

Borrowed Horses

A STORY OF THE
OLD SMUGGLING DAYS

By Richard Holt



THE FIRST CHAPTER The Decoyed Dragoons

DICK HARNETT rubbed the big lanthorn with unnecessary vigour.

"I feel mighty cross about it, Bob," he said to his cousin, engaged on a similar task at the other end of the bench. "Just as we going to set those rabbit snares, along comes father and slings all these dirty old lanthorns at us to clean."

He pinched a tallow candle into position in the horn lantern with a deft hand. Ever since he could toddle Dick had been lantern-boy to his father, a Kentish fisherman, of whom it was rumoured that much of his profit came from other sources than his net. But, in those golden days of King George the Third, to make a little money by cheating the revenue was an accomplishment to be applauded, although it was dangerous to be caught in its performance.

Bob agreed with his cousin, but he struck a hopeful note.

"Rabbits will keep another night, Dick," he said. "You know your father can't want these lanthorns for fishing. If they're bringing the tea and kegs of spirits ashore to-night, maybe he would let us join in the fun."

Dick sniffed contemptuously.

"Here comes father," he said, "you'd better ask him; I've tried him often enough."

Old Thomas Harnett was a seaman of the best stock; from the top of his red stocking cap to the sole of his porpoise-hide thigh boots he was every inch a sailor. He had been trained in the hardest school for a seaman. The narrow, short seas that beat on the treacherous banks of the Goodwins had been his bitter experience, and made him a man trusted by his comrades—and cordially disliked by the officers of His Majesty's Excise.

The old sailor's keen blue eyes took in the boys at their work, and he nodded grim approval.

"Say, Uncle," began Bob, "we were wondering, if you were busy to-night, whether Dick and I could help you."

For a moment the old man's eyes flared, then they twinkled.

"What course are you steering, sonny?" he asked. "Is it at fishing you are wanting to help."

"Oh no," laughed Bob, "it wouldn't be fishing you are wanting all these lanthorns for. We were thinking, Dick and I, that if you were running a cargo ashore to-night we'd like to be there and have some fun."

At the mention of the word cargo the old seaman's face hardened; he reached forward and gripped the scared Bob with a clutch of steel.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded, in a low voice. "So far as you're concerned, it's for fish'n we're wanting those lanthorns. Get on wi' them, and not another word from either of you, or I'll rope's-end you both and hand you over to the press gang in the morn."

There was no mistaking the anger in his voice; both boys rubbed their lanthorns as if their lives depended upon it. The fisherman's stern manner relaxed a little.

"There's a lot o' things ye'll larn as you gets older, b'ys," he said in a more kindly tone. "At present you are too young to know about these things. When I'm in a heavy sea, I don't hang to a light kedge anchor."

He stumped away in his big boots, and the two boys glanced at each other.

"Is he running a cargo, think you, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I can't say," replied Dick. "Anyways, he won't tell us anything, and as good as says we are too young to be trusted, or——"

"Look, there is old Uncle Silas coming down the cliff road! Seems he's found life good somewhere," interrupted Bob, and he pointed along the road that led to the cove. Along the chalky track rolled a cheery little fisherman; his round red face was puckered into a perpetual grin; every few yards he would stop, slap his thigh, and burst into uncontrollable laughter. His peals of mirth echoed back from the cliff-face, and Thomas Harnett turned in his tracks to see what was happening.

"Hi, Silas, what ails ye," he cried.

"You can't be sober, man!"

"Oh, ay, skipper," laughed Silas, "'tis sober I am, and as dry as a herrin' barrel wi' laughing. An' so would ye be, skipper, if ye saw them. The gauger hisself and twenty bold dragoons all gone riding over to the other side of the marshes, twenty miles away, to catch you there to-night as you runs a cargo of tea and spirits ashore."

And the little man laughed himself into fresh paroxysms of mirth.

Even Tom Harnett's face broadened.

"You've spread the tale well, then, Silas," he said. "Our trick has worked, and the Exciseman and his soldiers are twenty miles away for to-night. That's good, just as we planned things out!"

"Faith, and it will be mighty cold hiding in them dykes to-night over there!" laughed Uncle Silas.

"I'm sure of that," agreed the chief

smuggler. "Now you run up to Tremayne's farm and let him know that his stable doors are to be left unlocked to-night. We'll be wanting his horses for carrying the cargo. Get away at once—and not a word to a soul!"

