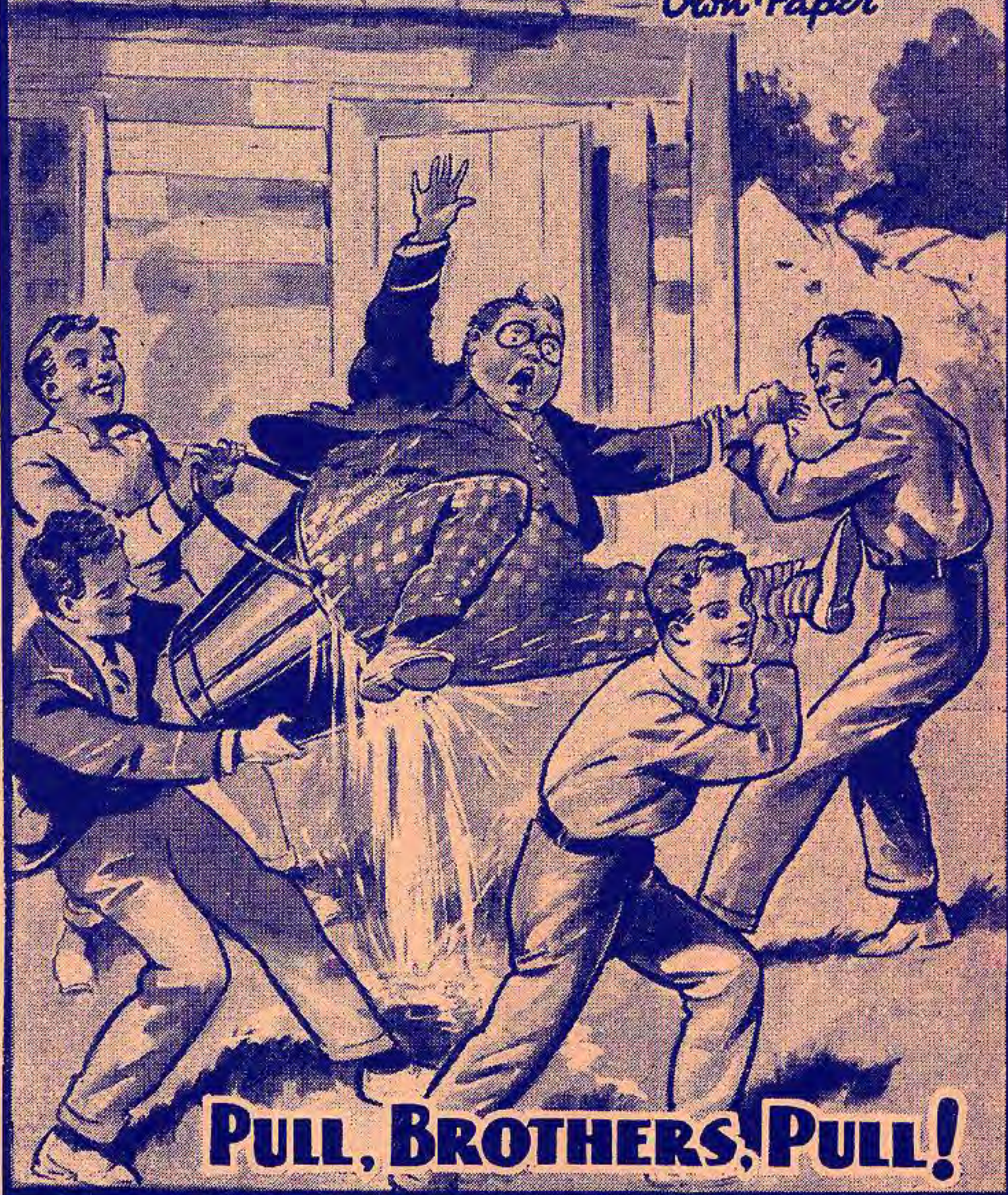


"The Mystery Of Blackrock Island!" Exciting
Holiday Adventures
of the . . . **Chums Of Greyfriars.**

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*





THIS WEEK BY
DAVID MORGAN,
the Welsh junior of the Remove

I HAVE just seen Skinner's drawing of me, and I have punched his nose. Look you, though, it wasn't because of my face, for it isn't a bit like me, though some of the silly asses here say it's my image. And it wasn't because of my costume, whatever; for the good land only knows what that costume was meant for. Was it an Eisteddfod costume, then? Or was it a cricket umpire's coat?

And it wasn't because of my hat, for, indeed, Skinner is so ignorant that he thinks a Welshman wears a woman's hat, if it was a hat at all. And it wasn't because of my Welsh homespun trousers, for look you, Welsh cloth is the best in the world. And it wasn't because of my Welsh harp, for indeed, I cannot play it, though I wish I could.

For why, then, did I punch his nose, whatever? It was because of the words that are floating up from my cavernous mouth. Skinner will have taken those words from a song-book, for they are the title of the greatest song in the world:

"Wales! Wales! Land of the mist and the wild,

Wherever I roam,
Though far from my home,
The mother is calling her child."

A good Welshman will not permit an English clown to make fun of his national song, and to add "whatever" to words like those, is to add insult to injury, look you. I think I shall punch Skinner's nose again.

I seldom say "whatever." My studymate, Wil, who is a silly ass, will sometimes pull my leg by saying: "Indeed to goodness, it was a ferry goot thing, whatever!" But I do not talk like this. I have a Welsh accent. Linley has a Lancashire accent, but you will not hear him say: "Ec, ba goom, lad, tha knows nowt about it."

I speak the Cymric language, but not very well. It was the most musical language in the world, look you. It has no very nice appearance when written, for there are so many consonants and commas; but you must take no notice of this. In Welsh some of the consonants have a vowel sound.

JESUS COLLEGE!

When I leave Greyfriars I shall go to Oxford, and like most Welshmen, I shall go to Jesus College. It is the Welshman's college, and a very old and fine place, whatever. I have been there with my father to see his old rooms. It was very interesting.

There is a big silver punch bowl, which holds ten gallons and is over five feet in circumference. It was worth a great deal of money. Sir Watkin Wynne presented it to the college ages ago, and it will be given to anyone who can (a) span it with his arms, (b) drink the full contents of punch, and (c) walk away with it afterwards.

Look you, I shall do this myself when I am older. At present I cannot get my arms round it. My father can get his arms round it, but he will not attempt to drink the ten gallons of punch, because, look you, he says he would have to be carried away afterwards, and that would disqualify him.

On St. David's Day, which is March 1st, there is a service in Welsh at Jesus Chapel, and the singing there is very fine, for Wales is the land of song, look you. Indeed, Welsh voices are the finest in the world, whatever.

Here's a joke. It'll probably make you laugh. It did me!

Foreman: "Where's your mate that used to be an artist?"

Bricklayer: "He laid some bricks, and stepped back to admire his work!"

GREYFRIARS GRIEVANCE

I have a distinction in my Form at Greyfriars. I am almost the only fellow who never worries Wharton for a place in the football team. Indeed, I do not want a place in the football team, and should refuse it if it were offered. And the reason for this was that Soccer is not my game, and I do not care for it.

Rugby is the Welshman's game. Every good Welsh village has its Rugger fifteen. Why can we not start Rugger at Greyfriars?

It was a better game than Soccer. I have tried to recruit a team, but there was no support. I think this very unfair, look you.

At home, I play at three-quarter for Pontysiliad, and during the Christmas vac., when we played Llaneddydrybrynnawddwy (Help! —Ed.) I got the only try of the game. This was the last thing I remembered, whatever; for all the Pontysiliad and Llaneddydrybrynnawddwy men were on top of me at the time. I woke up in a doctor's parlour, where they were trying artificial respiration as a last hope. A grand game, indeed.

I have drawn a picture of me scoring this try.

I shall play for Oxford when I leave here. My father insists on it. After that I shall play for Wales. My father insists on that, too. He played for Wales.

LAND OF MY FATHERS!

I do not wish to write much about Wales, for most readers will have been there themselves. Once Wales was a battleground; now it was a playground. Holiday places like Eisteddfod, Aberystwyth, Colwyn Bay, etc., are filled with English visitors every year. They make tours of the mountains and castles. The wild, romantic country of North Wales has become famous.

But, look you, North Wales is only half the country. They do not go to South Wales. I myself have been only once to Neath and Swansea. I do not wish to go again. I am a Welshman, and I wish to say that if I had my

will, I would put ten thousand million tons of gunpowder under South Wales and blow it to Kingdom Come.

And after that, I would sweep up the remains, whatever; and then I would build houses worthy of the people who would live in them. At present, the houses are not worthy of the good Welsh people who live in them. Many of them are not worthy of use as pig-sties.

I come from the mountains of Montgomery, where even the poorest cottages are clean and fresh, look you; and have gardens for their potatoes, and wells of clear water. There are deep, dark lakes in the valleys. If there had been coal in the valleys, they would all now be like the Rhondda valley in Glamorgan. That was a sad thought to me.

THE EISTEDDFOD!

I regard the Welsh Eisteddfod as one of the most civilised things in the world. I think every country should adopt the custom, look you. What does England or Ireland or Scotland do for her artists and musicians and poets? Why have they each not started great national festivals to encourage the country's talent?

Our Eisteddfod goes back to A.D. 1100, or even earlier. It was a yearly competition among the bards and minstrels, and the winners

were given crowns of laurel by the Archdruid. It was worth something to feel that you are the first poet or first harpist or first orator in your country. Everyone will look up to you. I would like to be a winner at the Eisteddfod, look you; but I think that is not very likely.

The word Eisteddfod means "a sitting," and was used to describe the ceremony when bards and minstrels collected in one place from all parts of the country, and then sat round and played and sang and recited. It was very interesting. The literary side of the competition is still kept chiefly in the Welsh tongue, so I am afraid it is of no great attraction to English people.



PROFIT AND LOSS!

Here's a figure problem. Don't let it beat you!

A father gave each of his four sons an equal amount of money to invest and, when they all met some time later, he asked them how they had fared. This is what had happened—one had gained £400, another had lost £500, the third showed a profit of two and a half times his original capital, while the fourth lost three-quarters of his gift. If the money that all the four sons now had amounted to £3,350, how much did each start off with?

spunod pappmu xis : NOILATOS

There is a lot more that I would wish to write, whatever; but I am warned that I have only one page, and that is now filled. If I should be allowed to write again some other time, it would please me to give you some interesting legends of the district where I live. I hope I will not have bored you by what I have written.

I will now go and punch Skinner's nose, and will say good-bye.

DAVID MORGAN, Study No. 6 (Remove)

Morgan shares Study No. 6 with Desmond and Wibley, and in spite of what he says on his page this week, he can at times be very Welsh. When an argument breaks out in the study, Morgan grows more Welsh and Desmond grows more Irish, so that it is quite entertaining to Wibley. The three are very good chums, and are usually together. David Morgan is a thickset youngster, with a rugged and rather freckled face. He is not brilliant at any form of sport, but plays honestly and doggedly, always doing his best. That sums him up in everything. There is something rather admirable about his honest and dogged efforts to do what cleverer fellows accomplish without thought. He will take more trouble to reach the middle of the Form than Luley, for instance, will take to get top place. At Rugby football, which is not played at Greyfriars, Morgan is very good. Taken all round, Wales can be proud of her son at Greyfriars.

(Cartoon by HAROLD SKINNER.)

DAVID MORGAN

REMOVE FORM—STUDY No 6



David Morgan

THE SCHOOLBOY CRUSOES! Stranded on a desolate island off the Cornish coast, due to Vernon-Smith's trickery, Harry Wharton & Co. find themselves landed in the midst of a strange mystery—a mystery they determine to solve!

The MYSTERY of BLACKROCK ISLAND!

By
FRANK RICHARDS



Bob Cherry clambered up on to his chums' shoulders. He found hand-hold on the rough surface, to get two or three feet up the rock wall; but there was no foot-hold, and he slipped back again!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Crusoes!

GROAN!
"Shut up, Bunter!"
Groan!
Shutting up was not really in Billy Bunter's line. He seldom shut up, though often requested to do so. On the present awful occasion the fat Owl of Greyfriars was less inclined than ever to shut up. And he did not shut up! He groaned, and groaned, and went on groaning.

Even groaning did not fully express Bunter's feelings. His feelings, in fact, were inexpressible.

There were six of them in the soup! Only one of the six uttered sounds of woe and lamentation. But that one, William George Bunter, uttered enough for the whole party and a little over.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood in a wrathful and worried group. They were landed and stranded, diddled, dished, and done! What they were going to do was a problem that seemed to have no answer. There seemed to be nothing they could do—yet, obviously, something had to be done!

"That rotter!" said Johnny Bull, for the umpteenth time.

"That terrific toad!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh; also for the umpteenth time.

"If a fellow could only punch his head—" sighed Frank Nugent.

"We'll punch it all right next term!" said Harry Wharton.

"That won't help us now!" said Bob Cherry, with a faint grin.

"Um! No!"
Groan!—from Billy Bunter. That was Bunter's contribution to the discussion. Bunter was tired. Even more serious, Bunter was hungry! Five other fellows were rather tired, and getting hungry; but, fortunately, they did not matter. Bunter was not worrying about them. His own woeful state was enough for Bunter to worry about.

"The rotter!" repeated Johnny Bull. He brandished a clenched fist in the air. Johnny would have given quite a lot to land it on the features of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Grey-

Thrill-Packed Easter Holiday Adventures of HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREY- FRIARS.

friars. "Pulling our leg, and landing us like this! Oh, the rotter!"

"Slanging Smithy won't help us much!" remarked Nugent. "What the thump are we going to do?"

"After all, it's a topping place!" said Bob Cherry.

That was Bob, all over! Even in the midst of dismay and disaster he could not help looking on the brighter side of things.

"Oh, fearfully topping!" said Johnny sarcastically. "We're landed on a dashed island, miles from everywhere,

without a bit of supper, or a roof over our heads! Nowhere to go, and we can't go back! That villain Smithy has properly dished us."

Groan!
"Oh, shut up that row, Bunter!"
"Beast!" moaned Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm hungry! I told you in the boat that I was hungry! You know I did! Fat lot you care! Oh dear!"

"Still, it is a topping place!" said Bob stoutly. "Fellows have been shipwrecked on desert islands before now—and it's not so bad as that! Matters might be a jolly lot worse."

"Might they?" grunted Johnny.
"Well, it might be raining—and it isn't!" said Bob cheerfully. "It might be cold—but it isn't! Smithy might have stranded us in the Orkneys or the Hebrides—we're jolly lucky to be on the coast of Devon. Anyhow, we've got to make the best of it."

Harry Wharton laughed.
"No doubt about that!" he agreed. "Looks like a Robinson Crusoe life for us, for some days—if not weeks! Bit of an adventure, anyhow."

A deep groan from Bunter! Bunter seemed to have no use for adventures in which a food shortage was included.

Still, it was, as Bob said, a topping place for a schoolboy's holiday!

Blackrock was a small island, and seemed to consist chiefly of huge rocks on which the Atlantic surf broke with an unending murmur. Far away eastward the cliffs of Devon could be seen in the daytime. Now it was night—a fine, clear, pleasant evening of a fine

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

April day. Bob was quite right in pointing out that it might have been worse—rain, for instance, would really have put the lid on.

Stars glittered in a deep blue vault of sky. A crescent moon was coming up, glimmering on the rolling sea.

But for the fact that they had been diddled and dished, and that they had to face a sort of Crusoe life without any preparation for the same, the chums of Greyfriars would have had little to grouse about.

"I say, you fellows, ain't it awful?" moaned Billy Bunter. He moaned instead of groaning, perhaps by way of a change. "That beast Smithy said it was going to be gorgeous! Oh dear! He gave me a letter for his butler at the castle on the island—and there ain't any castle, except an old ruin, and there ain't any butler—and there ain't anything—not even grub! Oh lor! And I'm hungry!"

"Nobody else is hungry, of course!" said Johnny Bull.

"That's like you!" said Bunter bitterly. "Thinking about yourself first and last and all the time! I say, you fellows, Smithy said I was to have the touring-car and the motor-boat and a special valet to myself when I got to the castle! And there ain't any castle—there ain't anything or anybody, except a putrid little cottage with a one-legged old blighter in it— Oh crikey!"

"I dare say you asked for it, you fat ass!" said Bob. "I couldn't make out why Smithy let you hook on to him for the hols—might have guessed that there was a catch in it, somewhere."

"Beast!" moaned Bunter.

"I shouldn't wonder if it serves Bunter right!" said Harry Wharton. "But that's no excuse for Smithy landing us in it, too."

"We thought he'd got over that ragging we gave him before he left Greyfriars!" said Bob. "Looks as if he hadn't!"

"Won't I punch him next term!" breathed Johnny Bull, brandishing a fist at the crescent moon that was peeping over the cliffs on the mainland.

"I say, you fellows, what's the good of jawing about next term?" moaned Bunter. "Punching Smithy next term won't get us any supper! What am I going to eat—that's what we've got to think about."

"Let's all sit down and think about what Bunter's going to eat!" hissed Johnny Bull with almost ferocious sarcasm.

Sarcasm was a sheer waste on Billy Bunter!

"Well, that's a good idea, if you think you can think of anything!" said the fat Owl. "I wonder if that man Oke has got anything in his cottage? He must have something, I suppose!"

Billy Bunter had been sitting down. Now he heaved himself to his feet. The thought of food seemed to give him new strength.

Leaving the Famous Five on the little beach at the head of the cove of Blackrock Island, Bunter rolled dismally away to the tiny cottage under the cliff—the only building on the island, inhabited by the only inhabitant—a dreadful contrast to the magnificent establishment Bunter had expected to find there!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Rough Quarters!

BILLY BUNTER groaned again as he looked in at the low doorway of Dave Oke's tiny cottage.

Really he could not help it.

That awful beast, Smithy, had described magnificent things as exist-

ing on the island his father had lately purchased. Billy Bunter had had a happy vision of a palatial establishment, a portly butler, a horde of liveried servants, motor-cars, motor-boats—the whole bag of tricks of a millionaire's lavish residence.

That was the vision! This was the reality!

A tiny cottage, built of old ship's timbers jammed under a bulging cliff—one room, which was kitchen, living-room and bed-room combined; as well as a storehouse for nets, fish, and fragments of wreckage that old Dave had gathered on the beach.

On a bench at a rough trestle table sat the sole inhabitant of Blackrock Island—with a wooden leg stretched out before him.

He was so old that it was hard to guess his age, but still active, though his hair and beard were quite white. He was eating a supper of bread and cheese, with a huge clasp-knife for aid. His face was old and brown and wrinkled, with sharp little eyes like pin-points.

He glanced round at Bunter as the unhappy fat Owl blinked in, and touched his forelock.

That ancient mariner, though surprised by the sudden incursion by a numerous party of visitors on the solitary island, was civil, and seemed not unkindly. He was prepared to do what he could for those visitors. But plainly there was little that he could do.

That tiny cottage, obviously, could not accommodate the party. Indeed, there was so much in the single room that there seemed none too much space for old Dave and his wooden leg.

"Come in, sir!" said old Dave. "You're Master Bunter, sir, that Master Vernon-Smith wrote me the letter about."

"Yes!" groaned Bunter. "The beast!"

"I ain't seen that young gentleman, sir, yet," said old Dave. "His father's been here—I see mun the day he came to look over the island afore he bought it. I dunno what's going to be done with your friends, sir; but I got my orders from Master Vernon-Smith to put you up here, and mun can only do his best."

"The beast!" moaned Bunter. "He told me there was a castle and a butler and—and— Oh, the rotter! Pulling a fellow's leg! I suppose you can let me have your bed and sleep somewhere else?"

"Ready and willing, sir, if there was a bed—"

"Eh?"

Billy Bunter was prepared to annex the only bed! Now he realised that there wasn't one to annex!

"I slings a hammock in the corner, sir," said the ancient mariner, poising a large lump of cheese on the point of the clasp-knife while he talked. "If you'd care for the hammock I'd make shift elsewhere."

"Oh crikey!"

"Put him to sleep on the floor!" Master Vernon-Smith says in his letter, sir," said old Dave. "Anything's good enough for him, he says."

"Oh, the beast!"

"I can fix you up a bed with sailcloth on the floor—"

"Sailcloth—on the floor! Oh scissors!"

"Don't give him too much to eat, he says, because it ain't good for him!" continued old Dave. "And clout him if he's cheeky, he says! That's what Master Vernon-Smith says in the letter, sir, that was brought off from Potkelly to me by old Tom Tregelly in his boat three days ago, sir."

"The awful rotter!" groaned Bunter. Billy Bunter had succeeded in hooking on to Smithy for the Easter holidays! This was the Easter holiday he had hooked on to!

"I got to carry out Master Vernon-Smith's orders, him being the son of t' rich gentleman that's bought the island. There's supper, sir, if you want it, and for your friends, too, if you'll call them. But there ain't room in here for a crowd, and that's a fact!" added old Dave, rubbing his weather-beaten nose. "They'll have to sit round outside."

Bunter was not bothering about them, however. He looked round for a chair. There was no chair to be seen. He dragged an old box to the trestle-table and sat down, with a weary grunt.

Fortunately, there was plenty of bread and plenty of cheese—little as it resembled the magnificent provender Bunter had expected at the non-existent castle! There was also fish—plenty of it, Dave being a fisherman.

The fat Owl's most dreadful anticipations were relieved. He was not going to starve on that desert island.

Only one implement for eating was available. It was an old fork with a prong missing. This, it seemed, sufficed for Dave Oke. Now, hospitably, he let Bunter have it.

A smoky oil-lamp, hung on a hook, illumined the scene. Bunter ate and ate and ate! But he groaned between the bites. He had pictured a vast dining-room, with butler and men-servants in attendance. Instead of which he sat on a creaking old box, at a trestle-table without even a cloth on it, eating cold fish with a damaged fork—with chunks of bread on which there was not even butter! Old Dave's supplies did not run to butter.

He had water to drink; there was a spring on the island, and the water was fresh and pure. Tea and coffee and cocoa and milk were lacking. Clearly the sole inhabitant of Blackrock Island did not live luxuriously.

He looked as if he thrived on it, for in spite of his great age he was strong and vigorous, and his eyes, though almost hidden in wrinkles, were clear and keen. Bunter did not feel as if he would thrive on it. He groaned in anguish of spirit.

Still, he parked a substantial supper. He was greasy and shiny when he had finished, but he was feeling better.

"Now, where am I going to sleep?" he asked.

"Here you are, sir," answered old Dave cheerfully.

