BILLY gets into HOT WATER.

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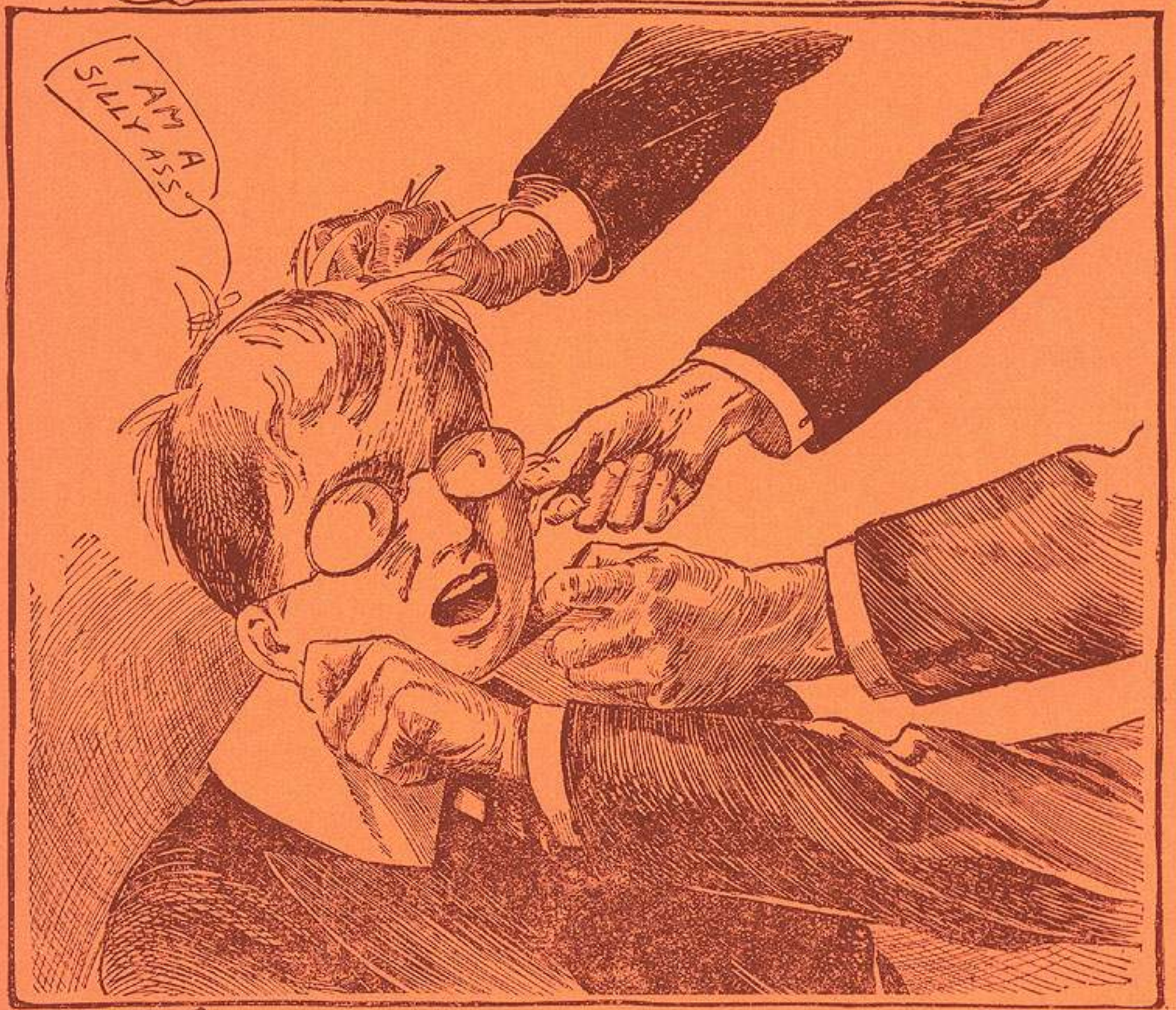
COMPLETE STORY FOR ALL

HARRY WHARTON'S TASK.

By FRANK RICHARDS



THIS POPULAR BOOK ALSO CONTAINS A TALE OF ARMY LIFE.

HARRY WHARTON'S TASK.

A Grand Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's New Wheeze.

THERE was silence in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars—silence broken only by the faint scratching of a couple of pens.

