" said Frank Nugent, mildly.

Hall gave a grunt.

"He gave us a message for you, too!" said Bob Cherry. "That is, if you're called Mule-Kick Hall—that's the name he used."

"That's me! Shoot!" snapped Hall.

"He said he would be waiting for you in Squaw Mountain, and would be powerful pleased to see you come!" said Bob, with a faint grin.

Jim Hall's square jaw shut like a vice.

"I guess I won't keep him waiting long!" he said grimly. "Give me the bearings of that canyon—I guess I'm hitting it before the sun's gone."

Harry Wharton & Co. paused. After the good turn the outlaw Kid had done them they certainly did not feel keen to help the hunters on his track. Outlaw he was, fire-bug he might be: but they owed him a debt of gratitude.

Hall stared at them.

"Shoot!" he repeated. "I ain't got time to burn, if I'm going to hit Squaw Mountain before dark."

The juniors exchanged doubtful glances. But Wharton made up his mind. It was little likely that the Kid had lingered where they had left him, long hours since: moreover, his message of defiance to the ranger captain meant that he did not care a boiled bean for Hall's pursuit.

So Wharton gave a description of the canyon, as well as he could—Hall listening keenly. Then with a grunt by way of acknowledgment, Mule-Kick Hall strode away to call his men.

"That chap," remarked Bob Cherry, "doesn't seem to believe in wasting words. Blessed if I wish him luck after that Kid chap."

"Same here!" agreed Wharton.

"The samefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "The esteemed Kid may be an execrable outlaw, but he was a stitch in time when he butted in and put paid to the ridiculous Barney."

"He brought Bunter in on his mustang!" said Vernon-Smith, as the juniors walked across to the rancho. "Must be a good-natured sort of sports-

man. You fellows had a lucky escape—we're going to have trouble, now Barney Stone is loose again. I want to know how he got away," added the Bounder, knitting his brows. "This means a heap of trouble till he's rounded up again."

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter, as the Famous Five came up on to the veranda. "I say, have you been looking for me all this time! He, he, he!"

Bunter was grinning all over his fat face. He seemed to find something amusing in the idea that the Famous Five, not finding him where they had left him, had been hunting for him.

"No!" answered Bob Cherry, cheerily. "We've been looking for cows, old fat man—no time to go pig hunting."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. "Why didn't you bring back my horse? I waited hours for you, till that fellow turned up, and gave me a lift home. But for that, I should have missed dinner! Fat lot you would have cared!" added Bunter, witheringly.

"Not a boiled bean!" agreed Bob.

"Beast!"

Chick put out his head and announced supper, for which the Famous Five, after long hours of cowpunching, were almost as ready as Billy Bunter.

As they sat down, they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on the prairie. Hall and his men were riding away from the ranch, to take up once more the trail of the outlaw of the Rio Grande.

"I say, you fellows, they're after that chap again!" said Bunter. "I say, he's an outlaw, you know, and there's a reward of a thousand dollars for him. That's a lot of money! If I'd known, you know, I could have bagged him—"

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I had him right in reach, you know, sitting on that horse with him!" said Bunter. "What are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Billy Bunter "bagging" the outlaw who defied the Texas Rangers, made the juniors howl. They really could not think that the fat Owl would have had much luck, if he had started bagging the Rio Kid.

"Still, on the whole, I don't think I'd have collared him!" said Bunter, considerably. "He gave me a lift, you know—he was jolly good natured. I think I'd have let him off, anyhow."

"I think you would!" agreed Bob, chuckling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The next morning, the chums of the Remove were rather keen to hear news of the boy outlaw. The rangers did not return to the ranch: but later in the day, a puncher rode in with news of them—Mule-Kick Hall and his men were camped on Squaw Mountain—and had not yet "cinched" the "fire-bug" of the Rio Grande. And Harry Wharton & Co. could not help feeling a little relieved to hear it.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Perplexing!

SHERIFF LICK gave a grunt.

"We'll sure get him!" he said.

"You young geeks had better watch out till we rope him in—but we'll sure get him."

Harry Wharton & Co. did not feel quite so assured of that as the Sheriff of Packsaddle appeared to be.

It was late in the afternoon. The



Harry Wharton placed his stetson hat on the end of his rifle and pushed it out into view. Crack! A bullet sent the hat spinning. The man on the rocky canyon wall was watching like a hawk!

Greyfriars fellows had ridden over to the cow town to see the sheriff and learn how Barney Stone had made his get-away.

Mr. Lick did not seem to be in a good temper. No doubt he was annoyed by the escape of his prisoner.

"But how did he get away?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I guess one of his side-kickers was around!" grunted the sheriff. "Nosey Pete has the room at the calaboose, and I guess he ain't never let a prisoner get by him afore. Some guy called 'Fire!' at the door at midnight—and when Pete put his head out he got a sockdolager on it with the butt of a gun, and I guess he never woke up till morning!"

The sheriff snorted.

"I'll say I've talked to Pete a few," he went on. "But that won't fetch that piecan back! Nope! It was one of Barney's side-kickers, and he had a hoss for him, I reckon—anyhow, he was gone before sun-up, and I guess we got to rope him in agin! But we'll got him!"

The juniors rode away down the cow town street, leaving the sheriff snorting.

Vernon-Smith's face was thoughtful as they trotted out of Packsaddle and took the trail for the ranch.

"I guess," he remarked—the Bouncer was always "guessing" since he had been in Texas—"I guess I can spill the name of that side-kicker of Barney who helped him out of the calaboose."

He knitted his brows.

"It's a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent," he went on. "It was that rascal Panhandle. He got leave from Bill to ride into town, and stayed the night without leave—and I can guess what he stayed for."

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Harry Wharton. "We had an idea all along that he was hand in glove with Barney Stone."

"And he came back to the ranch to

play at gun-play with Bill!" went on Smithy. "I've no doubt that the best news he could carry to Barney would be that the new foreman was shot up."

"He didn't have much luck, from what you've told us!" said Harry.

The Bouncer laughed.

"No; Bill quirted him off the ranch. I guess he was sorry he tried gun-play with Bill Buck. But—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, glancing back, at a sound of galloping hoofbeats behind on the trail. "Talk of angels!"

"Panhandle!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

All the juniors looked back. They were about a mile out of the town, when the horseman came after them at a gallop. It was Panhandle, the suspected confederate of Barney Stone, whom they had just been discussing.

Vernon-Smith's face set grimly. He hitched his belt, quite in the manner of a gunman, to bring a butt nearer his hand.

"Hold on!" he said. "If that sportsman's looking for more trouble we'll give him all he wants, and a little over."

The juniors sat their horses at a halt by the trail, waiting for the cowman to come up.

Panhandle had evidently seen them in the cow town, and followed them, and they wondered whether his intentions were hostile. If he was, as they believed, the side-kicker of Barney Stone, he could scarcely have friendly intentions, especially after having been quirted off the ranch by Buckskin Bill's heavy hand.

So they were on their guard as Panhandle came clattering up, and pulled in his horse when he had overtaken them.

But Panhandle, if his thoughts were hostile, did not betray any hostility in

his looks. He jerked at his stetson in a civil salute.

"I guess I seen you in town, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he said. "I reckoned I'd ride after you to speak to you, sir."

The Bouncer looked at him, keenly perplexed. He was quite prepared for the handling of a quirt, and he would not have been surprised at gun-play; but he did not understand the puncher's civility.

"Spill it!" he said.

"Bill Buck fired me off'n the ranch yesterday, sir!" said Panhandle. "I ain't denyin' that I give him some lip—mebbe I wasn't used yet to a noo foreman. It sure does get my goat, sir, to quit Kicking Cayuse, where I've rode with the bunch ever since I came from the Panhandle country. I reckoned, sir, that you might put in a word for me with your foreman, sir, and let me come back."

"Oh!" said Smithy.

"You being the owner's son, sir!" said Panhandle.

"Bill runs the ranch!" said Vernon-Smith. "Bill wouldn't stand for the owner's son hornin' in—even if I wanted to."

"Mebbe not, sir," admitted Panhandle. "I'll say that Bill Buck mightn't have no use for orders from the owner's son, or the owner himself, but mebbe you'd put in a word and ask him to chew it over agin, sir."

The Bouncer sat silent on his bronco, his face very thoughtful and a curious look in his eyes as he scanned the puncher's face.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not speak.

They waited to hear Vernon-Smith rap out a curt refusal. He believed, as they did, that Panhandle had been Barney's confederate in his dealings with the rustlers, and suspected, or more

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(Continued from page 13.)

than suspected, that he was the man who had stunned the gaoler at the calaboose with a gun-butt and let Barney loose. So it was not likely that Smithy would make any move to get the "fired" cowman back on the ranch.

But the Bounder seemed to be thinking it out.

He nodded at last.

"If you come back, Panhandle, you've got to get it down that Bill Buck's foreman of the ranch and that the bunch have to jump to his orders!" said the Bounder.

"Sure, sir!" said Panhandle eagerly.

"I can't say yes or no," went on Vernon-Smith, "but I'll speak to Bill and ask him as a favour to take you back in the bunch, Panhandle. That's all I can say; but Bill's a good-natured guy, and I've no doubt it will be O.K."

The Famous Five simply blinked at Herbert Vernon-Smith.

That a word from him would induce the good-natured Bill to take the fired cowman back into the bunch they had no doubt. But they were amazed that Smithy was prepared to speak that word after what he had been saying on the subject of Panhandle.

"I guess that's O.K., sir!" said Panhandle, and his face showed that he was satisfied. "You can tell Bill, sir, that he ain't got no more backchat coming from me. I'll tell all Texas I'm ready to jump when Bill says jump."

"Leave it at that, then," said Vernon-Smith. "Ride into Kicking Cayuse in the morning and ask Bill. I'll put in a word when I get back."

"I'll say I'm obliged, sir!" said Panhandle, and, saluting the son of the owner of Kicking Cayuse very civilly, he wheeled his bronco and rode back to the cow town.

The juniors resumed their way—Vernon-Smith with a faintly sardonic grin on his face, and the other fellows looking as they felt, puzzled.

"You mean what you said to that chap, of course, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton at last.

"Sure!" said Smithy.

"That means that Panhandle will be coming back to the ranch."

"You said it!"

"Well, I'm blessed if I can make you out!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "Don't you believe any longer that that man was a confederate of Barney Stone?"

Smithy laughed.

"I'm more sure of it than ever!" he answered. "Kicking Cayuse isn't the only ranch in Texas; Panhandle could look for a job in another bunch, but he's fearfully keen on coming back to Kicking Cayuse. It isn't because he pulls well with the bunch, either; he's too much of a bully and a gun-slinger to be popular in the bunkhouse. But he's got his reasons."

"His reasons are plain enough, I think!" said Harry. "We may be wrong about the man, of course; but, if we're right, he's simply coming back as a spy of Barney Stone."

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"Plain as Bunter's face!" said Bob Cherry.

"Think so?" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Johnny Bull. "It's plain enough to all of us, and you know it as well as we do, Smithy."

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"Surest thing you know, as Bill says," admitted the Bounder. "But that scoundrel doesn't know that we know it. If we let him back on the ranch it will be as good as proof to him that he's not suspected. Let him spy for Barney Stone if he likes—he may turn out more useful to us than to Barney!"

"Blessed if I see——"

"My dear innocents," drawled the Bounder, "I can see Barney's game as plain as if he laid out the cards under my nose. He hoped to get the news that Bill had been shot up in gun-play with Panhandle. Instead of that, he's got the news that Panhandle was quitted off the ranch, and will think twice, or three times, before he pulls a gun on Bill again! So what's his next move? Getting the skunk back on the ranch as a spy! Barney's an outlaw now, working with the rustlers of Squaw Mountain—with a special eye on Kicking Cayuse herds! A man in the bunch playing his game for him would be very useful to Barney."

"Well, if you can see all that——" said Bob.

"I'm not blind!" said Vernon-Smith, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yet you're letting the man come back!" exclaimed Bob.

"Sure, if I can fix it with Bill!"

"Well, it's your bizney," said Bob. "But I think you're an ass, Smithy!"

"Perhaps!" said the Bounder, laughing.

And the subject dropped as the juniors rode back to Kicking Cayuse. It was, as Bob said, the Bounder's business, and, perplexed as they were, they gave no more heed to the matter.

But as soon as they arrived at the ranch, Vernon-Smith sought out Bill at once, to put in the promised word for Panhandle. As the juniors expected, the good-natured foreman agreed at once to give Panhandle another chance.

"I guess I ain't got no kick coming," said Bill. "I sure did hate to fire one out of the bunch; and if Panhandle's got a spot of hoss-sense into that moss head of his'n, I'll sure sign him on ag'in; and if he ain't, I'll quirt him off Kicking Cayuse like I did afore!"

When Panhandle turned up in the morning, he seemed to have acquired the necessary spot of "hoss-sense," for his manner to Bill was extremely civil and respectful; and he was duly signed on again, turned his horse into the corral, and pitched his slicker roll into his old bunk in the bunkhouse.

Bill, who was a simple and unsuspecting guy, had no suspicions; but to Harry Wharton & Co., it meant that the rustlers of Squaw Mountain had a spy on the ranch. That Smithy believed as they did, they knew, and they could only wonder; but his thoughts on the subject the Bounder kept to himself.

—

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Raid on the Ranch!

"I'LL tell a man!" roared Bill.

Bill's voice was both loud and deep.

Bill was "mad"—mad as a hornet.

Harry Wharton & Co., coming out

into the veranda of the rancho after breakfast, heard Bill's roar, and wondered what was up.

Bill was standing by the corral, his bronzed, bearded face red with wrath. Yuba Dick stood before him, his reins looped under his arm, his dusty bronco at his side, and a bandage showing under his stetson. Yuba looked as if he had been through trouble.