Uncle Silas nodded. It was quite the usual proceeding. During the hundreds of times that Thomas Harnett might have met his neighbour, Farmer Tremayne, such a subject as smuggling was never mentioned.

But often, on receipt of a message that it would be unwise to lock his stable doors, the farmer had come down in the morning to find his horses tired and covered with mud—and hidden in the corn bin would be a keg of brandy or a parcel of tea.

As Uncle Silas went back inland to take the message to the farmer, Dick grinned at his companion.

"Not much doubt about what's happening to-night, is there, Bob?" he said. "I've always been asleep when they've run cargoes before; this time I'm not missing any of it."

"Neither am I!" replied Bob.



The boys saw a tiny point of light flash seawards out of the velvet softness of the night. Three times it flashed, then came an answering signal from the smugglers' lantern on the beach below. (See Chapter 2)

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Dick's Strategy.

THAT night, up in their little attic bedroom, Dick and Bob lay curled in their blankets, waiting for the time to arrive when they should slip out. The big pear tree that brushed their window made it an easy matter to get out, but below them they could hear Thomas Harnett as he moved about. Then they heard him go, shut his cottage door, and, as his feet crunched on the shingle of the road outside, both boys slipped silently out of the window.

There was no doubt as to where they should go to see the smugglers at work; there was only one beach along that coast, and by tacit understanding both made for the cliffs overlooking the landing.

In case they should be met they made a long detour to get to their observation post, across two fields of stubble and through a cove of stunted oaks. Then the roar of the sea came up to them, and they found themselves looking down upon a black beach with the white line of the breakers outlining the water edge.

Bob was frankly disappointed.

"We might 've stayed in bed for all we can see," he whispered, staring into the darkness of the deserted beach.

"Have patience!" muttered Dick. "I can hear men down there."

And almost before he had finished speaking a tiny point of light flashed seawards out of the velvet softness of the night. Three times it flashed, then below them the boys saw a lantern give an answering signal.

"Here comes the froggie with his cargo!" muttered Dick delightedly. "They were his signals we saw!"

There was the movement of men over the shingle beach, and dim figures stood at the water edge staring into the darkness. A few minutes later the sound of muffled oars came up to the ears of the waiting boys, followed by the grate of a boat's keel on the beach. Then the waiting men dashed into the water, and with suppressed grunts lifted a heavily loaded galley shoreward.

Nobody said a word; except for the creaking of the oars and the lap of the water against

the side of the boat, everything was carried out in absolute silence. Every man knew what he had to do. With his six-foot ash pole over his shoulder and a keg of spirit or a parcel of tea at each end, he staggered up the beach to unload his burden in a cave, and return at once to repeat his performance.

"And the gauger is waiting twenty miles away to see them do that," chuckled Dick.

In about an hour's time the last of the cargo had been carried ashore, and Dick saw his father leave the last boat and tramp up the beach.

It was still very dark, and the chief smuggler gave his orders about breakfasting.

"Then we'll get up to Tremayne's for the horses in two hours' time," he instructed. "It will be dawn then."

"We'd better be getting back," whispered Dick to his cousin. "As it gets lighter we might be seen, and I reckon father would grow handy with the rope's-end then."

The mere thought of such a thing made Bob shudder; bending low they ran back from the cliff's edge into the shelter of the oak spinney. Resting there a moment to gain their breath, they crossed the stubble fields and dropped over the hedge into the road.

It was a sunken road, and Bob was the first over into it. But as he touched the ground he gave a cry of alarm. It was too late to stop Dick, who was just behind, and both boys found themselves staring at a group of dragoons who were sitting by the roadside, resting their horses.

It did not require a second glance on the part of the boys to recognize them as the soldiers supposed to be twenty miles away.

"Hi, here are some young jackanapes who'll tell us our way!" cried one of the dragoons.

"I warrant they've been robbin' hen-roosts!" said another soldier. "Born thievin', they are, in these parts!"

Both Dick and Bob turned to run, but the soldiers were too quick for them; they were grabbed and held prisoners as a man in the blue uniform of the Excise came towards them.

He struck Dick under the chin to make him look up.

"Who are you?" he demanded.
"Dick Harnett," replied the boy.
"Son of Thomas Harnett, eh?"
Dick nodded.