There were five juniors in the study, and each of them was busy in his own way.

Nugent and Hurree Singh were writing lines. Bob Cherry was mending a fishing-rod. Harry Wharton was sitting in the only easy-chair, his legs stretched out and his hands in his trousers' pockets, his brow knitted with an expression of deep thought. Billy Bunter was standing near the fireplace, with his eyes—or, rather, his spectacles—fixed upon Wharton.

Billy Bunter's look was very peculiar. His expression was deeply earnest, his forehead corrugated with thoughtful lines, and his gaze was fixed unwaveringly upon Wharton's face, as if he were trying to penetrate Harry's thoughts by the sheer power of gazing.

The silence in the study had lasted some time. Harry Wharton, immersed in reflection, did not notice Bunter's peculiar occupation. Nugent and Hurree Singh were too busy with their lines to have any attention to bestow upon the fat junior. It was Bob Cherry who first observed that something was "on."

He shut up his fishing-rod with a snap that sounded like a pistol-shot in the quiet study, and looked up with a yawn.

"That's finished!" he remarked.

No one replied. Frank Nugent gave a faint grunt in acknowledgment of the fact that a remark had been made, but that was all. Bob Cherry looked round the study.

"Seem jolly busy, all of you," he remarked. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you up to, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter did not reply.

His spectacles remained fixed upon Harry Wharton, and he apparently did not hear Bob Cherry's remark.

Bob stared at the fat junior in blank amazement.

He was accustomed to the vagaries of Billy Bunter, but this time it really did seem as if the Owl of the Remove were off his "rocker" at last.

"Billy! Ass! Duffer! What's the matter?"

Bunter was still silent. Harry Wharton looked up, and glanced round at Bob.

"Wherefore that thoughtful brow, my son?" asked Bob Cherry. "Are you doing a sum in mental arithmetic, or have you just had a tailor's bill in?"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Neither."

"Do you know what's the matter with Billy, then? He's suddenly become deaf as well as blind and silly."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, I spoke to you twice, and you didn't answer."

"You've spoiled it all!" exclaimed Bunter, in a tone of deep disgust. "You are always doing something fatheaded, Cherry."

Bob stared at him.

"Spoiled all what?"

"Well, not exactly spoiled, but interrupted. I was reading Wharton's thoughts."

"You were whatting Wharton's what?"

"Reading his thoughts. I have lately discovered that I have a remarkable gift for thought-reading, and I have

taken it up instead of hypnotism as a hobby. I was reading Wharton's thoughts when you interrupted me."

"You—you howling ass!"

"Fellows always start calling me names when they're envious of my mental powers."

"Ha, ha, ha! I never knew that you had any, and I'm jolly well not going to take your word for it."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"If you were reading Wharton's thoughts, spout them out. He's been sitting in that chair for about ten minutes as solemn as an Egyptian mummy, and his cogitations ought to be valuable. What was he thinking about?"

Wharton flushed a little.

"I don't think Billy can guess," he remarked.

"It's not a case of guessing," explained Billy Bunter. "Thought-reading is a science. I have studied it on the methods of Monsieur Jong Bong."

"Monsieur what what?"

"Jong Bong, the famous thought-reader."

"Blessed if I've ever heard of him. How do you spell him?"

"J-e-a-n B-o-n-g," said Billy Bunter. "Owing to my knowledge of French I give the name the exact Parisian pronunciation—Jong Bong. Monsieur Jong Bong is the most famous thought-reader of the present day."

"Who says so?"

"He says so himself, in his book on the subject. I picked it up for twopence secondhand, and it was a big bargain, for it first enlightened me as to my wonderful powers as a thought-reader. I can tell you accurately what Wharton was thinking about, and I could have given you his thoughts word for word if you hadn't interrupted me."

"Well, go ahead, ass."

"He was thinking about the little sum I owe Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter. "You remember that Quelch said it must be paid to-day, or else he would place the matter before my governor. Wharton promised to see me out of the difficulty."

"I said I'd do my best," said Wharton.

"That amounts to the same thing," said Bunter. "I rely upon you."

"But——"

"That's all right; I rely upon you. Now, you were thinking of a way out of the difficulty, and——"

"But I wasn't."

"Eh?"

"I wasn't thinking of anything of the sort."