He rose from the bench, stumping on his wooden leg, dragged some lumber out of a corner, leaving a clear space, and threw down some rolls of weather-worn old sailcloth.

Bunter blinked at those preparations. His feelings, as he blinked, were almost too deep for words.

He was tired. He was no longer hungry and he was sleepy. He could, as a rule, sleep almost anywhere. But this was the limit. There was plenty of old sailcloth. Perhaps Dave Oke salvaged it from wrecks. Anyhow, there was any amount of it. But there was nothing else.

"Haven't you got any sheets?" asked Bunter faintly.

"Sheets!" repeated old Dave, staring. "My eye! No, sir!"

"Or blankets?"

"Blankets! My eye! No, sir."

"Or a pillow?"

"You take a roll of sailcloth, sir—you'll be all right!"

"Oh crikey! Oh, that beast Smithy!" hissed Bunter. "Oh, wouldn't



Billy Bunter dragged an old box to the trestle-table and sat down, with a weary grunt, to partake of bread and cheese. The fat Removite ate, and ate, and ate, But he groaned between the bites. Old Dave looked on, puffing away at his pipe!

I like to punch his head! Wouldn't I like to boot him! Wouldn't I just! Pulling a fellow's leg and landing him in this filthy hole!"

Old Dave eyed him. So far, he had been quite considerate to Bunter, though he could hardly have been pleased at the fat Owl butting into such close quarters. But at that discourteous description of his residence he showed signs of annoyance.

"Master Vernon-Smith says in that letter, sir——"

"Blow him!" roared Bunter. "Don't talk to me about the cad!"

"He says, says he," continued old Dave, unmoved—"he says, says he, anything's good enough for Bunter, he says, seeing he cooms where he isn't wanted! That's what Master Vernon-Smith says in his letter, sir."

"Don't tell me what the cheeky cad says!" hooted Bunter. "I don't want to hear his rotten cheek!"

"A chap who cooms where he isn't wanted must take things as he foinds them, sir, he says in that letter!" said old Dave stolidly. "And he says——"

"Shut up!" roared Bunter.

"He says——"

"I said shut up, blow you!"

"He says, clout his head if he's cheeky!" said old Dave calmly.

"You cheeky beast!"

"I jest mentioned that, sir, thinking that perhaps you'd like to remember it!" said old Dave.

"You——" began Bunter.

A hand that was rather like a ham half rose. Old Dave, it seemed, was prepared to carry out Master Vernon-Smith's instructions to the very letter!

Billy Bunter decided not to finish his remarks!

He turned in.

In such an awful sort of bed Bunter was longer than usual getting to sleep.

It was a full minute before his snore began to wake the echoes of Blackrock Island.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man In The Boat.

"A BOAT!"

"Oh, good!"

"Thank goodness!"

"This is luck!"

"The luckfulness is terrific!"

Five faces brightened wonderfully in the gleam of the moonlight on Blackrock Island.

At that moment nothing could have been more happily welcome to the eyes of the Famous Five than a boat.

Old Dave had no boat on the island. Once a fortnight, he had told them, a boat came off from Potkelly. That was his only communication with the mainland. And it was only three days since a boat had come off—so unless some craft came out by chance, the prospect of getting off the island in a hurry was remote.

Getting off, if they could, was naturally the first thought of the stranded schoolboys. While Billy Bunter was parking his supper in Dave's hut they discussed the possibilities—or rather, the impossibilities—standing in a group on the little stone jetty.

There was perhaps a remote chance that Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith might visit the island. He had bought it, along with a number of other properties along the Devon coast, with the intention of developing it—putting up buildings, and so on.

The millionaire, at the present time, was touring Devon, acquiring properties, spending thousands that were to turn into tens of thousands—sprats that were to catch whales, as it were.

With his usual keen foresight Mr. Vernon-Smith foresaw the rise in values in that part of the country, owing to crises and scares, and he was getting in on the ground floor, as he would probably have expressed it.

Smithy was joining him in that tour for the Easter holidays. The Famous Five had not doubted that that was what he had intended them to do also. He had not exactly said so, but left it to be inferred.

Even Smithy, who was not very scrupulous when his back was up, would hardly have asked fellows for the holidays, and then let them down, especially in such a way.

But as he had left the school a few days before the term ended, he had been able to put it in a telegram which, naturally, was brief.

In that telegram, he had only said that he would be more than glad if they would come with Bunter!

They knew now what that meant! It meant that Smithy would be more than glad if they would be diddled and dished, as he had planned to diddle and dish the obnoxious fat Owl.

They knew it now—now that it was too late to be of any use! Smithy had not asked them for the hols at all! He had asked them to be spoofed and stranded with Billy Bunter! And they had unsuspectingly fallen for it!

But, as Mr. Vernon-Smith had bought that remote island, with the intention of building accommodation on it for foolish people who scuttled off into the West Country when there was an alarm of war, it seemed possible that he might come along some time to take another look at it.

That seemed the only chance of getting off ~~exeat~~ by waiting for the fortnightly boat from Potkelly.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1.627.

They realised that it was a faint hope. And there seemed no other, unless a boat came out by chance. And then, all of a sudden, the boat appeared—gliding past the mouth of the cove, on the open sea, plainly visible in the clear moonlight.

Five pairs of eyes fixed on it at once. The boat was pulling seaward, past the cove, and not turning into it—pulling out to the open sea, unless it was going round the island.

Two men sat at the oars, and a third was steering. The two rowers looked like fishermen or boatmen, in jerseys and caps; the man in the stern wore an overcoat and a bowler hat. It was not easy to make them out at the distance, and in the moonlight, but the juniors could see that much.

"Must be a boat out from Potkelly!" said Bob Cherry. "Some tripper taking a run on the water by moonlight, perhaps."

"Anyhow, it's a boat," said Harry, "and if they can't give us a lift off the island, they can take word back to Potkelly for a boat to be sent out."

"Give them a yell!" said Bob. He waved his cap to the boat. It was a considerable distance out, and the men in it were not looking shoreward. But they were within hail.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob, with all the force of his powerful lungs. "Ahoy!" shouted Johnny Bull. "Boat ahoy!"

The Famous Five ran to the end of the jetty, shouted at the tops of their voices, and waved their hands.

That their hail reached the boat they could soon see, for the two rowers rested on their oars, staring into the little cove, and the man in the stern rose to his feet, and stood gazing directly towards them.

They could make out his face now, as the moonlight fell on it, under the brim of the bowler hat.

It was a sharp, keen face, with a sharp nose, and sharp eyes, and sharp mouth. The expression on it was one of anger, as if the man was surprised to see a crowd of fellows on the island, and displeased thereby. All the juniors could read that expression quite plainly, though what had caused it, they could not guess.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "Pull in, will you! We want to speak to you."

There was no answering hail from the boat.

The man with the sharp face, after staring at them long and hard, sat down again, and made a sign to his crew.

The oarsmen immediately pulled again, and the boat shot onward, faster than before.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Bob.

"Can't they answer?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob. But the boat was shooting out of sight beyond the cliff that jutted on the western side of the cove. It disappeared seaward, beyond the cliff.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob, panting for breath after his efforts. "They jolly well heard us, and saw us, too. Why couldn't they answer?"

"Bother them, whoever they are!" granted Johnny Bull.

"Rotten!" said Nugent.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. It had looked like a chance of getting a message to the mainland for a boat to take the juniors off Blackrock. It would have cost the sharp-faced man only a few minutes' delay to pull

nearer and hear what they had to say. Such disobliging incivility was exasperating in the circumstances.

"I'd like to punch him, as well as Smith!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "Nothing doing, anyhow."

"But I say, I wonder what those chaps are up to?" said Bob, staring at the jutting corner of the cliff, beyond which the boat had vanished. "Running out to sea at night in a row-boat—it's queer! Nothing nearer than Ireland if they keep on."

"Can't be going to land on this island, anyhow," answered Harry. "This is the only landing-place on Blackrock. Look here, it's no good jawing it over any more—Smithy has done us brown, and we're booked for this place until something turns up! Let's go and see if old Oke can scrounge us a spot of supper, and then look for a place for camping."

And the Famous Five left the jetty and tramped up the beach to old Dave's hut, where the ancient mariner greeted them with a hospitable grin, and Billy Bunter, from his sailcloth bed in the corner, with a deep and rumbling snore.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Does Not Want His Cake!

"When the rising-bell clangs in the dewy morn,
We roll out of bed by the light of dawn."

BOB CHERRY was singing. At all events, if his comrades had asked him, that was what he would have told them. Any uninformed person might have supposed that he was trying to hail the mainland. Bob's voice was more powerful than tuneful.

The rising-bell was a thing of the past. But the Famous Five turned out early, all the same.

It was bright morning on Blackrock. Bob had turned out in cheery spirits. He signified the same by waking the echoes of the lone island.

Old Dave was already up, setting a net at the end of the jetty. The Owl of the Remove was still snoring in the hut.

Harry Wharton & Co. went down the beach for a morning dip in the cove.

It was a glorious April morning. The sea rolled bright and blue. Far away, the Devon cliffs barred the horizon—Potkelly nestling somewhere under them, out of sight at the distance.

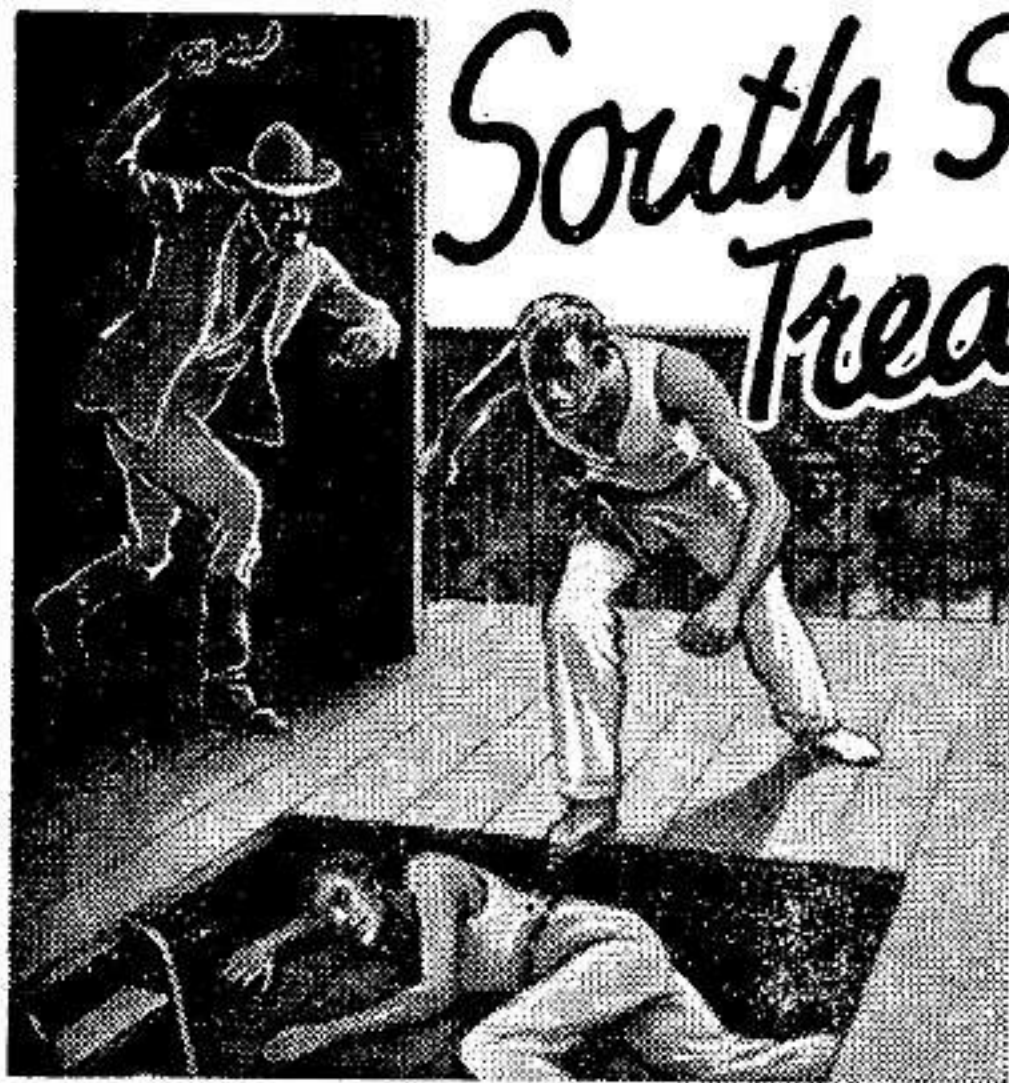
The night had been fine; they had camped on the soft sand, with old sailcloth for blankets. And they slept as soundly as in the old dormitory at Greyfriars.

Coming up the beach, after their dip, they looked cheery and bright. Smithy's malicious trick was fading a little from their minds. Booked for Blackrock, they were the fellows to make the best of it, so long as it lasted. Bob declared that it was a tremendous lark to play Crusoe.

"Here we are, like jolly old Robinson Crusoes," said Bob. "No end of a lark, my beloved 'earers! It's a jolly old island, and we're going to have a jolly old time on it."

"The jolliffulness is going to be terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamsct Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"We've got a Man Friday, just like jolly old Robinson!" continued Bob, with a nod towards old Dave, who was stumping in and out of the hut with



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supplies for breakfast. "After all, that swab Smithy might have stranded us somewhere without a Man Friday and a stock of grub."

"Well, even that rotter has a limit, I suppose!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows!"

It was a dismal fat squeak, as Billy Bunter rolled out of the hut.

Billy Bunter's fat face was quite a contrast to the other five. It was lugubrious, and as long as so plump a face could be.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "Enjoying life, Bunt?"

"I say, you fellows, ain't it awful?" groaned Bunter, blinking dismally at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles. "Ain't it fearful?"

"What's the odds, so long as you're happy?" asked Bob. "The fact is, you fellows, we're really rather in luck. After all, our arrangements for Easter did break down at the last minute—and Smithy's really done us a good turn, without meaning to—if you look at it the right way."

"I'll punch his head, all the same, next term!" growled Johnny Bull.

"We've got that to look forward to!" grinned Bob. "I'm going to alter Smithy's features next term to such an extent that his pal Redwing won't know him! But Smithy will keep! Put on a smile, Bunter! Look at the grub!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the grub. But it did not have the usual cheering effect on him.

"Fish again?" he moaned.

"Lots of variety!" said Bob, encouragingly. "There's cheese, when you get tired of fish—and fish again when you get tired of cheese!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"And lots of bread!" said Bob. "Staff of life, you know—"

"I like new bread!"

"Bad for the digestion," said Bob, shaking his head. "Think of your inside."

"Does Bunter ever think of anything else?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I say, isn't there any tea?" moaned Bunter.

"Tea's bad for the digestion, too—"

"You silly ass! Any coffee?"

"Coffee's bad for the nerves—"

"Yah! Any cocoa?"

"Cocoa makes you sleepy—"

"Isn't there anything?" yapped Bunter.

"Lots of fresh water," said Bob.

"Old Oke says there's a spring on the island—no end of fresh water—"

"Urrgh!"

"And plenty of salt water, when you want variety—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! You fellows may like this sort of thing!" hooted Bunter. "I don't! And to think that that beast Smithy said there was a castle—and a butler—and a special valet for me personally, and a car! Oh crikey! Pulling a fellow's leg, you know, after all I've done for him! Well, if that's all there is, I'd better have some—I can't starve! It's not much I eat, as you fellows know—"

"Eh?"

"But a fellow must eat something."

Outside the hut the juniors sat on chunks of rock and ate breakfast, with a good appetite. Over breakfast, the Famous Five discussed exploring the island, and especially the smugglers' cave which existed on the western side, cutting the Atlantic. Smugglers belonged to the dim and distant past, but the cave was still there, and had plenty of interest for them.

It did not interest Billy Bunter.

Bunter accompanied the cheery conversation with an unending melody of grousing.

Nevertheless, he packed away fried fish and stale bread at a rate that made old Dave Oke glance at him several times, at first in surprise and then in something like alarm. Old Dave seemed puzzled at first to guess where Bunter was putting it all, and then uneasy whether he might not burst. And he gave quite a jump when Bunter, having finished at last, leaned back against a rock, grunted, and remarked:

"It's no good! A fellow can't make a real meal of this prog! I can see that I'm going to starve here."

"Are there plenty of fish in the cove, Mr. Oke?" called out Bob.

"Iss, iss, more'n plenty," answered Dave.

"That's lucky, if Bunter is going to starve at that rate!" said Bob. "Still, there's the whole Atlantic to draw on if the fish in the cove run short."

"On, really, Cherry! I suppose that old goat hasn't any jam or marmalade?" asked Bunter.

"No; and if you're not civil, old fat man, he may carry out Smithy's instructions. Smithy told him to clout your head if you were cheeky, you know."

"Beast! No porridge, not a tomato, not a spot of bacon, not even a biscuit, or a spot of cake! Oh lor'! I say, you fellows, didn't you think of putting any grub in your bags?" asked Bunter, with a gleam of hope.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We don't generally pack grub in our bags when we're going on a visit, old fat bean," he answered.

"No chocs, or anything?"

"Nothing but what's left of a cake in my bag," said Bob Cherry. "I had a trifle off it this morning—you can have what's left if you like."

"I think you might have left it for me," said Bunter. "You know I like cake. Selfishness all round, as per usual."

"My dear chap, I had only a spot off it. You can have the rest if you like to sort it out of my suitcase."

"I'm sitting down," said Bunter, with dignity. "I think you might sort it out for me."

"Go on thinking as long as you like!" said Bob, affably.

"Yah!"

Starving as he was, the fat Owl had parked rather too much breakfast to be willing to stir if he could help it. But the prospect of cake was alluring, and he heaved himself to his feet and rolled over to the suitcases that were stacked under a bulge of the cliff.

Bob Cherry's chums looked at him rather curiously. They had not seen Bob scoffing cake that morning, neither was Bob the fellow to keep a private supply of tuck for himself.

Bob gave them a cheery wink as Bunter opened a suitcase and blinked and groped therein.

"Is there really a cake in your bag?" asked Harry.

"My dear chap, didn't you hear me tell Bunter so? I cannot tell a lie, any more than George Washington could—less, in fact!"

"What sort of a cake?" grinned Nugent.

"Just the kind Bunter wants! Found it, Bunter?" bawled Bob. "All I had was a little bit off the top. You can have the rest, and it will do you good."

"There isn't any cake here!" hooted Bunter wrathfully.

"There jolly well is!"

"Well, I can't find it!"

"You want some new specs, old man, if you can't see that cake! It's in a little bag along with a sponge and a nail-brush—"

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

"You silly chump!" shrieked Bunter. "There's nothing but a cake of soap in that—"

"That's it! I had a little of it this morning—you can have the rest. Do you a lot of good."

"You—you—you—" gasped Bunter. "Think I want a cake of soap, you—you—you blithering idiot?"

"Yes, judging by appearances, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

He rolled back to his seat, minus that cake! He seemed to have no use for that particular kind of cake, though, really, judging by appearances, as Bob declared, he might have found a use for it.

"Coming exploring, old fat man?" asked Bob, jumping up. "The tide's out, and we can walk right round the jolly old island—only a few miles—"

"Beast!" was Bunter's answer, apparently in the negative.

But the Famous Five were full of beans. Old Dave lent them a lantern, for exploration purposes in the smugglers' cave, and they started—the ancient mariner calling after them to mind the toide. And, remembering that they had to mind the tide, they tramped away round Blackrock Island.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Footprints In The Sand!

"SMUGGLERS' CAVE!" announced Bob Cherry.

Once round the cliffs that shut in the little cove, the juniors were out of sight of the cove and the jetty, and of the mainland. They might have fancied that they were on some solitary island in a far sea, instead of hardly more than a mile off the coast of Devonshire, so utterly lonely and untrodden did the island of Blackrock look.

When the tide was full it washed against the giant cliffs that fronted the ocean. But at low tide there was a narrow beach, between the cliffs and the water. It was not easy going, for long spurs of rock ran down from the cliffs to the sea and had to be clambered over. Masses of seaweed and fragments of old wreckage lay about, cast up by the tides.

Like a wall the solid cliffs shut in Blackrock Island from the sea till the juniors reached the western side fronting the boundless Atlantic.

There, facing due west, a great cavern opened in the cliff, the arch of rugged rock a good thirty feet over their heads.

Peebles and seaweed and driftwood cumbered the floor within, and the juniors could see that at high tide the sea flowed some distance up the cavern.

No doubt it was at high tide that, in the old days, the smugglers had pulled in to land contraband cargoes of kegs of rum, and casks of wine, and bales of French silks, from some craft lying out to sea and stacked them in those remote rocky recesses safe from the eyes of revenue officers.

But at low tide the cavern was high and dry, with a stretch of sand and shingle between it and the ocean.

Clambering over rocks, clattering over pebbles, the schoolboys reached

the great cavern, and stood looking into its gloomy depths.

Within, twilight reigned, deepening to dense darkness in the farther distance.

"Not a nice place to be caught in the tide," remarked Nugent.

"Hours yet," answered Bob. "Lots of time to explore the place and pick up anything the jolly old smugglers may have left behind."

Perhaps hoping to find some sign or relic of the tough old smugglers, who had frequented the lonely cavern in days long gone, the juniors tramped in under the high arch of rock.

For some distance seaweed and sea-shells and fragments of driftwood showed that they were still below high-water mark. The floor of the cavern sloped gently upwards; and at length they reached a spot where ridges of pebbles and massed seaweed marked the limit of the tide.

At that spot, some distance from the shore, the twilight was deepening to darkness, and Bob lighted the lantern.

Dark and gloomy, the cavern extended far beyond the radius of the lantern-light. It widened as they advanced, and the rocky sides were lost to view in the gloom and they could not now see the rocky roof over their heads.

Looking back, the opening of the cave was like a doorway on the sea—rolling bright and blue in the April sunshine.

"Come on, old beans!" said Bob, flashing round the light of the lantern. "We're going right on to the end! Topping place!"

"The topfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shivering a little.

It was chilly in the deep cave, after the bright sunshine of the shore.

"Might find a cask of rum they forgot to take away a hundred years ago," suggested Bob.

"It would be rum if we did," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"The rumfulness would be preposterous."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob, coming to a sudden halt, as he tramped on ahead of his comrades with the light.

"What—"

"Found that cask of rum?" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Great Christopher Columbus!" roared Bob. "Look at this!"

"What the thump—"

"Somebody's here before us!"

"Wha-at?"