"Something's up!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Doggone my cats!" roared Bill.

"Sounds like it!" grinned Nugent.

"The soundfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Carry me home to die!" roared Bill.

"I guess this gets my goat! I'll sure tell that big stiff Lick what I think about him! I surely will! Search me!"

"Come on!" said the Bounder, with a grin.

And the juniors went across to see what was "up."

A number of the punchers were gathering round, and all faces were serious. Evidently there had been some untoward happening, and the juniors wondered what it was. There was a dull crimson showing through the bandage on Yuba's head; the puncher had been wounded.

"What's the trouble, Bill?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Bill snorted.

"That big stiff Lick let Barney Stone make his getaway from the calaboose," he roared, "and Barney sure has let us know that he ain't forgot the Kicking Cayuse! You sure you seen him, Yuba?"

"Sure!" grunted Yuba. "It was Barney fired on me, and I guess if it had gone an inch closer, I wouldn't have hit the ranch ag'in to tell you!"

"But what——" asked Harry.

"Them pesky rustlers!" snorted Bill.

"Barney's jined up with his side-kickers; now he's got loose—like I knowed he would! That pesky piecan Lick can't rope in that scallawag—nope! They been rustling cows last night; they've driven Yuba's bunch off'n the Frio range, and I guess they came mighty near making it last sickness for that guy!"

The juniors understood now.

Three or four days had elapsed since the escape of Barney Stone from the calaboose at Packsaddle. He had not been seen or heard of since the Famous Five had encountered him on Squaw Mountain till now. But they had all expected to hear of him again, and now they heard.

In former days, as foreman of the ranch, Barney had leagued with the rustlers to run off Kicking Cayuse cows. Now that he was an outlaw, hunted by the sheriff and his deputies, he was playing the same game without disguise. What he had been secretly, he had now become openly. It was no surprise to the juniors or to Bill. But evidently it got Bill's "goat" to hear that a herd had been run off a Kicking Cayuse range.

Yuba Dick had been riding herd over that bunch of cows six or seven miles from the ranch. The herd was gone, and here was Yuba, with a bandaged head, grazed by a bullet from the leader of the ranch raiders.

"They got the cows in the night?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Sure! A hundred cows!" answered Yuba. "There was six or seven of the doggoned bushwhackers. I guess I burned powder, sir, when they started driving the cows, and that got-darned

scallawag Barney put it across me. I reckon he figured I'd got it for keeps when I went down. I'll say I never woke up till after dawn. They was gone with the cows, and I got back to put Bill wise."

"We're getting after them, Bill?" asked Smithy.

"You said it!" growled Bill. "But I guess that they got that bunch safe hidden in Squaw Mountain afore sun-up. But we sure getting after them, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir! We got to take the outfit off'n the ranch, and get after them doggoned rustlers!"

"We're helping!" said Harry Wharton.

"You bet!" said Bob.

Bill nodded, and proceeded to roar orders to the punchers. Every available man on the ranch was wanted now.

The work of the ranch had to be let slide while the stolen herd was followed. There was at least a chance of getting in touch with the ranch raiders and getting back the rustled cows. Bill was ready to jump at the remotest chance, and every man at Kicking Cayuse was called on to ride.

Nine or ten punchers gathered and saddled up, and the Greyfriars fellows lost no time in preparing to join them. Bill, perhaps, did not expect the school-boys to be a lot of use on such a trail; still, every rifle counted if it came to a show-down with a gang of rustlers, and Smithy and his comrades were not going to be left out.

They hurried into the rancho for their rifles.

Billy Bunter, in a rocker on the veranda, blinked at them.

"I say, you fellows—" he squeaked.

But they had no time for Bunter. They ran into the rancho, and came out again, rifle under arm, and clattered down the steps.

"I say, you fellows," yelled Bunter wrathfully—"I say, where are you going. Look here, wait for me—see?"

"Oh, all right!" called back Bob Cherry. "Buck up, Bunter, if you want to take a hand! You'll come in jolly useful to stop the bullets!"

"The what?" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, where are you going?"

"After the rustlers!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Come on, Bunter!" grinned Bob.

"Oh! The fact is, you fellows, I don't feel much like riding this morning!" gasped Bunter. "You needn't wait for me!"

And the juniors didn't. They would have had to wait an extremely long time for Billy Bunter to join up on a hunt for an armed and desperate gang of rustlers!

Bill and his men were already in the saddle. The Famous Five and the Bouncer mounted and rode out after them.

Hardly a word was spoken as the bunch swept away at a gallop for the range where the cows had been driven. It was very soon reached, and the trail of the driven cows was plain enough for even Billy Bunter to have picked it up. The trampling hoofs of a hundred cows had left plenty of "sign," and the pursuers were able to follow it without drawing rein.

The trail led westward, and there was no doubt that the rustlers, under cover of night, had driven the herd to Squaw Mountain, perhaps beyond.

As they had so many hours' start of the pursuit, prospects were not very hopeful, for there were a hundred inaccessible hiding-places in the extensive and untrodden wilderness of Squaw

Mountain. But the pursuers pushed on fast, to make the best of what chance there was.

Clear to the most careless eye, the trail of the herd led across the prairie, nearer and nearer to the great mountain, and led at last into a rocky gulch, a mile or so from the canyon where the Famous Five had encountered Barney Stone.

"That lets us out, I fancy," Vernon-Smith remarked to his comrades. "There won't be much sign on the rocks."

"Not likely!" agreed Bob.

Bill probably had little hope, but he rode into the gulch at a slower pace, scanning the rocky soil as he went.

The gulch led to a high, open, rocky hillside, where the stony, acrid earth could hardly be expected to retain sign. It was easy enough in such a locality for the rustlers to "blind" their trail, and the stolen herd might have been driven in any of a dozen different directions, once through the gulch.

Bill Buck pulled in his horse on the hill and glared round him under the brim of his stetson.

Wide and bare, arid and hot in the glare of the Texas sun, the rocky hillside stretched before him. He gestured to the punchers to scatter and look for sign.

There was a sudden shout from Panhandle, and he leaped from his horse. He picked up a quirt—evidently dropped by one of the rustlers. He held it in the air, and Bill dashed towards him.

"I guess they rode this way!" said Panhandle.

"Surest thing you know!" agreed Bill, his eyes gleaming. "Ride on, you 'uns—that sure puts us wise the way they went."

The party rode on. Unexpectedly, sign cropped up again, in the shape of a trampled juniper bush. And then again, in a softer patch of earth, hoof-marks of cows and broncos were plainly read.

Bill's eyes glittered under his knitted brows.

"I'll tell a man!" he exclaimed. "We sure are trailing them rustlers! I guess Barney Stone won't get them cows away so easy as he figures! I'll tell a man from Texas, we got the goods on him."

And, led by sign after sign of the passage of the rustlers and the stolen cows, the Kicking Cayuse bunch rode hopefully on into the heart of the rocky wilderness of Squaw Mountain.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Awful for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER sat in the rocker on the veranda, and blinked at a bunch of horsemen approaching the ranch at a gallop.

He blinked peevishly.

It was long past midday; and at mid-day it was time for dinner at the ranch. Bunter was very far from satisfied with Chick, the choreman, and the services he rendered as the entire household staff. Now he was less satisfied than ever—for Chick had joined up with the bunch that rode on the trail of the rustlers, every available man being needed. Even Hank, the ranch cook, was gone; and the only man left at Kicking Cayuse was William George Bunter!

For which reason, Bunter had had to scrounge a dinner for himself.

Fortunately, he had found plenty of "cats" in Chick's kitchen. And, equally fortunate, cooking was the kind of work that Bunter disliked least.

Still, he was not pleased.

This, Bunter considered, was not the sort of thing that a fellow had a right to expect when he came out on a holiday! He had no doubt that Herbert Vernon-Smith, and the other fellows, had not given a single thought to his dinner, or to himself! It was just like them!

Spotting that bunch of horsemen approaching the ranch, the fat Owl supposed that it was the ranch outfit returning. He blinked at them morosely as they came; but failed to pick out any of the Greyfriars fellows among them. There were six men in the bunch; and one of them, who rode a little ahead of the others, seemed familiar to Bunter's eyes—and he gave a startled jump when he recognised the lean brown face of Barney Stone.

He rose from the rocker, fixing his eyes, and his spectacles, on the approaching horsemen—coming at a fast gallop.

The leader was Barney Stone, once foreman of Kicking Cayuse; now a hunted outlaw and cattle-thief in the hills. The others Bunter did not know; but they looked the roughest and toughest gang he had ever seen since he had arrived in Texas.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

Why Barney Stone was riding to the ranch was a mystery to him. Had Bill and the bunch been at home, the outlawed foreman would have been roped in at once, under the muzzle of a gun.

Then it dawned on his fat brain that Barney knew that Bill and the bunch were gone, and had taken advantage of that absence to visit the ranch.

Bill and the bunch, as a matter of fact, were a good fifteen miles away, at that moment, following sign in Squaw Mountain, which they did not yet suspect had been intentionally left for them to follow.

Bunter was not aware of that circumstance; but he knew that Bill and the bunch were away; and he could guess that Barney Stone and his gang did not expect them to return yet awhile, or they would not have ventured to show themselves near the ranch.

Bill had gathered every available man for the pursuit, even to the choreman and the cook. Even Yuba Dick, with his bandaged head, had gone. Billy Bunter was left on his own—alone, unaided, like Coriolanus of old—and the roughest and toughest gang of bush-whackers in Texas were coming at full gallop!

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the rapid riders. They were quite close at hand when he recognised Barney Stone; and there was no time for Bunter to get hold of a horse and ride—even if he could have kept on the horse, which was doubtful.

He blinked at the oncoming riders with a terrified blink; and then rolled through the doorway into the living-room.

Flight was impossible; and what was going to happen to him when those wild and reckless roughnecks arrived, Bunter did not know—and did not want to learn by experience! Bunter hunted cover.

He heard the trampling hoofs as he dodged into the ranch-house, his fat heart palpitating. The rustlers were riding in. Evidently they knew that the ranch was unguarded; for Barney Stone rode in at the gate as unhesitatingly as

if he had still been foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

Billy Bunter ducked and dodged under the table in the living-room.

It was a large table, and he was quite out of sight there, unless some of the gang stooped, and looked under. Bunter hoped that they wouldn't!

Under the table the fat Owl palpitated.

Through the open doorway, he heard the voice of Barney Stone. Every tone of that harsh voice was familiar to his fat ears.

"Shoot on sight, you 'uns!"

"You bet, Barney!"

"I guess them geeks are fur enough away, following the sign we left for them, the doggoned stiffs! But shoot on sight if you see a guy on the ranch."

Billy Bunter trembled in all his fat limbs.

Barney knew that Bill and the bunch were away; but he did not know that not a man had been left on the ranch. The fat junior could hear trampling and shouting as the gang scattered over the ranch, gun in hand, prepared to "shoot on sight"—if they found any of the Kicking Cayuse bunch at home. Barney's feelings, evidently, were bitter against the outfit he had once commanded.

"Oh scissors!" breathed Bunter.

There was a heavy tramp in the veranda. A pair of cowman's boots appeared in the range of Bunter's terrified vision from under the table. They were followed by another pair.

"Seems like the whole bunch is gone, Euchre!" It was Barney Stone's harsh voice.

"You said it, Barney!" Bunter heard a chuckle. "I guess Bill Buck was mighty keen to get to a show-down—he's done taken the whole bunch with him. This is sure pie for us!"

"Search me!" said Barney. "I'd have been glad to find them young geeks here—and specially the owner's son, doggone him. But they done all followed Bill, I reckon. I guess I'll give the rancho the once-over—I sure would like to find that goldarned young geek Vernon-Smith to home."

He tramped through the living-room to the hall-way, and Bunter heard his heavy tread on the stairs. The man Euchre followed him, but went into Chick's kitchen, and Bunter heard a clatter of pots and pans. Euchre was evidently thinking of "eats."

Barney came clattering down the stairs again.

"I guess they're all lit out!" Bunter heard his voice. "But we ain't got time to burn, Euchre—there's men out on the ranges, and they sure might ride in. I guess that if word of this got to Pack-saddle, Sheriff Lick would hump himself to get on our trail. I'll say we got to be sly."

"You said it, Barney!" Euchre's voice came muffled through a mouthful. "But I guess we got time for eats."

"Aw, can it, you gink, and follow me!" snapped Barney. "We got to get the hosses out of the corral! I guess they won't give us time to run off cows—cows is too slow; but we got a bunch of hosses that's worth two thousand dollars, if we get them clear—and I guess that's what we're sure going to do."

Bunter heard them tramp out of the house by the door on the hall-way.

He gave a gasp of relief.

He hoped that they were gone for good.

It was certain that the ranch raiders had, as Barney said, no time to "burn." Deserted and unguarded as the ranch

was at the moment, Barney's raid was a reckless and desperate one. Bill had taken every available man in pursuit of the rustlers; but there were a score of the outfit out on the ranges, and any of them might have ridden in. Sheriff Lick and his men might have appeared, hunting for Barney himself. Bill and the bunch might return at any time. Jim Hall and the Texas Rangers were somewhere in the vicinity.

Barney, at the moment, had the ranch at his mercy; but every moment was packed with peril for the raiders. In fact, the raid was so desperate, that it was probable that his motive was revenge, as much as the hope of plunder. Bunter knew that he had been disappointed not to find Vernon-Smith at home.

Driving cows was too slow work for the rascals who were raiding the ranch in broad daylight, and who might have to flee at full gallop. But the horses in the corral were a valuable prize, and could be led off "on the rope," as fast as the horse-thieves could ride.