"Oh, come, now! Wharton, it's not fair to prevaricate."

"To what?"

"I—I mean, it's not the thing to—to conceal the truth, just to throw discredit upon my wonderful powers as a thought-reader."

"You utter ass!"

"I like a fellow to speak candidly," said Bunter. "If you weren't thinking of what I've said, what were you thinking of?"

"That's my affair," said Harry drily.

"There you are, you see! You refuse to acknowledge——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bob Cherry. "You're off the track, Bunty. The fact is, you are a shrieking ass. Your thought-reading is on a par with your hypnotism and your physical culture, and the rest of it. You are an ass."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"The assfulness of the honourable Bunter is great," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, looking up from his work, "and the chatterfulness of the honourable idiot is terrific."

"Really, Inky——"

Nugent looked up, too.

"Do you think you could guess my thoughts, Bunty?" he asked.

Bunter fixed him with his spectacles.

"Certainly, Nugent. The indications are infallible to one who has carefully studied the methods of Monsieur Jong Bong. You are thinking of—of—of tea—of having tea when you've finished your lines."

"Wrong!" said Nugent. "I was thinking that if you don't shut up and let me get my work finished, I shall bump you out of the study"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Dry up!"

"If you would care for a further exhibition of my powers, Wharton——"

"No, thanks," said Harry, laughing; "I'm quite satisfied."

"I'm willing to prove to you, by any test, that I have studied the methods of Monsieur Jong Bong, and can work them off as well as he can himself. I will demonstrate to you——"

"Shut up!" roared Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

Nugent jumped up and seized a ruler, and Bunter dodged towards the door.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off! I say—— Ow! I'm going! I'm going, I tell you! Keep that ruler away, you beast!"

Billy Bunter jerked open the door of the study, and, running out, bolted right into a junior who was coming along the passage.

There was a terrific biff and a yell.

Levison of the Remove rolled on the linoleum, and Billy Bunter staggered to and fro for a moment, and finally collapsed—upon Levison's chest.

And Levison gave a fearful gasp as the fat junior sat upon him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Little Difficulty.

"OW!"

"Dear me I believe I ran into somebody!" exclaimed the short-sighted Owl of the Remove, holding on his spectacles with one hand, and blinking through them dazedly. "I—I'm almost sure I ran into somebody. Wh-what's this I'm sitting on?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Gerroff!"

"Dear me! I'm sitting on somebody! I'm sincerely sorry, Bulstrodo."

"I'm not Bulstrode idiot; I'm Levison."

"Sorry! You know I'm a trifle short-sighted," blinked Bunter. "I'm sincerely sorry, Levison. It was very fortunate I sat upon you, however, as I might have hurt myself severely if I had bumped on the floor."

"Gerroff my chest!"

"Certainly! I feel very breathless. It is all Nugent's fault."

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. Levison sat up, gasping. Harry Wharton stepped forward to lend him a hand to rise, but he disregarded it, and helped himself up by the wall.

Wharton drew back, a faint flush in his cheeks.

Levison rose slowly, and turned to the chums of the Remove, with an angry sneer upon his face.

"I suppose that's your idea of a joke?" he remarked.

"It was quite an accident," said Harry Wharton quietly.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I say, Levison, it was really an accident," said Bunter, blinking. "Nugent was chasing me with a ruler, and I bolted out. I'm sincerely sorry, but it was all Nugent's fault."

"Rats!" said Nugent. "Why didn't you look where you were going?"

"You know I'm slightly short-sighted."

"Blind as an owl, you mean."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Can't see that it matters much," said Bob Cherry, with a yawn. "Why shouldn't Levison be bumped over? It won't hurt him."

"I knew it was done on purpose," said Levison.

"You know a lot, don't you? Didn't you hear Wharton say that it was an accident?" asked Bob Cherry, with a sparkle in his eyes.

Levison gave that irritating shrug again.

"Oh, yes, I heard him say so!"

Wharton bit his lip.

"It's no good talking," he said. "You can think what you like, Levison. Let's get along, Bob, and Nugent can finish his lines."

Levison, with a sour scowl on his face, walked on, rubbing his shoulder, which had had a painful bump. Billy Bunter,

after a moment's hesitation, followed him. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry went downstairs and out into the Close. Bob Cherry's face wore a troubled and slightly impatient look.

"Look here, Harry," he broke out abruptly, "what's the little game?"