Beyond the pebble-ridge that marked the limit of the tide, soft white sand carpeted the floor of the cavern. The juniors' footsteps left clearly defined marks in it.

Bob was staring at the sand in front of him, where he had not yet trodden. Holding the light in his right hand, he pointed with his left—and his comrades stared in equal amazement.

Clear and distinct in the soft sand was a human footprint!

The Greyfriars fellows stared at it blankly. They were as astonished as Robinson Crusoe by the discovery of a footprint in the sand on the shore of his lonely island.

It was utterly amazing to see the footprint there.

Old Dave Oke was the only resident on Blackrock. He had told them that, apart from the millionaire's visit a few weeks ago to survey the place and the fortnightly boat from Potkelly, no one had set foot there since the previous summer.

This was a fresh footprint—almost as fresh as their own! Time would have rendered it indistinguishable—plainly, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

it had been left there recently by someone who had tramped up from the sea into the gloomy depths of the smugglers' cave! But by whom?

They stared at it—and stared round at the dark shadows that encompassed them. Then they stared at the footprint again.

"Well," said Bob. "This beats Banagher!"

"The boatfulness of esteemed Banagher is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Who the dickens!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Nobody could be on the island without old Oke knowing it."

"Nobody!" agreed Bob. "But somebody's been here! Picked in from the sea at high tide, like the jolly old smugglers, what?"

"Must have—they certainly never landed at Dave's cove or he would have known!" said Nugent. "But who—"

Harry Wharton uttered a sudden exclamation.

"That boat we saw last night! That man with the hatchet face in it—they were pulling round to the cave—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob.

He bent down and put the light close to the footprint and scanned it.

Obviously, it was too fresh to have been made at the time when Mr. Vernon-Smith had visited Blackrock—even if the portly millionaire could have been supposed to share the school-boys' taste for exploring smugglers' caves.

"Somebody's been here, and he must have come in a boat!" said Bob. "Ten to one it was that boat we saw last night. That chap with a face like a knife was rowed in, and he landed here—goodness knows why."

He cast the light round him.

Further footprints, all clearly marked, showed that the unknown man had gone farther up the cave. But the traces were of only one pair of shoes; only one man had landed.

If, as the juniors could hardly doubt, it was the sharp-faced man they had seen in the moonlight the night before he had landed alone, leaving the two oarsmen in the boat to wait for him.

"Some tripper, with a fancy for exploring caves by night," said Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Why couldn't he stop when we hailed him?" he said slowly. "And why did he glare at us as if he could have bitten us when he saw us on the jetty? There's something else in this, goodness knows what!"

"Modern smugglers?" grinned Bob. "Contraband cargo! Yo-heave-ho, and a bottle of rum, what?"

"Not likely! But—"

"Well, let's get on!" said Bob. "The jolly old trail is leading us the way we were going. I suppose there's a back trail somewhere about—he can't have stayed here. Kim on!"

Keeping the light on the trail of footprints in the sand, Bob tramped on, and his comrades followed him; deeper and deeper into the vast cave; till, when they looked back, the spot of daylight at the cavern's mouth seemed hardly larger than a man's hand. And still the footprints led them on into deeper and deeper gloom.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Of The Cave!

"JOURNEY'S end!" said Bob.

He came to a halt at last, flashing the lantern-light over a rugged wall of rock that shut in the extremity of the deep cavern.

Far away, behind the juniors, the mouth of the cave was now a small speck. Except where the light of the

lantern gleamed, impenetrable blackness surrounded them.

At the back of the cave the ground was a good deal higher; they had been ascending all the time. Still the roof was out of sight, when Bob flashed the light upward. It was like an immense vault, hollowed in the heart of the soaring, sea-beaten cliff.

A rock wall confronted the juniors at their journey's end; as Bob called it.

The sand on the rock floor was less thick the farther they advanced; and here it was thin, and bare rock showed through in many places. But there was still enough for them to pick up the track of the feet that had trodden up from the sea.

The trail had led them to the remote end of the cavern and stopped at that rocky wall that closed it in. Plenty of sign remained to show that the man, whoever he was, had moved about there, and there was sign to show where he had turned and gone back, slanting off towards one side of the cavern away from his original trail.

"Well, he came as far as this and then hiked back," said Bob. "Couldn't have gone farther unless he climbed up there."

He flashed the light up. The juniors could discern an opening in the rock twelve or fifteen feet up—a black gap five or six feet wide. It looked like the opening of a tunnel.

The trampled sand showed that the unknown man had halted there and moved about directly under that gap in the rock. An oblong indentation in the sand looked as if he had laid down a portmanteau or suitcase which he must have been carrying.

The juniors examined it with increasing surprise.

The sign left little doubt on the subject. But why a man should have carried a portmanteau up the cave was hard to guess—as, indeed, it was hard to guess why he had come there at all.

"Hiding something?" suggested Nugent.

"Well, that's possible," said Harry Wharton slowly. "Some sort of a crook hiding plunder? But—"

"Plenty of nooks and crannies in the cliffs on the mainland without coming out here for that!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yes! Blessed if I make it out!"

Bob stared up at the cavity above, dimly outlined by the rays of the lantern. The rock wall was sheer, though a rugged surface; it did not seem possible that anyone could have climbed there.

Yet it was extraordinary that the unknown man had carried a burden up the cave, only to carry it back again to the boat.

"Hold the lamp, Franky, while I have a shot at climbing!" said Bob. "It may be easier than it looks! There's something jolly fishy about all this, you fellows."

"The fishiness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Singh.

Frank Nugent took the lantern and held it up while Bob essayed to clamber up the rock wall.

But it was in vain.

He found handhold on the rough surface to get two or three feet up, but there was no foothold, and he slipped back again.

But Bob was not beaten yet.

"Give us a bunk," he said. "It jolly well looks to me as if that sportsman came here to hide something, and if he did, it was jolly well something that didn't belong to him. Two of you stand here and I'll get on your shoulders."

"Go ahead, old man!"

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull stood close to the rock.



"Not a word!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Go back to the disgraceful friends you have chosen—my wishes and my commands are nothing to you—go back to them if you choose—in any case leave this house!" "Father!" muttered Vernon-Smith. "I've done wrong—but—but won't you let me speak a word?"

Bob Cherry clambered up again and succeeded in getting a foot on a shoulder belonging to each.

"Ow!" howled Johnny Bull.

Bob, clinging to the rock, stared down.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Only a silly ass shoving a silly hoof into my jaw!" growled Johnny.

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"My hat! What's the matter with you?" hooted Bob.

"Only a silly ass shoving a silly hoof into my ear!"

"Look here, don't jaw, and stand steady!" grunted Bob; and he grabbed at the rock and clambered again.

There was handhold above, and he drew himself slowly but surely from his perch on the shoulders of the two juniors below.

A foot, and then another foot, he gained, but the ledge of the cavity was still several feet out of his reach, and there was no further hold. He clung on, in a state of some exasperation, holding with one hand, groping with the other.

The holding hand suddenly slipped from a precarious grip.

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

He shot down.

"Oh!" roared Wharton and Johnny Bull together, as he landed on them.

"Look out!" gasped Nugent—rather too late.

Wharton and Johnny went over, sprawling, and over them sprawled Bob Cherry.

Three juniors sat up, spluttering.

"You silly owl!" gurgled Johnny Bull.

"Ow! I slipped! Wow! I've banged my funny-bone on something!" gasped Bob, clasping his right elbow with his left hand. "Ow! I banged it on something—"

"It was my nose, you mad ass!" gasped Harry Wharton. He rubbed his nose in anguish. "Ow! My nose, you dangerous maniac!"

"Ow! My funny-bone—"

"Blow your funny-bone! My nose—"

"Well, blow your nose! I've nearly put my elbow out of joint."

"I believe you've quite put my nose out of joint!" groaned the captain of the Remove. "Oh crikey! It feels as if it had been driven in like a nail!"

Bob Cherry scrambled up.

"Well, let's try again!" he said.

"One swallow doesn't make a summer! If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again, you know! You fellows stand here—"

"What!" gasped Wharton and Johnny together, as they scrambled up.

"Stand here, and don't tumble over again if I slip down! Catch hold of me—see—and stop me!" explained Bob.

"We'll do that before you start!" roared Johnny Bull. "Grab the silly ass!"

"We'll catch hold of you and stop you all right!" gasped Wharton.

And they did, grabbing Bob Cherry and seating him on the cavern floor with a heavy bump.

Bob's roar as he sat woke all the echoes of the smugglers' cave.

"There, you ass!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"There, you chump!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"You—you—you—" spluttered Bob Cherry, scrambling up in great wrath. "I'll jolly well—"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh hastily interposed. He pushed Bob back with a dusky hand.

"The rowfulness is not the proper caper, my esteemed Bob," he murmured. "Let dogs delight in the barkfulness and the bitefulness, but the soft answer is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks."

Perhaps that English proverb helped to restore Bob's good humour; anyhow, he ginned.

"You silly asses!" he said. "I'll bet there's something up there to see—that sportsman never carried a big bag all this way for nothing. I might be able to reach if I stood on your heads instead of your shoulders—"

"Oh crumbs! You won't put your hoof on my head—I know that!" said Johnny Bull, with emphasis.

"Nothing in it to damage, is there?" asked Bob. "Well, if we're going to give it a miss, let's get back. No good standing here."

It was clear that there was no head at Bob's service for standing on, so the idea of exploring that gap high up in the rock wall had to be given up.

As Bob had failed to climb into it, it did not seem that the unknown man could have done so, though possibly

he might have tossed something up into it if he had anything to hide.

The juniors turned back and again followed the trail of the footprints, now leading them back towards the sea, though at a distance from the original trail, which ran up the middle of the great cavern.

Why the man had changed his route going back was rather a puzzle. He had walked directly up the cave till he reached the end, and must have had some reason for slanting off to the side as he returned towards the sea.

That reason the juniors discovered when the track led them to the rocky side of the cave, where a narrow fissure opened in the rock.

It was only a few inches wide, and obviously no man could have entered it. But Bob, as he flashed the light in, spotted something that lay there, and uttered an exclamation.

"Look!"

In renewed surprise, the juniors looked.

Hidden in that narrow fissure lay a boathook, with a handle six feet long. Beside it lay another handle, with a socket instead of a hook at the end. That, clearly, was to fit on and double the length of the boathook. But why and wherefore beat them hollow.

Evidently, the unknown man had left the boathook and the extra handle there—his footprints led direct to the spot. But what any man could want with a boathook, so far from the water and a boat, was a puzzle.

"It's getting curiousest and curiousest, as Alice said in Wonderland," remarked Bob. "I'll tell you what—that chap with a face like a bread-knife is up to something here, and it's something jolly secret! But what?"

"Echo answers what," said Nugent.

"Esteemed echo answers that the whatfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"Well, come on!"

Deeply puzzled, the juniors went on their way again, following the footprints in the sand, back towards the cavern's mouth.

The return trail ended at high-water mark, where they could guess that the boat had awaited the man.

From that point there was no sign of any kind—only they knew that the mysterious visitor to the cave must have rowed away in the boat before the tide went down.

And, remembering old Dave's warning to "moind the toide," Harry Wharton & Co. left the smugglers' cave to tramp round the shore back to the cove, wondering a good deal about that strange mystery of the cave, and wondering, too, whether they would see anything more of the man with the hatchet face during their enforced stay on Blackrock Island.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Return Of The Prodigal!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, sat in the train as it boomed through the glorious Devon landscape towards the town of Okeham, smoking his last cigarette—his last, because he was going to join his father at Okeham, after which Smithy had to chuck up being a sportsman and become a schoolboy again!

There was a thoughtful shade on the Bounder's face.

His conscience was not quite easy.

He had had his own way, in spite of THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

of opposition which, to the headstrong and arrogant Bounder, came before most other considerations.

He had had three days' extra leave before Greyfriars broke up for the Easter holidays. He had gone off with his sportive friends, Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe. And he had had a high old time.

That high old time had included a run across the Channel on a day trip, and a flutter at the casino over the water—where very nearly all the Bounder's ample supply of cash had fluttered away.

Smithy cared little enough about that. Money was made to be spent—and he always had plenty. In holiday-time, especially, his millionaire father never dreamed of stinting him. He was not in the least worried by the fact that he had now only a few shillings and half-crowns in his pockets, and nothing at all in his notecase.

Neither was he in the least worried about the trick he had played on the fellows stranded on Blackrock Island.

They had, in the Bounder's opinion, asked for it and got it!

Bunter had helped him play the trick on the headmaster, by which he had obtained his extra leave. On the strength of his share in that trickery, Bunter had hooked on to him for the Easter holidays. One word from the fat Owl would have caused the cancellation of his leave. So he had let the fat and fatuous Owl have his way—as Bunter fondly believed—till he arrived at Blackrock Island and found out exactly what kind of a holiday he had screwed out of Smithy!

Harry Wharton & Co. had bumped the Bounder in his study to show him what they thought of his trickery. So—in Smithy's opinion—they had asked for it, too, and got it!

Whenever he thought of the stranded schoolboys Smithy grinned.

But he was not thinking of them now, and he was not grinning. He was thinking of his father, and it did worry him.

Mr. Vernon-Smith supposed that his son was coming direct to him, in Devonshire, from the school, only putting up one night at the mansion in Courtman Square, London.

There was no reason why he should ever learn that Smithy had done otherwise. Smithy's little run with Pon & Co. was his own secret.

But—now that it was over—Smithy wished that he had listened to the counsel of his chum, Tom Redwing, and not done it.

If there was a soft spot in the Bounder's rather hard heart it was his affection for his father. If there was anyone whom his disrespectful nature respected, it was Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith. And though in his headstrong obstinacy he had not realised it, he knew, on reflection, that he was deceiving his father—and every time he thought of it it gave him a jolt.

He had deceived his headmaster and his Form-master by his trickery—and for that he cared not a jot. They believed that his father had telephoned to ask extra leave for him, never dreaming of guessing that a fat ventriloquist had imitated Mr. Vernon-Smith's rich, rolling voice over the wires, at the Bounder's instigation.

Beaks, from Smithy's peculiar point of view, were fair game. But deluding his father troubled him—all the more since his disreputable jaunt with Pon & Co. was over and he had to face his unsuspecting parent with that wretched trick a secret on his mind.

That was why his brows were knitted

in a thoughtful frown, and he threw away his final cigarette half smoked as the train ran into the ancient town of Okeham.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's headquarters, at present, were in that old town. He was never long in one place during that busy tour of the West Country. Smithy was going to roam all over Devon and Cornwall with him, and at the bottom of his heart he knew that he liked that prospect much better than he really liked his blackguardly trip with the Highcliffe crowd.

He stepped from the train, and the station, and stepped into a taxi.

"Rance & Co.," he said to the driver.

The taxi rolled away down the ancient High Street of Okeham.

It stopped at a building which was partly private house and partly business premises. Gilt letters on an office window announced that it was the headquarters of Rance & Co., estate agents, valuers, auctioneers, etc.

Rance & Co., as the Bounder knew, were doing most of Mr. Vernon-Smith's business for him in the real estate line, and the head of the firm, Mr. Elias Rance, accompanied the millionaire on many of his trips to view innumerable desirable properties.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was making his headquarters in Mr. Rance's private house, handy to the Rance office, where so much business was transacted. It was there that his son was to join him.

Smithy stepped from the taxi, paid off his driver, and stood glancing at the windows, wondering whether his father was at home.

Then he smiled as he caught sight of a well-known portly countenance at an open window.

Samuel Vernon-Smith was sitting there, in the afternoon sunshine, with a wad of legal papers on his knees, looking over them.

Smithy waved his hand.

The millionaire looked down from the window. He fixed his eyes on his son, but not with a welcoming smile in response to Smithy's.

Smithy's own smile died away.

The millionaire looked down for a long minute with a grim face, and then shut the window, disappearing from the Bounder's sight.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood stock-still.

He had been looking forward to seeing his father, resolving that he was going to be the most dutiful son ever, to make up for certain shortcomings. He was almost stunned by the look his father gave him and by Mr. Vernon-Smith's action in shutting the window in his face.

Something, evidently, was wrong!

It flashed into the Bounder's mind at once what it was, and for some moments he felt quite sick. His father knew.

How he knew Smithy could not guess. But that he did know he hardly doubted. Nothing else could have accounted for this.

"Oh!" breathed the Bounder.

He did not stir for a long minute. How had his father found him out? But he did not worry long with that thought. His father knew, and it did not matter much how. That Mr. Vernon-Smith had been deeply and intensely angered was very plain.

Slowly, at last, the Bounder crossed the pavement to the door, and knocked.

The door was opened by a manservant who looked very curiously, and Smithy thought compassionately, at him.

"Master Vernon-Smith?" he asked.

"Yes," muttered the Bounder, and he made a movement to enter.

The man held the door half-shut. Smithy gave it an angry push, but a foot was against it inside.

"I have orders not to admit you, sir," said the man apologetically.

The Bounder gasped.

"Orders?"

"Yes, sir; from Mr. Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder's face reddened, and then paled.

"I am Mr. Vernon-Smith's son," he said. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, sir; but Mr. Vernon-Smith's orders are very strict, sir. I am not to admit you to the house."

Smithy almost staggered.

"I must see my father," he said huskily.

"I am sorry, sir. Mr. Rance has given instructions that Mr. Vernon-Smith's orders are to be obeyed like his own, sir."

"He can't have given such orders—he—"

"I am sorry, sir—he has!"

And the door was shut, and Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a dazed face, stood staring at it.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise For Young Mr. Rance!

"OH!" muttered the Bounder.

"Oh gad!"

He felt almost stunned.

His father was angry, if he knew; Smithy expected that. But he had not expected this. The prodigal son had returned, but not to meet the welcome of the prodigal of old! He had no defence to make if his father gave him a hearing, but he was condemned, discarded, without a hearing. What was he going to do?

He was going to see his father. His mind was made up on that. It was futile to knock at the door again, but he was going to see his father. After a few minutes he moved along the building to the office that adjoined the house.

It was easy enough to enter the office, at all events; it was open for business.

Smithy pushed the door and walked in. As it was the same building, obviously there was a way in from the office to the house. That was Smithy's way to his father if he could find it.

A ruddy-faced young man with a pen behind his ear sat on a high stool at a desk in the outer office. He gave Vernon-Smith an inquiring look. He did not seem to think that a junior schoolboy had called on business connected with commodious residences or desirable properties.

"I am Herbert Vernon-Smith," said the Bounder quietly. "Can I come in this way?"

"Oh!" said the ruddy-cheeked young man, with a start. Evidently he had heard of Herbert Vernon-Smith. "No! If you don't mind, no!"

Unheeding him, the Bounder walked quickly across to a door marked "Private." That was plainly the way in, and he was going in.

The ruddy-cheeked young man jumped off his stool in alarm.

"Here, you, stop!" he exclaimed. "That's Mr. Rance's office—" Before he had time to finish the Bounder had knocked on the door, opened it, and passed into the inner office, leaving the ruddy-cheeked young man staring.

Smithy shut the door after him.

A startled and somewhat angry exclamation came from a man who was seated at a desk in the inner office, bending over a large plan of buildings.

"What," snapped the man, as he half rose, staring at the Bounder—"what is it? What do you want?"

"Are you Mr. Rance?" asked Smithy.

"Mr. Elias Rance?"

"That is my name. What—"

"I am Herbert Vernon-Smith."

"Oh!"

Mr. Rance stood staring at him. Vernon-Smith looked at Mr. Rance. He was a man of rather slight frame, with a thin, keen, sharp face—every feature on it giving an odd impression of having been sharpened! His eyes, especially, were sharp and seemed rather to penetrate than fix upon Smithy.

He was quite a young man—not over thirty, but he had an old look. Rance & Co., the Bounder knew, were a very old-established firm in Okeham, old Mr. Rance having been head of the firm for uncounted years. This was young Mr. Rance, who had succeeded to the business.

He had been bending over a large plan, showing designs of buildings—but, as the Bounder entered, he had slipped something else under that large sheet—something else upon which his attention had been fixed.

His action had been so hurried that it was not wholly concealed, and the Bounder saw the edge of a pink newspaper protruding from under the building plan.

It was no business of his if young Mr. Rance consulted a racing paper in his private office and slipped it out of sight when anyone entered. Smithy took no heed of it.

"So you are Master Herbert Vernon-Smith?" asked Elias Rance, after a brief pause.

"Yes! I am here to see my father."

"This is not the way into the house—"

Mr. Rance left his desk, and stepped in front of an inner door, on which Smithy's eyes were already turning.

"I've got to see my father, Mr. Rance!" said the Bounder doggedly. "I've been turned away from the door. I've got to see him."

"I am sorry!" said Mr. Rance, though his face did not express his feelings, if he was sorry. "I understand that your conduct—"

"My conduct is no business of yours, Mr. Rance!" the Bounder flared out angrily. "I will answer for that to my father, not to you."

"I did not say that it was any business of mine, Master Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Rance calmly. "It does not concern me in the very least. But as your father is an honoured guest in my house, I have no choice but to regard his wishes, indeed orders; and I understand that your conduct has made him extremely angry—to such an extent that he does not desire to see you."

"Has he said so?"

"He has, in so many words, and has given orders that you are not to be admitted."

The Bounder breathed hard. There was a glimmer in Mr. Rance's sharp eyes that seemed to hint that he was by no means sorry to have this disagreeable message to impart. No doubt he had, as a business man, a use for a millionaire; but none for the millionaire's son.

"Well, I've got to see him!" said Vernon-Smith.

"You have heard what I have said!" said Mr. Rance coldly.

"I'm going to see my father."

"That, I think, is for your father to decide!" said Mr. Rance. He moved a little nearer to the door, and leaned his back on it.

"He's bound to give me a hearing!" muttered the Bounder. "Does he know—I suppose he knows—"

"Really, I am unacquainted with the details of Mr. Vernon-Smith's personal affairs!" said young Mr. Rance. "It is not a matter for me to discuss. I can only point out to you that you had better go."

"I'm going to see my father."

Mr. Rance shrugged a pair of narrow shoulders.

Vernon-Smith looked at him. He disliked the man—perhaps rather unreasonably—already. He was going to see his father, and this rat-faced man, who hid racing papers under building plans in his office, was not going to stop him.

Smithy's mind was made up on that. He advanced a few steps towards young Mr. Rance, who eyed him with surprise, as he realised that the millionaire's son was thinking of forcing a way through.

"No violence, please!" said Rance, holding up a bony hand. "Please, no violence, Master Vernon-Smith! Your father—"

"Will you let me pass?" breathed the Bounder.