Through the open doorway Bunter could hear the trampling and squealing, as the horses were gathered from the corral and put in "strings" to be led away by the raiders.

Every moment he hoped to hear the trampling die away on the prairie. But there was no sound as yet of the raiders' departure.

Instead of that there came a heavy tramping in the veranda, and from under the table Bunter had a horrified view of a whole assortment of dusty and muddy cowmen's boots. The whole crew seemed to be coming in. The fat Owl could have groaned aloud, though he was very careful not to do so. Apparently they were stopping for "eats" before they rode away with the stolen horses.

Barney Stone, in fact, had gone along to the foreman's office to search it for possible plunder. Bunter heard a distant crash which sounded like breaking furniture. He had no doubt that the roll-top desk in the office was going to pieces in a search for loot. That did not worry Bunter. He was not deeply concerned about the cash kept in that desk, but he was fearfully concerned about his own fat self.

Two or three of the ruffians tramped through to the kitchen. Others flung themselves into the chairs at the table. Bunter dodged in a hurry as a pair of long legs were shoved under the table, and a pair of large and dusty boots almost banged on his fat little nose.

As he dodged back, another pair of boots on the other side of the table poked into his plump back.

He wriggled away, suppressing a squeak of terror. There was a surprised exclamation from above.

"Search me! Is that a doggoned dog under the pesky table?"

Bunter hardly breathed.

A stetson hat, and a rough-bearded face under it, appeared in his view. The man who had kicked him was looking under the table to see what he had kicked.

Bunter blinked at that terrifying face. The rustler stared blankly at Bunter. He goggled at him in his surprise.

"Carry me home to Hanner!" he gasped.

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Bunter.

"What you got there, Pecos Pete?" asked Euchre. "What—"

"Search me!" gasped Pecos Pete.

And he reached under the table, grabbed Bunter by the collar, and jerked him out into view, wriggling like a fat eel, and yelling with terror at the top of his voice.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Choreboy!

"Y A R O O O H!" roared Billy Bunter.

He wriggled wildly.

"I say—yaroooh! I say, did-dod-don't shoot me!" howled Bunter. "I say, it wasn't me! Oh crikey! I say—ow! Wow!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" came a roar from the rustlers.

Pecos Pete held the fat Owl, wriggling, at armslength. The whole gang stared at him and roared with laughter.

Bunter, wriggling, squirming, his fat face frantic with terror, his spectacles slipping down his fat little nose, his eyes popping over them, seemed to strike the Squaw Mountain gang as comic.

He was not feeling comic. He was feeling awful, fearful, frightened out of his fat wits.

"Say, what you got, Pete?" howled Euchre. "You done roped in a pig under the table? Haw, haw, haw!"

"I guess that fat gink was hiding!" chuckled Pecos. "He sure took cover when he saw us around. Say, you fat gopher, didn't you want to meet up with this here crowd?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wasn't hiding, you know. I—I wanted to meet you very much. I—I think you're so—so nice!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the rough-necks.

Perhaps it was just as well for Bunter that he struck them as funny, and not at all dangerous. It was, at least, a relief to him, though not perhaps flattering, to be taken as a joke. He had been in awful dread of hearing a six-gun roar.

He knew that Barney Stone had fired on the Famous Five in Squaw Mountain, and it did not occur to his fat brain that Barney, who would have "shot up" Smithy and his friends without mercy, regarded his fat and fatuous self with contemptuous disregard, and certainly would not have wasted a cartridge on him.

Certainly none of the gang, lawless and rough as they were, had any idea of loosing off their six-guns at Bunter. They roared with laughter as the fat junior wriggled and howled.

"You the only guy to home?" demanded Pecos. "Nobody else hiding under a table or sich?"

"Ow! No!" gasped Bunter. "The beasts left me here all alone! Oh dear! I wish I'd gone with them now! Oh crikey!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Say that fat gink can hand in the eats!" exclaimed Euchre. "You make yourself useful, buddy, and mebber we won't fill you full of lead!"

"Oh, yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I'd like to, no end!"

"Jump to it!" said Pecos.

He released the fat Owl's collar, and Billy Bunter promptly "jumped" to it.

Work of any kind never agreed with Bunter. He disliked it with a deep, abiding, unchanging dislike; but he jumped to work now as if he loved it. Chick, the choreman, in his most active moments, had never jumped to it as William George Bunter did now.

Only too glad was the fat junior to make himself useful to the gang of roughnecks and escape their brutality.

He scuttled into the kitchen, collared Chick's tray, loaded it with eats, and bore it back to the living-room.

He opened cans, he opened bottles; he fetched and he carried, he carried and fetched; and in his terror utterly forgot that he was lazy.

Five grinning ruffians sat or sprawled



Vernon-Smith swung his quirt in the air, and then brought it down on the heap of bedclothes. The heap stirred quite suddenly, and the fat face of Billy Bunter appeared to view. "Ow! I say, keep off!" roared the fat junior. "I wasn't hiding! I say, d-d-don't shoot!"

at the table, packing eats, waited on hand and foot by the terrified Owl of Greyfriars.

There was plenty of provender in Chick's larder, and the roughnecks seemed to have brought good appetites with them from Squaw Mountain. They kept Bunter busy—very busy. Bunter packed more work into a half-hour than he was accustomed to put into a week or a month.

Barney Stone appeared in the doorway from the veranda.

He stared at the sight of Billy Bunter carrying in a laden tray.

"Say, what—" he exclaimed.

"I guess I rooted that fat gink out from under the table, Barney!" chuckled Pecos Pete. "He allows he's the only guy around the ranch."

Bunter plumped the tray on the table and blinked at Barney Stone with a scared blink. He was more afraid of the lean, saturnine Barney than even of the brawny ruffians who were his followers.

"I—I say, I—I'm so glad to see you back, Mr. Stone!" gasped Bunter.

Barney stared at him.

"I—I was so—so sorry when you went!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't like the new foreman half so much, Mr. Stone. He's a—a—a beast! Kik-kik-kik—can I get you some dinner, Mr. Stone? H-h-here's a chick-chick-chair!"

Barney Stone seemed at first in doubt whether to kick Bunter across the living-room. But he grinned faintly, and sat down in the chair Bunter eagerly placed for him instead.

Bunter hurried to supply his wants.

The former foreman of Kicking Cayuse ate hastily, with one eye on the open doorway, where, across the veranda, he had a view of the prairie. He was in haste to be gone while the going was good.

Bunter was glad when the meal finished. He hoped that the dreadful visitors would go.

But, having finished, the roughnecks seemed to be in a mood to have a little fun with Bunter. They found entertainment in pelting him with plates and platters, roaring with laughter as he yelled and dodged and bounded to elude the missiles. Crockery smashed right and left round the unhappy Owl.

Luckily for Bunter, Barney Stone gave the word to "beat" it. The fat Owl could hardly believe that his awful ordeal was over when the roughnecks tramped out at last, and he was left alone in the living-room.

He mopped his perspiring brow.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

A heavy tramping on the trail showed that the Squaw Mountain gang at last were departing.

Bunter cautiously approached the window, and blinked out after them through his big spectacles.

They were mounted in the trail, every one of the gang leading a string of horses.

Bunter watched them with deep thankfulness as they got into motion.

The loss of that swarm of horses was a heavy one to Kicking Cayuse Ranch; but Bunter was not thinking about that. Neither was he thinking about the rolls of greenbacks that Barney had probably found in the office. Billy Bunter did not worry about what the gang took with them, so long as they went. Fortunately they were going.

With a clatter of hoofs the rustlers started, and the whole gang, with the drove of horses, galloped away across the prairie in a cloud of dust.

Gladly Bunter watched that cloud of dust diminish in the distance.

It vanished at last.

Once more Billy Bunter was left alone

on Kicking Cayuse. He rolled out into the veranda, dropped limply into a rocker, and wiped his fat brow.

And when, about an hour later, a bunch of stetson hats appeared on the distant prairie, Billy Bunter gave them a terrified blink, and did not wait for them to get near enough to see who the riders were.

Billy Bunter was not going to be caught by rustlers again!

He bolted into the ranch-house in search of the deepest, darkest corner he could find to hide in—and he was hidden deep when a crowd of horsemen rode clattering up to the ranch.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Where Is Bunter?

"**D**OGGONE my cats!" bellowed Bill Buck.

Bill glared.

He had not returned in a good temper. Neither had the bunch.

They had had a long and weary trail, over the sun-baked rocks of Squaw Mountain. Again and again sign had been found which led the bunch hopefully on; and, rather to the surprise of the Greyfriars fellows, Panhandle had been the most useful in picking up sign.

Several times, when the trail had seemed to be lost, Panhandle had picked up traces, and Bill, with a grunt of approval, had bidden the bunch ride on.

But all sign had petered out at last. Late in the hot afternoon, Bill, after long and vain seeking, had been driven to give it up. There was not a spot of sign to guide the pursuit further, and there was nothing more to be done.

Angry and disappointed, tired and
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dusty and disgruntled, the bunch rode back to Kicking Cayuse.

But if Bill was exasperated by the weary trail that had led to nothing, he was more exasperated by what he found at the ranch on his return.

The corral gate stood wide open. Tracks of innumerable horses showed in the dust. Not a cayuse was left in the corral.

Bill could hardly believe his eyes at what he saw! Not for an instant had it occurred to him that the Squaw Mountain gang would venture to raid Kicking Cayuse.

Rustling of cows had been frequent enough on Kicking Cayuse, and on other ranches in the valley of the Rio Frio; but raids on the ranches themselves were a thing of the distant past in the Packsaddle country. Bill could hardly believe that a gang of rustlers had had the temerity to ride into the ranch in broad daylight, in the absence of the bunch. But he had to believe what he saw.

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill. "I'll surely tell a man from Texas! They've done raided the ranch and rustled the hosses—I'll surely tell a man!"

Bill fairly raged. "By gad!" said the Bounder, setting his lips. "So that was the game!"

"The game?" repeated Harry Wharton.

Smithy gave an angry grunt.

"I wondered why they left so much sign—they could have blinded their trail easily enough on the mountain. They left it for us to follow—to keep us away from the ranch."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I wondered, too, why Panhandle made himself so jolly useful, picking up sign!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "I know now! He was leading us a dance over Squaw Mountain, while his friends got busy here."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"By gum!" he said. "It was a trap, and we walked right into it! Barney Stone's been here while we were on the mountain—"

"And run off the horses!" said Vernon-Smith. "And everything else he could lay his hands on! We've been fooled—"

"Bunter was left here," said Bob, rather anxiously. "I—I suppose they wouldn't do that fat ass any damage—"

"Blow Bunter!" snapped the Bounder.

But the Famous Five did not feel disposed to "blow" Bunter, who had been alone at the ranch when the raiders came. Bunter, certainly, was not likely to make himself troublesome or dangerous, and the roughnecks had no motive for harming him; still, they could not help feeling anxious. They hurried at once to the ranch-house to look for Bunter.

"I'll say they've sure been here!" remarked Chick, as he followed the juniors in. "They been packing cats here, and I'll tell a man from Missouri they left their company manners to home."

The juniors stared round the living-room, which was in a state of utter disorder. Overturned chairs lay about, remnants of food were on the table, and broken crockery scattered all over the floor.

It had not occurred to Billy Bunter to do anything in the way of tidying up after the unwelcome visitors were gone. The place was just as the rustlers had left it, and they had left it looking rather as if a herd of cattle had wandered in.

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"But where's Bunter?" exclaimed Bob.

Bunter was not to be seen.

Chick, regardless of Bunter, tramped to his kitchen, fuming.

The raiders had left plenty of work for Chick, and the choreman proceeded to get busy with it.

But the Famous Five were anxious about Bunter. If the raiders had not harmed him, there was no reason, so far as they could see, why the fat Owl should not have been on view. But he was not to be seen or heard.

"Bunter!" shouted Bob.

"Bunter, old fat bean!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Where are you, Bunter?"

But answer there came none. More and more anxious, the juniors hunted through the rooms on the lower floor. There was no sign of Bunter in any of them. But in the foreman's office they found Vernon-Smith, standing before the roll-top desk, which was smashed almost into splinters.

The Bounder's face was dark and savage.

"Stone's been here!" he said, between his teeth. "Look! The villain's made a haul this time—that lot of horses was worth thousands of dollars, and I don't fancy we shall see hide or hoof of them again—and there was a roll of five thousand dollars here—gone! By gad!"

"Rotten!" said Bob Cherry. "But, I say, we can't find Bunter—"

"Hang Bunter!"

The Famous Five, making no reply to that, left the office and crossed the hall-way to the stairs. Bunter was not on the lower floor; and if he was in the room above, they could not understand why he did not answer their calls. But they hurried up the stairs to search for him.

Swiftly they looked into room after room.

There was no sign of Bunter.

The juniors gathered on the landing in a worried group. It was possible, of course, that Bunter had left the ranch; but it was not probable. He was not likely to have left on foot—and still less likely, perhaps, to have left on a horse.

Where was Bunter?

Vernon-Smith came up the stairs and joined them. The Bounder was intensely irritated—not so much by the loss caused by the raid, heavy as it was, as by the fact that he, like the rest, had been tricked.

For long and weary hours he had trailed over Squaw Mountain in the hot sunshine—only to give Barney Stone time to carry out his raid on the ranch and escape with his plunder! Still, Smithy was not indifferent to the fate of the fat Owl of the Remove—Smithy's bark was always worse than his bite.

"Can't you find the fat ass?" he asked.

"No, he doesn't seem to be in the house!" answered Wharton. "They—they can't have—"

He broke off.