Wharton looked at him and coloured.

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"Why are you putting up with that rat's insolence? For the past week or more Levison seems to have had nothing in mind but to insult you, and you've taken it all lying down!"

Harry Wharton laughed shortly.

"It's my own fault," he said. "I've set myself a task that I'm beginning to think was rather too big for me, that's all."

"About Levison, you mean?"

"Yes. I know the fellow has his good points, and he doesn't mean to be a cad, though he has done a good many caddish things. Every now and then he comes out with some decent action that shows he is the right stuff at heart."

"Possibly. But he's a suspicious, irritating beast, and I haven't any patience with him! What he wants is a licking!"

"Well, I gave him a licking once, and a jolly good one!" said Wharton. "It didn't seem to do him much good, did it?"

"No, that's right."

"Then I made up my mind I'd give him a chance—as I had a chance given me once, when I badly needed it," said Wharton, colouring a little. "I admit that it's uphill work! He tries a fellow's patience!"

"Look here," said Bob Cherry abruptly; "I haven't mentioned it before, but—but I heard from Bunter—blessed if I know how he knew; he seems to get on to everything—I heard from Bunter that Levison——"

Bob Cherry paused.

"Well?" said Wharton quietly.

"That when he came to the study on Saturday and we left you together, he—he struck you!"

Bob Cherry blurted out the words and turned very red. It was plain that he didn't want to believe them, but half-believed them.

"Well, Harry?"

"It's true," said Wharton.

"True?"

"Yes."

"And what did you do?"

"Nothing."

"Harry!"

"My dear Bob, I suppose you don't think I was afraid, do you?" said Wharton, with a short, uneasy laugh. "He did strike me—and you know I could have knocked him to pieces if I had liked."

"And you didn't?"

"No, I didn't. I had set myself a task, as I've told you. I dare say I was a fool——"

"No dare-saying about it!"

"Well, I was a fool, if you like that better! But I said I would do it, and I'm going to do it if it's possible! I'm going to get through the shell to the kernel, if I can."

"If there's any there."

"I am sure of that. Levison is suspicious; he suspects everybody of trying to take a rise out of him. But there must be a way of getting through it. I said I would try, and I'm not going to turn back; I'm going to stick it out."

Bob Cherry looked at his chum, half-admiringly and half-angrily.

"Well, I must say you're an ass!" he remarked.

"Thank you," said Harry, laughing.

"The fellow's not worth it!"

"Very likely."

"And, look here; if it gets about the school that you took a blow without returning it, there will be trouble!"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Well, you will get chipped, first thing; the fellows will make jokes about it!"

"They had better not make the jokes in my presence," said Harry, with a gleam in his eyes. "I have made up my mind to stand Levison, for the reasons I've given you, but that doesn't mean that I've turned myself into a worm to be trodden on."

"Well, that's some relief, anyway!" said Bob Cherry. "One never knows quite what you are going to do, or how you are going to take things! I dare say if you punch a few heads over it, it will be all right again!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, that's a simple way of making matters all right, and I'll do it if necessary!"

"As for Levison, the sooner you throw him over the better!"

"I hope I shall succeed with him."

"Rats! Hallo, Vaseline! What's the news?"

Hazeldene of the Remove joined the chums in the Close. He looked as if he had something to say.

"It's about Bunter," he said. "I'm afraid Bunty is booked for a regular row this time!"

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"You know he owes Mrs. Mimble at the tuckshop ten shillings?" went on Hazeldene. "He yarned to Quelch about a postal-order he expected, but we all know Billy Bunter's postal-orders—they never come! This evening is the end of the grace allowed him to pay up, and if he doesn't settle, Quelch is going to write to his father by the evening's post, and perhaps enclose Mrs. Mimble's little bill! Rough, isn't it?"

"Serve the young ass right!" grunted Bob Cherry. "He's always getting into a fix, and bothering people to get him out again!"

"Billy doesn't seem to see it in that light," grinned Hazeldene. "He's going about trying to borrow ten bob of everybody he meets! "He says that you promised to see him through!"

"I said I would do my best," said Harry Wharton, with a worried look. "I was going to raise the tin to pay Mrs Mimble."

"Well, why don't you, then?"