"Certainly not."

"I'm going to see my father."

"Stand back," rapped Elias Rance. "Another step, and I shall call my clerk to put you out of this building. I— Oh!"

Vernon-Smith did not wait for him to call the ruddy-checked young man from the outer office. He made a spring, grasped young Mr. Rance by his thin shoulders, and whirled him away from the door.

"Oh!" gasped Rance. "Oh! You young ruffian—oh!"

He staggered five or six steps before he came up against the desk and caught at it.

Vernon-Smith dragged open the door and ran through.

"Stop!" shouted Rance.

Panting for breath, and with his sharp face red with rage, he ran through the doorway after Smithy.

Smithy found himself in a passage, and cut along it.

Whether he could handle Mr. Rance or not, he did not know; but he knew that he was going to try, if the estate agent tried to stop him. But even the obstinate and reckless Bounder preferred to get through without such a shindy, if he could.

Rance was close behind him, but luckily the first door he came to was half-open, and he could see his father in the room.

Some sound, clearly, had reached Mr. Vernon-Smith, for he was standing, with a bundle of papers in his hand, staring towards the door as Smithy reached it.

The schoolboy pushed the door open, and ran in—Rance panting after him.

Thunder gathered in the millionaire's brow, as he saw them.

"Father!" exclaimed the Bounder, appealingly.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith. "How dare you force a way in here! Rance—"

"I regret, sir—" panted the estate agent. "I did my best to stop this headstrong boy—he will admit it—"

"No doubt! Take him away with you."

"Father—"

"Not a word from you, sir!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I desire to hear nothing from you! Go back to the disgraceful friends you have chosen—my wishes and my commands are nothing to you—go back to them, if you choose. In any case, leave this house."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

The Bounder gave him almost a haggard look.

His father had been angry with him before this, more than once; Smithy had given him plenty of cause. Indeed, once there had been a threat of disinheritance. But he had never seen the millionaire in so grim a mood as this before.

"Father!" he muttered. "I—I know I've done wrong—but—but—won't you let me speak a word?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith paused. His face did not relax in its grimness, but he answered more calmly.

"Speak if you like! You have forced your way in here, against my desire—I did not wish to see you! If you have anything to say in your defence, I will hear it—but be brief."

He made a gesture to Rance, dismissing him.

Even at that tense moment, Smithy, who was close to the man, noticed the rat-like glitter that shot into his eyes, as he was dismissed with a gesture, like a manservant by a not over-courteous master. Probably it did not occur to the millionaire that an estate agent, whom he was employing, might have any feelings of his own—Elias Rance, to him, was little more than office furniture.

But if young Mr. Rance felt any resentment, he gave no other sign of it. He faded quietly out of the picture, leaving the Bounder of Greyfriars facing his father.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

His Own Master!

MR. SAMUEL VERNON-SMITH stood grim, silent, and implacable.

His eyes were fixed on his son with a cold stare.

It was only a matter of days since the millionaire had called at Greyfriars to see his son and had discussed with him his business schemes in real estate in the West Country, and his plans for taking Smithy over all those new acquisitions in the holidays. Then the portly gentleman had been kind, affectionate—the father Smithy knew. Now it seemed to Smithy that he hardly knew him at all.

Only on one point, at that time, had Mr. Vernon-Smith been adamant; he had refused to ask for leave for his son to go off on his excursion with Pon & Co., of Highcliffe. In any other matter, Smithy had only to make a request, for it to be granted almost before it was asked.

And, on that one point, he had deceived his father, and now, he could see, Mr. Vernon-Smith knew it. What he was to say, the Bounder hardly knew. There was, in fact, no excuse for what he had done.

"I—I suppose you know—" he began at last, in halting tones.

"Quite!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I am fully acquainted with your disrespect, your deception, and your rascality."

"I never meant—" muttered the Bounder miserably.

Mr. Vernon-Smith waved a plump hand.

"If you have no more to say than that—" he granted.

"I never thought you'd know—" stammered Smithy.

"I am quite aware of that!" said his father contemptuously; and Smithy realised that he was making matters rather worse than better.

"If Bunter's told you—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

"Bunter! Who is Bunter? What has Bunter to do with it?" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith, staring at him.

The Bounder was quite at a loss. How his father had learned the facts was a puzzle to him, but the suspicion crossed his mind that Bunter might have had a hand in it.

"Then how did you know?" he muttered.

Mr. Vernon-Smith shrugged plump shoulders.

"I will tell you! It may help to make you ashamed of yourself!" he grunted. "You asked me, the day I saw you at your school, to get you early leave for the holidays, so that you could join those young Highcliffe blackguards. I refused. Later, thinking that I would do as much as I could for you, I telephoned to your headmaster—"

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder.

"To ask him to let you leave before break-up and join me here. I was foolish enough to think that you would like a holiday with your father!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, with grim sarcasm.

The Bounder's heart sank.

He had believed that his trickery was undiscovered. His only danger was from Bunter; and he had stuffed Bunter with a pretended invitation for the hols, and kept him quiet!

The discovery had come all the same; and it had come through his father's affection for him, his desire to make up for the Bounder's disappointment.

"Your headmaster," went on Mr. Vernon-Smith, in the same grimly sarcastic tone, "was surprised by my call. I think he fancied that I must be losing my memory! I learned from him that I—or someone using my name—had rung him up already, asking leave for you, and that you had already left."

"Then—Dr. Locke knows—" stammered the Bounder.

"Dr. Locke does not know!" answered his father. "As soon as I realised how the matter stood, I let it drop at once. He concluded, probably, that you had been delayed in joining me, and that I had forgotten having made the request already."

"Oh!" muttered Smithy.

"But I learned," said Mr. Vernon-Smith, "that your headmaster was in the belief that I had telephoned and asked early leave for you to join me here. How you played such a trick I do not know, as your headmaster is acquainted with my voice, and some extraordinary trickery must have been used to make him believe that I had spoken to him on the subject. My name, at all events, was used—and you left your school three days before break-up!"

Smithy stood silent.

"You did not join me here!" went on Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You carried out your own scheme of joining a crew of disgraceful young blackguards. Is not that the case?"

The Bounder did not answer.

"And you came here with the intention of leaving me in the dark and in the belief that you had remained at school until yesterday! Is not that the case?"

Smithy could not speak.

"Very well," said Mr. Vernon-Smith, "your father's commands and your father's wishes are nothing to you. Nothing shall be said at your school: I do not desire to cause you trouble with your headmaster. But you have chosen your own way—and having chosen it, you must follow it. Have you anything more to say before you go?"

"Where am I to go?" muttered Vernon-Smith.

"That is a matter of your own choice. It is useless for me to give you commands—you will not obey them. It is useless for me to state my wishes—you will disregard them. You have claimed complete independence. Well, I grant it! Is not that what you want?"

It was very far indeed from what Herbert Vernon-Smith wanted! But he could only look at the grim face in miserable silence.

"You have, no doubt, had a very merry holiday with your good friend Ponsonby," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Rejoin him! I desired to keep you away from such blackguardly company—I failed! Continue as you have begun."

Smithy did not speak. He was not likely to hook on to Cecil Ponsonby for the holidays, in Billy Bunter's style. He could picture the lifting of Pon's eyebrows had he butted in, unasked, at Ponsonby Place!

"The house in London is open to you," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I shall not refuse my son shelter—indeed, the law would not permit me to do so. I simply desire to see nothing of you. That is my right, which I shall exercise. I claim no further right to control your actions! You desire to be your own master—let it be so! Now, I am busy—"

"Oh, father!" muttered Smithy wretchedly.

"I shall, at least, save you from any necessity for further deceptions," said Mr. Vernon-Smith grimly. "You will not be accountable to me—there will be no need to put through any more false telephone-calls in my name! Go your own way—the way you have chosen!"

"Father!"

"I have said that I am busy!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith sat down again, with his pile of papers on his knee, and turned his back on his son.

Smithy stood looking at him.

For a long, long minute he stood, but his father did not glance at him again, and slowly he turned and quitted the room.

In the passage he lingered, hoping for a voice to call him back. But there came no voice; and with a dark face and a heavy heart, the Bounder of Greyfriars went down the passage to Mr. Rance's office.

A pair of sharp eyes glinted at him as he passed through that office.

But the Bounder did not look at Rance.

He passed through the outer office, into the sunny street.

The ruddy-cheeked young man stared at him unnoticed as he went.

In the street Smithy paused, and stood looking at the window of his father's room. It was shut, and remained shut.

Slowly he walked away—his own master!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Cliff Climbers!

"I SAY, you fellows."

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

Bucking up was not in Billy Bunter's line. Grousing was! So Bunter groused instead of bucking up.

It was a glorious April day. Bright sunshine streamed down on Blackrock and on the circling blue sea.

Several days had passed since the stranded schoolboys had landed on the lone island. And—unexpectedly per-



"Leggo!" yelled Bunter, as a grasp on either fat ear helped him onward. "You beasts, leggo my ears!" "Don't you want to be helped?" asked Bob Cherry. "Yaroooh! Leggo!" roared Bunter. "I can manage all right—leggo!"

haps—the Famous Five had enjoyed every one of them.

Boats had been sighted in the distance—too far off for hailing or signalling. The juniors had settled down to wait till the fortnightly boat from Potkelly was due.

But, in point of fact, they were in no hurry for that boat.

Life on Blackrock was rough and ready; but there was great interest in fending for themselves, making something out of nothing, as it were, and going through a Crusoe experience.

With old Dave's assistance they had gathered wrecked timbers and put up a lean-to under a bulging cliff for shelter.

They had knocked old nails out of old wood, and with the nails and the wood made stools, and a table, and other things for use.

There was a hitherto unsuspected pleasure in a primitive kind of existence, without any of the gadgets of civilisation.

Bob Cherry declared, many times, that Smithy, quite unintentionally, had done them a good turn, and the other fellows agreed that Smithy had—and even their desire to punch the Bounder's head for his trickery rather faded away.

Only Bunter grouched—though it had to be admitted Bunter did enough grouching for the whole party if it was needed! Bunter, like the Israelites of old, sighed for the fleshpots of Egypt.

Twice in the last few days the Famous Five had explored the smugglers' cave again. But they had made no further discoveries there—and the footprints in the sand were disappearing, obliterated by the sea-winds that often roared through the great cavern, stirring and scattering the sand.

They had gone over the whole extent

of the island—nearly all rock, though here and there were patches where old Dave succeeded in growing vegetables—which occasionally made a welcome variation to the diet.

Now they were clambering up the high western cliff, over the smugglers' cave, on the summit of which lay the ruins of the ancient castle of Blackrock. Billy Bunter was clambering with them, partly because he hoped to sight some craft from the top to take him off the island; but chiefly because Harry Wharton & Co. had advised him not to undertake the climb.

That kind advice being interpreted by Bunter as signifying that his fascinating company was not desired, Bunter naturally came.

But half-way up the cliff Bunter's weight told heavily upon him, added to shortness of breath and natural laziness.

From the cove to the top of the western cliff was nearly a mile; and in a mile there were 1759 more yards than Bunter really liked.

So the fat Owl grunted and grouched and puffed and blew!

He halted at length, and fixed his big spectacles on the other fellows with deep and indignant reproach.

"I say, you fellows, who's going to help me along?" he asked.

"Can't roll a barrel uphill!" said Bob, shaking his head. "Roll you down, if you like."

"Beast!"

"Buck up, Bunter!" urged Harry Wharton. "We're nearly at the top."

"Are you going to help me, or are you not going to help me?" inquired Bunter categorically.

"Oh, lend a hand, somebody!" sighed Bob Cherry. "You take his other ear, Johnny."

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

Bunter wanted, it seemed, to be pulled up the hill, but he did not want to be pulled by his fat ears. On the other hand, they were large, and gave a good hold, and came handy for the purpose.

"Leggo!" yelled Bunter, as a grasp on either fat ear helped him onward.

"You beasts, leggo my ears!"

"Don't you want to be helped?"

"Yaroooh! Leggo! You're pulling my ears off! Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "I can manage all right! Leggo!"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull decidedly.

"May as well keep on, now we've started! Go it, Bob!"

"I'm going it! Buck up, Bunter!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter.

"You're getting on faster already!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you leggo my ears?" shrieked Bunter. "You beasts, will you leggo my ears, or won't you?"

"Oh, all right!" said Bob resignedly.

"There's no satisfying some people. First you want to be helped, then you don't!"

"I want to be helped, you beast, but I don't want my ears lugged off!" yelled Bunter.

"Oh, if that's all, I'll hold on to your nose! What are you dodging for, you fat ass? Don't you want any help?"

It seemed that Bunter didn't, after all. He dodged his little fat nose very quickly out of reach.

Now the Famous Five, chuckling, tramped on up the steep, rocky way.

Billy Bunter rolled after them, panting, perspiring, grunting, groaning, and grouching, but making no further demands for assistance.

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.



(Continued from page 13.)

The summit was reached at last. A glorious view spread out before the eyes of the juniors.

Seaward, the vast Atlantic rolled, boundless to the eye; and, looking landward, across the island, the coast of Devonshire rose in a rugged line of cliffs. Distant specks on the sea showed where fishing-boats rocked on the blue waters. Far away, in the direction of Ireland, the smoke of a far-off steamer trailed against the blue. Of the castle that had once stood on the cliff little remained, but rubble and a few fragments of old walls.

"Take a squint at the view, Bunter," said Bob Cherry.

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

Billy Bunter had no use for views. He sat down on the cliff, leaned his back against a rock, and rested his weary limbs, dabbing streams of perspiration from his fat brow. From where he sat, the fat Owl could see another rock in front of him. That seemed to be as much view as Bunter wanted.

"I say, you fellows, you've got the grub?" he asked. "I'm hungry."

"Guessed that one!"

"Beast!"

Harry Wharton was carrying a parcel of provender, such as it was, as Bunter had bitterly remarked. But, such as it was, Bunter seemed ready for it, and he opened the bundle and started.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly. He pointed landward, across the island. "A boat coming from Potkelly."

"Old Tregelly's boat isn't due yet," said Harry. "But, by Jove, it looks as if they're coming here!"

From the distant shore the boat pulled, heading directly for the island. Two men in jerseys were pulling; a man in a bowler hat sat in the stern.

The distance was much too great for recognition; but it came into the minds of all the Famous Five at once that it was the same boat that they had seen in the moonlight their first night on the lone island, and which, as they suspected, had paid a mysterious visit to the cave now under their feet.

"No use to us if they're going to the cave," said Nugent. "That chap with the knife-blade chivvy won't stop for a hail."

"I fancy it's the same lot," said Harry. "If so, they're going to the cave by daylight this time, instead of after dark. Still, we can't be sure. That boat may be coming into the cove."

"Better get back," said Nugent.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I'm not at all sure that I want to get off this jolly old island," he said. "Ain't we enjoying life here?"

"Well, yes," said Harry thoughtfully. "The fact is, I'm not half-sorry we came to Blackrock. We were at a loose end for the hols, and this is a jolly place—in its way. But we can

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

please ourselves about staying or going. We'd better get in touch with the mainland, if we've a chance."

"Beasts!" came a yap from Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to stay here, if I can get off. If you fellows think you're going to keep me here——"

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" roared Bunter indignantly. "I'm jolly well going to get away as quick as I can, and you ain't jolly well going to keep me on this putrid island, see?"

"Wouldn't for worlds!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "If that chap with the pickaxe features will take you off, old fat man, we'll give him anything he likes to ask."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Beasts!" snorted Bunter. "I'm jolly well going, anyhow!"

"Stick to that, old fat man!"

"Yah!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! They're going into the cove!" exclaimed Bob.

From the cove to the cliff-top the juniors had covered a mile by winding ways. The direct distance was less than half of that. And, tiny as the boat looked in the distance, they could see that it was swerving to pull into the cove.

If it was the same lot, the sharp-faced man was not going to the cave this time. He was coming to the landing-place.

"That settles it," said Harry. "We'd better get back at once!"

"I say, you fellows, you haven't had any lunch yet! I say, don't you cut off and leave me here!" hooted Bunter.

"Get a move on, fatty!"

"I shan't take another step till I've had a rest. You can't expect it," grunted the fat Owl. "Look here, one of you cut back, to make sure that boat doesn't go without us, and the rest stay with me till I'm ready to go. I may be able to get back after an hour's rest—well, say two hours."

"Say anything you like, old bean," said Bob. "Good-bye!"

"I say, you fellows——" roared Bunter.

But answer there came none. The Famous Five were already trotting, running, and leaping down the winding, steep way—much quicker and casier than the ascent had been.

Billy Bunter heaved himself to his feet, and glared after them through his spectacles.

"I say, you fellows——" he yelled.

They disappeared among the rocks.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

Echo answered beasts. And Bunter sat down again, to go on with his lunch, that being at the moment the most urgent matter within the wide limits of the universe.

Not till the provender was safely parked did Bunter heave himself to his feet, to roll on his homeward way.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Ordered Off!

"THAT'S the sportsman," said Bob Cherry.

It was the sharp-faced man.

All the juniors knew him again, though they had seen him only once before in the moonlight on the sea. There was no mistaking that sharp-featured face, with its odd, sharpened look.

Harry Wharton & Co. had trotted all the way down the cliff, but they dropped into a walk as they

approached the cove. They arrived rather breathless.

The sharp-faced man had already landed. He was standing near old Dave's hut, in talk with the ancient mariner, and with an expression of angry impatience on his sharp face. The boat was tied up at the jetty, and the two men in jerseys sat there, smoking, while they waited.

They stared at the juniors curiously. And the juniors, looking at them, could see that they were not, as they had supposed from a distant view, fishermen from Potkelly. They looked like a couple of rather disreputable long-shoremen picked up from some seaside town.

"Here they coom, sir!" old Dave's deep voice boomed out, as the schoolboys came in sight. "They be cooming, sir!"

The sharp-faced man turned round and stared at the schoolboys as they came. Old Dave's words rather surprised the juniors. It seemed that the sharp-faced man wanted them, and had been inquiring of Dave Oke about them.

If that meant that he had remembered them, and had made a trip on their account to the island, he was more good-natured than he looked.

His sharp eyes remained fixed on them in a rather disconcerting stare as they approached. His voice, as sharp as his features, rapped out as they drew near.

There was a subdued, but only half-concealed hostility in the sharp face. The juniors remembered how he had scowled when he had sighted them on the jetty that moonlight night; and it was clear that he was as displeased now, as he had been then, to see them on Blackrock. Why, they could not begin to guess.

"What are you boys doing on this island?" he rapped unpleasantly.

Harry Wharton looked at him steadily.

He did not like the man's manner, or his tone. And he saw no reason whatever for a stranger calling him to account in this sharp way.

"We are quite ready to explain our presence here to anyone who is entitled to ask!" answered Wharton coolly. "What right have you to question us?"

"You had better answer me."

"We shall please ourselves about that!" retorted Harry. "If you like to ask a civil question, I will answer it."

The sharp eyes glinted at him. Only too clearly the presence of the schoolboys on the island annoyed and irritated the man.

"I saw you here a few days ago!" said the sharp-faced man after a pause. "You called to me, I think—but I was going out to some deep-sea fishing, and had no time to stop."

None of the juniors answered that.

They were as good as certain that the man had been going round the island to the cave on that occasion, and that the footprints they had picked up in the sand were his. There was no actual proof of it, but they could hardly doubt that the man was lying. His visit to the cave had been a secret one; and, for some mysterious reason, he desired to keep it secret.

"I supposed at the time," went on the sharp-faced man, "that you were some party of trippers who had rowed out to the island for the day, and supposed that you would be gone next day, naturally."

"I don't see why you should suppose anything about it," answered Harry. "I don't see that it concerns you."

"I am Elias Rance!" snapped the sharp-faced man. "You may never have heard the name, if you are a stranger in these parts."

"Quite. I never have!" agreed Harry.

"Anything special about being Elias Rance?" asked Bob Cherry affably, and his comrades smiled.

Elias Rance scowled at the cheery Bob.

Old Dave Oke broke in.

"It's young Mr. Rance, sir," he said. "Everybody to this coast knowed old Mr. Rance! Now it's young Mr. Rance."

"We're about as wise as before, Dave!" said Harry, with a smile. "We've never heard of any Rances, old or young."

"I will tell you then!" snapped the sharp-faced man. "Rance & Co. are pretty well known, I think. We are a firm of estate-agents at Okeham, and this island was one of the properties on our list, before it was sold recently. Now do you understand?"

Harry Wharton & Co. could understand, so far, that the sharp-faced man was young Mr. Rance, that he had inherited the business of old Mr. Rance, and that when Mr. Vernon-Smith acquired Blackrock Island, young Mr. Rance had put the matter through. But they could not understand in the least why young Mr. Rance was there, and still less why he was hostile.

"Supposing, as I said, that you were day-trippers and would be gone, I gave no attention to the matter," said young Mr. Rance, in the same sharp, snappish tone. "I have learned to-day, at Potkelly, that you were still here, and have been told that you were staying on the island, apparently for a holiday—"

"That is correct!" said Harry.

"How dare you do anything of the kind!" snapped Mr. Rance. "This island is private property. Visitors have sometimes been allowed to land here, to sketch the ruins of the castle on the cliff, and so forth, by communicating with the proprietor first. Trippers are not allowed to camp here, especially without leave asked or given. You are trespassing here, and must leave the island immediately."

"Oh!" said Harry slowly. "Is that it?"

"That is it! I have never heard of such impudence!" exclaimed Mr. Rance. "A party of trippers camping on private property, without a word to the owner—you could be given into custody for it."

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed. Johnny Bull gave a grunt, and his jaw squared. Three other faces looked grim.

But the captain of the Greyfriars Remove answered quietly enough:

"If you had been a little more obliging the other night, Mr. Rance, we should be gone now. We were stranded on this island without a boat to take us off, and we wanted you to take a message to Potkelly for a boat."

"Oh!" said the sharp-faced man.

Evidently that had not occurred to him, and he was rather taken aback.

"Just a spot of civility, and the trick would have been done!" grinned Bob Cherry. "After all, civility costs nothing."

Elias Rance gave him another scowl. "Well, if that was your desire, it is easily arranged," he said. "I have come here now to remove you from the island. You may get into my boat, and I will tell my men to row you at once to Potkelly."

"Not quite so fast!" said Harry Wharton coolly. "If you'd done the

civil thing that night, Mr. Rance, we should be gone. We were tricked into getting stranded here, and when we found ourselves stranded, we wanted to get away. But—"

"But what?" snapped young Mr. Rance.