"Rot! Why should they hurt the fat idiot?" grunted Vernon-Smith. "Barney's got his knife into us because we spoiled his game here, and got him on the run—but he's got nothing against Bunter. Besides, if they'd shot him up, he wouldn't be out of sight."

"They can't have bagged him, I suppose?" said Bob.

"Why should they? He's no use, and no ornament." The Bounder gave a snort. "More likely hidden in some corner, and afraid to show up."

"Well, that would be like Bunter!"

admitted Bob. "Let's have another look round. Might have dodged out of sight when they came, and mayn't know they're gone."

The juniors went into Bunter's room to make a closer inspection of the same. There was no sign of Bunter to be seen; but, now that the Bounder had suggested that he might be in hiding, there were other signs, which had escaped their attention at first.

The bedclothes were off Bunter's bed and lay in a heap in a corner of the room. Chick, who made the beds, had had no time to perform his usual duties that morning, having ridden out with Bill and the bunch. So the juniors expected to see the beds unmade. There was, however, no reason why bedclothes should be piled up in a corner of the room—no reason except one!

Vernon-Smith, with a sour grin, stepped towards that heap of bedclothes. He had his quirt under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand, swung it in the air, and brought it down on the heap of bedclothes.

Up to that moment the heap had not stirred. Bunter, if he was under it, was completely hidden from sight; and no doubt the blankets had prevented him from hearing the voices of the juniors calling. The Famous Five wondered whether he was there. But as the Bounder's quirt came down with a terrific whop, they wondered no longer.

"Yoo-hoop!" came a fearful yell from the interior of the heap. It stirred—quite suddenly!

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

Evidently Bunter was found.

A foot shot into view, from under one side of the heap. A fat hand emerged on the other. Then the blankets rolled off, and a fat figure was disclosed, and a pair of little round eyes blinked over a pair of big round spectacles, which had slid down a fat little nose.

"Ow! I say, keep off!" roared Bunter. "I wasn't hiding! I say, d-d-don't shoot! I—I—I'm so glad to see you again, Mr. Stone! I—I always liked you. Oh crikey!"

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

Bunter gave them another blink; then he set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked again.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You fellows! I—I say, is—is it really you?"

"Little us," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Are you as glad to see us as if it was Mr. Stone, that you like so much?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I've had an awful time! They made me wait on them, you know, as if I was a choreman—me, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And when they'd finished, they chucked the plates at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" howled Bunter. "I say, are you sure they're gone? I saw a lot of beasts coming to the ranch, and I thought it was that gang coming back."

"We were the beasts you saw, old fat man," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "And we've been hunting you all over the ranch."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "They ain't coming back?"

"Not likely!"

"Not that I'm afraid of the brutes, of course," said Bunter. His fat courage revived, in the absence of danger. "I didn't hide under those bedclothes

because I was afraid of that crew, you fellows."

"You hid there because you were bursting with pluck?" asked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! I'd like to see you face them as I did, anyhow," said Bunter. "I never hid under the table when they came in, and they never found me through a beast poking his boot in my back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was as cool as a cucumber—I mean, a cucumber. I'd have tackled the whole gang of them, only—"

"Only?" chortled Bob. "Why didn't you, old fat man?"

"Well, you see, there were six of them," explained Bunter. "And—and I don't think I could have handled more than four."

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

And they went down the stairs, yelling.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped by the Kid!

MULE-KICK HALL, captain of the Texas Rangers, gripped his revolver hard, his eyes gleaming under his bent brows.

Those gleaming eyes fixed on a footprint in a mass of Spanish moss.

On the northern side of Squaw Mountain, a great belt of timber stretched for miles into the prairie. And under the great branches of immense cottonwood-trees, through which the sun-rays filtered and glinted, the ranger was searching for sign—sign of the Rio Kid.

Now he had found it.

For days and days, since the meeting at Kicking Cayuse Ranch, the rangers had been hunting the Kid, and doubtful sign had led them northward. But whether the outlaw of the Rio Grande was still in the vicinity of Squaw Mountain, or whether he had ridden on into the solitudes of the Staked Plain, or whether he had doubled back and gone southward, Hall could not know. But he knew that he was sticking to the Kid's trail, while a fragment of hope was left to getting a cinch on the outlaw he had so long hunted.

And now in the thick timber he had found sign—unmistakable sign. His men—more than a dozen of them—were scattered, far and wide, on the hunt. The ranger captain was alone in the timber, and had been alone for hours, gun in hand, watchful as a wolf, or as the Kid himself. He did not fear to meet the Kid alone—he would have been glad to meet him under any conditions. All he feared was that the outlaw would escape him again, as he had escaped him so many times before.

He bent and scanned the sign with intent eyes.

A mass of Spanish moss, fallen from a branch, lay on the earth among the thickets of pecans and trailing junipers. And the footprint was clearly marked in it—the print of a small and handsome riding-boot.

Hall knew the Kid's track; he had followed it often enough. There were few men in the cow country who wore cowman's boots that left so small and neat a track. The ranger's eyes glittered.

He was on the track—unmistakably on the Kid's track. The Rio Kid was in the timber. He had passed that

way, and he had passed recently—the footprint was fresh.

Jim Hall breathed deep. He shot a swift, watchful glance round him, and then, soft and silent as a panther, crept onward through the brush, in the direction indicated by the footprint.

His finger was on the trigger of his six-gun, ready to pull at a sign of the outlaw, at a sound of him. But there was no sound in the deep wood, save the sigh of the wind in the high branches.

Another track, and another. He followed on, watchful, wary. Branches and twigs jutted in his way; he parted them with hardly a sound. Through the thick foliage overhead the glimmering sunshine fell in golden shafts, and glimmered on another and another footprint ahead of him.

Jim Hall was wary as any man in Texas; but with that trail leading on in front of him, he did not expect to discover that the man he hunted was behind him. He made that discovery suddenly.

A grip was laid on his shoulder from behind, and, at the same moment, the muzzle of a six-gun was pressed into the back of his neck, grinding hard into the skin.

"Drop that gun, Jim Hall!" came a soft voice over his shoulder—the pleasant tones of the Rio Kid.

Hall stiffened.

For an instant his grip closed harder on the gun-butt. His rage was so intense that at that moment he almost threw away his life. But he restrained it; he was accustomed to grim self-restraint. It was sudden death to lift a finger. The Kid's gun was grinding into his neck, and he had to obey, or die. He dropped his revolver.

"Put 'em up!"

Critting his teeth, Hall put his hands over his stetson, his back still to the Kid, whom he had not yet seen. But he knew the voice—only too well he knew that voice, soft and pleasant and mocking.

A looped rope was tossed over his uplifted arms. It drew taut, and the Kid knotted it. Then he was allowed to drop his hands, and the Kid took a turn of the rope round him, knotting it again.

There was a soft chuckle.

"I guess you can turn round, Hall, if you hone to give this baby the once-over," said the Kid.

Mule-Kick Hall turned, his eyes burning. The Kid, handsome and smiling, stood before him, shoving his six-gun back into its holster.

He gave Hall a friendly nod.

"We've met up again, Jim," he remarked pleasantly.

Hall choked. His life was at the mercy of the outlaw he had hunted mercilessly. The Kid could have shot him down like a prairie rabbit. He had chosen to cinch him instead.

It was like the Kid. Hunted as he was, his life in his hand, the boy outlaw was not the man to shoot if he could help it.

He seemed amused. The ranger captain's eyes were burning with rage at the Kid—rage at himself. He did not need telling how he had been tricked. He could guess that now—now that it was too late.

"You sure are a lobo-wolf on a guy's track, Jim," went on the Kid, grinning. "I been watching you, and I'll say a guy can learn a lot from you, Jim Hall. I've had my eyes on you ever since you tied up your boss—back there on the edge of the timber. I reckoned you'd fall for it, if I left a

track for you. And I kinda guessed that you wouldn't figure that a galoot made that track walking backwards, Jim, jest to string you along."

"Doggone you!" breathed Hall.

"And you walked into it like a good little man," said the Kid, laughing. "And here we are, Jim, you tied up all good and safe, enjoying a little friendly talk."

"Shoot, darn you!" muttered Hall. "I guess you got me! Shoot, darn you, shoot!"

Hall gave one savage wrench at the rope knotted round him; then he leaned on a tree-trunk, silent, save for his panting breathing.

"You're a hard-boiled cuss, Jim!" went on the Kid. "You sure savvy a whole heap that I wouldn't spill your juice, and you with your fins tied. Why, you big stiff, I've had my gun on you all the time you been hunting me in this here timber! But I guess you know that I wouldn't burn powder unless I was crowded, Jim. And was you crowding me? Not by a jugful!"

Hall said nothing.

Almost he would have preferred the Kid to have fired on him and shot him down as he hunted for sign, rather than have cinched him like this—handling him as easily as an infant.

"Nope," said the Kid, "I ain't spilling your juice, Jim. I'm jest going to talk turkey to you. I'll mention, Jim Hall, that I'm sure tired, and peeved by you sticking on my trail this-a-way. You're going to ride back to the Rio Grande, Jim, and take your bunch with you. I guess if you want to get busy on a trail, there's Five-Hundred-Dollar Smith in the Pecos country that will give you something to do. You're going to give me a rest, Jim."

The Kid's smiling face hardened.

"You're a hard-boiled cuss, Jim, but your word's your bond," he said. "Jest sing out that you'll ride for the Rio Grande, and I'll take that rope off'n you and let you run. Yep?"

"Never!"

"You figure you'd rather leave your bones in this here timber?" asked the Kid.

Hall did not answer.

The Kid eyed him. His hand strayed for a moment to a walnut butt in a holster, but he did not touch it.

"I guess," said the Kid, "that I'll give you time to chew it over, Jim. I got you by the short hairs, and I sure ain't letting you loose again to tell your bunch that the Kid is jest round the corner! Not so's you'd notice it, Jim! Mebbe this time to-morrow you'll have changed your mind."

He stepped to the ranger and took hold of the trail rope that was knotted round him. He ran the rope again and again round the tree behind Hall and knotted it fast. The ranger's strong limbs were fastened as securely as if held in an iron vice.

Then the Kid jerked off his neck-scarf and carefully and scientifically gagged him with it.

"I guess I'll be seeing you agin, Jim," he remarked. "I'll say that you'll wait till I call, like the good little hombre you are!"

The Kid stepped lightly away. As he went he stirred up the trail that had led Mule-Kick Hall into the trap. Not a sign was left that might have guided a hunter through the brush to the spot where the gagged ranger was bound to the tree.

The Rio Kid disappeared in the brush.

Hall could not stir, he could not utter a sound, but he could hear. Faintly from the distance he heard the sound of a horse. The Kid had gone to where he had left his tethered bronco and cast it loose on the prairie. After that there was silence. The captain of the rangers was left alone in the heart of the deep, silent timber with his thoughts—which were black and bitter enough!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hard Pressed!

CRACK, crack!

Herbert Vernon-Smith half-rose in his stirrups and stared round over the sunlit prairie.

The Bounder was far from Kicking Cayuse Ranch that hot afternoon and riding northward, Squaw Mountain looming against the sky on his left.

Harry Wharton & Co. were putting in a busy day helping to "punch" cows; and Smithy had left them to it, with Bill, and mounted and ridden away on his own.

The latest news of the rangers was that they had camped on the northern side of Squaw Mountain, where they were still hunting the Rio Kid.

Vernon-Smith was not giving the outlaw of the Rio Grande any thought; he was heading for the ranger camp for reasons of his own.

Exactly where the camp lay he did not know, except that it was north of the great mountain, but he had no doubt of finding it somewhere between the northern slopes of Squaw and the belt of timber that stretched across the prairie.

The timber was in sight ahead of him, like a dark line across the plain, when sudden shots startled him, and he stared round.

From behind a fold of the prairie which had hitherto hidden them from sight two riders emerged.

They were behind the Bounder, and he must have passed quite near to them, though the rugged irregularities of the prairie had hidden them from him, and him from them.

Now, however, they were in sight; and as they saw him they grabbed six-guns from their belts and opened fire.

A bullet whistled on either side of the Bounder as he stared round at the sudden attack.

Two tanned, bearded, grim faces under stetson hats met his eyes—faces he did not know. But he hardly needed telling that the two roughnecks belonged to Barney Stone's gang of rustlers; that was the only reason why they should have fired at him on sight.

He had never seen them before, so far as he knew; but evidently they knew him. Billy Bunter would have recognised them had he seen them; for they were Euchre and Pecos Pete, and the fat Owl had had the pleasure of waiting on them and handing them "eats" on the day of the raid at Kicking Cayuse.

Smithy gave them only one glance, and then he set spurs to his horse.

Sharp shots rang behind him as he galloped, bending low over the saddle.

There was a crash of galloping hoofs. The two rustlers were riding after him, firing as they rode.

The Bounder rode his hardest. They were between him and the ranch, if he had thought of turning back—which he did not. He was well mounted, and he was armed with rifle and revolver if it came to a fight; but he was not looking

for a desperate affray with two gunmen, if he could help it. With quirt and spur he urged on his bronco, trusting to the speed of the horse.

Somewhere on the plain between the mountain and the forest he expected to find the rangers' camp. The two roughnecks were not likely to follow him near it.

The rangers' business in the Frio valley was to hunt down the Rio Kid, but they would gladly have roped in any of the rustling gang had the opportunity come their way.

The Bounder, riding hard, cast a glance over his shoulder, and he grinned as he saw that he was distancing the roughnecks.

They were still firing, but the distance and the rapid motion of the horses made the shooting wild. Not a shot so far had gone within a dozen feet of the Greyfriars junior.

The timber ahead of him loomed darker and nearer. He swept the plain with his eyes, hoping to see something of the rangers. But there was nothing to meet his view, but the sea of waving grass and the dark line of the timber beyond.