"Quelch has forbidden it. He guessed that Bunter would fix it on us somehow, and he has expressly forbidden us to advance the money. His idea is to give Bunter a lesson; and, as a matter of fact, he needs one!"

"No doubt about that, but it makes it awkward for you, after you said that you would help him!" said Hazeldene.

"I know it does."

"You might fix it by handing the money to somebody else, and letting him lend it to Bunter," Hazeldene suggested.

Wharton coloured.

"I promised Quelch."

"That would be a way out of it," said Hazeldene, whose sense of honour in some matters was not quite so keen as it might have been.

Wharton shook his head.

"Then Bunter will get into a row at home," said Hazeldene. "It serves him right, of course, but I'm sorry for him!"

"The worst of it is that he stood us a feed with the grub he got from Mrs. Mimble," said Harry. "We'd pay up like a shot if we were allowed!"

"Take French leave."

"It can't be done," said Wharton, frowning. "Still, I may think of some way out of the fix yet. Where is Bunter?"

"He was going into Mr. Quelch's study to ask for time when I saw him," grinned Hazeldene. "My idea is that Quelch will be as hard as nails! Bunter has been trying to borrow the tin of Levison. Not much chance there, eh?"

"Not much, I think."

Hazeldene strolled away. Bunter's troubles did not seem to weigh upon his mind very much, but Harry Wharton looked worried and troubled.

"I don't see what's to be done," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Something must be done," said Harry quietly. "Billy's got to be helped out of this scrape. But—I'm blessed if I see how!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Levison Pays!

"AH, it is you, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter was trembling a little as he entered Mr. Quelch's study and found the cold, grey eye of the Remove master fixed upon him. He blinked uneasily through his big glasses.

"Y-e-es, sir," he stammered.

"I am glad to see you, Bunter! You have come to tell me, of course, that you have paid Mrs. Mimble?"

"If you please, sir——"

"It was very wrong of you to take those goods from Mrs. Mimble without a certain prospect of being able to pay for them," said Mr. Quelch, wagging his forefinger at the fat junior in an admonitory way. "The fact that you thought you could extract the money from your study-mates only makes matters worse. You have no right to do anything of the kind, and that is why I have forbidden them to find the money."

"But, sir——"

"You have a lesson to learn in these matters, Bunter. I hope it will do you good. I am very glad you have found a way of settling Mrs. Mimble's account."

"But sir——"

"You may go."

"But, sir—— But—I haven't settled it, sir."

Mr. Quelch, who was taking up his pen, laid it down again upon the inkstand.

"You haven't settled it, Bunter?" he rapped out.

"N-n-n-n-no, sir."

"Then why have you come to me?"

"I-I-I-I've had a disappointment, sir. I was expecting a postal-order, but there's been some delay in the post, and—and——"

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir. I can't account for that delay in the post—I've been thinking of writing to somebody somewhere about it—but——"

"Bunter, were you really expecting a postal-order?" demanded Mr. Quelch severely.

"Oh, yes, sir! As a matter of fact, I was expecting two—one that didn't come last week, and one that didn't come the week before. They both ought to have arrived by the evening post, but—but they haven't."

"Then you have not paid Mrs. Mimble?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"In one hour," said Mr. Quelch, glancing at his watch, "my letters will go to the post. Among them will go one to your father, enclosing Mrs. Mimble's bill."

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"I say, sir, I really wish you'd give me a little more time."

"I would willingly do so, Bunter, if it were any use. But it is perfectly clear to me that you have run into debt without the slightest prospect of paying. Unless you have a severe lesson, you are likely to drift into actual dishonesty!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Therefore, I cannot allow this matter to pass. Besides, Mrs. Mimble must be paid."

"I'm expecting a postal order——"

"Nonsense! You may go!"

"But, really, sir——"

"You may go, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a tone there was no arguing with.

And the Owl of the Remove disconsolately left the study.

He met Levison in the passage, but did not stop to speak to him. For once Billy Bunter had been made to realise responsibility, and he was sorely troubled. Up till now he had always managed, somehow, to shift his worries off upon other shoulders, more or less willing to bear them. But that was impossible in the present case, and Bunter was in a fix.

He knew what would be the result if the bill went to his father. Bunter's people were poor, and a bill for ten shillings for a "feed" would make them open their eyes. His father would in all probability refuse to pay it, and then the matter would come before the Head. His pocket-money would be stopped until the account was settled, and that might not be the worst.