"But we're not at all sure that we want to go, now," said Harry, in the same cool tone, "and in any case, we shall not dream of taking orders from any Mr. Rance, old or young. You've said that you're here to remove us! That's cheek!"

"What?"

"Cheek! We shall please ourselves whether we stay or go, and you can mind your own business, Mr. Rance."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

"The mindfulness of your own business is the proper caper, esteemed Rance!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Mr. Rance stared at the Nabob of Bhanipur, perhaps a little startled by his fine flow of English. Then he fixed his eyes on Harry Wharton again.

"I order you off this island!" he said.

"You can order till you're black in the face, and it won't make the slightest difference!" answered Wharton.

The sharp-faced man breathed hard and deep. His irritation, caused in some mysterious way by the presence of the juniors on Blackrock, was evidently increasing. But he kept it in check.

"I have told you," he said, "that this island is private property. It is in the hands and under the care of my firm. I am empowered to call on the police to eject trespassers."

"I've no doubt that this island was in the hands and under the care of your firm!" agreed Wharton. "But since it has been sold, it is nothing of the kind; and you and your firm can go and eat coke, Mr. Rance!"

"I am the representative of the present proprietor, as I was the representative of the late proprietor," said the estate-agent, breathing hard. "I order you off this island as trespassers."

"But it happens that we are not trespassing!" said Wharton coolly. "I will take your word for it, Mr. Rance, that you represent the present owner; but I am quite certain that the present owner would make no objection to our presence here, and we're quite willing to leave it at that."

"Do you dare to say that you have the present owner's leave to camp here?" almost shouted Mr. Rance. "He knows nothing of you—a crew of trippers—"

"That's where you get it wrong!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Mr. Vernon-Smith knows us quite well, and if you're curious to know all about it, Mr. Rance, we came here on his son's invitation. We're going to punch his head for stranding us here—but that's the fact, all the same."

"You—you know Mr. Vernon-Smith!" stammered Rance. He seemed utterly taken aback by the information.

"We know him quite well," answered Harry. "His son is at our school. That's how we got stranded here."

"Oh!" gasped Rance.

He seemed quite at a loss for some moments.

The juniors watched him with smiling faces.

So far, he had taken them for a tripping party who had camped on the island without asking leave. Even so, there seemed no real reason for his angry intervention. Now he learned that they were Herbert Vernon-Smith's schoolfellows; that they were acquainted with the proprietor of Blackrock; and that it was on the invitation of the

millionaire's son that they were there.

All the wind seemed taken out of the sails of young Mr. Rance, as it were!

"So, you see, we're not trespassing here!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Are you satisfied now, Mr. Rance?"

"No! I have only your word that the matter is as you say—" snarled Mr. Rance, recovering himself.

"We've only your word that you're anything but a cheeky, meddling busybody!" said Harry.

Rance set his thin lips.

"You will leave this island, and at once," he said. "Go down to the boat, and my men will give you a passage ashore."

"We shall stay on this island exactly as long as we like," answered Harry Wharton, "and you can mind your own business, as I've said already."

Rance's eyes glinted at him.

"Will you go or not?" he snarled.

"Not!" said the Famous Five together.

Whether they wanted to prolong their Crusoe life on Blackrock or not they had not decided. But they were fully and firmly decided on one point—they were not going to be ordered about by the hatchet-faced man. On that point, there was not the slightest hesitation on the part of any member of the famous Co.

"Then force will be used!" said Mr. Rance; and he turned away and walked down to the jetty, to speak to the long-shoremen sprawling and smoking there.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Battle Of Blackrock!

"YOU be going?" asked old Dave Oke.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood looking after Mr. Rance as he went to the jetty.

Old Dave, leaning in his doorway, glanced after the estate-agent with a worried brow, and then looked at the Greyfriars fellows.

The ancient mariner had taken a liking to the schoolboy party, who roughed it on Blackrock with such cheery good-humour. But evidently he stood very much in awe of young Mr. Rance.

"Going?" repeated Harry, and he smiled. "No, Mr. Oke, we're not going."

"No fear!" said Bob, with emphasis.

"Who the dickens is that chap to order us off?" growled Johnny Bull. "If we wanted to go ever so much, we shouldn't go at his order." Johnny, who came from Yorkshire, had all the proverbial obstinacy of the Yorkshire tyke, warranted to bite alive or dead! A whole battalion of Rances would not have shifted Johnny off Blackrock.

"Cheeky cad!" remarked Nugent.

"The cheekfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and the stickfulness of our esteemed selves is also great."

"Why doesn't that man want anybody on this island, Dave?" asked Harry Wharton quietly.

Old Dave shook his head.

"Young Mr. Rance has got a quick temper!" he answered. "Old Mr. Rance was as kind a man as you'd meet between Okeham and Truro. Fifty year I knowed him. They do say the business ain't what it was in the old gentleman's time—young Mr. Rance with his noo ideas! Too much away in the big towns, they do say, and letting it go! P'raps that's why! He's got a quick temper."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627.

Mr. Oke shook his ancient head again.

"I don't hear much on Blackrock," went on Mr. Oke, "but they do say things up and down the shore, and along to Okeham and Penruddy. What the old ones gather, the young ones scatter, and mebbe that's why young Mr. Rance has such a quick temper. But you be going, surely?"

The juniors smiled. Plainly old Dave had had a respect for old Mr. Rance, but his awe of young Mr. Rance was mingled with dislike. But that awe was very real, and he did not seem able to realise that the Greyfriars fellows had the nerve to pass young Mr. Rance by, like the idle wind which they regarded not.

"We're staying!" said Harry.

"But you heard surely what young Mr. Rance said!" expostulated old Dave.

"Oh, quite! But, you see, we don't care a boiled bean for young Mr. Rance," explained Bob Cherry. "Not a single, solitary boiled bean!"

Old Dave scratched his ancient nose in puzzlement.

"They'll put you in the boat!" he said.

"We'll be there while they're doing it!" said Johnny Bull, with a warlike look.

On the jetty, the two rough-looking longshoremen had risen to their feet. Rance was speaking to them, and making gestures towards the group of schoolboys.

The longshoremen nodded and grinned.

"Think that cheeky swab means it?" asked Nugent, as the juniors watched.

"I've no doubt he does!" answered Harry. "But if he thinks that those two scrubby loafers can handle five Greyfriars men, he's got another guess coming!"

He set his lips, as the two men came off the jetty, Rance following at their heels.

Plainly, there was going to be trouble. But if the Famous Five had been determined before, they were doubly determined now. The bare idea of being chucked into the boat and taken off the island willy-nilly was more than enough to rouse their deepest ire.

Moreover, they did not attribute Rance's action to what old Dave called his quick temper, thereby no doubt meaning irritable and disgruntled.

Since they had told him that they knew Mr. Vernon-Smith, and that it was by his son's invitation that they had come there, it was up to Elias Rance to let the matter drop, or at all events refer it to the millionaire for decision.

His present high-handed proceedings impressed one thing on their minds—that he had some reason, known only to himself, for not desiring the presence of strangers on Blackrock.

They would not, perhaps, have suspected as much, but for the discovery in the sea-cave. But Rance's angry determination to clear them off, convinced them, if they had needed convincing, that it was his footprints they had traced in the sand.

There was something going on on Blackrock, in which young Mr. Rance was mixed up—something of a dubious nature, or he would not have been so secret about it, would not have told that falsehood about the deep-sea fishing, and would not want to clear off a schoolboy party who were doing no harm.

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The idea of being chucked off the island because young Mr. Rance had some sort of a shady secret to keep did not appeal to the Famous Five at all.

They were not going, and that was that!

They gathered a little closer, and stood in a group, ready for trouble, as Rance & Co. advanced towards them.

"Young gentlemen—" murmured the distressed Mr. Oke.

"You keep clear of this, Dave!" said Harry Wharton. "We've a sort of idea that we can look after ourselves all right."

"Young Mr. Rance looks mortal angry, sir!" mumbled the ancient mariner. "Iss, he do look mortal angry, surely!"

There was no doubt about that. Young Mr. Rance's sharp face looked sharper than ever, and as bitter as acid.

"Now then, go!" he snapped, as he came up.

"Think again!" said Harry.

"Are you going?"

"No!"

"Harker!" Rance addressed the taller of the two longshoremen, a rather powerful man with a slanting nose, which looked as if it had hit trouble rather hard in some shindy. "Take that young cub and fling him into the boat."

"Ay, ay!" grinned Harker.

"Peter Coot, knock the other young rascals down, if they interfere."

"Ay, ay, Mr. Rance!" said Peter Coot.

"I warn you," said Harry Wharton, speaking quietly and steadily, "that we shall not leave this island at your orders, Mr. Rance, and that we shall resist force if it is used."

Rance did not trouble to answer him. He made an angry gesture, and big Harker jumped at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove and grasped him.

"Back up, Greyfriars!" roared Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton struggled in Harker's grasp. He was no match for the man, though he was able to give him plenty of trouble, but his comrades were not likely to leave him to it.

Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grasped Harker at once, and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull moved between the struggling bunch and Peter Coot, ready for his intervention.

He came right at them, hitting out, Rance urging him on with angry gestures.

Plainly Peter Coot expected to knock the two schoolboys right and left.

But Johnny Bull stood like a rock, and Bob Cherry, the heftiest fighting-man in the Greyfriars Remove, was, in point of fact, a match for Peter on his own, though Peter did not yet know it.

Johnny caught a drive with his chest, and returned it with a jolt to the jaw; and the next moment Bob's fist crashed under Peter's ear, and Peter went full length along the sand.

There was a howl of rage from Rance.

He made a jump forward, as if to take part in the combat himself—and Bob turned on him like a flash.

"Come on, Rancey!" he invited.

Young Mr. Rance jumped backward more quickly than he had jumped forward. He howled to Peter Coot.

"Get up! Get up, you sprawling fool! Turn those young scoundrels off! Do you hear me? Get up!"

Peter Coot dragged himself breathlessly to his feet. He groped at his

ear, where Bob's knuckles had landed like a mallet. With obvious reluctance, he came on again. The two juniors engaged him at close quarters. They put in more punches than Coot was able to put in, and he retreated before them down the beach.

Meanwhile, Harker had gone down in a struggling heap in the grasp of three fellows. He was a good deal more powerful than Coot, and he kicked, and hit, and struggled rather like a bull. But though he could have handled one, and perhaps two of the schoolboys, he had no chance with three; and after a strenuous struggle, he went over on his back, and they pinned him down. And in spite of his savage resistance, they kept him pinned down.

Old Dave, from his doorway, stared on rather like an ancient mariner in a dream. Young Mr. Rance, almost dancing with rage, turned to him, yelling.

"Give help! Help them turn those trespassing young scoundrels off the island! Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, sir!" answered old Dave without stirring. "And I will not raise a hand agin mun."

"I will have you turned off the island!" shouted Rance.

"Mebbe, and mebbe not!" said Mr. Oke. "Howsumdever, I will not raise a hand agin mun."

Rance turned from him with a muttered oath and ran towards the struggling group, evidently intending to take a hand personally in the scrap.

By that time, Peter Coot had been driven a dozen yards down the beach, and Bob Cherry, with the corner of his eye, spotted Rance's action.

"Leave this rascal to me, Johnny—cut back and help them!" he panted. "I can manage this blighter!"

Johnny cut back.

Left with only one adversary, Peter Coot rallied and held his ground. But he had his hands full with Bob, who kept him very busy.

Rance was grasping at Harry Wharton, to drag him away from Harker, when Johnny panted up.

Johnny announced his arrival by a jolt in the ribs that sent young Mr. Rance staggering and spluttering.

"Good man, Johnny!" gasped Wharton. "Go for him!"

And Wharton threw himself again at the struggling, heaving Harker.

Johnny Bull followed Rance up, with a grim, bulldog face that the estate-agent from Okeham did not seem to like the look of, and young Mr. Rance quite changed his mind about intervening in the combat.

He jumped back and jumped back again and yet again in hasty retreat, his sharp face almost convulsed with fury. And he jumped back still more swiftly as Johnny's knuckles landed on the point of his sharp nose and a spurt of crimson answered the punch.

"Hands off, you young ruffian!" shrieked Rance.

"Keep your distance, you rat!" grunted Johnny, and Rance, having been fairly driven off, he hurried to Bob Cherry's aid again.

But Bob did not need aid, for as Johnny came running, Peter Coot evidently decided that it was not good enough. He turned and ran for the jetty and jumped into the boat.

Peter, clearly, had had all he wanted.

"Greyfriars wins!" grinned Bob breathlessly.

He dabbed a crimson stream from his nose, and ran up the beach with Johnny to the spot where Harker still heaved and struggled in the grasp of three fellows.



"Back up, Greyfriars!" roared Bob Cherry. The Greyfriars juniors rushed forward, hitting out right and left. "Help turn these trespassing young scoundrels off the island!" yelled Mr. Rance, dancing with rage and yelling to old Dave. "Do you hear me?" Old Dave did not stir.

The grasp of two more being added to the grasp of the three, Harker's struggles came to an end, and he lay gurgling and gasping in the sand, with Hurree Janset Ram Singh sitting on his chest.

Harry Wharton, breathless, glanced round.

Big Harker lay pinned and helpless; Rance, at a safe distance, was spitting with fury like a cat; Peter Coot was caressing a darkened eye in the boat, rocking by the jetty. The battle of Blackrock was over, and the Famous Five of Greyfriars were the victors.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Rance Retreats!

"OUR win!" said Bob Cherry. He dabbed his nose. "Oooh!" he added.

All the juniors were breathing hard after that strenuous combat. All of them had damages to show.

In the excitement of the scrap they had hardly noticed the punches—but there had been many punches, and some of them hard punches. But the casualties were more severe on the other side.

Peter, in the boat, rubbed and rubbed at a fast-darkening eye with one hand, while he dabbed a streaming nose with the other. Young Mr. Rance held a handkerchief to his sharp nose, staining it red, his eyes glinting and glittering over it with rage. Harker, who had put up the hardest fight, had more bumps and bruises than he could have counted in a hurry.

Rance came towards the group of juniors at last. The rage and malice in his sharp face were not pleasant to see.

Harry Wharton & Co. eyed him warily, but Mr. Rance was not thinking of renewing the combat. He had not had a large share of it, but he had had enough.

"You young ruffians—" he began, his voice trembling with rage.

"Chuck that!" interrupted Harry Wharton. "If you ask for some more, Mr. Rance, you'll get it fast enough."

"More than you want, you rat!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Johnny was caressing a swollen eye, and rather inclined to give Mr. Rance one to match.

"Do you think you can remain on this island against my wish?" said Rance, between his teeth.

"Put us off it, old bean!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"You shall be put off if you dare to remain here!" panted Rance. "For the moment—"

"We shall stay here," said Harry Wharton, "and we shall stay as long as we choose! We have a right here, as you know perfectly well, Mr. Rance."

"And we shall stay if only because you have ordered us off," said Johnny Bull. "We'll let you see exactly how much you can order Greyfriars men about, you cheeky rat!"

"And that's that!" agreed Bob Cherry.

Rance gritted his teeth.

"Let that man go!" he snarled. "I shall return to the mainland now. Later, I will deal with you, as you will see! Let that man go!"

Big Harker, pinned in the sand and half buried in it, was powerless. But his look showed that more trouble was to come if he was released.

The Famous Five, however, were ready to give him all the trouble he had an appetite for.

"Jolly glad to see the last of you, Mr. Rance," said Bob Cherry. "Get going as soon as you like. What about booting him into his boat, you men?"

Mr. Rance gave him a black look and walked hastily away to the jetty. He did not give the Greyfriars fellows time to act on Bob's suggestion. He was very quickly in the boat.

"Now let that brute go," said Harry.

Big Harker was released and allowed to scramble up out of the sand. He stood for some moments panting for breath, his stubbly face red with rage.

Bob Cherry pointed to the boat.

"Hook it!" he said.

Harker's answer was a savage rush. After his experience at the hands of the Famous Five he could hardly have expected to get the upper hand; but his rage was too much for him. He rushed on them rather like a bull.

The next moment he was down again in the grasp of ready hands.

"Chuck him into the boat!" panted Bob.

He grasped one of the longshoreman's long legs, and Johnny Bull grasped the other. Using them like the shafts of a cart, they started down the sand for the jetty.

Harker, on his back, trailed behind them, yelling fantastically and clutching at the sand with thrashing hands. Sand flew up in clouds round him as he went.

Old Dave, in the doorway of his hut, chuckled as he watched. Rance and Peter Coot stared from the boat.

Harker roared and yelled and raved as he went, his shoulders and the back of his head leaving a deep trail in the sand.

But he could not get loose, and the juniors did not heed his roaring, his yelling, and his raving. Johnny Bull

and Bob Cherry marched on, with his legs, and the rest of Big Harker had to follow, and Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh walked on behind, laughing.

They reached the jetty, and Harker travelled across it on his back, his head bumping on the old stones.

"Now chuck him in!" gasped Bob. "Catch, Mr. Rance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Nugent took Harker's shoulders and lifted the same, while Bob and Johnny swung up his legs. The long-limbed longshoreman swung clear of the jetty.

"One!" said Bob, as he swung.

"You mad young scoundrels!" panted Rance, in the boat. "Stop—"

"Two!" said Bob; and the spluttering longshoreman swung again.

Peter Coot scrambled out of the way of what was coming. Rance followed his example, but not in time.

"Three!" rapped Bob.

At three Harker went—tossed bodily into the boat. He crashed on Rance, sending him headlong, and sprawling across him.

"Ho, ho, ho!" came a roar from old Dave Oke, watching from the hut.

The boat rocked wildly by the jetty as Harker and Rance sprawled in it.

Bob put his foot to the gunwale and sent it spinning out by the stern to the end of the painter.

Peter Coot hurriedly cast loose the painter, and the boat rocked out into the cove, shipping water as it rocked.

Rance scrambled up, Harker still sprawling and spluttering. Young Mr. Rance, spitting with rage, shook both fists, clenched, at the grinning juniors on the jetty.

Then, as the boat rocked, he stumbled over a thwart and went down again, crashing on the sprawling Harker.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the jetty.

"Ho, ho, ho!" came another roar from the hut.

The boat rocked away.

Peter Coot seized an oar, and Mr. Rance scrambled up again and grasped another. Harker still sprawled, with all the wind knocked out of him.

Two oars jammed into the rowlocks, and the boat pulled unsteadily out to sea.

Elias Rance's face was almost demoniac in expression as he glared back at the Greyfriars fellows on the jetty.

Bob Cherry waved his hand in cheery farewell.

The boat went rocking out of the cove, and the bow was turned towards the mainland. Then Harker, at last, heaved up, and Rance handed him his oar. The estate-agent of Okeham sat in the stern, glaring back over a bony shoulder as the two longshoremen pulled for Potkelly.

"Enemy in retreat!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "Blow my nose! I believe it's doubled in size!"

The juniors walked back up the beach. The pressing matter now was to repair damages—and they all had damages to repair.

Old Dave greeted them with a grinning face.

"Ye've beaten mun!" he said. "Iss, iss, ye've beaten mun, surely. Be ye going to stay along to island, again Mr. Rance's orders?"

"We be!" answered Bob cheerily. "We've beaten mun, old bean, and we're ready to beat mun again, as often as mun wants a beating; and we be going to stay along to island just as long as we jolly well like."

Old Dave, grinning, fetched a large

bucket of water, in which the juniors proceeded to bathe their damaged features—which needed it. And they were thus engaged when a fat figure rolled, panting and perspiring, down the rugged path from the cliff over the sea-cave.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Tight Fit!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter arrived.

He arrived warm, perspiring, and very cross. He was also amazed.

He blinked through his big spectacles at five juniors gathered round a large bucket standing on the sand, bathing heated and damaged faces.

He blinked at a distant boat, between the island and the mainland, pulling away for the shore of Devonshire.

"I say, you fellows, what's up?" squeaked the amazed fat Owl. "I say, have you fellows been scrapping?"

"Don't we look it?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The scrappfulness has been terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh through streaming water.

"But the boat's gone!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, the boat's gone; look!"

The fat Owl cast another dismayed blink after the boat. It was already distant, two damaged oarsmen pulling wearily at the oars. The man in the bowler hat in the stern had a handkerchief to his nose. Every now and then he cast a glance back at the island, still with the handkerchief to his nose. The fat Owl could not discern all those details at the distance; but he could discern that the boat was going, and that it was already out of the reach of a hail.

He glared at the crowd round the bucket in amazement and wrath.

"You fellows been scrapping with one another?" he asked.

"Idiot!" said Frank Nugent tersely.

"Have you been scrapping with those chaps in the boat?" gasped Bunter.

"Sort of!" agreed Bob.

"Well, you silly chumps!" howled Bunter. "What did you let that boat go for, you blithering dummies? You jolly well knew that I wanted to get off this putrid island. What did you row with them for?"

"They ordered us off the island, old fat man."

Billy Bunter's little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at that answer.

"What?" he yelled.

"They were going to turn us off, old fat chump!" explained Bob.

"Turn us off the island!" gurgled Bunter. "But we want to get off the beastly island, don't we?"

"Not at all."

"Why not?" shrieked Bunter.

"Chiefly because those cheeky rotters want to turn us off!" answered Bob cheerily. "Giving them a tip that they can't order Greyfriars men about. See?"

"Did they offer to take us off?" yelled Bunter.

"They did—quite emphatically."

"Isn't that what we want?" howled Bunter.

"Not a bit of it."

"Why, you—you—you silly cuckoo!" stuttered Bunter. "Do you want to stick on this beastly island till that beastly fisherman Tregelly comes out in a week's time in his beastly boat from that beastly place on the beastly coast?"

"Longer!" said Bob. "We're sticking here for the hols, old fat fathead—"

just because that chap with a face like a meat-axe says we shan't!"

"You—you—you—" gurgled Bunter.

"I dare say they'd have taken you off, Bunter, if you'd been here," said Harry. "Sorry you weren't! They're welcome to you!"

"The welcomefulness is terrific."

"If you'd come back with us, old fat man, you might have got a lift off the island! How nice that would have been—for us!"

"How could I come back with you, you fathead, when I hadn't eaten my lunch?" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Now we're stranded again!" howled Bunter.

"We are—we is!" assented Bob. "But it's worse for us than for you."

"How is it worse for you, you beast?"

"Well, you've got our company! We've got yours!" explained Bob.

"The worsefulness is terrific!"

chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You silly chump—you—you—"

Words seemed to fail Bunter.

His chance of getting off Blackrock had come—and gone! It was gone with the boat that was pulling slowly and wearily back to Potkelly.