Vernon-Smith intended to keep the timber on his right, the mountain on his left, as he knew that somewhere between the rangers' camp lay. He was swerving a little to the left with that object, when there was a sudden squeal from his bronco.

The animal stumbled and almost fell.

Vernon-Smith shut his teeth as he gripped the reins. The bronco had been struck by a whizzing bullet. One of the rattling shots from behind had told at last—not on the rider, but on the horse.

The Bounder rode on. The bronco galloped, but its speed was lessening. Another shot from the rear went close enough for the Bounder to feel the wind of it as it passed.

The rustlers were gaining now.

Vernon-Smith looked back with glinting eyes. They were coming on fast, gun in hand, gaining at every stride of the horses.

He swerved to the right again and headed direct for the timber, now near at hand. His horse was failing him, and his one idea was to get into cover, which would give him a chance of standing off the attack; on the open prairie he had little enough chance against the two.

Again the bronco stumbled—and again. But it kept on, though at a failing speed. The Bounder wondered whether he would reach the timber alive. Closer and closer loomed the tall trees; a minute more—

Crack, crack, crack! came ringing behind; and the bronco gave a wild leap and crashed over.

The Bounder was on his guard; he leaped clear as the animal fell. In a twinkling he snatched his rifle from the saddle and dashed on towards the trees.

A bullet knocked up a spurt of dust within a foot of him; then he reached cover and backed behind a trunk, his rifle to his shoulder.

Bang! roared the rifle—and bang! again. And the two raiders, still at a distance on the open plain, drew rein.

They separated—Euchre riding to the right, Pecos Pete to the left—with the evident intention of getting at the timber out of range of his rifle, and coming at him through the trees.

The Bounder panted.

He slipped the rifle under the hollow of his arm and plunged deeper into the timber. Farther in the forest it was thicker and closer, with trailing vines

and heavy brush growing between the trunks of the tall trees. The Bounder threaded his way on, leaving as little sign as he could.

He stopped at last, looked back, and listened.

He was deep in the timber, trunks and hanging vines and moss shutting off the view on all sides at a distance of a few feet. He bent his ear to listen.

From a distance came a sound of rustling. A mutter of rough voices reached him.

They had left their horses on the edge of the timber, and were hunting him in the brush. The rustling came closer; and Vernon-Smith gripped his rifle hard. Crouching low in the tangled brush, hardly breathing, he waited and listened.

The rustling receded; then it drew nearer. Through the brush, within three yards, a brawny leg came in view, the rest of the ruffian hidden from the Bounder's eyes. He fired instantly at what he saw.

There was a fearful yell following the shot.

The leg crumpled like a broken stick, and he heard the sound of a heavy body that fell and crushed in the brush.

Another loud yell pealed from the wounded man.

"Doggone him, he's got me in the laig! Here, Euchre!"

Heavy trampling answered the call. Pecos Pete sprawled with a broken leg; Euchre was tramping towards him through the brush. The Bounder did not linger. He heard the groans of the wounded man and the calling voice of the other, but they died away behind him as he plunged on, deeper and deeper into the heart of the timber.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

MULE-KICK HALL wrenched and wrenched at the rope, and groaned silently behind the gag. The sweat stood out in great drops on his tanned forehead.

Hours had passed since the Rio Kid had left him there—bound, gagged, helpless.

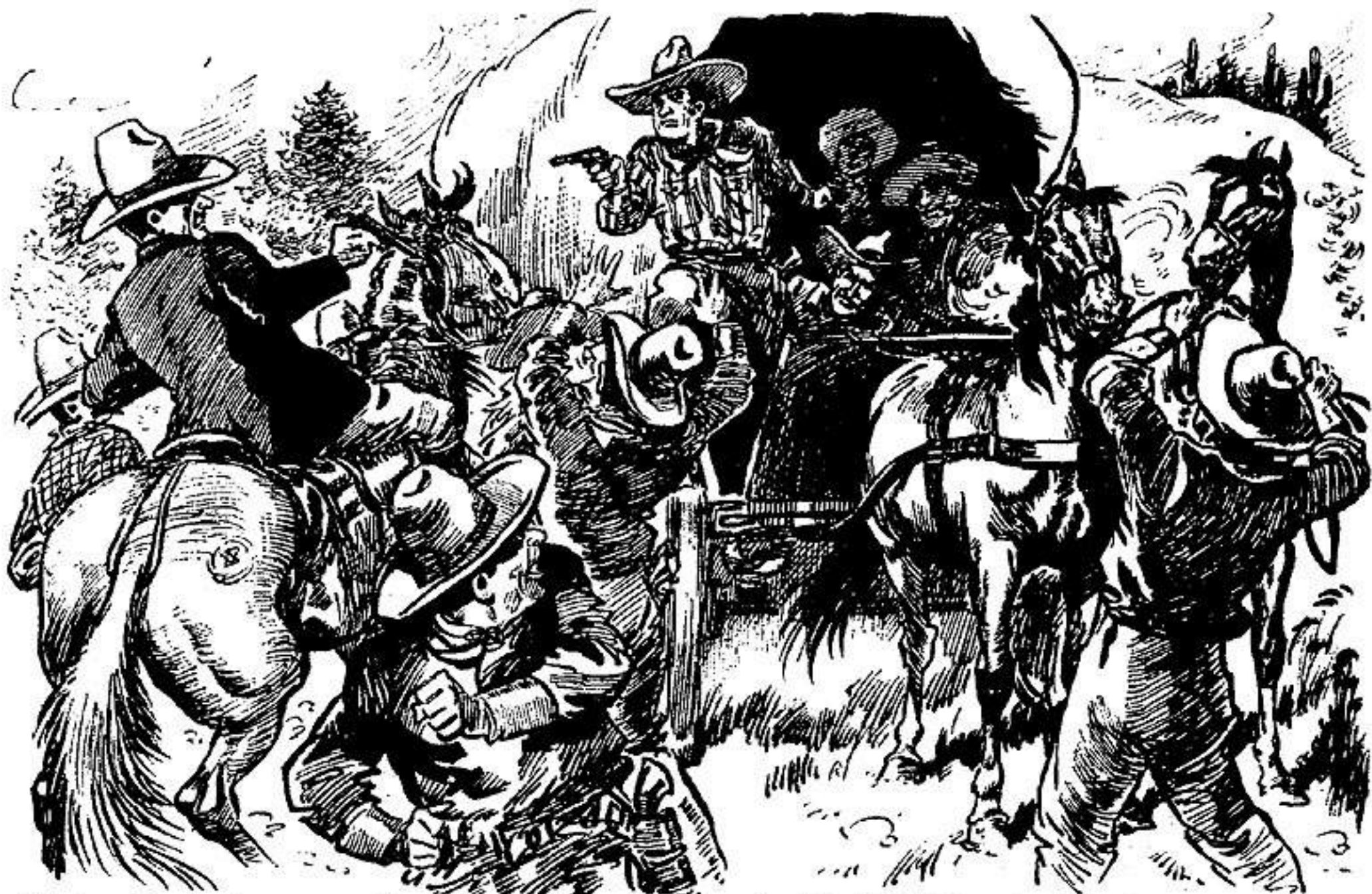
Hope he had none. His men were far away, riding in search of the outlaw. If they found his horse wandering, which was little likely, they could only suppose that he had lost it on the prairie; they could never guess that he was a mile deep in the timber. Even if they had sought for him there, a searcher might have passed within ten feet of him, unseeing.

There was no chance of help from his men; he knew it, as the Rio Kid had known it. No one else was likely to penetrate into the timber—far from the ranches, far from the plains where the cowmen rode herd. Hall was a prisoner there till the Kid came back for his answer—to remain a prisoner, unless he gave his word to quit the trail of the Kid.

The hours that passed were hours of black bitterness to the ranger captain. And then suddenly came the sound of firing—a sound of hope to his ears. What could it mean except that his troop were in touch with the Kid?

He listened eagerly.

The firing was in the direction of the prairie. But suddenly there came a rifle-shot, which his keen ear told him was not more than a hundred yards distant. He heard the yell that followed the shot. Had the Kid gone down? Then there came to his ears a rapid



The flap of the chuck-wagon was flung suddenly aside, and in the opening Mule-Kick Hall appeared, gun in hand—and the gun was levelled at Barney Stone. "Hands up!" rapped the Ranger captain. "Search me!" gasped Barney Stone, as he and the masked men stopped dead.

rustling and brushing, as of someone in flight. It was not the Kid who had gone down.

He wrenched and wrenched madly. He bit at the gag. But the Kid had done his work well. He could not get loose, he could utter no sound; the wild efforts only made the sweat start out on his brow.

Suddenly a stetson had shot into his sight through the brush, and he saw a face under it—not the face of the Rio Kid, not the face of one of his hard-bitten rangers, but the face of a school-boy he had seen at the Kicking Cayuse Ranch—the owner's son.

His eyes bulged at that face.

At the same moment the Bounder saw him.

Stupefied with amazement, Herbert Vernon-Smith came to a sudden halt, staring at the bound ranger.

If Hall was surprised, the Bounder was astounded. He could hardly believe his eyes as they fixed on the tanned, hard face of Mule-Kick Hall.

For a long moment they stared at one another.

Hall could not speak, but his look was expressive. And the Bounder, pulling himself together, stepped to the ranger.

"Captain Hall!" he gasped.

He looked back for a moment and listened. There were faint sounds from afar; no sound near at hand. The next moment his knife was out and sawing at the rope that knotted the ranger to the tree.

He cut swiftly with the keen blade. In a matter of seconds Jim Hall, freed from the rope, was dragging the gag from his mouth.

He panted and panted.

The Bounder sheathed his knife. The sounds in the timber were dying away; he had little doubt that the pursuit was over. One of the roughnecks, at all

events, was in no state to carry on with it. Likely enough, the other was helping him back to his horse; the distant sound died into silence.

"How come?" exclaimed Hall, speaking at last.

"I was going to ask you that," said the Bounder. "Somebody seems to have fixed you up safe, sir."

Hall gritted his teeth, and his eyes gleamed at Vernon-Smith. Glad as he was to be free again, he hated to have been found in such a position. But it was a relief, at least, that it was not one of his troop who had found him, but only this schoolboy.

"I was coming to look for your camp, to see you," went on Vernon-Smith. "A couple of the rustlers got after me and shot my horse. I dodged them in the timber; that's how I'm here."

"Search me!" grunted Hall. "You ain't seen any of my troop?"

"No. Those roughnecks would have beat it fast enough if any of your men had been on hand. They can't be about."

"Or the Kid?" muttered Hall.

"No!"

The Bounder understood now who had fixed up the ranger captain. But he carefully suppressed a grin. It was easy enough to see that Hall was sore and savage, and he did not want to "get the goat" of the ranger.

Hall knitted his brows. The firing, after all, had not meant what he had supposed; the Kid was nowhere near, and his men were nowhere near. But he was free now—free to get back to his camp, miles away towards Squaw Mountain, and get a fresh horse to ride on the trail again.

"I guess I'm obliged, boy!" he said gruffly. "I sure was fixed up like a hog-tied steer! You lost your cayuse?" He grunted again. "We got spare

horses at the camp. If you hoof it there with me, I'll fix you up with a critter."

"You said it!" agreed the Bounder. "I don't think I need dodge those rustlers any longer, Captain Hall, in your company."

"I guess not!" grunted Hall. "I'd sure be glad to meet up with them. You got to put it on if you're coming to the camp. I got no time to burn."

He tramped away through the brush, and the Bounder followed him. In such company Smithy would not have been displeased to come upon the rustlers, but nothing more was seen or heard of them in the timber.

But when they emerged from the trees on to the open prairie, two distant figures could be picked up, specks in the distance—two horsemen riding away towards Squaw Mountain, one holding the other in his saddle.

The Bounder grinned, and made a gesture towards the distant figures.

"That's the pair!" he said. "I got one of them in the leg with a bullet."

Hall gave the distant riders a glance. "Too far off to get their critters!" he grunted. "We got to hoof it."

Euchre and Pecos Pete disappeared in the distance as Vernon-Smith and the ranger captain tramped across the rugged prairie. Hall had spoken hardly a word so far, but now, as they tramped over the plain, he glanced at the Greyfriars junior.

"You allowed you was coming to my camp to see me?"

"That was the idea," said Smithy.

"Why?"

"I want your help," said the Bounder. Hall's tanned face wrinkled in a faint smile.

"I guess you've a right to it, after getting me out of that trap!" he said. "Trouble at the ranch?"

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"A whole heap!" said the Bounder. And he gave Hall a succinct account of the driving of Yuba Dick's herd of cows, and the raid on the ranch that had followed.

"I'll say that guy Barney Stone sure has a grouch ag'in Kicking Cayuse!" remarked Hall. "I guess if I wasn't hard on the Kid's trail, I'd sure give that cow-thief the once-over!"

"That's what I want you to do," said Smithy. "That's what I was coming to your camp to speak to you about."

Hall shook his head.

"I guess I ain't the time to comb Squaw Mountain for them rustlers, boy," he answered. "Why, it might be weeks and longer! I got to get after the Rio Kid afore he loses himself in the Staked Plain. You got to put it up to the sheriff at Packsaddle."

"Not by a hatful!" said Vernon-Smith. "Sheriff Lick can't handle this, and the Texas Rangers can. But let me get it clear. I'm not asking you to throw in days and weeks; I've got a plan for catching Barney Stone like a rabbit in a trap, and all I want you to do is to shut the trap on him."

"You're talking!" said Hall, with a curious look at the Bounder.

"Barney got away from Sheriff Lick," went on Smithy. "He would not get away from the Texas Rangers. Once you get him, he's safe."