The prospect was a worrying one to poor Billy, and it was no wonder that he drifted hopelessly along the passage, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the floor, and his brows darkly knitted.

Levison watched him curiously as he came along, and tapped him on the shoulder.

Billy Bunter stopped, and regarded the new boy in the Remove with a lack-lustre eye.

"What's the trouble?" said Levison.

Billy Bunter grunted.

"You know what it is. What's the good of asking me?"

"I suppose Quelch is as hard as nails?"

"Yes. I'm in a fix. He's going to write to my governor. Of course, I shall get into a row. It's not my fault."

"Well, you had the things from Mrs. Mimble."

"The other fellows would lend me the money, though, if Quelch would let them."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"It's safe enough for them to say so under the circumstances," he remarked. "If Quelch gave his permission, they might talk to another tune."

"I shouldn't wonder. They ought to help me out somehow. Wharton said he would, or, at least, that he'd try. He hasn't done anything."

"You needn't expect it of him!" sneered Levison. "It looks to me as if you were in a fix, Bunty."

"So I am. Somebody ought to give me a leg up."

"You want such a precious lot of legs up," said Levison. "You're always in some trouble or other."

"If my postal order had come——"

"Oh, blow your postal order!"

"I'll tell you what, Levison. I'm expecting two postal orders, and I think they'll be for ten shillings each. If you like to stand me the ten shillings now, you can have both of them when they come."

"Thank you for nothing!"

"It's jolly big interest—cent. per cent.! It's a chance to make money, and you know you're fond of money. Everybody says you're mean——"

"Oh, do they?" said Levison, with a curious grin. "You have an awfully tactful way of trying to borrow money, Billy, and no mistake. Now, look here, I don't want any nonsense about your silly postal-orders that never come! I know jolly well that if I lend you ten bob I shall never see a penny of it again——"

"Oh, really, Levison——"

"So I'm not going to lend it you. I'll give it you, if you like."

Bunter's mouth and eyes opened wide.

"You—you—you'll give it me?" he stammered blankly.

"Yes."

"You'll give me ten bob?"

"Yes; or, rather, I'll come with you and pay Mrs. Mimble, and get the receipt."

"I hope you could trust me with the money, Levison," said Billy Bunter, with great dignity. "It's rather an aspersion on my character to——"

"Oh, don't jaw! Come along!"

"You had better give me the ten bob——"

"Look here, Bunter, I'm going to pay Mrs. Mimble, or I'm going to do nothing! Do you understand that?"

"Yes; but look here, Mrs. Mimble doesn't half expect to get her money, and she'd be glad to give me a receipt if I gave her seven or eight bob, and chalk up the rest to the old account," said Bunter confidentially. "We could have a feed on the rest—two or three shillings, you know!"

"Are you coming?"

"I say, don't you think it's a good idea?"

"No, I don't!"

"I don't see why you can't trust me with the ten shillings. Blessed if I can see how it matters to you what I do with my own money!" said Billy Bunter, with an injured expression.

"Only this is my money!" grinned Levison.

"Not now you've given it to me."

"But I haven't given it to you; I'm going to pay Mrs. Mimble. And if she isn't paid at once I shall probably change my mind about it, and——"

"We'd better cut along!" said Bunter hastily.

They cut along. Mrs. Mimble was in the school shop, and she frowned when she saw Bunter. But when she saw the half-sovereign in Levison's fingers, the frown cleared off her brow as if by magic.

"We've come to pay your little bill, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter importantly. "What discount are you going to allow for cash?"

"My account is ten shillings, Master Bunter!"

"Now, ma'am, do be businesslike! You ought to allow at least ten per cent.——"

"My account is ten shillings, Master Bunter!"

"Oh, it's no good arguing with a woman!" said Bunter, with a sigh of resignation. "They can never understand business! Hand it over, Levison!"

"I'm paying this for Bunter," said Levison. "Give me the receipt."

"It's very generous of you, Master Levison!"

"Is it?" said Master Levison. "I shall sleep all the sounder to-night through being the happy possessor of your good opinion, ma'am! Please make out the receipt!"

Mrs. Mimble looked puzzled, and did so. She did not quite understand Levison. She scratched out the receipt for the ten shillings, and took the golden coin.