And the Famous Five didn't care! He could see that they didn't! They did not care a boiled bean! They were, in fact, rather occupied with the damages sustained in the combat; and, actually, they were not bothering about William George Bunter at all!

They stepped away from the bucket and towelled streaming faces.

Old Dave handed them rough towels from the hut.

Billy Bunter followed them, glaring with a glare that almost endangered his spectacles.

"Why couldn't you ask them to wait for me, you beasts?" he bawled.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We weren't on the best of terms with them when they left!" he answered. "Besides, we'd forgotten all about you."

"What?" yelled Bunter.

"Forgotten there was such a grease-spot in existence!" said the captain of the Remove cheerily.

"You—you—you—" gasped Bunter.

"Of—of all the beasts! You jolly well want to keep me on this island! That's your game! You jolly well want to keep me sticking on this beastly island along with you—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Not guilty, my lord!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five chortled. Really and truly that accusation was unjust. They did not want to keep William George Bunter on Blackrock Island! Very much indeed they didn't!

"Rotters!" roared Bunter. "Swabs!"

"Go it!"

"Beasts! Rotters! Cads! I've a jolly good mind to punch your heads all round!" roared Bunter.

"Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter breathed deep wrath. He shook a fat fist at five grinning faces. He gurgled with ire.

"If you fellows think I'm going to stand this, you're jolly well mistaken, see?" he roared. "I'm not going to stand—"

"You're not going to stand?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No—I'm jolly well not going to stand—"

"Sit down then, old fat bean!"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter as Bob reached out. And he jumped back just in time.

Unfortunately, he had forgotten that the bucket was behind him. Two fat calves banged on the bucket, and

Bunter, involuntarily, sat down—in the bucket!

Splash!

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Famous Five, almost in hysterics.

"Oooogh!"

Bunter sat in the tin bucket fair and square. Water splashed all round him as he sat. It was a large bucket, and there was room for Bunter—just room! But there was only barely room; and Bunter had sat suddenly and hard. He folded up in a sitting attitude in the bucket, with his fat knees nearly touching his fat chin.

"Wooooogh!" spluttered Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh! I'm wet! Oooogh! I say, you fellows, help me out!" shrieked Bunter. "I say, I'm soaking! I say, I can't get out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five could not help Bunter—they were laughing too much.

The fat junior struggled and squirmed. But his struggling and squirming only wedged him more tightly in the bucket. It fitted him, really, as if it had been made for him.

His feet were in the air! Between his feet a fat face glared at the yelling juniors. Bunter's attitude, and aspect, were really remarkable. Folded like a pocket-knife, Bunter sat—and squirmed—and roared! The Famous Five roared, too, and old Dave roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you help me out, you beasts?" shrieked Bunter. "I'm stuck tight!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Bunter will be the death of me yet! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooh!" shrieked Bunter. "I say, you fellows—you rotten beasts—Wow-ow! Pull me out! Will you pumme out, you beasts! I tell you I can't get out! I'm all wet! I'm wedged in! Oh crikey! Help!"

But there was no help for Bunter! The Famous Five seemed to be in convulsions; old Dave clung to his door-post and yelled. Bunter's feet kicked in the air—his fat hands were brandished. But the rest of him was wedged hard and fast.

"Help!" yelled Bunter. "Beasts! Cads! Do help me, old chaps—will you lend me a hand, you rotters—dear old fellows—cads—— Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a crash as the bucket under the frantic squirmings went over. But the jolt did not release Bunter—he was wedged too tightly for that. He rolled over, bucket and all.

"Urrgh! Help! I say, you fellows, I—— Yaroooh! Gurrgh! Will you come and gemme out! Oh crikey! Yurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co., still yelling, ran to the rescue at last. Some of them grabbed Bunter, and the others grabbed the bucket. They pulled, and they dragged, and they wrenched.

"Pull devil, pull baker!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Go it!"

"Put your beef into it!"

"Yaroooh! Stoppit! You're pulling my neck off! Yow-ow-ow! Leggo my ear! Yaroooh! You're chook-chook-choking me! Gurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, the Famous Five did it at last. Billy Bunter came out of the bucket, like a fat winkle out of a shell. He rolled on the sand, gurgling and gasping—without even enough breath left to tell the Famous Five what he thought of them!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Suspicion!

MR. SAMUEL VERNON-SMITH jammed down the receiver with a jam that made the telephone rock in the private office of Elias Rance, at Okeham.

He grunted expressively.

That golden April afternoon, the millionaire did not seem to be in a good temper.

He had seen and heard nothing of Herbert Vernon-Smith since the day the Bounder of Greyfriars had walked out of Mr. Rance's office, his own master!

But if the millionaire thought of his son, he was not the man to turn back from what he had decided. The boy had, he supposed, taken the train for London, to pass his school holidays in the almost deserted mansion in Courtman Square; or he had, perhaps, joined some friends of Greyfriars School. When the thought of him came involuntarily into the millionaire's rather hard mind, he dismissed it.

It was not only Smithy's deception, but the want of respect and affection that it seemed to imply that had stirred his father's ire so deeply. In that he hardly did Smithy justice, for the Bounder did not really lack either. It was his obstinate, arrogant, headstrong self-will that had hurried him into what he had done—and bad as his conduct had been, he had more than half-repenting of it by the time he left Pon & Co., and went to join his father.

But the passage of days had not diminished Mr. Vernon-Smith's grim anger and resentment.

At the present moment he was not thinking of Smithy. Another matter had driven that thought from his mind. He was thinking, as he paced the office after jamming back the receiver on the telephone, of young Mr. Rance.

Young Mr. Rance was absent from his office, which the millionaire used as his own, and where young Mr. Rance was usually in obsequious attendance.

His absence annoyed Mr. Vernon-Smith—especially after what he had just talked on the telephone. He had in his mind a discomforting doubt of young Mr. Rance.

He touched, or, rather, banged, a bell, and the outer door opened, and the ruddy-cheeked young man looked in.

"Has not your master returned yet?" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"No, sir!"

"Where has he gone?"

"He did not tell me, sir."

Grunt!

The ruddy-cheeked young man closed the door, and went back to his stool in the outer office.

Mr. Vernon-Smith paced, and grunted, and paced.

The millionaire's operations in real estate were putting a very unaccustomed amount of business in the way of Rance & Co. Young Mr. Rance was making quite a good thing out of those operations; and he was only too glad to place his office, his house, and himself, at the service of the great man from London.

That was all right. Mr. Vernon-Smith did not care how much he made in the way of just commissions and expenses. He knew that he was a wealthy bird for an estate-agent in a small country town to catch; and he was quite willing that young Mr. Rance should make a good thing out of it, and feather his nest in every legitimate way.

But if young Mr. Rance tried feathering his nest in any other way—by "ways that are dark, and tricks that are

vain"—Samuel Vernon-Smith was the man to break him like a reed.

And now he did not exactly suspect it—but he doubted!

Deep in business as he was, touring, viewing, surveying, acquiring commodious residences and desirable properties right and left, accompanied, served, and helped everywhere by the indefatigable Mr. Rance, the millionaire left himself little leisure, especially for idle talk or gossip. Nevertheless, certain whispers had reached him, from one quarter or another, that the estate business of Rance & Co. was no longer under young Mr. Rance what it had been in the time of old Mr. Rance.

Young Mr. Rance, it was said, spent a great deal of time in the bar or the billiards-room at the Okeham Arms, which might have been better spent in his office. Young Mr. Rance, it was rumoured, was making ducks and drakes of what had been left by old Mr. Rance. Clients did not get the same careful attention from young Mr. Rance that they had been accustomed to receive from old Mr. Rance.

All that mattered nothing to Mr. Vernon-Smith, so long as he found young Mr. Rance useful. But——

He paced and grunted.

He swung round and stopped as the door from the house opened, and young Mr. Rance entered, at last.

He stared at him.

"Accident?" he grunted.

Young Mr. Rance's nose presented a red and bulbous aspect. It looked as if it had had a hard knock—as, indeed, it had!

"A slight accident!" said the estate-agent. "Nothing to speak of—I slipped stepping out of the car at Penruddy. Nothing."

Mr. Vernon-Smith dismissed that trifle with a grunt. He was not really interested in young Mr. Rance's sharp nose, and the redness and rawness thereof.

"You've been to Penruddy?" His eyes narrowed as he watched the sharp face with a penetrating look.

"Yes, sir! I thought I had better see the solicitors with regard to the title deeds of Penruddy Manor—your purchase, sir."

"Quite!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You have seen Mr. Wardle, the solicitor, at Penruddy?"

"I have but just returned."

"He did not mention that you had seen him!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith grimly.

Young Mr. Rance gave a start. His sharp eyes, like a hawk's at that moment, fixed on the millionaire's grim face.

"I do not quite understand you, Mr. Vernon-Smith." There was a slight tremor on the voice of young Mr. Rance. "You have not seen Mr. Wardle?"

"I have telephoned to him."

"Oh!"

Young Mr. Rance stood very still.

"I thought it singular," said Mr. Vernon-Smith, "that the title deeds of Penruddy Manor were not forthcoming——"

"I have explained to you, sir, the delay, caused by the mislaying of an essential document——"

"Quite! Nevertheless, I thought it best to explain to Mr. Wardle that my time is of value!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Young Mr. Rance's eyes glittered rather like a rat's.

"As the matter was in my hands, sir, I should hardly have expected you to intervene personally!" he said. "I really consider——"

"Neither should I have done so, had you been here!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I should have asked you to ring up Wardle's. As it happens, I rang up Wardle's myself, and learned, greatly to my astonishment, Mr. Rance, that Mr. Wardle is unaware of the mislaying of any document, and that he is somewhat surprised that the matter has not come to a conclusion."

Young Mr. Rance breathed rather hard.

"Evidently there is some misunderstanding," he said.

"Evidently," agreed Mr. Vernon-Smith, with tensifying grimness, "a misunderstanding that had better be cleared up without a moment's delay, as I have placed the sum of four thousand pounds in the hands of Rance & Co. to make the due payment."

Young Mr. Rance breathed harder.

Mr. Vernon-Smith gave an expressive grunt.

"If this is carelessness, or forgetfulness, or whatever it is," he said, "I must say, Mr. Rance, that it will not do for me. I must say that I shall expect to see the title deeds of the property to-morrow morning, and I strongly recommend you to have them ready for me."

Young Mr. Rance seemed to recover himself.

"They shall be in your hands, sir, at ten o'clock in the morning," he answered—"I guarantee that!"

"Leave it at that!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

With a nod, he passed the door into the house, and shut it after him.

Young Mr. Rance stood staring at the door. Then he went to his desk and sat down, breathing very hard and very deep.

Young Mr. Rance was in an unenviable position. Of four thousand pounds placed in the hands of Rance & Co., hardly four hundred still remained available in the Okeham and County Bank. Young Mr. Rance had not expected the millionaire to learn how matters stood—not until he had had time to carry out certain plans for dealing with that very delicate situation.

And young Mr. Rance, as he sat staring at the door that had shut after Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, realised that he had no time to lose—ready or unready, his plans had to be carried out—before ten o'clock in the morning! That night, in fact, young Mr. Rance had to get busy, carrying out those plans of his, or it was likely to be the worse for him.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Schemer!

"WHERE'S that bucket?"

"Which?"

"That bucket!" said Billy Bunter irritably.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at William George Bunter.

It was bed-time for the Greyfriars Crusoes. Old Dave had already gone to his hammock in his hut. Billy Bunter, generally ready to sleep as soon as he had finished eating, had not yet turned in.

The Famous Five, sitting on the sand after supper, were looking out over the starlit sea, rolling and glimmering boundless before their eyes. Likewise they were rubbing, every now and then, spots where knuckles had landed in the battle of the afternoon. And they were discussing their stay on Blackrock—in full agreement that they were going to stay on, if only because that sharp-

headed rascal, young Mr. Rance, had wanted to bully them off.

Though, less a chance boat came along, they had no choice about the matter till old Tom Tregelly came the following week. But it seemed likely to them that the obnoxious Rance might make another attempt to dislodge them—in which case, they agreed that they were going to put paid to him as before.

Bunter's question interrupted that discussion. Bunter had been rooting about for some minutes, and now he asked them irritably where the bucket was. Which naturally surprised them.

What Bunter could want with that bucket was rather mysterious. And they would naturally have supposed that the fat Owl had had enough of that bucket!

"Want to sit in it again, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I just want it!" said Bunter. "I can't see it anywhere about."

At which the Famous Five grinned. That tin bucket was glimmering in the stars at the side of the hut, where old Dave had left it. But the fat Owl was both short-sighted and lazy, and he had not found it.

"What on earth," said Frank Nugent, "do you want that bucket for? Not going to wash, surely?"

"Help!" gasped Bob Cherry, quite overcome by the suggestion.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "The fact is, I want to fill it ready for washing in the morning—save time when I get up—see?"

"Oh crumbs!"

The Famous Five bestowed all their attention on Bunter now. What he was up to they did not know; but it was clear that he was up to something.

Bunter really was not the fellow to make over-night preparations for a wash in the morning. A wash in the morning, or at any other time of day, was a thing to which Billy Bunter never looked forward with pleasure.

At Greyfriars, Bunter reduced washing to the barest minimum. Indeed, it was said in the Remove that Bunter had once been forcibly bathed, and that he had then found a long-lost shirt and waistcoat!

That was probably an exaggeration. But it was quite certain that if Bunter wanted a bucket of water he did not want it for washing. He might have wanted it for anything else, but not for that.

"It's all right, you fellows," added Bunter reassuringly, as the chums of the Remove stared at him. "I'm not thinking of paying you out for that rotten trick this afternoon, or anything of that sort."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"No deception, gentlemen!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently the fat Owl was on the trail of vengeance, and a bucket of water had something to do with it!

"In fact, I'd forgotten all about it," assured Bunter. "It was a rotten trick, jamming a fellow in a bucket. I got all wet, too! Perhaps somebody else is going to get wet. He, he, he! I don't mean that I'm going to do anything with that bucket. I'm going straight to bed—after you fellows have turned in. I say, do you know where that bucket is?"

Bob Cherry pointed to it, and Bunter rolled off to secure it.

The chums of the Remove looked at one another with grinning faces.

Bunter rolled back, bucket in hand.

"I say, you fellows, will one of you fill this for me?" he asked. "You

needn't go as far as the spring—sea-water will do."

"You're going to wash in salt water?"

"Eh? Oh! Yes! He, he, he! I—I prefer it! That's all right," grinned Bunter. "You fill it for me, will you? It's rather heavy to carry up the beach full of water."

"Anything to oblige," agreed Bob. And he rose and took the bucket.

Billy Bunter watched him, with a fat, grinning face, as he went down to the jetty, filled it with water, and returned.

"Leave it here," said Bunter. "Now, aren't you fellows going to bed?"

"Any hurry?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, no! I'm not waiting for you to go to bed for any special reason, you know! It doesn't matter to me what time you go to bed, of course. Still, aren't you going?"

Bunter blinked anxiously at five smiling faces.

He was ready for bed himself. He was going to bed, as usual, in the corner of Dave Oke's hut.

The Famous Five bedded down in the lean-to they had built under the cliff close by. They had been thinking of turning in when Bunter began his inquiries about the bucket. Now they sat on!

"Early to bed, early to rise, you know," urged Bunter, "makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise! Why not turn in?"

"We're enjoying your company too much, old man," said Bob gravely.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"The enjoyfulness of the esteemed Bunter's company is terrific," declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"We'll stay up as long as you do," said Nugent.

"Look here, you beasts—" exclaimed the exasperated Owl.

"What?"

"I mean, look here, old chaps," said Bunter hastily, "you'd better turn in. I'm jolly well going to bed now—see?"

"O.K.! Good-night, Bunter!"

"Well, the fact is, I'd rather see you fellows settled first," declared the fat Owl. "Why don't you turn in? I'm not going to do anything with that bucket of water."

"Not!" gasped Bob.

"Certainly not! I'm not the chap to chuck a bucket of water over fellows when they've gone to bed, I hope! The idea never crossed my mind."

"Oh crikey!"

"All I'm worrying about is that you'll be injuring your health by sitting up late!" explained Bunter. "You look awfully sleepy, Cherry."

"I don't feel awfully sleepy."

"Well, you look it! I know I am! I say, you fellows, are you going to bed or not?" yapped Bunter.

"Presently!" grinned Bob.

"Beast! I mean, suit yourself, old chap! Of course, I don't mind what time you go to bed! Nothing to do with me. But you'll be fearfully sleepy in the morning if you don't turn in."

Bob Cherry winked at his chums.

"Well, after all, perhaps Bunter's right," he remarked. "As it's so jolly kind of him to want to see us settled before he goes to bed, what about it?"

"Earliness to bed is healthful, wealthful, and wise!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let's, my esteemed chums."

And the Famous Five at last got going—to Bunter's obvious relief.

Bunter was sleepy, but he was not going to bed till they did. Now they went.

It was rather close quarters for five fellows in the lean-to. The end was left



Wharton and Nugent took Harker's shoulders, while Cherry and Bull swung up his legs. The long-limbed longshoreman was swung clear of the jetty and tossed bodily into the boat. He crashed on Rance, sending him sprawling!

wide open for air. Sailcloth was spread on soft sand all over the floor.

Billy Bunter, sitting by the bucket, grinned almost from one fat ear to the other.

A bucket of water, splashed in at the open end after the fellows had turned in, would be about equally distributed over the whole lot. Bunter wanted to be impartial!

This, Bunter considered, was what the beasts deserved, what they had asked for, and what they were going to get.

Bunter had got wet in that bucket; they were going to get wetter. Having drenched them, he was going to execute a rapid retreat into Dave Oke's hut and peg the door in case they suspected that Bunter had done it. He was happily unaware that they were fully acquainted with his intentions. Billy Bunter's podgy intellect moved in its own mysterious way its wonders to perform.

Bob Cherry's head was suddenly projected from the open end of the lean-to.

"Not gone to bed yet, Bunter?"

"Oh, just going!" gasped Bunter. "I say, do settle down and go to sleep. I'm just going—in fact, I'm going now."

And, to reassure his intended victims on that point, Billy Bunter rolled in at the doorway of Dave's hut and disappeared.

But the fat and fatuous Owl did not go to bed. From the inside of the doorway he watched with wary eyes and spectacles.

Five long minutes passed, and then from the direction of the lean-to came the sound of a snore.

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

snored or not Bunter did not know, as he was never awake when they were asleep. That snore was reassuring to Bunter.

Grinning, the fat Owl rolled out to the bucket. Just as he was grasping it a head with a mop of flaxen hair was put out of the lean-to.

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

Bunter jumped, almost knocking over the bucket.

"Oh!" he gasped. He was taken quite by surprise.

"Not gone to bed yet, old fat man?"

"Oh, yes! No! I—I came to—to see—to—to have a squint at—at the moon; it—it's so lovely to-night!" gasped Bunter.

"That's jolly queer, when there isn't a moon to-night—"

"I—I mean the stars—" stuttered Bunter. "I—I mean the—the stars, of course! But I'm going to bed now."

And he rolled back into Dave's hut and squatted down inside the doorway, leaning on an old sea-chest to wait and watch. This time he was going to give the beasts plenty of time to settle down in balmy slumber.

It was fearfully annoying, for Bunter was very sleepy and wanted to get to bed. But he was not letting those beasts off!

He had made up his mind to drench the beasts, and he was going to do it, nothing would stop him.

He sat and waited and watched—and his fat chin drooped on his podgy chest and his eyes closed behind his spectacles. He was waiting for another snore from the lean-to. But there came no snore from the lean-to; there came a deep, rumbling snore from the hut!

Bunter was fast asleep!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not As Per Programme!

BILLY BUNTER slept and snored. He did not hear a voice that murmured:

"Oh, listen to the band!"

Neither did he hear the chuckle that followed from the lean-to a dozen feet away; neither was he aware that Bob Cherry stepped out and sorted out a length of cord and a couple of pegs. Bob was going to make a little preparation for the vengeful fat Owl when he woke and got busy with the bucket.

Bunter snored on regardless.

Whether the fat Owl, once asleep, would wake before morning the juniors did not know. Bunter was not easy to wake. On the other hand, as he was sitting up, it was probable that he would not sleep so soundly as was his wont. In any case, the Famous Five were not likely to turn in at the risk of being awakened suddenly by a drenching shower of water.

Had Billy Bunter's eyes been open, instead of tightly shut, he might have observed that Bob Cherry drove two wooden pegs into the sand at a distance from one another and about six feet from the opening of the lean-to.

He might have observed, further, that Bob tied the cord from one to the other of the pegs a few inches above the ground.

Being deep in the land of dreams, Billy Bunter did not, of course, observe any of Bob's proceedings.

He snored on.

Had he awakened a quarter of an hour later he would have been satisfied that the beasts had, at long last, gone to bed and gone to sleep. But he did

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not awake; he slept on and snored on.

In the lean-to the Famous Five were fast asleep as the starlit spring night wore on, lulled by the wash of the sea—and perhaps by the unending melody of Billy Bunter's snore. They had settled down in the cheerful certainty that Bunter, if he got on the war-path that night, would not get within six feet of the lean-to with that bucket of water. If he got as near as that they were sure to hear him when he tripped over the stretched cord. So they went peacefully to sleep.

The midnight stars were gleaming down on the sea and the rocks when Billy Bunter's snore changed into a grunt, and he stirred, and his eyes opened behind his spectacles.

He blinked and shivered. It had been a fairly warm day, but the night was cold; the wind came chilly from the shadowy sea. Perhaps that had helped to wake Bunter.

Anyhow, he had awakened. For a few moments he sat blinking, wondering why he was not in bed. Then he remembered. He had gone to sleep on his watch—for how long he did not know—and he wondered whether those beasts had gone to sleep yet.

Quietly the fat Owl rose to his feet. Softly he stepped out into the dusky starlight. He listened with both fat ears.

All was quiet and still.

He crept cautiously as far as where the bucket stood and stopped to listen again. From the open end of the lean-to he could catch a sound of regular breathing.

The beasts were asleep! They had, if Bunter had only known it, been asleep for hours; it was now getting towards one in the morning. Anyhow, they were asleep now. Bunter was sure of that.

He picked up the bucket, putting both fat hands to it.

He grinned.

A few steps and he would reach the lean-to; then—swish, swoosh!—and the beasts would be drenched to the skin! Then a rapid retreat to bed, leaving them drenched—and wondering what had happened.

Bunter repressed a chuckle. The hour of vengeance had struck. Now they were going to get it in the neck; not only in the neck, but all over them, in fact!