"Bank on that!" said Hall. "But it—"

"I've got it all cut and dried," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "It will cost you a day, Captain Hall; and a captain of the Texas Rangers won't grudge a day to rope in a gang of rustlers."

"How come?"

"Barney Stone's got a spy on the ranch. I've got him located. He carries the news to Barney. I'm fixing up some news for him to carry that will land Barney Stone exactly where we want him, and that's where the Texas Rangers will get a grip on him," said Vernon-Smith.

"Search me!" said Hall. He gave Smithy a penetrating look. "Spill the

whole bag of beans, boy, and I'll see what I can do."

Vernon-Smith "spilled the whole bag of beans" as they tramped on to the distant camp.

Hall listened in silence, but when the Bounder had finished he gave a curt nod.

"O.K.!" he said.

And when the Bounder rode back to Kicking Cayuse, on a horse borrowed from the rangers' camp, he rode in great spirits.

Barney Stone had escaped from the sheriff of Packsaddle; but he would not escape from the grip of the Texas Rangers, once that grip closed on him. And unless the Bounder missed his guess, that grip was going to close on Barney, before many more suns had risen and set on the grassy ranges of Kicking Cayuse.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Is Mysterious!

"SURE!" said Bill.

He nodded approval.

It was the following morning. Herbert Vernon-Smith had come down to the bunkhouse, to speak to the foreman, after breakfast.

Bill was giving orders to the bunch when Smithy came along, and most of the Kicking Cayuse outfit were present—among them, Panhandle.

Vernon-Smith did not seem to care if the whole bunch heard what he had to say to Bill. But no one, certainly, guessed that he had picked a time when what he said was sure to be heard by the ears he wanted to hear.

He did not glance at Panhandle, or seem to notice that the man was there. But he knew that he was there, and that he heard.

Outside the ranch gate stood the chuck-wagon. Chick, the choreman, was driving it over to Packsaddle, to return in the afternoon, with supplies from Wash's store.

Chick drove the rumbling wagon away, while Smithy was speaking to Bill. It rumbled and jolted away on

the rugged trail, and the crack of Chick's whip died away over the prairie.

Bill glanced after it as it went, and grinned.

"It sure is some stunt, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir!" he said. "I guess I was thinking of riding into town with a dozen guys to see them dollars safe from the bank to the ranch. But I reckon I'll be glad to save the time."

"O.K., Bill!" said the Bounder. "I'll ride over to Packsaddle this afternoon and get the dollars from the bank. I'll see Chick at Wash's store. Barney Stone may be on the look-out; but I guess that the cutest rustler in Texas will never guess that there's a roll of ten thousand dollars packed in a bag of boiled beans in a chuck-wagon."

Bill chuckled.

"You said it, sir!" he agreed.

"That's settled, then!" said Vernon-Smith, and he strolled away, leaving Bill issuing orders to the bunch.

He joined the Famous Five, who were waiting for him in the veranda of the rancho.

From the open doorway of the living-room came a sound of champing.

Billy Bunter was busy with his third breakfast.

The Famous Five looked at Smithy very curiously.

Of his interview with the ranger captain Smithy had said nothing—not even to his friends. Walls had ears—when Barney Stone had a spy on the ranch; and the Bounder was wary by nature. He was not going to utter a syllable, on the subject of his move against Barney Stone.

"What sort of an ass do you call yourself, Smithy?" inquired Bob Cherry, as the Bounder came into the veranda.

"Meaning?" drawled Smithy.

"Blessed if I can make you out," said Bob. "You've told us that there's ten thousand dollars to come from the bank at Packsaddle to-day; and you've got a stunt of packing it in Chick's wagon, to keep it safe. It's a good stunt—if it's kept dark—"

"But the darkness is the sine qua non, my esteemed Smithy!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"You haven't forgotten what you said about that man Panhandle?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No. Why?"

"Did he hear what you said to Bill?"

"I fancy so."

"Well, that beats it!" said Bob. "You believe that he's Barney Stone's spy on the ranch, and you let him hear you talking to Bill about the dollars coming over in the chuck-wagon. Think he won't get the news to Barney before the morning's out?"

"Think so?"

"Well, don't you?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "There's heaps of time for him to get word to Barney before Chick pulls out of Packsaddle with the wagon this afternoon. That wagon will be stopped somewhere between Packsaddle and the ranch."

"Safe as houses!" said Bob.

"Panhandle's booked to ride the Frio range, with Yuba Dick, this morning," said Smithy. "That's in the opposite direction from Squaw Mountain, where Barney Stone has his hideout."

The Famous Five all stared at Vernon-Smith.

"Well, you fathead," said Bob, "think he won't drop Yuba somewhere on the prairie and hit for Squaw Mountain, as fast as his brone can go?"

"I wonder!" said the Bounder blandly.

"SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!"

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"Well, you can bank on it!" said Frank Nugent. "You'd better wash that stunt out, Smithy, if you've let Panhandle get wise to it."

The Bounder laughed.

"Let's get the horses and ride a bit of the way with Yuba," he said. "Then we can see whether Panhandle does anything of the kind."

"Bet on it!" said Bob.

"Well, let's see."

The Famous Five followed Vernon-Smith to the corral, and saddled their broncos. They were quite puzzled and perplexed.

They had been perplexed by Smithy allowing Panhandle to return to the ranch at all, after Bill had "fired" him, and Kicking Cayuse was rid of Barney Stone's confederate. They were still more perplexed now.

It was quite certain that, if the rustlers of Squaw Mountain got wind of the dollars coming from the bank, packed in the chuck-wagon, that wagon would be held up, on its way back to the ranch. And the Bounder had let the rustler's spy hear him discussing the stunt with Bill. None of the Famous Five had the slightest doubt that Panhandle would seize the earliest chance of getting news to Barney.

Punchers rode out at the gate; and soon after the juniors had saddled their horses. Panhandle and Yuba Dick rode out. They had been assigned to ride the Frio range, which lay eastward, by the banks of the Rio Frio. But that Panhandle, after what he had heard, would ever reach that range, the Famous Five did not believe for a moment.

"Come on!" said Smithy cheerfully.

And the juniors rode out, joining Panhandle and Yuba on the prairie. Yuba gave them a cheery grin—Panhandle glanced at them furtively from under the brim of his stetson.

"Ain't you hitting Packsaddle, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir?" asked Yuba.

"Plenty of time for that," said the Bounder. "Chick won't be back till this afternoon. We'll ride round by way of your range, Yuba."

"Sure!" said Yuba.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not look at Panhandle; but they knew his brow darkened at the Bounder's words. They were quite certain that he was already thinking out some excuse for losing Yuba on the prairie; and now he had the half-dozen juniors to lose as well.

The bunch of horsemen rode on, eastward. A couple of miles from the ranch Panhandle pulled in his bronco.

He jumped down and proceeded to examine a hind hoof. Yuba reined in, and the juniors followed his example.

"Doggone it!" said Panhandle. "I guess the critter's gone lame! I got to hit the ranch for a fresh boss, Yuba."

"Search me!" said Yuba.

He rode on with the juniors, and Panhandle turned back in the direction of the ranch, going at a walk.

Harry Wharton & Co. gave the Bounder expressive looks.

Yuba Dick had no suspicion; but it was clear enough to the Famous Five that the "lameness" of Panhandle's horse was merely an excuse for getting away.

They had no doubt whatever that the lameness would disappear as soon as they were out of sight, and that Panhandle would be riding westward at full gallop, with news for Barney Stone.

A few minutes later, however, Vernon-Smith slowed down, where a tall, solitary cottonwood-tree reared its immense branches against the sky.

"I guess it's hot," said the Bounder. "Let's rest in the shade here a bit, you fellows."

Yuba Dick chuckled.

"You sure want to buy a lady's fan, sir," he said. "I guess I ain't no time for resting in no shade! S'long."

The puncher rode on, at a gallop, to reach his distant range. The Greyfriars fellows reined in, under the shade of the great cottonwood.

Vernon-Smith dismounted, and threw his reins to Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five watched him, in puzzled silence.

The Bounder, without a word, clambered swiftly up the massive trunk of the tall cottonwood.

He disappeared into the foliage.

But a few minutes later his friends saw him again, astride of a high branch, seventy feet from the ground.

They watched him as he opened a pair of field-glasses and focused them on the prairie to the west.

"Looking for Panhandle!" said Bob.

Panhandle was out of sight of the juniors. But from the height of the tall cottonwood, with the field-glasses, they knew that Vernon-Smith would be able to pick him up easily enough—even if he was, as they suspected, already going at a gallop.

For a long minute the Bounder was motionless, his eyes to the glasses at the tree-top, the juniors watching him from below.

Then he shut the glasses and came clambering down. He dropped to the ground rather breathlessly, and chuckled.

"Did you see Panhandle?" asked Bob.

"Sure!" grinned the Bounder.

"Walking a lame horse to the ranch?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Hardly! Riding full gallop and giving the ranch a miss!" answered the Bounder.

"Well, that settles it," said Harry.

"That rascal is a spy of Barney Stone's, and he's heading for Squaw Mountain to tell the news. Chick's wagon will be stopped on the trail this afternoon, Smithy."

"Not much doubt about that now!" agreed the Bounder. His eyes danced.

"Come on, you men—it's time we hit the Packsaddle trail."

"Not to fix up for the dollars to be packed in Chick's wagon, surely!" exclaimed Wharton.

"No; something else!" chuckled Smithy.

"Eh? What else?"

"You'll see."

More and more puzzled, the juniors rode away with Vernon-Smith and reached the well-marked trail that ran from Kicking Cayuse to Packsaddle.

They struck it half-way to the cow-town and turned in the direction of Packsaddle. At a spot where the trail ran through a timber-land the Bounder pulled in his bronco.

"Hold on!" he said.

"What the dickens—"

Vernon-Smith dismounted and looped his reins over his arm. He led his bronco off the trail into the timber.

Utterly puzzled, the Famous Five followed him.

In the timber, out of sight from the trail, the Bounder halted; and, to the further amazement of his friends, gave three sharp, successive whistles.

Evidently, it was a signal.

There was a sound of rustling in the brush. A figure stepped into view—and in blank astonishment the Famous Five recognised Mule-Kick Hall, the captain of the Texas Rangers.

Hall gave them a curt nod and fixed his eyes inquiringly on the Bounder.

"O.K., sir!" said Vernon-Smith.

"You're not wasting your time."

"Shoot!" said Hall tersely.

"Barney Hall's spy has gone full gallop for Squaw Mountain with news that ten thousand dollars from the bank will be coming to the ranch this afternoon, hidden in the chuck-wagon!" said Vernon-Smith.

Hall's face wrinkled in a grim grin.

"Oh!" gasped Bob Cherry.

The juniors understood at last.

The Bounder remained a few minutes in talk with the ranger captain; then Hall disappeared into the timber.

The Greyfriars fellows led their horses back to the trail and remounted.

The Bounder chuckled as they rode on to Packsaddle.

"So that's the game?" said Harry Wharton.

"That," grinned Smithy, "is the game! I fixed it up with Hall yesterday—and gave Panhandle the bait this morning! And I guess, my beloved hearers, that Barney Stone will be after those dollars like Bunter after a jam-tart—and I guess, too, that he won't get away from Mule-Kick Hall as he did from Sheriff Lick."

And the Bounder laughed.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapping the Rustlers!

"HALT!"

Chick stared.

In the sunny afternoon the choreman of Kicking Mule was driving the chuck-wagon home from Packsaddle. He was about half-a-mile out of the cow town when that unexpected command fell on his ears.

The chuck-wagon was a large vehicle. It was generally used for carting supplies to the punchers' camps at the time of the round-up. A large canvas tilt covered it from the sun, and Chick sat in front, half-sprawling, and driving his two horses at a leisurely pace. The interior of the wagon was packed with stores, boxes, and bags and barrels, for the ranch.

Chick had been "held up" in his time, but never when driving a ranch chuck-wagon. So he jumped.

But the next moment he grinned.

"Mule-Kick!" he ejaculated.

The wagon had run down into a dip of the prairie trail, where the route lay through a belt of scrubs. From the cover of the scrubs a man had stepped suddenly, holding up his hand and rapping out the word to halt. It was Jim Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers.

Chick pulled in at once. For a moment he had supposed that it was a hold-up, when the sharp command rapped on his ears. He grinned cheerily at the ranger captain.

"You sure made me jump a few!" he remarked. "I reckoned it was Barney Stone cavorting around. I surely did."

"Mebbe you'll see that guy cavorting around afore you're much older," said Hall. "I guess we got to borrow this wagon, hombre. Them stores can be packed in the chaparral here and picked up later."

"Say, what you giving me?" exclaimed the astonished Chick. "I'll say I got to get them stores to Kicking Cayuse, Mister Hall."

"Can it!" answered Hall briefly. "This is fixed up with your boss—all you got to do is to quit chewing the rag."

From the chaparral, thick and dense beside the trail, where they had been in cover, six rangers emerged. They proceeded rapidly to turn Chick's stores out of the chuck-wagon, packing them out of sight in the brush.

The choreman looked on, astonished.

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but in silence. He did not understand; but he had no hunch to argue with Texas Rangers.

The wagon empty, the six rangers and their captain stepped into it. Hall carefully fixed the canvas tilt so that they could not possibly be spotted from outside.

"Drive on!" he said tersely.

"I should smile!" gasped Chick.

He drove on—amazed. What the rangers' game was, he could not guess; but he knew that Mule-Kick Hall must have some good reason for what he was doing. The rangers had waited for the chuck-wagon on the trail, and at the first spot where there was cover they had cleared it of its stores and packed themselves in. Why, had Chick guessing.

But he was soon going to guess.