"And now, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter, in quite a grand manner, "I hope you will feel safe in trusting me with a few shillings' worth of things."

"I can't trust you, Master Bunter!"

"Not when I've just paid up ten shillings in a lump?"

"You haven't paid it; Master Levison has paid it!"

"He's lent me the money——"

"No, I haven't," said Levison unceremoniously; "I've given it to you, to get you out of a fix, and Mrs. Mimble would be a fool if she trusted you with a penny!"

"Oh, really, Levison——"

"And this is the first and the last time I'm going to pay your debts, too!" said Levison. "Come along! Here's your receipt!"

"I say, Levison, those jam-tarts look awfully ripping!"

"Yes, don't they?"

"Why don't you have some?"

"Because I haven't any tin!"

"But you've just lent me half-a-sovereign."

"I've just given you half-a-sovereign!"

"Well, given, then!" said Bunter, with an uncomfortable twist. "You've got such a rotten unpleasant way of putting things, you know! Of course, that wasn't your last coin."

"How do you know it wasn't?"

"Well, you wouldn't have lent——"

"Given!"

"Well, given it to me, if it had been your last. That stands to reason. I say, these cream puffs are ripping! Don't you think we had better have a dozen between us?"

"Yes, if you can pay for them."

"Well, you know I can't. But you——"

"I'm off!"

Levison walked out of the tuck-shop. Bunter looked disconsolately after him, then at the receipt in his hand, and then at the cream puffs. The receipt saved him a great deal of mental worry, but—he was hungry.

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, you ought to allow something for cash," he said. "Suppose you throw in a dozen tarts——"

"Good-night, Master Bunter!"

"Half a dozen cream puffs, then!"

Mrs. Mimble went into her little parlour. Bunter leaned over the counter and called after her.

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, just one slice of cake, then!"

There was no reply from Mrs. Mimble, and Bunter slowly and dismally quitted the tuck-shop.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise.

"IF you please, sir——"

"Really, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, laying down his pen and frowning at the fat junior—"really, I cannot have you interrupting me again and again like this!"

"But if you please——"

"I have told you my decision. No amount of talking can alter it. Now leave my study at once, and do not return!"

"But, sir——"

"Will you go?" exclaimed the Remove master, reaching for his cane.

Bunter backed away a step.

"I'm sincerely sorry, sir, but—but you told me to come if I had paid Mrs. Mimble!"

Mr. Quelch started.

"You have paid her, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! That alters the case, of course!"

"I hope you haven't written to my gov—to my father, sir?"

"Not yet. Have you the receipt?"

"Here it is, sir."

Mr. Quelch, who evidently had his doubts, looked at the receipt. It was quite in order, and there was no further doubting that Mrs. Mimble had been paid. The Remove master was puzzled.

"I am glad of this, Bunter," he said; "I am surprised also. You have not borrowed this money of your study mates, I know, as I exacted a promise from Wharton on that point. But you have borrowed it elsewhere, I presume?"

"Some chaps have faith in me, sir," said Bunter, with dignity. "They know I'm not the kind of fellow to leave a debt unpaid."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Then I hope they will not be disappointed in you, Bunter. The matter is ended now, as far as I am concerned; but I caution you to be more careful in the future."

That caution made about as much impression upon Bunter as the proverbial water on a duck's back. He left the master's study with a weight gone from his mind, but still feeling rather discontented at having nothing but a bit of paper to show for the expenditure of ten shillings. Billy Bunter had a short memory. A feed once over was past and done with, and it seemed to him that he had paid away ten shillings for nothing. The fact that the ten shillings had belonged to somebody else made no difference to his way of looking at it.

The chums of Study No. 1 were in the common-room. Harry Wharton caught sight of Bunter, and came over towards him.

"I'm sorry, Billy," he said quietly. "I can't think of a way out of the fix. If Quelch would let us find the money it would be all right. Without that, I can't see what's to be done."

"You needn't bother now," said Bunter, in a stately way.

Wharton looked surprised.

"Do you mean that Quelch has let you off?"

"I mean that I've paid Mrs. Mimble."

"You've paid Mrs. Mimble!"

"I don't see that there's anything to be surprised at in that, Wharton. You really speak as if I were a fellow who never paid a debt in his life."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"I don't mean to, Billy. But I am surprised. I thought you had no money."

"Well, I hadn't!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "The postal order's come at last!"