Bucket in hand, the fat Owl rolled towards the lean-to. In the dusky shadows of night even a sharp-eyed fellow would hardly have noticed that cord stretched across the way. Bunter did not dream of it.

He did not know what suddenly caught his feet.

But he knew that something did; for as he rolled onward his feet seemed to be suddenly plucked backward under him, and the rest of him, naturally, shot forward.

Crash! went the tin bucket on the sand. Splash! went the water out of it. Bump! went Billy Bunter, with a roar that startled the sea-birds in the crannies of the cliffs, plunging head first into wet sand.

"Whoooo-hoooo!"

Bunter did not know what had happened. He was taken utterly by surprise. His fat face and his fat little nose were grinding in sand—wet sand—wet from the water in the upset bucket. He dug up sand with his features and spluttered and roared.

"Ow! Ooogh! Yaroo! What the—Oooooogh! Oh crikey! Wow! My nose! Ow! Woooooogh!"

There was a sound of stirring in the lean-to. The Famous Five had been sleeping quite soundly. But Bunter's frantic roar would have awakened Rip van Winkle, or the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Is that Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Wow! Oh! Ooogh!" spluttered Bunter, scrambling frantically in the sand. "Ow! I fell over something—Yow-ow-ow!"

"He fell over something!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Now, I wonder what it was?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Five faces looked out in the starlight. Billy Bunter, scrambling blindly, with eyes and nose and mouth fairly well filled with sand, knocked his fat

head against the bucket and yelled again; then he sat up, blinking.

"Ow! I say, you fellows—Ow! Groogh! Ooooooh! Wharrer you cackling at, you beasts? Oooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I've had a bump! I've banged my nose! Oooh! I've got my mummum-mouth full of sus-sus-sand—Gurrgh!"

"What did you turn out for, Bunter?" gasped Bob. "What were you going to do with that bucket?"

"Oh, nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wasn't—I mean, I didn't—that is, I never touched it! It—it fell over! I wasn't going to chuck it over you fellows—"

"You weren't!" agreed Bob. "You fancied you were, old fat man, but you weren't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I think I caught my foot in something—"

"I think you did!" chuckled Bob. "And I think I'm going to catch my foot in something—and that that something is a fat porpoise—"

"I say—yarooooh!" roared Bunter.

Bunter bounded up. He bounded away to the hut.

Twice a foot landed, as he bounded. A third time it landed, as he shot into the hut.

"Save us, what's oop?" came old Dave's startled voice from the hammock in the corner.

"Yarooooh!"

"What be ye doing?"

"Yow-ow-woop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh crikey! Oh scissors! Ow!"

Billy Bunter crawled to his bed in the corner. He seemed tired of the trail of vengeance.

Old Dave settled down to sleep again. But it was quite a long time before Billy Bunter could settle down to sleep.

For a long, long time there was gasping and spluttering, gurgling and mumbling from Bunter's corner—till, at last, the sounds of woe died away, and a rumbling snore once more woke the echoes of Blackrock Island.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Watchers Of The Night!

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

He stood staring out over the starlit sea.

Having seen Bunter home, as it were, Bob had been about to return to the lean-to, and bed. But the moving object on the starry waters caught his eyes, and he stood staring. A boat from the mainland was pulling out to sea; distant, but easy to pick up in the bright shine of the stars.

"What's up?" called out Harry Wharton.

"The Rance-bird, I fancy!" answered Bob. "Come and look!"

The four juniors joined him at once, and all eyes were fixed on the craft far out on the shining waters. It was passing the island at a distance—pulling to the west. Three men sat in it, one in the stern, and two at the oars. In the distance and the uncertain light, recognition was impossible; but it was easy to make a guess.

"Not coming here this time," said Johnny Bull. "But I'll bet it's the same crew—"

"And going where they were going the first time we spotted them!" said Frank Nugent with a nod.

"And that's the smugglers' cave!" said Bob.

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Harry Wharton nodded, with a puzzled brow. He could not be sure, but he did not doubt that the three men in the boat were Rance, Peter Coot, and Big Harker.

They were passing Blackrock at a greater distance than on the previous occasion; and, at that hour of the night, could hardly have suspected that wakeful eyes watched from the island. Indeed, but for Bunter's antics, the Famous Five would have been fast asleep in the lean-to under the cliff; and the boat would have pulled away to its destination unseen and unsuspected.

"That rascal was lying when he talked about deep-sea fishing!" said Harry. "It's as good as certain that they went to the cave that night—or whose tracks were they that we found? There's something jolly queer going on here—but what—"

"The whatfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "But those esteemed rascals are up to no goodfulness."

"That's a cert!" said Bob. "Rance has some jolly particular reason for wanting nobody on this island. Bet you he doesn't want anybody to wander into that jolly old cave—where he goes trickling about and hiding boathooks and things. Can't be smuggling—"

"No! But what the dickens—something fishy at any rate, there can't be any doubt about that, if they're pulling out to the cave!" said Harry. "Looks as if they've got something in the boat, though I can't make it out."

"Well, we'll jolly well spot this time whether they're going to the smugglers' cave or not!" said Bob. "Get some clobber on, and we'll get up the cliff—we can see them from there, and see whether they go into the cave or not. And if they do, we'll jolly well spot what their game is later on—you can bet it's something that won't bear the light."

"No doubt about that!"

It was mysterious enough to the juniors. That Mr. Rance, of the firm of Rance & Co., estate-agents, of Okeham, was mixed up in secret smuggling, was possible—but it was not probable. But if that was not the explanation, they could not guess what the explanation might be.

On one point, at least, they had no doubt—it was something that Rance wanted to keep extremely dark and hidden from the law. Only law-breaking of some kind could have accounted for that mysterious secrecy.

The juniors hurried on their clobber, and cut across the beach to the cliff on the western side of the cove.

From that summit, they could watch the farther course of the distant boat when it passed the cliff—and ascertain whether it was bound for deep-sea fishing—or for the sea-cave.

They clambered up the rugged rocks, in the starlight, losing sight of the boat pulling out steadily into the western sea.

It was a hard and rugged climb, but they lost no time, and they were soon on the high summit of the cliff. From that coign of vantage they picked up the boat again. It was no longer heading due west, but swerving round the island.

Lying on the high edge of the cliff, looking down from a height of over seventy feet, they watched. Following the shore with their eyes, they could see the point where the sea washed the great rocks at the entrance of the smugglers' cave.

The tide was at full flood, and through the silence of the night came the booming of waters washing into the deep hollows of the sea-cave. Whether the boat was heading for the smugglers'

cave or not, it came at a time when the full tide gave access to the cave from the sea.

"Look!" breathed Bob.

The boat was turning in to the shore. There was no doubt now that it was heading for the opening of the cave.

This brought it closer to the juniors on the cliff-top; closer and closer, and they could see the occupants of the boat more distinctly.

It was still not easy to recognise them; but they saw that one of the rowers was a big, burly man; the other smaller; a description that fitted Big Harker and Peter Coot. The man in the stern wore an overcoat and a bowler hat. Under the hat brim they glimpsed sharp features—and once or twice they saw the man pass his hand over his nose, as if he had a lingering pain there.

"Rance!" murmured Harry.

It was young Mr. Rance. There was not a doubt of it. From the boat's course, when they had first seen it, it did not seem to have come direct from Potkelly, but from some point farther along the coast. That was a suspicious circumstance in itself; for why should Rance have put to sea from a lonely, tide-beaten shore, instead of from the quay at the fishing hamlet? It was, at all events, heading for the smugglers' cave—that was clear enough now.

"What the thump has he got in the boat?" murmured Bob. "This is getting fearfully mysterious, you fellows."

Lying in the boat was what looked like a large roll of canvas. That it contained something, the juniors did not doubt; but what it might possibly contain was quite a mystery to them.

Whatever it was, it hardly seemed possible that it meant smuggling. Smugglers might have hidden goods in the cave to convey ashore in the darkness of the night. But they could hardly have been bringing goods out from the shore to carry to the sea-cave.

"Not smuggling—" said Harry, shaking his head.

"No! But what—"

"Goodness knows!"

"I'll bet you Rance would jump, if he knew there were eyes on him, whatever it is!" grinned Bob.

"The jumpfulness would probably be terrific!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur. "It is something unknown to the esteemed and idiotic law."

"There they go!" murmured Nugent.

The boat, pulling in on a full tide, glided behind a jutting cliff, and disappeared from sight. That it had floated into the sea-cave on the tide, the juniors knew. There was no longer any doubt—if there had been doubt before—that it was young Mr. Rance who had left those footprints in the sand of the cave. But why and what his game was—except that it was something secret and unlawful—had the Famous Five completely beaten and puzzled.

"Well, that's that!" said Bob, as he rose from the cliff. "We know exactly how much deep-sea fishing Mr. Rance comes out at night for. He hides things in that cave—it was a suitcase the other day, and now it's something rolled in canvas. No wonder he wanted to clear us off Blackrock, with this going on."

"We're making another trip to that cave to-morrow!" said Harry.

"What-ho!"

That was settled, in the minds of the Famous Five, as they tramped down from the cliff to the cove and went back to bed.

The Bounder's malicious trick had landed them, unexpectedly, in the midst of a strange mystery—and they were going to solve that mystery before

they left the island. They little dreamed how closely that mystery was connected with the Bounder—as little as Smithy dreamed anything of the kind, when he had stranded ~~them~~ on Blackrock.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped!

MR. SAMUEL VERNON-SMITH awoke.

Awake, he wondered whether he was dreaming—in the grip of some terrible nightmare.

Like a man in a nightmare he strove to move, and could not.

Yet he was awake! He had to realise that he was awake, and not dreaming. But what did it mean?

He could not stir a limb. Slowly he realised that his limbs were tied—a cord round his ankles, and another round his wrists, knotted fast.

He felt himself in motion. But it was not the motion of a car, to which he was accustomed.

It was the motion of a boat. That was so amazing that again he wondered whether he was dreaming. Okeham was ten miles from the sea. How could he be in a boat?

He could see nothing.

Something was over his face; he did not know what. Where it touched his skin it had a rough surface.

What had happened?

His head was dizzy—it was hard to think clearly. He tried to remember.

His last recollection was of sitting in Mr. Rance's office at Okeham. He had sat up rather late, going over papers with Elias Rance. He remembered that clearly enough.

Rance's clerk had long gone; the office had long been locked up; the adjoining household had gone to bed. Mr. Vernon-Smith had been keenly interested in these papers—relating to a large property in Cornwall, to be secured at a give-away price. It was one of those huge family mansions on which the owners could not afford to pay the taxes, and which, like so many of the "stately homes of England," was offered for sale for a tenth of its real value, buyers being few.

It had been easy for Mr. Rance to keep the millionaire up on such a subject!

For Mr. Vernon-Smith, with his keen foresight and his almost uncanny knowledge of what was to come in the business world, was looking for exactly such bargains as this. Samuel Vernon-Smith knew that those vast mansions, which nobody could afford to buy and the owners almost despaired of ever selling, were going to have a new value in the near future—what with "crisis scuttlers" and A.R.P. evacuation schemes!

So Mr. Vernon-Smith had sat up late with the attentive Mr. Rance, going through papers; and Mr. Rance had brought in coffee, which he had made himself, the household having gone to bed.

Up to that point, Mr. Vernon-Smith remembered it all clearly enough. But from that point all was dim.

Coffee, of course, was stimulating in the late hours, and should have made him more wakeful. But he realised that he must have gone to sleep after that coffee—actually gone to sleep in his chair in young Mr. Rance's office! That was amazing.

But, if that were so, as it seemed it must have been, what had happened afterwards—how had he come here, wherever he was, tied hand and foot, and rolled up in something that covered

him from top to toe—and rocking to the motion of a boat on the sea?

He lay silent, trying to think it out. A wrench or two showed that he could not get his hands loose.

What had happened?

Clearly he had nodded off to sleep after drinking that coffee. Instead of clearing his head, the coffee had sent him to sleep. But Rance had been with him—how could anything have happened when Rance was with him?

His head seemed to spin in the effort of thinking it out. He opened his lips at last and called. Someone was near him now—he could hear movements—and the sound of oars grinding in rowlocks. He called—and immediately there was a pressure on the rough canvas that covered his face, choking back his voice.

He was left gasping.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not call again. He was in the hands of men who did not intend to let him call out.

He realised that now! He was a prisoner! Who were they—how had they got him away from Rance's house? What had Rance been doing?

Then in a flash he knew.

He could not have been got away from Rance's house without Rance's knowledge—and connivance! He knew what Rance had been doing! Rance had been doing—this!

Samuel Vernon-Smith set his teeth hard as he realised that. The coffee had been drugged. He had been drugged into insensibility; at the mercy of a plotting rascal and his confederates—all others fast asleep in bed.

He had been conscious of nothing—but he knew that he must have been carried out, doubtless through the long dark garden at the back—probably to Rance's car, already waiting! Rance!

Those title deeds were not going to be produced at ten in the morning! His doubt was a certainty now! The cash placed in the hands of Rance & Co. would never be seen again. Young Mr. Rance, with his own peculiar methods of carrying on the business left by old Mr. Rance, had landed himself deep in difficulties—and this was his way out!

The rage that swelled up in the millionaire's heart was deep and fierce. But he did not open his lips again. He did not want to be choked by the rough canvas thrust into his mouth.

Samuel Vernon-Smith, the keenest business man in London, the man who foresaw every boom months before it came, who added thousands to thousands, and millions to millions, had been trapped like a bird—trapped like a rabbit! Trapped, by a hard-up little estate-agent in a remote country town, whom he had regarded as little more than a useful piece of mechanism!

And what was intended?

Rance, clearly, had embezzled the funds placed in the hands of Rance & Co. for the purchase of property. On the following morning the millionaire would have known it—his vague doubt would have become a certainty. Rance had acted just in time! But what did he intend?

The wash of the sea sent a cold chill to the millionaire's heart as he thought of that! But he shook away that thought! That rat of a man was capable of swindling, of embezzlement, even of kidnapping, as a last desperate resource to escape discovery and prison. But he was not the man to risk his neck!

But what?

Mr. Vernon-Smith could only wait to learn "what"!

He had been taken down to the shore

and taken out to sea in a boat at a late, dark hour. Where were they going? Somewhere out to sea—that was all he could know.

He heard splashing and a mutter of voices. There was a sound as of an oar fending off hard rock. He knew that they were approaching a shore—it was journey's end. Somewhere along that wild coast—that was all he knew.

Bump!

He felt the boat quiver. There was a splashing of sea-boots in shallow water, and the boat was dragged up sloping sand. A mutter of voices again.

Through the canvas, over his face, came a faint glimmer. A lantern had been lighted.

Then he felt a touch. The canvas was drawn away from his face. He lifted his head and stared dizzily.

The boat was aground, the bows resting on sand, the stern still awash. Two men in jerseys stood by it, holding it, the water washing round their sea-boots.

On either side rose walls of rugged rock—rising to dense darkness. He was in a cavern. The open sea was left behind him; the boat had penetrated a deep sea-cave as far as the tide flooded.

One glance the millionaire gave round him at his strange surroundings; then he fixed his eyes, with a deadly gleam in them, on the sharp face that bent over him.

"Rance!" he breathed.

"Your servant, sir!" said young Mr. Rance, with a sardonic grin.

"You scoundrel!"

"Quite!"

Rance rolled away the remainder of the canvas, and cut loose the cord at the millionaire's feet.

One of the rough-looking men grasped him and helped him out of the boat.

The millionaire stood unsteadily in wet sand, his hands still tied down to his sides.

"You scoundrel!" he repeated.

"Where have you brought me?"

"You do not know your own property, Mr. Vernon-Smith?" said Rance. "No! You did not visit this sequestered nook when I showed you over Blackrock."

"Blackrock Island?"

"Precisely."

"And this cave?"

"It is called the smugglers' cave! I mentioned it to you when I had the honour, and the pleasure, of showing you over the property before you made the purchase, sir!" said young Mr. Rance, with a sardonic imitation of his customary obsequious manner of addressing the millionaire. "You did not care to visit it on that occasion—your time was of too much value for such frivolous excursions."

Mr. Rance smiled a catlike smile.

"You will now have ample time to become thoroughly well-acquainted with this part of your property," he said. "You will be more at leisure now, valuable as your time is, sir. With so many irons in the fire, it may cause you some inconvenience. I regret that that cannot be helped."

"Do you think you can keep me here?" breathed Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Otherwise, sir, I should hardly have brought you here," smiled young Mr. Rance. "But I hope that your stay will not be prolonged—your time being, my dear sir, so exceedingly valuable. I hope that we may be able to come to terms—amicable terms."

"If you think—"

"At the moment, sir, we will not discuss it," smiled young Mr. Rance. "Later, sir, later—not at this hour. At the moment I will show you to your quarters—rough quarters, I fear,

sir—though I have visited this place once or twice already, and made a few preparations. Please come with me, sir!"

Big Harker walked on ahead—up the cave with the lantern. Young Mr. Rance grasped the millionaire's arm, and led him after the longshoreman. Peter Coot, grinning, remained by the boat.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Barred Off!

"COMING, Bunter?"

"Beast!"

Bunter, it seemed, was not coming.

Bunter appeared to be shirty that morning—possibly on account of the events overnight. He gave the Famous Five morose blinks through his big spectacles. Moreover, scrambling over rugged rock and rough shingle and tangled seaweed had no special appeal for Bunter.

But the Famous Five were very keen, and full of beans that bright April morning. After breakfast they waited for the tide to be well out before starting for the cave—their calls in that spot having to be made at times exactly opposite from those picked by Mr. Rance.

Then, leaving old Dave setting nets off the jetty, and Billy Bunter sprawling in the sand, and blinking after them morosely as they went, they started along the sandy beach of the cove, and tramped round the big western cliff, and disappeared from Bunter's eyes and spectacles.

It was a glorious morning, and they were in cheery spirits as they tramped under the bright sunshine, on the narrow strip between the outgoing tide and the wall of rock that circled the island. And they were looking forward to exploring the sea cave with the keenest interest.

The more they thought about it, the more the mystery of Blackrock perplexed them. Previous visits to the smugglers' cave had revealed nothing, beyond the boathook in the fissure, the use of which, in such a spot, they still had to guess at.

But they rather hoped for something more this time. Rance & Co. could hardly have failed to leave traces of their visit during the night—and those traces, followed up, might lead to some discovery, though what, they could hardly conjecture. Only on one point they were agreed—that it was something fishy that would bear looking into.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly, as they were drawing near the sea cave, tramping in the sand round the high, bulging cliffs.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as Bob pointed to a figure seated on a boulder between them and the cave entrance.

The juniors came to a halt, staring. They were taken quite by surprise by the sight of Big Harker—for it was he!

They had not doubted that, after visiting the cave, Rance & Co. had gone to the mainland as before. Not for a moment had it occurred to them that one of the boat's crew had remained on the island.

But there was the long-limbed, rough-bearded, stubbly-featured longshoreman, sitting on the boulder smoking a pipe, and watching them as they came, with a jeering grin on his unprepossessing face.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"So the Rance bird has left a man

here this time," he said. "What the dickens has he done that for?"

"I think we can guess that one," said Harry Wharton quietly. "As he couldn't shift us off the island, he means to take care that we don't wander into the smugglers' cave. That man's there to see that we don't."

"He won't stop us!" said Bob, with a warlike look.

"He won't," agreed Harry. "We don't want any more trouble with the brute, but we're going anywhere we like on this island. We've handled that ruffian before, and if he meddles, we'll handle him again."

And the juniors, after a pause, walked on.

Big Harker, with the same jeering grin on his face, watched them approach. There was no sign of Rance or Peter Coot, and the juniors had no doubt that they had gone in the boat. Big Harker, plainly enough, was left on guard.

Rance, certainly, had no idea of the discovery the schoolboys had already made in the sea cave, and no knowledge that their interest was centred in it, no suspicion, probably, that they suspected him of anything. He was merely taking precautions against a chance visit to the cave—likely enough to happen with holiday-making schoolboys on an island where there was a smugglers' cave.

Keeping as clear of the ruffian as they could, the juniors moved along the strip of sand between the wall of cliff and the boulder where Harker sat.

The burly longshoreman rose to his feet, and waved his hand, and called: "Stop!"

They looked round at him; then, as they walked on, he cut across and planted himself directly in their path. And they observed now what they had not noticed as he sat on the boulder—that he was armed with a thick stick, which he gripped in his right hand as he stood facing them.

"I told you to stop!" he snapped.

"You can tell us to stop till you lose your voice if you like," retorted Bob Cherry. "We're going on, all the same."

"Better not," said Big Harker. "You handled me pretty rough yesterday. I'll give you something back for it, fast enough, if you butt in where you're not wanted—and you can lay to that!"

He made a swinging swipe with the heavy stick, and the schoolboys halted again, and backed a little. Their heads had had rather a narrow escape, and that thick cudgel looked dangerous.

The day before they had handled Harker, and he had not been easy to handle then. With that weapon in his hand, it was a still less easy proposition, if he was prepared to use it.

Harry Wharton set his lips, his eyes gleaming at the jeering, leering ruffian.

"We're going into the cave," he said.

"You surely ain't!" retorted Harker.

"And why not?" asked Harry quietly, watching the man's face.

"Mr. Rance's orders," answered Harker. "You're trespassing on this here island, like the gov'nor told you. You ain't going to be allowed to stop on it, when the gov'nor's got time to deal with you, and get you took off. So he tells me to come out this morning to keep an eye on you."

"This morning?" repeated Harry.

Harker clearly had no suspicion that

(Continued on page 28.)



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THE other day I received a long and most interesting letter from Mr. Cross, a Birmingham reader. I cannot possibly publish it all, but I must give the following extract:

"Dear Editor,—I am sure you will excuse my encroaching on your valuable time, but now I have the opportunity I would like to air my views of your splendid paper, the MAGNET, which I have been wanting to do for some time past; also because I know you invite readers' opinions. First of all, I must tell you that I am over forty years of age, and, with the exception of the Great War period—while on active service—I have read every number of the MAGNET since the very first issue. I can assure you that I think there is nothing to come up to the Old Paper in style or excellence, and I enjoy reading it every bit as much now as I did years ago, and always look forward to Saturday. May Mr. Frank Richards be able to keep on the good work for many more years to come!"