The excise man rubbed his hands with glee.
"Good hunting!" he exclaimed. "We've caught the cub, and later on we shall catch the old fox. Ha, ha, he thought we were well over the other side of the marshes, I know! But I am too old a fish to jump at a made-up fly like that. Come, young Harnett, you shall help us in the cause of His Majesty's Customs. We would find Tremayne's farm—lead us on!"

Dick had no alternative but to do as he was told. A big dragoon pricked him in the calf of his leg with the point of his sword, and Dick moved forward.

"Methinks that Farmer Tremayne will be in bed and asleep, sir," he said to the excise man.

"Then it's a rude awakening he will have," replied the gauger. "I warrant that his horses stand ready harnessed in the stables."

Dick looked at Bob; they both knew how true the excise man's remark was. What could they do? In two hours, when the light was stronger, the smugglers would be coming along and fall into the trap.

At the farm the excise man set his dragoons about the house. Then he thumped upon the door, and the farmer's nightcapped head was thrust out of the upper window.

"Who may you be, disturbing honest folk of a night?" he cried angrily.

"Come down and open your yard," said the excise man. "In the King's name, I command you!"

"In truth I will," he cried. "There has been some ruffians in my stable this night—gentlemen that were running a cargo I reckon—who would punish me sore if I stopped them. I would you had come before, Mister Excise man."

He clattered down the stairs and flung open the door; the gauger and his dragoons swaggered into the kitchen, leaving their horses steaming outside. A few minutes later the sergeant followed them, and reported

six horses in the stable with their harness on. "Just as I thought," said the excise man, in a self-satisfied tone. "That old ruffian Harnett thought to send us on a wildgoose chase across the marshes; we only pretended we had gone, and now I trow he will walk right into our trap if we only wait with patience."

"And serve him just right!" echoed



Bob and Dick turned to run, but the burly dragoons were too quick for them; they were prisoners ere they had covered a dozen yards. (See Chapter 2)

Farmer Tremayne snuggled. "Come now, Mister Exciseman, I warrant you and your friends are cold. I will make something hot—a goodly brew of punch, to warm you after your wanderings. Come, you boys!" he cried to Dick and Bob. "Lend me a hand with this fire!"

In reply, the dragoon who still held the boys loosed them, and they went and helped the farmer stir the dying embers of the fire into a blaze.

As the twigs crackled the old farmer bent his head over to Dick.

"You must get away, b'y, somehowsees, and tell your feyther," he muttered.

It was a great relief to the boys to hear him speak so; it meant that the old man was playing a part after all.

"Drat it," he muttered a few moments later, "the water bucket is empty. Hi, you boys, get away to the spring and bring back the water."

The ruse worked quite well. With studied sullenness Dick and Bob picked up the leather buckets and slouched out of the kitchen. In the outhouse, though, Dick stopped in front of a shelf of lanterns.

"I'm faking a lantern, Farmer Tremayne," he cried. "'Tis plaguey dark down those fields!"

"I don't care what ye do," snapped back the farmer, "s'long as you hurry."

But to Bob's surprise, Dick did not content himself with one lantern. He lit four of them.

"Quick, hide them under your coat, Bob, and come along," he whispered.

The startled Bob did as he was told, and hurried out. But Dick did not leave the yard. He ran to the cow-byre and roused into wakefulness four of the sleeping cattle.

Snorting and gasping they were driven out of their shed. Dick looked anxiously towards the lighted kitchen, but there was no sign that the cattle had roused any suspicions.

"What are you going to do, Dick?" asked Bob anxiously.

"Hush!" said Dick. "Just do as I tell you." He held up his hand and both the boys listened. The voice of the exciseman came out of the open door.

"I reckon old Thomas Harnett will get transportation," he was saying in his chirpy manner, "and the rest about five years apiece."

"And a very good thing, too," mumbled old Tremayne. "They are a scurvy lot, and a trouble to honest folk, with their night walkings."

"Did you hear that, Bob?" muttered Dick. "We've got to save father and the others. We can't go and warn them, or we'll be missed, and the dragoons will follow. Now; those lanterns have given me an idea!"

He hooked a lighted lantern on to a horn of each of the four cattle and drove them down the yard out on to the marshes.

"Don't let them get too close, Bob," he said. "Let them keep a good way from each other and trail across the dyke-lands."

They had no trouble in getting the cattle to move as they desired. The unusual condition, and the flicker of the lantern just below their horns, sent them plunging out into the night.