The chuck-wagon rolled on, jolting on the rough trail, mile after mile. It was four miles from the spot where the rangers had got aboard that the trail dipped again in a wide hollow that was thickly grown with post-oaks and pecans. The trail ran through it—and out of view of the open prairie.

"Halt!"

For the second time that command fell on Chick's startled ears; and for the second time he jumped.

"Search me!" gasped Chick.

Five horsemen pulled out of the scrub into the trail as the choreman pulled in his wagon.

Four of them were masked, but their leader wore no mask; and Chick stared at the well-known face of Barney Stone, once his foreman at Kicking Cayuse.

Barney, known as outlaw, ranch-raider, cow-thief and rustler, had no need to mask his lean, hard face. But the others of the gang were not known as rustlers, and they were keeping their identity secret. Chick, as likely as not, had seen their faces in Packsaddle; but he could not see them now.

Barney Stone made a gesture with a revolver.

"Light down, Chick, and hold them hosses!" he rapped.

"Sure!" gasped Chick.

He got down and held the horses' heads—more and more astonished.

Why Barney Stone and his gang were holding up a chuck-wagon had him beat; and how Mule-Kick Hall and his men had known it in advance was a still deeper mystery.

But he could see that Hall had known—that was why the Texas Rangers had packed themselves in the wagon in the place of the stores.

Chick suppressed a grin as he stood holding the horses. Barney Stone, he reckoned, was booked for a surprise when he looked into the halted wagon. Quite plainly, the rustlers of Squaw Mountain had not the remotest suspicion of what that chuck-wagon contained.

Chick stood ready to dodge as soon as the lead began to fly. He had no doubt that it would be flying soon.

"Get to it, you 'uns!" grunted Barney Stone. "I guess you'll have to root through the stores for what we're after. Get going."

Four of the raiders dismounted, and hitched their horses. They approached the halted wagon, to clamber in.

Barney sat his horse, revolver in hand—but the weapon was lowered; he did not expect any trouble from Chick. Certainly the choreman was not the man to give a bunch of trail robbers trouble. But there was trouble coming, from an unexpected quarter.

The canvas flap in front of the chuck-wagon was flung suddenly aside. In the

opening Mule-Kick Hall appeared, gun in hand—and the gun was levelled at Barney Stone.

"Hands up!" rapped Hall.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Roped In!

"HANDS up!"

Hall's voice rang sharply. Barney Stone stared at him blankly. The ghost of the ranger captain could not have startled him more. He sat his bronco as if petrified, staring.

Hall's eyes gleamed at him over the levelled Colt.

Behind the ranger captain his men appeared in view—six hard-bitten rustlers, revolver in hand.

"Search me!" gasped Barney Stone.

The four masked men, about to clamber on the wagon, stopped dead. They were under the guns of the rangers in the wagon, and not one of them ventured to touch a weapon. Indeed, for the moment they were too astounded to think of doing so. They stared at the rangers—they goggled at them.

Not for a moment had any of the rustling gang dreamed that there was anything in the chuck-wagon but ranch stores—and a hidden bag of dollars! Not for a moment had they dreamed that Texas Rangers were within twenty miles of the Packsaddle trail.

"I said hands up!" rapped Hall, his eyes glinting.

Four pairs of hands went up. Four rustlers obeyed the order, still staring in blank amazement.

But Barney Stone's grip closed convulsively on the butt of his revolver.

"Trapped!" he breathed.

"You said it!" assented Mule-Kick Hall. "Trapped like a lobo-wolf, hombre! Drop that gun and put up your hands if you don't want to get your ticket for soup, feller!"

Barney panted.

"Stand for it, you 'uns!" he shouted, and he whipped up his revolver and fired at the ranger captain.

Bang!

Hall's six-gun roared on the instant as Barney Stone's arm swung up. The bullet crashed into the shoulder of the rustler even as he pulled trigger.

Barney Stone's bullet flew wide as he pitched off his bronco and crashed into the trail.

Mule-Kick Hall shrugged his shoulders. The rustler's action had been utterly desperate with the ranger's gun trained on him, and Hall's keen eyes glittered over it. He had had no chance.

"I guess he wanted it!" said Hall. "You 'uns asking for the same?"

But the other rustlers had their hands up, and they kept them up.

Hall dropped lightly from the chuck-wagon. His men followed him.

Barney, lying in the trail, made an effort to lift his revolver again. The ranger captain kicked it from his hand.

"You got me!" muttered Barney.

"I sure got you!" said Hall. "I guess I'd be glad to get the Rio Kid as easy! But I sure got you."

The rangers were disarming the rustlers and binding their arms. Then they jerked the masks from their faces.

There was a yell from Chick.

"Say, you Panhandle, that you!" he exclaimed, staring at one of the rustlers as his face was revealed.

Panhandle scowled savagely.

"Say, Mr. Hall, that's a Kicking Cayuse guy!" exclaimed Chick.

Hall grinned faintly.

"I reckon," he assented. He glanced at the scowling cowman. "You'll be the guy, I reckon, that took the news to Barney Stone and got him here after the dollars in the chuck-wagon."

"How'd you know?" gasped Panhandle.

Hall shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess a little bird told me!" he answered.

"Trapped!" muttered Barney Stone hoarsely. "Trapped—and cinched!"

"Sure!" said Hall.

He bent over the former foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

Barney eyed him evilly as he examined his wound and bound it up.

"You'll pull through," said Hall. "I guess you'll live and put in your time in the pen, hombre."

Barney Stone muttered an oath.

Hall turned to his men.

"Stick them in that hearse, you 'uns! I guess we got to get back for our hosses, and that guy's got to get back for his stores!"

Chick turned the wagon in the trail.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Good News at Kicking Cayuse!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. rode up the trail to Kicking Cayuse in the sunset in a dusty but cheery crowd.

They had waited in Packsaddle till one of Hall's men rode in with the news of the rangers' success.

It was good news to the Greyfriars fellows. So long as the former foreman of Kicking Cayuse was loose and on the trail of vengeance danger dogged their steps; but the danger was over now. Barney Stone and his gang were in the hands of the rangers, and the Greyfriars party were through with them. They rode back to the ranch with light hearts.

"Chick's in!" remarked the Bouncer, pointing with his quirt to the chuck-wagon, which stood at the gateway of the ranch.

"Then Bill's got the news!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Billy Bunter was sitting on the ranch gate, watching the juniors, as they came, through his big spectacles. He waved a fat hand to them and squeaked as they trotted up and dismounted in the gateway.

Bunter's fat face was excited.

He was full of news!

The chuck-wagon stood by the gate, still full of stores—Chick had not had time to unpack it yet. Chick was standing by the bunkhouse, surrounded by Bill and a crowd of punchers, telling the tale for the fifth or sixth time. The ranch was buzzing with the news of the capture of Barney Stone and his gang by the Texas Rangers.

Billy Bunter was eager to impart that startling news to the Bouncer and the Famous Five when they came in. He had no doubt that it would make them jump!

As they were already aware of it, it was not likely to make them jump to any great extent. But the fat Owl of the Remove was as yet unaware of that little circumstance.

"I say, you fellows, you haven't heard!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you'd

(Continued on page 28.)

Don't Wait For An Invitation, Join Up Right Now With—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

THE DAILY ROUND. 2.30 p.m. THIRD SCHOOL.

(1)

The afternoon school is not so bad
As the morning's beastly labours,
No Latin or maths to send us mad
Until we bite our neighbours.
We have geography twice a week,
And history, too, and drawing;
It's mainly listening while the beak
Stands up before us, jawing.

(2)

In literature class we have to read,
Not tales of high adventure
Like Buffalo William and his steed—
They'd all come in for censure;
We'd very much like to study them,
So I suggest quite meekly
That Quelch allows us to read "The
Gem,"
And its companion papers weekly.

(3)

It's poetry, poetry all the time,
While Quelch is grimly frowning.
That highbrow drivel that doesn't
rhyme,
By Tennyson, Gray, and Browning.
Now, I like poetry, as you know,
But when I've done fifty pages
My brain is a muddle—well, look below,
I'll show you the way that it rages—



POTTY POETRY.

My Brain after a Literature Class.

A chieftain to the Highlands bound
Doth walk in fear and dread,
The stars that in the heavens abound
Shone round him o'er the dead;
And brightly shone the moon that night
Like angels' visits, short and bright,
On his devoted head.

The way was long, the wind was cold
To bear him company,
And all day long the battle rolled
Across the Sands of Dee.
Week in, week out, from morn to night,
Never a moment ceased the fight
Of the one and the fifty-three!

Beside him sported on the green
A little child at play,
And Eugene Aram walked between
To summon his array.
A voice rang through the startled air,
"There's water, water everywhere
A mile or so away!"

"My strength is as the strength of ten,"
The good old man replied,
And twenty thousand Cornish men
Plunged headlong in the tide.
Man wants but little here below,
For men may come and men may go
To win a blooming bride!

AND IF YOU WANT A JOB—you
can trace the poems from which these
lines were taken. There are only
twenty-five of 'em!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET DICK PENFOLD,

the "Poet Laureate" of the Remove,
alias The GREYFRIARS RHYMESTER.

P is for PENFOLD—here I am!
Still writing verses like a lamb,
And like a lion, going forth
To draw my pay, for what it's worth!
To write about oneself, you know,
Is much more difficult, and so
You'll pardon me, I'm sure, if I
Am rather diffident and shy.



It would be hard, as no one doubts,
To find my equal hereabouts.
At games I'm splendid, simply great!
At class I'm equally first-rate!
I'm gay and handsome, sure enough.
My poetry is brilliant stuff.
In modesty alone I err—
It mars my perfect character!

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

One halfpenny.



A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GOSSIP.

The new spring fashions have created quite a stir. Especially choice are the elastic-sided trousers, which give great ease in bending over. Since we spend such a lot of our time in this position, it is good to know the tailors are trying to make us as comfortable as possible.

Cricket boots with spring soles are in great demand with Mr. Skinner and the smart set. They enable the wearer to skip smartly out of the way of balls when fielding on compulsory practice days.

The new portable sofa is very handy for born-tired aristocrats fielding at long-on.

PUZZLE PAR

A bottle and a cork cost 1s. 1d.
The bottle costs a shilling more
than the cork. What is the price
of the cork?

Answer at foot of column 2.

Telescopic toppers to fit swelled heads are popular in the Upper Fourth. As the head swells the hat can be extended by means of a zip fastener. After a crushing defeat by the Remove it is easily taken in again.

Waistcoats are also being made with zip fasteners, to allow Bunter to slit them up the back without injuring them.

There was a brilliant assembly at the first function of the season, a smoking party. Mr. Snoop, in a nobby green tie which exactly matched his complexion, was leaning out of the window, regretting a cigar. The other guests settled down to banker, at which Mr. Peter Hazeldene lost a large number of IOU's. Later in the evening Mr. Quelch, wearing a modish black gown and a black frown, looked in for a moment, and invited the guests to accompany him to his study to finish the party. They were rather unwilling to do so, but Mr. Quelch would take no denials, so the fashionable party adjourned to the master's study, where after a most exciting time they broke up.

never guess! I say, what do you think's happened?"

"Has anything?" asked Bob cheerily. "Yes, rather!" said Bunter impressively. "I say, do you remember that chap who was here last week—a chap with a face like a hatchet—man named Hall?"

"I seem to remember him," said Vernon-Smith. "What about him, Bunter?"

"He's caught Barney Stone!" announced Bunter.

"Not really?" ejaculated Bob.

"Honest Injun!" declared Bunter. "Chick brought the news in when he came back with the chuck-wagon. He's been jawing ever since. I hope he won't keep on jawing, and keep us waiting for supper! I say, you fellows; that chap Hall bagged the whole gang. And what do you think? One of them was a man belonging to this ranch!"

"Phiew!"

"Did you fellows ever notice a man called 'Panhandle'?" asked Bunter.

"Panhandle?" repeated the Bouncer gravely.

"Well, that's the man," said Bunter. "He was one of the gang, and Chick knew him as soon as they took his mask off. I'll tell you how it happened——"

"Oh, do!" said Frank Nugent.

"Go it, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's have the latest news."

"The rangers—Hall's men, you know—got them," said Bunter. "They held Chick up on the trail——"

"The rangers did?"

"No, you ass—the rustlers! They held Chick up on the trail; they seem to have fancied that he had a lot of money in the chuck-wagon, for some reason. I don't know why," explained Bunter. "They got Barney Stone——"

"The rustlers did?"

"No, you ass—the rangers!" yapped Bunter. "You see, they never knew that they were hidden in Chick's wagon, and then they showed all of a sudden, you know, and they got them——"

"Hold on—let's have it clear!" gasped Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I mean, the rangers were in Chick's chuck-wagon—I mean, Chick's chuck-wagon, see? It looks to me as if that man Hall must have known, somehow, that they were going to stop Chick on the trail——"

"Think so?" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Well, it looks like it to me," said Bunter sagely. "You see, they were parked in the wagon, all ready, and when Stone and his gang showed up and stopped Chick, they got them! I fancy Hall must have had a tip."

"I shouldn't wonder!" agreed the Bouncer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "What are you cackling at, I'd like to know?"

"You see, Smithy was the man who gave Hall the tip!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bill! Got the good news, Bill?"

"I'll tell a man!" explained Bill. "You young geeks heard——"

"Bunter's just told us," said Bob, "and one of Hall's men told us at Pack-saddle before we left——"

"I'll surely tell a man!" said Bill. "That scallawag Panhandle was in cahoots with Barney's gang—they got him with the rest, from what Chick allows! I guess he took the noos of them dollars to Barney, when I figured that he was riding range with Yuba, down on the Frio! I'll tell a man! Them dollars wasn't on the chuck-

wagon, after all, Mister Vernon-Smith?"