I get heaps of letters like this, chums. Here's another, for example—this time from a lady reader, Mrs. Salmon, who writes me from Salisbury:

"I can say of your splendid yarns of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars," she says, "that they never fail to reach a high standard. Without doubt they are the finest stories of their type on the market to-day, which is saying a good deal. They seem to bring you face to face with Nature. I have taken the MAGNET from the start, and have followed the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. with rapt interest. I have no sons, but two daughters, and there's always a rush to be first to read the grand old paper. My husband, too, was a staunch reader of the MAGNET until he was suddenly taken away from us."

Thanks, Mrs. Salmon, for your very nice letter. It shows that the MAGNET can be relied upon to keep up its high reputation. May you and your daughters continue to enjoy reading it in the future as you have done in the past.

Just fancy! Both Mrs. Salmon and Mr. Cross were reading the MAGNET before some of you were born! That seems a long time, doesn't it? I wonder how many more readers have been taking in the MAGNET since its first number and have not yet written me? I should very much like to hear from them if and when they have time to spare.

Now we come to a few complaints—if they can be termed as such. Some readers inform me that they have to go to quite a number of newsagents before they can obtain a copy of their favourite paper, and they ask me why I do not arrange for every newsagent to have plenty of spare copies of the MAGNET.

This, I must point out, is not possible; and the only way I can help my boy and girl chums is by once again telling them that it is absolutely imperative for them to order their copies in advance. It is the only way to make certain that you will not be disappointed.

"PERIL IN PARIS!"

Are you flying with the chums of St. Jim's on their Continental air tour? If not, you're missing the fun and thrills of a lifetime! Join up with them now, and follow their exciting adventures in "Gay Paree," where they land on the first "hop" of their flight. It will only cost you twopence. Treat yourself to-day to the "Gem," our popular companion paper, and enjoy the great new extra-long yarn of the flying schoolboys of St. Jim's.

There's just room to write about our next grand, long story of Harry Wharton & Co., which will appear in next Saturday's issue of the MAGNET. It is entitled:

"THE KIDNAPPED MILLIONAIRE!"

Crusoes on Blackrock Island, Harry Wharton & Co. seem to be enjoying life, regardless of hardships and the roughest of rough quarters. But there are others on the island, among whom is Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, a millionaire financier and father of Vernon-Smith of the Remove. Imprisoned in a vault, he is shut off from the world. Will the rascally Rance gain his ends, or will he—The question is answered in next Saturday's thrilling story, written as only Mr. Frank Richards can write a story, and every boy and girl who reads it will say that even the great Mr. Frank Richards has surpassed himself. There is not room to mention our other features. Rest assured, chums, they are well up to standard.

There is going to be a great rush for next Saturday's MAGNET—make sure of your copy by ordering it **WELL IN ADVANCE**.

Here's wishing you all the very best,

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,627

they had seen the boat in the night. "That's it," said Harker. "Get out to Blackrock, Bill, the guv'nor says. 'See them young trespassing rascals don't wander where they can't be found when they're sent for,' he says. And I'm 'ere to do it. You go back to that cove along of old dot-and-carry-ono, where you'll be found when wanted. You ain't hiding in no caves when the guv'nor sends for you, you ain't!"

"And that's why you're here on the watch, is it?" asked Harry.

"Wot else?" grunted Harker.

Wharton did not reply to that. He knew, as his comrades knew, that the ruffian was speaking falsely, and that young Mr. Rance had some other reason, and a much more powerful one for keeping them clear of the sea cave.

"Git back!" Harker flourished the stick again. "Git back, and stick along of old Dave! I'm going to see you do it!"

"You're not!" said Harry. "We're going on—"

"You'll get 'urt if you do!"

"If you dare to use that cudgel—"

"You'll see, if you don't 'ook it!" grinned Big Harker. "I ain't waiting for you to 'ook it, neither! Git out of it!"

He advanced towards the schoolboys, flourishing the stick. His eyes glinted, and his stubby jaw jutted threateningly.

The juniors were rather nonplussed. A powerful ruffian, armed with a thick cudgel, was rather more than they were ready to handle. At the same time, the idea of being driven off like a flock of sheep was altogether too intolerable. They stood their ground, and Harker, coming on, struck with the cudgel, and Bob Cherry gave a roar as it cracked on his shoulder.

"Come on!" shouted Harry, and he made a spring at the longshoreman.

The next moment he was reeling over as the cudgel cracked on the side of his head. He tottered, and pitched into the sand, half-stunned. Evidently Big Harker was not going to stop at anything in carrying out the orders of the guv'nor.

"Now, 'ook it!" roared Harker; and he made a leap at the juniors, slashing out right and left with the cudgel, utterly reckless of the damage he did.

The schoolboys scattered before his rush.

Harry Wharton lay on the sand on his elbow, trying to collect his scattered wits.

The other fellows could only scatter. With bare hands, they could not deal with the reckless ruffian.

Johnny Bull caught a savage blow across the arm; Hurree Jamset Ram Singh caught another with his shoulder; Frank Nugent barely dodged a slash that would have stunned him had it landed. Bob Cherry, making a desperate rush, received a crack on the head that laid him on his back.

Only too clearly, Big Harker meant business, and he was giving his savage brutality full play.

Harry Wharton pressed his hand to his head, staggering to his feet. His head was spinning.

"Chuck it, you fellows!" he called out. "Get out of this!"

Big Harker, a little breathless from his exertions, but grinning, brandished the cudgel.

"'Ook it!" he roared. "'Ook it sharp! If I begin on you ag'in you'll know it, and you can lay to that."

There was no help for it. Johnny Bull helped Bob to his feet, and the Famous Five retreated along the beach.

Big Harker stood watching them, grinning and jeering, flourishing the cudgel, evidently ready to handle it again if they remained on the spot. They were outmatched, and there was nothing for it but retreat; but it was bitter enough to retreat from the jeering brute, all the same.

They tramped away in a breathless bunch, round the cliffs, Harker watching them till they were out of sight, heading for the cove.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were rubbing their heads, bruised and aching. Johnny Bull rubbed a numbed arm; Hurree Singh wriggled a painful shoulder, and Nugent a painful elbow where a slash had caught him. Every one of the Co. had had a knock or two, more or less severe.

"Well, this is a go!" said Bob Cherry. "Ow! My napper's nearly cracked! This isn't where we smile, you men!"

"The smilefulness is not terrific," mumbled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ow!" was Johnny Bull's contribution. "Wow!"

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"We're not through with that ruffian yet," he said. "Bare hands are not much use against a cudgel, but we shall be ready for him next time. We're going into the sea-cave, and that rascal isn't going to stop us! Next time—"

"Ow!" said Bob. He rubbed his mop of hair ruefully. "Ooch! Next time we'll handle him all right, cudgel and all! We can play that game quite as well as he can! Wow! The brute didn't care a boiled bean if he cracked our nappers! I say, that man Rance must have something pretty serious to hide—"

"And we're going to spot what it is," said Harry. "Next time—"

"Yes, next time—Ow, my napper! Wow!"

It was not a happy party that tramped home.

Billy Bunter blinked at them as they came, and grinned. Clearly, the Famous Five had been in the wars—only too clearly. Bunter seemed amused.

"I say, you fellows, been scrapping again?" grinned Bunter. "You fellows are always getting into a shindy! He, he, he! You look a bit damaged—he, he, he! Oh crumbs, you've got a bump. Wharton! Oh crikey, what a bump! He, he, he!"

"Anything funny in having a bump?" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter seemed to think that there was. He chuckled.

"He, he, he!"

It was the last straw. Bumps and bruises were bad enough—Billy Bunter's cautions put the lid on. Like one man, the Famous Five grasped the fat Owl and sat him down on the sand.

Bump!

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

"Think that's funny?" bawled Bob.

"Ow! Wow! Beast! Leggo!"

Bump!

"Yoo-hoop!"

Bump!

"Ooooooooooooooh!"

Billy Bunter was no longer amused!

THE END.

(Look out for more thrills and exciting situations in: **THE KIDNAPPED MILLIONAIRE!** the next yarn in this powerful series. You'll find it in next Saturday's MAGNET.)

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JACK JOLLY'S PROTEST!

A Screamingly Funny School Story of Jack Jolly & Co., of St. Sam's.
By our Laughter-Maker... DICKY NUGENT.

"Grate pip!" exclaimed Stedfast of the St. Sam's Fourth.

Stedfast was one of a group of fellows that stood grousing and grumbling about Dr. Birchmell's spring-cleaning stunt.

Dr. Birchmell had ordered that the boys of St. Sam's were to give the school a thorough spring-clean. He had said that nobody was to be allowed out of gates till the school had been cleaned from cellar to attic!

The general opinion was that it was a bit thick, even for an old tirant like Dr. Birchmell!

The Fourth were properly up in arms; and they were standing at the foot of the stairs, handing out some pretty fierce criticisms.

Stedfast's cry of surprise, however, put a stop to their eggsting buzz. The fellows looked upwards, where Stedfast was pointing.

Coming down the stairs were Jolly and Merry and Bright and Fearless; and all four were dressed up in girls' print dresses! They wore aprons and lace caps, and they carried feather dusters in their hands. They were grinning all over their faces.

There was a roar from the crowd.

"What's the game, you fellows?"

"What's the idea of dressing up as giddy maid servants?"

Jack Jolly held up his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen, chaps and sportsmen," he grinned, "there's no need to get eggsting. It's just a jape—or, if you prefer it, a hokes. It's a hokes on the Head!"

"My hat!"

"The Head," went on Jack Jolly, "has ordered us to do the spring-cleaning. Regardless of the fact that this is a school for the sons of gentlemen, he has turned us into maids-of-all-work. Well, we've decided to go the whole hog and dress for the part—that's all! We've borrowed these togs from the school Stage Society and here we are. Don't you think we look good?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But the Beak won't half be wild if he sees you," said Loyle, with a dewy shake of his head. "He'll think you're taking the mike out of him over this spring-cleaning stunt."

Jack Jolly chuckled cheerfully.

"That's eggstingly why we're doing it," he said. "Our object is to pore ridicule on it. When the Head sees us in this get-up, he'll see how silly the whole thing is. He'll realise that he'll be making a laughing-stock of himself by carrying on with it any longer!"

"Few!" wissled the Fourth.

"Something in what you say, Jolly!" remarked Stedfast, sagely. "Probably it hasn't struck him yet how absurd it is for us to be doing maids' work. This should bring it home to him!"

"Eggsactly!" nodded the kaptin of the Fourth.

"When he spots us to-day, he'll reckonise the injustiss of it. I can just picture the culler flooding into his face and the tears of yewmiliation coursing down his wrinkled cheeks."

"It's quite likely, old chap."

"Pretty well a certainty I should say," said Jack Jolly. "We all know he's several sorts of a tirant, but I take it he has a consiance. This little hokes of ours will make just the right appeal to it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Jolly!"

"Half-a-minnit, though!" wined Craven, the cowherd of the Fourth. "You forget the Head says that this spring-cleaning stunt is not his fault—that it's forced on him because the spring-cleaning munny left by the school guvvernors has disappeared!"

"Ratts!" retorted Jolly, scornfully. "It's up to the Head, anyway, to find another way out of the dilemma—and when he sees us in this uniform he'll realise it! Fall in and follow us!"

"What-ho!"

"Shut up, Craven!"

With loud and wringing cheers the crowd exepcted Jolly's invitation and fell in and followed the heroes of the Fourth.

This latest fatheaded stunt of Dr. Birchmell's had put them all on their metal; and they marched up to the old fogey's study as bold as brass.

Binding, the page, was standing outside the study door when the crowd arrived. He seemed to have been put there to keep out intruders. But the Fourth didn't care two straws for Binding, and when they all came sailing along, he was as chaff before the wind to them!

Binding gave a yell, as he was swept aside.

"Which the 'ead's him there with Mr. Lickham a-searching for the missin' spring-cleanin' munny! Which 'e said 'e wasn't to be disturbed. Look 'ere, yung jents, you can't go him!"

"Go hon!" yelled the Fourth, yewmorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jolly led the way. There was nothing of the cowherd about Jack Jolly, and he seazed the bull by the horns and boldly entered Dr. Birchmell's sanktum. The rest streamered in behind him.

Grato was their serprize when they found there was no sign in the study of either the Head or the Fourth Form master. Papers and books and odds and ends were scattered about all over the place as though they had recently been searching, and the carpet was turned up at the corners.



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HARRY WHARTON CALLING ALL CHUMS!

How much should a Remove man have in the way of pocket-money?

This question, mooted by Bob Cherry recently, led to quite a warm argument.

It was a surprise to me to find out how widely different were the ideas of the various members of our little Co. on the subject.

Frank Nugent was the most modest of the lot with his suggestion of half-a-crown a week. Franky said that, although he was naturally willing to take all that was given him, he considered

that people learned to appreciate the value of money better if they were not overburdened with it when they were young.

The most grandiose idea of pocket-money came from Hurco Singh, who will be simply rolling in luero when he obtains full control of his own affairs. Inky thought in all seriousness that a Removite should have at least ten pounds a week. He expressed the opinion that lack of cashfulness crampfully restricted the style of the present generation of esteemed and idiotic Remove fellows!

Between these two extremes all sorts of ideas were put forth—quite surprisingly to me, at first. Yet when I came to think over it, ideas on the subject are more varied than the sums actually dished out as pocket-money!

Billy Bunter, for instance, probably receives, on the average, less than Nugent's modest half-crown a week. At the other end of the scale, we have Lord Mauleverer and Vernon-Smith, each handling a fiver or more every week of their lives!

I myself am allowed ten shillings a week. This goes chiefly on study teas, occasional bus and train fares, amusements and subs to school clubs. I could do with more. Who couldn't? Sometimes I am hard up. But on the whole, I manage pretty well, and at times even find myself with a surplus out of which I can buy odd bits of sports kit.

And that, chums, is all the space I can spare to discuss the vexed question of how much a Remove man should have in the way of pocket-money.

Meet you all again next week!

HARRY WHARTON.

HOBBIES UP TO DATE!

By H. SKINNER

Quite a number of chaps I know sneer at the mere sight of a fretsaw and openly scoff and scorn when they meet a fret-work fan.

But it takes more than this to make a real enthusiast "fret"!

The great and glorious thing about fretwork is that it teaches a chap to be patient.

You can always tell a newcomer to the game by the irritable way he wields his saw.

I happened to be present on the occasion when Bolsover first took up fretwork. His impatience was quite shocking. He flung himself on the wood with a ferocious snarl, used his fretsaw like a backwoodsman using his axe, and finished up by tearing wood and saw to ribbons!

Now that he's a seasoned veteran at fretwork, you'd hardly recognise him as the same man. He caresses the wood coyly, fondles the saw foolishly, smiles sheepishly, and crows contentedly as he daintily and delicately shapes the piece he's making!

He offered to make me a pipe-rack the other day. But I don't smoke a pipe—not me!

But Dr. Birchmell and Mr. Lickham were nowhere to be seen!

"Where are they?" asked Jack Jolly, blinking round the room in amazement.

"Echo answers 'Where?'" grinned Frank Fearless.

"Perhaps they're hiding under the table," said Bright.

A duzen fellows dived under the table to see; but without result.

Then Merry suggested that they mite be hidden by the Head's desk; and there was a rush to investigate.

Still the missing masters failed to come to light. They must have been searching there because the carpet was so fearfully bumpy that it was like climbing over the Alps to get round the desk. The old fogeys, however, were still not to be seen.

But if they were not to be seen, they were very soon heard! The moment the fellows started tramping over those bumps in the carpet, the muffled voices of Dr. Birchmell and Mr. Lickham rang out in deffening corus.

"Oow-ow-ow! Help!"

"Yaroooo! Stop squashing me! Yooooop!"

"What the merry dickens!"

"Oh, grate pip! They must be underneeth the carpet!" gasped Jack Jolly. "We're walking over them!"

"My hat! So we are!"

There was a rush for the other side of the desk, as the Fourth Formers realised that they were trampling on the sacred persons of the Head and their Form-master! The fellows didn't need telling now the meaning of those grate bumps in the carpet!

As they scrambled away, the bumps moved swiftly to the edge of the carpet and the beaks came to light at last. They were holding flash-lamps in their hands and they looked rather the worse for wear. They seemed frightfully waxy, as they staggered to their feet.

"Wow! Wow! You yung raskals, I'll slawter you!" gasped the Head. "I'll birch you all black and blue! I'll—"

The Head's fearsome threats died on his lips. He had suddenly spotted the bogus maidservants in the front of the crowd! He fairly blinked at that uneggspected site.

"Ahem! Beg pardon, I'm sure, yung ladies!" he coffered, not reckernising them for a moment. "I—I'm afraid I didn't know you were here and—"

Then the Head suddenly saw who they were. He gave a violent, spasmodick start.

"Jolly!" he thundered. "Merry! Bright! Fearless! What is the meaning of this here?"

Jack Jolly eggspalined. The time had come to put Dr. Birchmell to shame over his preshus spring-cleaning skeem, and the kaptin of the Fourth was not going to spare him.

"The fakt is, sir," he said, in a wringing voice, "we've decided to do this spring-cleaning stunt of yours properly. You want to turn us into domestick servants. So we don't see why we shouldn't put on proper clobber for the job."

There was a jerry "Hear, hear!" from the Form. All eyes were turned on the dead. The fellows eagerly looked for the blush of shame to mount his cheeks and the tears of shagrin to glissen in his eyes.

But neither of these things happened. "Topping wheezes!" cried the Head, enthewsiaatically.

"Wha-a-at?"

"The one thing that has worried me over this bizness is the thought that one of the school guvvernors may come al— and see you boys doing the spring-cleaning!" said Dr. Birchmell. "But if you're all dressed

up as female servants, such stray visitors will never guess the truth!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Lickham!" cried the Head joyfully. "I will leave the arrangements to you. Get together as many maids' dresses as you can find. Borrow them from the housekeeper—from the Stage Society's props—anywhere! But whatever you do, got as many yungsters as you can into uniform!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly, sir!"

"A thousand thanks, Jolly, for bringing your braney skeem to my notiss!" finished Dr. Birchmell. "And now, please, all of you, return to

your brooms and scrubbing-brushes, and get on with the spring-cleaning at once!"

Words failed the Fourth. They went! Not in their wildest dreams had they dreamed that the Head would look on Jolly's spectacular protest as a skeem to help on his spring-cleaning. But he had!

There was nothing left for them to do but to get on with the washing!

(Look out for the side-splitting sequel to this yarn in next week's number. You'll find Dicky Nugent at his brightest and best in "The Secret of the Study!")

ON A BICYCLE BUILT FOR TWO!

Coker's Holiday Romance

By WILLIAM GREENE

Don't think that Coker's sudden conversion to riding a tandem during the Easter vac. means that he has abandoned his famous motor-bike. It doesn't!

The plain fact about it is that Coker has, at passed through one of his periodical romantic moods!

Potter and I guessed that he was suffering from one of these fits when he bought a rhyming dictionary and shut himself up in his room in Aunt Judy's house for hours on end. We slowly hit on the bright-eyed young lady in the car park of the local cinema as a probable object of Coker's affections.

We were right. She was. But when Coker hired a tandem, we didn't at first connect it up with her. We just thought his restless spirit was in search of now experience. Tandem-riding seemed good fun anyway, and we cheerfully took it in turns to go out on it with Coker—Coker, by the way, always in front.

It was not till Coker brought the yung lady round to the fact that we heard she was a tandem fan. Then, of course, we saw daylight!

"Shan't be seeing you chaps this mornin'," Coker said. "Fill up a bit time as best you can, on know. By the way, Sybil, these are my pals. The one with the nose is Potter, and the one with the ears is Greene."

A nice way to introduce us to his girl-friend, you'll think. But just like Coker. It's one up against us, by the way, that the young lady seemed to identify us

from Coker's description without the slightest difficulty!

She threw us each a smile she had probably acquired from the screen in her rest hours at the cinema, and then turned to Coker.

"Well, now, Horace, where's that tandem?" she asked, briskly. "I have to start work at one, remember, Horace, so we shall have to make it snappy if we're to get in a good run."

"Sure you wouldn't prefer the motor-bike?" asked Coker. "Pedalling away on a tandem for a long journey is no joke, you know. All right for a man like me, of course. Girls are different—softer, weaker, less able to stand up to exertion and so on. You quite see that, Sybil?"

"M-yes!" murmured Sybil, not very enthusiastically. "Perhaps you're right, Horace. But, anyway, I'm keen on tandem-riding."

"All serene, then," said Coker, permitting an indulgent smile to spread over his rugged features. "I believe in a girl exercising freedom of choice—though I must say there aren't many girls capable of exercising it."

"Aren't there really?" asked the fair Sybil, staring a little.

"Not a bit of it!" said Coker, cheerfully. "Girls lack a sense of judgment,

I suppose it's because they haven't any brains."

"I—I suppose so!" gasped Sybil.

"Look at the way they drive cars," chuckled Coker. "Simply no idea, you know. Ought never to be allowed on the roads! But let's get going—and the tandem it is!"

Coker and the young lady from the cinema then mounted the tandem and rode away, leaving Potter and me doubled up with mirth. Coker as a lady's man, acting the gallant and simultaneously explaining how weak, soft, brainless, and inefficient girls were, struck us as funny. When the tandem had gone, we roared!

But the best laugh came later, when Potter went out for a spin on Coker's motor-

As for his boasted masculine sense of judgment—well, as soon as he saw us, he started wobbling all over the road; and before we had reached him he had gone into a skid and pitched off the tandem into a ditch!

Potter pulled up. Sybil had crashed, but was unhurt. She seemed tickled to death when Coker emerged from the ditch, streaming mud.

"Well, that's that!" she giggled. "I'm awfully sorry for you, Horace; but you really did ask for it, steering like that. After what you said about girls' steering, too! Now how am I to get back to the cinema for the opening?"

Coker made no reply to that. If he had not been too muddy, he would have been too breathless, anyway.

Potter stepped into the breach.

"If you'd like to ride pillion," he smiled, "it will, of course, be a pleasure."

"Thank you so much!" giggled the girl from the cinema. "You won't mind, of course, will you, Horace?"

"Croooooogh!" was Horace's only reply—which must have meant "yes" since she promptly prepared to ride pillion with Potter.

Potter drove off triumphantly. I helped Coker home with the tandem. And that's about all there is to tell, I think.

Coker never went out again with the young lady from the cinema. And it can be taken for granted that there is no likelihood of his abandoning motor-cycling for tandem-riding!



bike with me as pillion passenger.

We caught up with the tandem on a country road—heading for home again.

After what Coker had said we might have imagined he was unaffected by the ride. We should have been very far wide of the mark.

The painful truth is that Coker had found the pace too swift! He was windled completely—while the young lady from the cinema seemed as fresh as paint.