In a few moments they were flickers of light over the marshes. Simulating terror, Dick rushed back into the kitchen.

"Ain't ye got that water, b'y?" demanded the indignant farmer.

Dick pretended to be stricken with fear.

"I—I c-can't," he gasped. "The gentlemen, out there, they are passing by. They will drop me in the dykes."

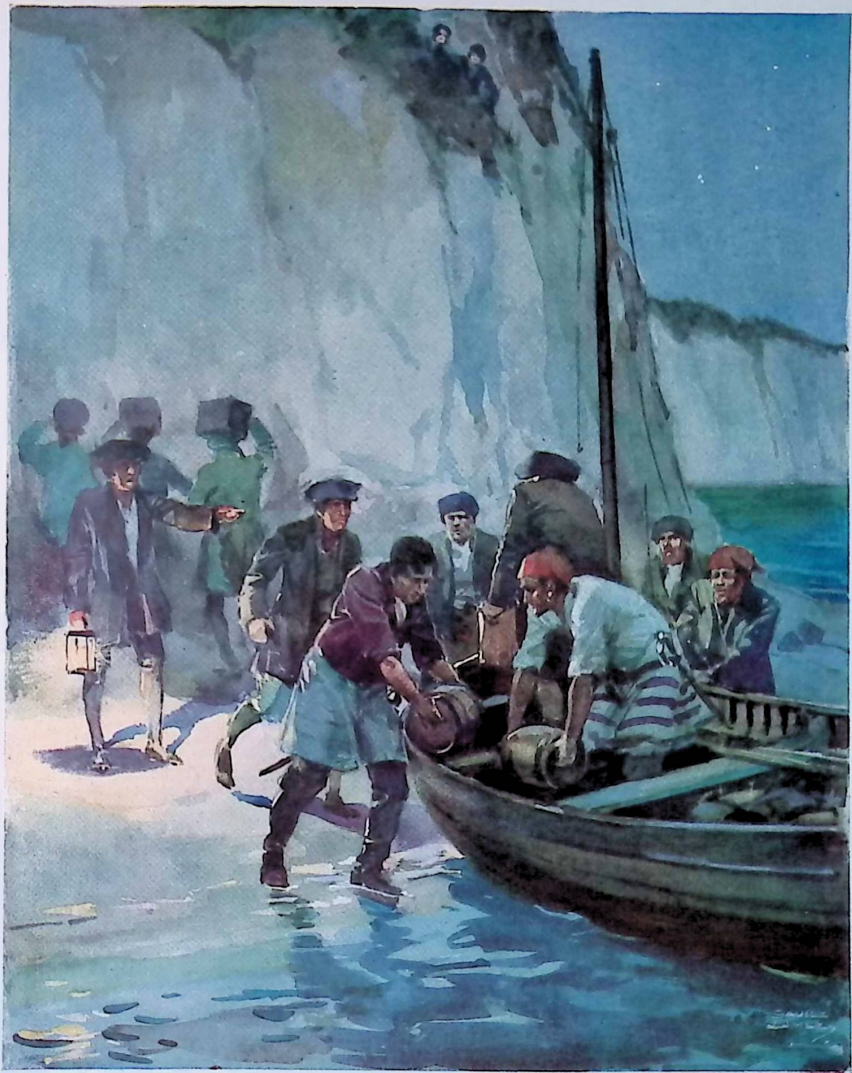
"In truth, what ails the lad?" asked the exciseman pettishly. "Come, speak up, what say you?"

"He means that the gentlemen are going by," said Bob. "We saw the lights outside on the marshes."

"Eh, what's this?" cried the gauger, and he jumped up and ran outside with the dragoons.