"No; they're packed in my saddle-bags, Bill," said the Bouncer, laughing. "O.K."

It was a very cheery party that evening round the supper-table at Kicking Cayuse. Every face was brighter, and every heart lighter, from the knowledge that Barney Stone and his bunch were safe in the hands of the Texas Rangers.

THE END.

(Harry Wharton & Co. are through with the ranch-raiders, but their adventures in the "wild and woolly" West are not yet over. Look out for "The Man with the Hidden Face!" the next yarn in this gripping series. There'll be more "Armaments" Stamps for you, too, in next Saturday's MAGNET.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him Editor of the MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, everybody! No, it's not a wireless announcer calling the British Isles—it's your Editor calling!

Here we are again with another tip-top issue of the Old Paper, and more stamps for readers who are taking part in

OUR GREAT "ARMAMENTS" RACE.

Naturally enough, I am hoping that every regular reader of the MAGNET will take part in this great race. If by any chance you missed the first two issues containing stamps, you can still obtain them from your news-agent, or, failing this, from our Back Number Dept., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. The Fifteen "Hercules" Bikes and 6,000 other splendid prizes are

WELL WORTH WINNING!

Don't delay, get busy to-day and collect as many stamps as you can—the more the merrier! And don't forget that you can collect or swap stamps with your pals.

I must now come to the rescue of D. Rowbottom, of Colindale, N.W.9., who has had a heated argument with his pal as to which is the longer river—the Amazon or the Yang-tsi-

Kiang. My chum is certainly right in saying that the Amazon is the longer river of the two. To be exact, the Amazon is 3,550 miles long, and is the third in point of length of the world's rivers, coming next to the Mississippi and the Nile. The Yang-tsi-Kiang, which rises in the centre of the high plateau of Tibet at an altitude of 16,000 feet, is 3,100 miles long—450 miles shorter than the Amazon. So much for that!

George Boys, of Aldershot, says that of all the lessons he dislikes most, it is Algebra. He asks me if I can enlighten him as to who first thought of this "brain-teasing" subject. Algebra was invented by the later Greek arithmeticians and developed by the Hindus and Arabs. No, George, there's no chance of boiling the learned men in oil!

Before winding up this Chat, let me say that another splendid issue of the MAGNET has been prepared for next Saturday. Topping the bill is the magnificent long complete yarn dealing with the further exciting holiday adventures of the Greyfriars chums in America. It's entitled:

"THE MAN WITH THE HIDDEN FACE!"

and is, without doubt, one of the best yarns Frank Richards' has ever penned. I cannot talk about the plot without revealing the identity of the man with the hidden face. And this I do not want to do. Suffice it to say that there's a surprise in store for you. 'Nuff said—what? Rest assured that you'll get a load of laughs in the "Greyfriars Herald," and more interesting news items by the Greyfriars Guide.

YOUR EDITOR.

Don't forget to ask your shop for XLCR STAMPS-ALBUMS & OUTFITS! If any difficulty write THOMAS CLIFFE RHYL

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Another Rollicking Instalment of "THE ST. SAM'S DONKEY DERBY!" starring Dr. Birchmall and the Boys of St. Sam's.



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 293.

EDITED BY DICK RAKE

May 21st, 1938.



YOUR EDITOR CALLING

I suppose it's bad form for an Editor to say "I told you so!" But I can't resist a quiet chortle over the result of the Highcliffe match. Two weeks ago I put forward the opinion that, despite the absence of our best men, we could find a team good enough to beat our regular opponents. And now we've done it! What's more, Redwing included in his team all the fellows whose names I mentioned in my article as worthy of special consideration. Which only goes to show what immense power the Press wields these days! As soon as the match was over, I cabled the result to Wharton. So you can bet your life that he and his pals celebrated it in flowing ginger-pop—or whatever they use for celebrations in lieu of ginger-pop in Texas!

A reader has written to ask if we find it quiet in the Remove with half-a-dozen of the leading lights away. Well, strange as it may sound, I haven't noticed it myself. The Form-room looks decidedly thinner, of course, but there is no perceptible difference in the volume of sound in the Rag during the evening.

The fact is, that, apart from Bob Cherry, who makes more noise than the rest of the tourists put together, none of our absent chums are particularly rowdy. The noisiest in the Form are still with us; and it would take a lot of Whartons and Nugents to reduce the general din to any extent. When Bolsover tramps into the Rag it's like a thunderstorm breaking over the school; and the arrival of Fisher T. Fish reminds me of a hurricane!

On the other hand, if my correspondent means to ask if we have more peace of mind, the answer is decidedly in the affirmative. The difference that Bunter's absence makes in this respect is amazing! To go through the first two weeks of a term without a single request to cash a postal order in advance and without the need to turf out a fat eavesdropper from under one's study table at frequent intervals is a strange and quite uncanny experience for Remove chaps. We can even leave tuck in our cupboards without locking it up!

All the same, Bunter will be as welcome as the rest from my point of view when he returns. Goodness knows what there is about the old Porpoise that makes me want to see his fat and shiny face again; but I must say that somehow I do!

All the best, chums, till next week!

DICK RAKE,
Acting Editor.

HE MUST BE CRACKED!

Bolsover major was observed in his study the other day, hitting himself on the back of the head with a coke-hammer. He explained that a phrenologist had told him that his bump of knowledge was too small. So he was just correcting the deficiency!

putting on atmosphere, I'll tell a man. When a guy gives the gateway and the quadrangle and the School House the once over, he has got to admit that they are all genuine antiques. One hombre I met in a train told me the place is more than a hundred years old, but that was hokum, you bet! No place could be as old as that!

Jevver see the little drug store they got in the corner under the trees! They call it the "tuckshop," and if it ain't the cutest drug store ever it's the next best to that! I'll say that drug store would be a riot on Broadway. So would the gateway and the quadrangle and the crypt—and the same goes for the masters, too!

GREYFRIARS FROM FRESH ANGLES

13. "I'll Say It's a Wow!"
Says HIRAM K. FISH

When I first sent Fisher to Greyfriars School, I said: "Listen, son, you're going to a swell dump to mix with ritzy Britishers, so when you come back to New York folks can see you're real class!" That was what I aimed at, and am I satisfied? I'll tell the world! I'll say a school where a kid can sit at the next desk to a real, live English lord

is a wow. Yes, sirce! Of course, they ain't all lords in the school; but Fisher tells me titles are common. Even the young guys without titles are a classy lot. Anyway, I know class when I see it and that's the way I feel about 'em! But what I like best about this dump is the atmosphere. Hollywood has got nothing on Greyfriars when it comes to



"Oh, grate gad!"

The cad of the Sixth looked round—his face garstly, as he saw the Head's stern gaze fixed accusingly on him.

"Bunker! How dare you?" roared the Head. "How dare you associate with a low, common bookmaker for the pur-

stand, Bunker, that there are limits to my patience. Return to the school at once and write out five hundred times, 'I must never speak to bookies.'"

Bunker went—looking quite dizzy! As soon as he had gone a strange change took place in Doctor Birchmall's demeanour.

"Pardon my somewhat heated remarks, my dear Mr. Bunks, but one does have to keep one's boys in their places, duzzent one?" he said. "Er—mite I inquire what odds you

before making their annual appearance. Customers finding hairpins in their ice-cream to have their money back.

Remove chaps to be served first. Others to queue up.

Targets to be painted on the ceiling for ginger-pop corks. A free feed to be given to every man scoring a bullseye when opening his bottle.

Compensation to be paid (in jam tarts) to all customers slipping up on banana skins.

I have several other bright ideas for improving the tuckshop; but Dick Rake tells me he can allow no more space this week, so I shall have to leave them over for a time.

(For a long time, if they are anything like the first lot!—D. R., Acting Editor.)

TUCKSHOP TOPICS

By TOM BROWN

The Greyfriars tuckshop gives much food for thought, especially to those who give much thought to food.

Mrs. Mumble is a dear old soul, but I really think she should pay more attention to complaints when we make them.

At present, if you mention that the doughnuts are stale, she thinks you're getting fresh.

Should a customer criticise her jam-puffs, her reply is very tart.

In the event of a chap passing a remark about her ice-cream, she is absolutely certain to give him a frigid look. I once heard Rake

tell her he couldn't get his teeth into one of her rock cakes. You should have seen how she chewed him up!

As for her cooking, a mere hint that it is not absolutely perfect is taken as a deadly insult. If you suggest that her sausage rolls are underdone she takes you to be a half-baked idiot. And if you dare to submit that her home-made jam has been in the pot too long she simply boils!

It would be far better if she accepted helpful suggestions with a beaming smile and a grateful curtsy. I could suggest several improvements myself if I thought they would be treated in this way. Here are one or two, for a tart:

Stools to be cleaned after customers drop jam on them.

Currant buns to be taken down and dusted

his lips into an apology for a grin. "Oh, exactly, Burleigh! A brany notion of yours, I must say! Er—are there any speedy ones among them?"

"Well, there's one called Bonny Boy that seems pretty good, sir. Jolly of the Fourth had the good fortune to draw him in the ballot. You can see him over there."

The Head glanced in the direction indicated and saw Jolly bowling along at a spanking pace on a trim-looking animal. A look of jellus rage flitted across his face for a moment, as he noted the speed with which the donkey was covering the ground.

"Pah! If that's the best that Bonny Boy can do, he duzzent stand an earthly against Dirty Dick!" he cried angrily. "Dirty Dick will nock the stuffing out of anything I see here this morning, I can assure you!"

"Which one is Dirty Dick, then, sir?" asked Burleigh.

"The donkey on which I am riding now, of course, Burleigh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

utter amazement, he found Muggleton Common looking rather like Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday. There were donkeys everywhere, with St. Sam's fellows of all sizes and ages bizzily engaged in getting them to gallop!

The Head fairly rubbed his eyes, as he gazed at the surprising scene. "Bless my sole!" he repeated. Then he spotted a big Sixth Former saddling one of the donkeys, and he bawled out: "BUR-LEIGH!"

Burleigh straightened up and doffed his cap. "Good-morning, sir!" he said cheerily. "I see you believe, like the rest of us, in early morning training!"

The Head nodded curtly. "I certainly came here for the purpuss of exercising my mount, Burleigh. But I must say I never expected to find the Common invaded by a crowd of this size. I should like to know the why and the wherefore of this amazing bizziness!"

"Oh, that's easy, sir!" grinned Burleigh. "I happened to hear of a farmer on the other side of Muggleton who was looking after a crowd of donkeys, so I thought I would hire the lot of them for the Donkey Derby and dish them out among the chaps by ballot. Good idea, sir, don't you think?"

Doctor Birchmall's greenish eyes glinted for a moment. He had been hooping for a shortage of donkeys so that he would have little opposition to face in the race. But it would hardly have done to let Burleigh know that, so he twisted

Highcliffe's second innings started sensationally. Peter Todd performing the hat-trick in the first over. But three wickets down for no runs was too good to last, and the visitors soon settled down to steady scoring, and eventually wound up with 101 runs, leaving us 102 to score to win.

The home team, too, made a disastrous start in their second session, Squiff and Linley both being dismissed when the score stood only at 9 runs. Greyfriars supporters began to look a little anxious when other wickets fell with the score still low. Then Redwing and Lord Mauleverer made a stand, and faces cleared when they carried the score on to 56 for 5 wickets. Redwing was run out at this point, but Morgan, who followed him, started hitting boundaries with great zest, and the required total was reached without the loss of another wicket.

It was a great day for Greyfriars, and a great day, too, for the second string players, who showed our opponents that even without our leading cricketers we are a force to be reckoned with.

The dark horses acquitted themselves with honour all through, and, amid great excitement, finished up dead level with exactly 121 runs, Redwing topping the score-sheet with 53 to his credit.

Bulstrode, was of a high standard. Greyfriars followed, and, amid great excitement, finished up dead level with exactly 121 runs, Redwing topping the score-sheet with 53 to his credit.



CRICKET OPENS—REMOVE WINS!

Reserve Men Shine Against Highcliffe

Junior cricket began in earnest on Wednesday, when the Remove played Highcliffe. To the delight of the home crowd, anxious about the result with the best players still in U.S.A., Greyfriars achieved a splendid victory. That this win was in no small measure due to the sterling play of men who have rarely figured in the team before is testimony to the shrewd judgment of Tom Redwing, on whom the burden of the captaincy has fallen during Wharton's absence. Well done, Redwing!

Choosing a team proved no light task for Wharton's deputy. Practically every fellow in the Form took it for granted that he would be selected, and it needed the tact of a diplomat to get some of the keener applicants to realise their hopes were in vain. Here is the team that Redwing finally chose:

T. Redwing (captain), S. Q. I. Field, M. Linley, T. Brown, R. Russell, Lord Mauleverer, P. Todd, P. Bolsover, D. Morgan, P. Hazeldene, G. Bulstrode.

There was a weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth when that list was posted up, believe us! The only fellows who saw any good points in it at all were those who had been se-

lected, and even they felt pangs of doubt about some of their fellow-players. It was pointed out everywhere that Redwing had omitted several fellows who had played quite frequently in last year's team—Newland, Penfold, and Delarey, for instance. To include moderate players like Bolsover and Morgan and yet leave out such as these three seemed completely potty to most critics, and they were not slow to put their viewpoint to

Redwing met the storm of criticism with his customary calm. He admitted that individually the team he had chosen might not be the eleven best players available; but he pointed out that selecting a well-balanced team was quite a different proposition from selecting the eleven best men.

He had made his choice, and he was going to stand by it. So that was that!

The match itself turned out to be one of the brightest and most interesting we have ever had with Highcliffe. The