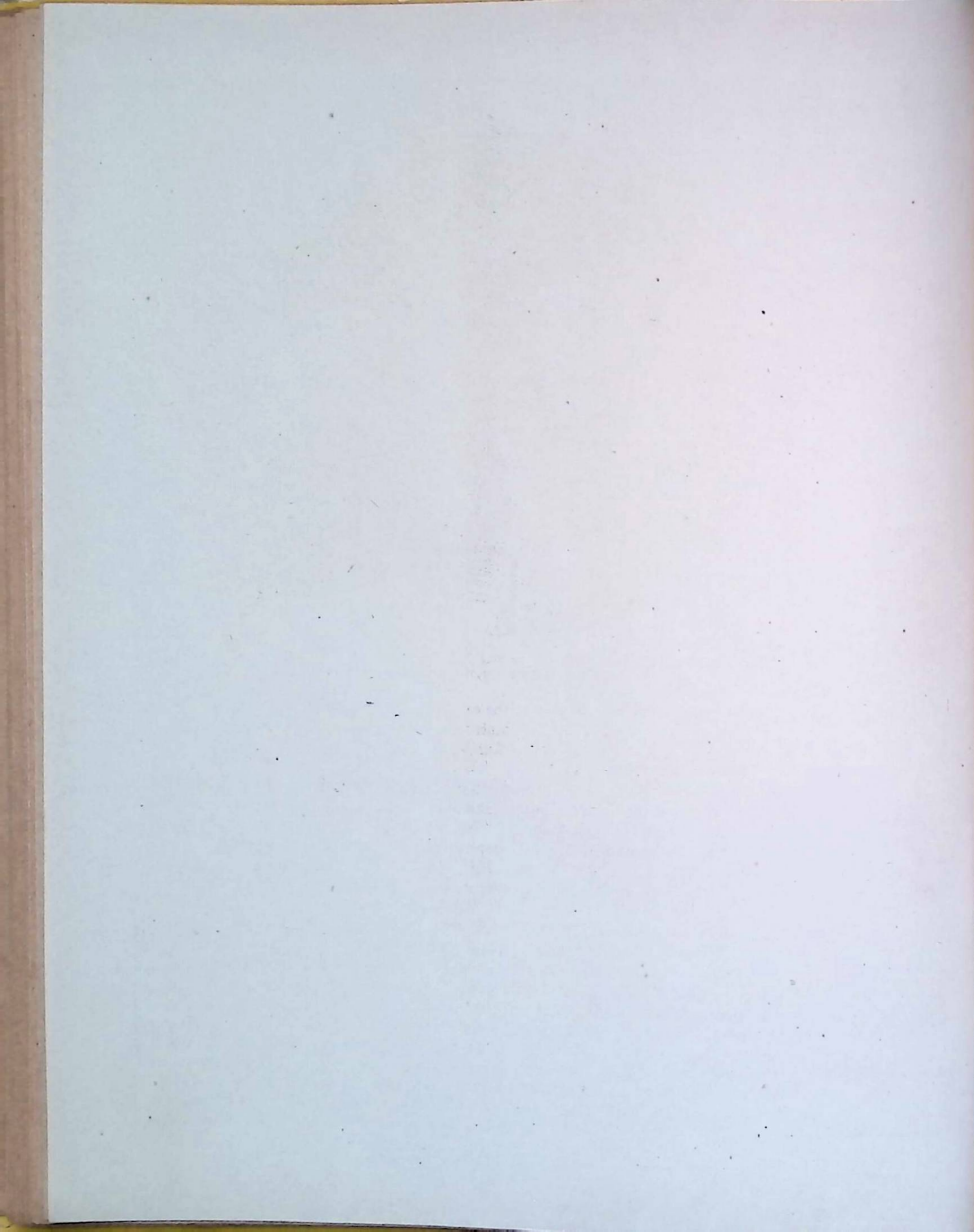
There, in a straggling row, across the distant marshes, trailed four flickering lights. They bobbed and danced just as lights carried by packhorses would move.

"'Tis the gentlemen!" cried old Tremayne, using the name employed by all the country folk in referring to smugglers. "It's they, for sure!"



To face page 40

RUNNING A CONTRABAND CARGO!



"After them, boys!" cried the exciseman. "We'll stop their little capers!"

But the farmer laid a restraining hand upon the little man.

"Ye'll have to go on foot," he said. "No horses can cross the marshes except in daylight."

"Then on foot we will follow them!" cried the other. "Come along, men, the hot punch can wait!"

And he plunged forward into the darkness, followed more reluctantly by the soldiers as they left their horses behind.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Turning the Tables.

As soon as they had disappeared the farmer turned to the boys, and they both burst out laughing at the disappointment in his face.

"I'm afeard they'll be caught after all, b'ys," he said sadly.

"They are only your old cows with some lanterns tied to their horns!" chuckled Dick.

"Well, I'm danged," said the old man, and he glowed with delight. "What an idea! Aye, 'tis a chip o' the ol' block you be, Dick. I almos' forgie ye for robbin' my orchard last week."

He stood and gurgled with delight. Below them they could hear the dragoons splashing about in the marshes, and the shrill voice of



The boys drove the scared cattle—each bearing a lantern on its horn—plunging out into the darkness of the marshes. (See Chapter 2)

the exciseman urging them on, while the four lanterns twinkled farther and farther into the distance.

"Will you be gettin' along an' warnin' your feyther?" asked the farmer.

But Dick had a better idea.

"No," he said decisively, "why shouldn't they carry their cargo inland after all?"

He grabbed the nearest horse of the dragoons and clambered into the saddle.

"We can't borrow your horses to carry the stuff, Master Tremayne," he said. "That would look as if you were in the business, so we will borrow half a dozen of His Majesty the King's!"

He grabbed the reins of two other of the horses and walked them down the road, followed by Bob with three more. The rest Farmer Tremayne, with sundry smacks on their broad flanks, drove into the marsh.

"There be good feedin' there," he chuckled.



The dragoons went racing away into the night—chasing the flickering lights which showed far out on the marshes. (See Chapter 2.)

"I reckon them sojers 'll have a main hard job cotchin' them again."

But Dick and his cousin were trotting down the road towards the sea.

"Whatever will Uncle say?" asked Bob, as he jerked up and down in the big military saddle.

"I wish it was light so we could see his face when he sees us," laughed Dick. "We'll tell him we're the light anchor he wouldn't hang to."

They did not meet a soul all the way to the cove; it was like a dead village they passed through, but just as they moved down the sloping track to the beach a voice called out of the darkness.

"Who goes there?"

"Friends!" cried Dick, as boldly as he could.

"Then stand fast till we have a squint at you," came back the voice. And a minute later a lantern on the end of a smuggler's "bat" was thrust into his face.

"Why, it's young Dick Harnett!" cried his challenger.

Under the light of the lantern Dick peered down and recognised Uncle Silas. But the old man's face was stern and hard.

"What are you doing here along?" he demanded.

"I want to see father at once. I have news for him," said Dick. "The exciseman is out with dragoons!"

At the mention of such news there was the movement of many men from among the rocks; they surged round the boys, all asking questions. Then Thomas Harnett pushed his way amongst them.

"What are ye doin' here, b'y?" he asked angrily of Dick.

"We've come to

warn you the gauger and the dragoons are out after you."

"But they are twenty miles away!" retorted the smuggler.

"They're not; they're out on the marshes now," said Dick.

"Ay, that they be," chimed in Bob. "Chasing lanterns fixed to cows' horns, thinking it is you."

The puzzled smuggler looked at them both; then he noticed their horses.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, "but these are dragoon horses you're riding?"

"Yes, we brought them down for ye to carry your stuff inland, father," said Dick.

"The dragoons have gone afoot into the marshes, and we daren't bring down Master Tremayne's animals."

A light began to break upon the old smuggler.

"You ain't such a dolt as I thought you, Dick!" he said. "I'll hear the tale later. Here, men, get the cargo aboard; we won't wait for dawn. And you, boys, you'd better get back to your blankets."

A trifle disappointed, Dick and his companion slipped out of their saddles to the

ground and made their way slowly home in the dark.

As they were undressing Bob suddenly cried "Listen, Dick!"

And craning their necks they heard the shuffle of muffled hoofs. Like dim wraiths there passed along the white road below a string of horses and men, carrying tubs and parcels, bound inland by their secret paths across the marshland.

It was about three hours after dawn that a mud-bedraggled exciseman, with a tired and angry troop of dragoons, came up out of the marshes, driving four frightened cows.

"Hi, there, what might be your game?" cried old Tremayne, "those cattle must have been missing from their stalls all night."

"Take them, then; they're the will o' the wisps we've been chasing, tumbling in and out of dykes after them, just to find them with lanterns tied to their horns!"

"Why who could 'a' done that, now?" asked the old farmer in mock innocence.

"Those infernal smugglers, Harnett and his gang," spluttered the little exciseman. "I'll be even with them yet, and—" but he never finished. A roar of anger had gone up from the sergeant of the dragoons.

"Where are our horses?" he cried.

It was while the old farmer was trying to pacify him by explaining that they must have stampeded into the marshes that Thomas Harnett came round the corner with Dick and Bob. The old fisherman carried a creel of fresh-caught fish, and Dick and Bob were loaded up with wet nets. The whole outfit had been borrowed from another fisherman, but, as Dick remarked, "The gauger won't know that. Beside he is so covered with mud as I saw him coming across the dyke that he won't be able to see clearly."

"What's that, sojer? Lost some hosses?" asked Dick's father in greeting.

The sergeant glared at him.

"I reck'n you know something about them," he snapped.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I does, sojer," drawled the old fisherman. "We just passed half a dozen o' your beasts coming up the road now. But they're main tired and just covered with mud."

The dragoon waited for no more. He ran down the road followed by some of his comrades. What the fisherman had said was quite true. Half a dozen of their horses, including the sergeant's mount, were listlessly walking up the road, too tired even to nibble the grass by the road edge. They were covered with mud and travel-stained, utterly exhausted and dejected.

"What ever ails them?" cried the sergeant. But he knew directly he reached his own horse. Across his brown saddle was a dark stain. One of the spirit kegs had been



"Friend!" called Dick, in answer to the smuggler's challenge, and a moment later his face was being scanned by a grim-featured man who stared in amazement at the soldiers' horses which the boy was leading. (See Chapter 3.)

leaking, and there was no disguising the smell of raw spirit.

"Why, the scoundrels have been using our horses—the Government horses—to carry their contraband inland!" cried the excise-man.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said the old fisherman. "They is that darin' these days they'll do anything!"

The gauger was beaten—and he knew it. It was a sad and weary party that trickled

out of the village an hour or two later. But up on the drying ground on the cliff top, where the brown nets were being pegged out, old Thomas Harnett looked across at his son and nephew.

"I don't know whether to rope's-end you for disobeying orders," he said, "or to let you help me in running future cargoes."

Then his eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps you had better come next time. You is both handy in borrowing horses."

THE END

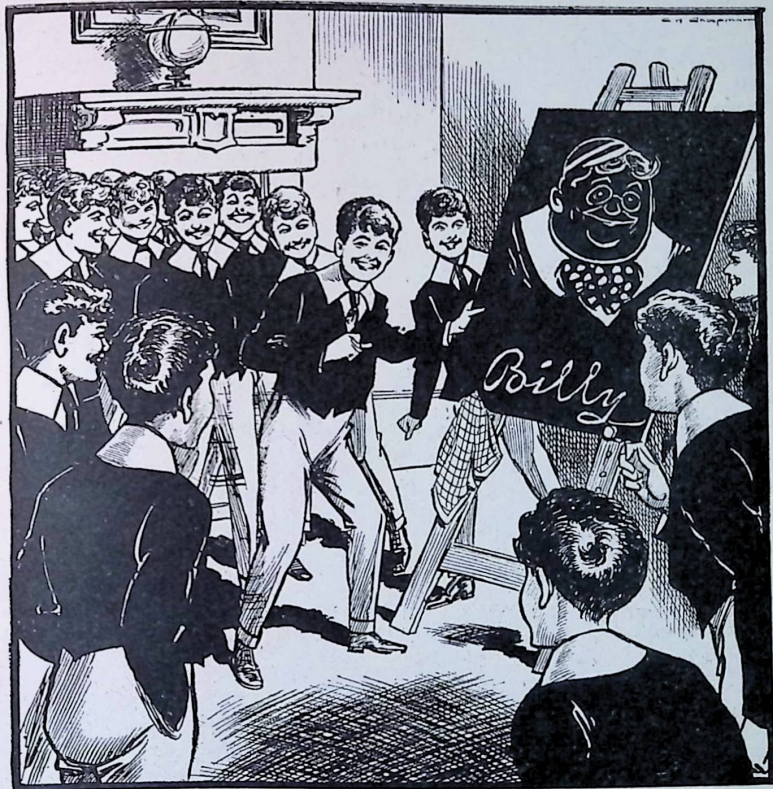
QUITE SIMPLE!



FOOTBALLER: Your church clock is all wrong. How ever do you know the time?

VILLAGER: Well, it's like this. When the hands point to ten minutes to five, and the old clock strikes seven, we all knows in these parts that it's two o'clock.

Billy Bunter Caricatured!



The fat junior is a great "character" at Greyfriars, and the merry Removites often have a little fun at his expense in the Form-room, before Mr. Quelch arrives to take lessons!