"Hurrah!" cried Bob Cherry.

"The hurrahfulness is terrific!"

"You're all wrong!" said Bunter. "The postal order won't be here till the morning's post, I expect; perhaps later."

"Perhaps very much later," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Still, I've paid Mrs. Mimble, and that's all right."

"I suppose it's a great secret how you did it?" said Nugent. "Have you pawned somebody's watch, or found a banknote in somebody's pocket?"

"Really, Nugent——"

"Well, then, what's the giddy secret?"

"A chap lent me the money."

"Stranger to you, I suppose?"

"A stranger would be hardly likely to lend me money, Nugent."

"More likely than one who knew you, Billy."

"Oh, really——"

"Well, then, where did the cash come from? Have you come into a fortune, or discovered the abbot's treasure in the Greyfriar's ruins, or what?"

"I tell you a chap lent me the money."

"Ahem!"

"I can tell you his name. It was Levison."

There was a general exclamation of surprise.

"Levison!"

"Yes."

"Lent you ten bob—ten solid silver bobs!"

"No; it was a half-sovereign."

"Ass! He really lent it you—really and truly lent you a haf-sov!"

"Yes. You can ask him."

"I jolly well shall," said Bob Cherry. "He's over there, and I think I'll get some first-hand information on this point. It's our duty to look after you. You've got a way of borrowing things without mentioning the fact to the owners thereof, and if you started borrowing money that way, you'll get on the treadmill in next to no time!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry crossed over to Levison, who was reading under one of the lights. The new boy in the Remove looked up at him.

"Levison, did you lend Bunter ten bob?" asked Bob Cherry, in his direct way.

"No."

"There you are!" exclaimed Bob. 'What do you say now, you young worm?"

"I say, you fellows——"

"I didn't lend him ten bob," said Levison calmly. "I gave it him."

"Oh, I see. You gave Bunter ten bob!"

"Yes, if you're so particular to know all about it."

"Oh, that's all right," said Bob Cherry. "It reminds me of an old proverb—something about a fool and his money; I dare say you know it. Still, I'm jolly glad this young ass has got out of his fix. He'll be in another one to-morrow, I suppose. What on earth are you blinking at Wharton like that for, Billy?"

Billy Bunter did not reply. His gaze was concentrated upon Harry Wharton, who was looking very thoughtful.

Bob Cherry gave the fat junior a dig in the ribs that made him gasp.

"What's the matter with you, Owl? Off your rocker?"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't interrupt me. I was just reading Wharton's thoughts on the methods prescribed by Monsieur Jong Bong——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the facial indications and the clue given by the expression of the eyes, I can always read——"

"Rot!"

"Let the honourable ass tell us the correctful thoughtiness of the esteemed Wharton," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can do that easily enough," said Billy Bunter.

"Then go ahead, ass!"

"Wharton was thinking that if Mr. Quelch had allowed him, he was going to stand me the ten bob to pay Mrs. Mimble, and as he hasn't had to do that, he has the ten bob to spare. As it really belongs to me——"

"Belongs to you!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Of course. He would have given it to me if Mr. Quelch had allowed him, to pay Mrs. Mimble. Well, as Mrs. Mimble is paid, there can be no objection whatever to his giving it to me now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see what there is to laugh at, Cherry. The thing is plain enough. It won't cost Wharton a penny more than if he had given me the money to pay Mrs. Mimble, as he wanted to."

"The businessfulness of the esteemed fat rotter is great."

"You see, Inky agrees with me. What do you think, Nugent?"

"If you're a giddy thought-reader, you can guess what I think," grinned Nugent.

"You think that Wharton is bound to hand over the cash."

"Guess again!"

"You think I'm quite entitled to it."

"Wrong again."

"Really, Nugent——"

"What I think is, that you're a cheeky, greedy young rotter, and that you ought to have a jolly good hiding," said Nugent.

"Oh, I say——"

"Did he read your thoughts correctly, Harry?" grinned Bob Cherry. "Were you thinking of wasting ten bob on the young cormorant?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No. I wasn't thinking of Bunter at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come now, Wharton," said Billy Bunter warmly. "Your eyes were fixed on me——"

"Were they? Absentmindedness, I suppose."

"Can't see why anybody should fix his eyes on such an object for any other reason," Bob Cherry remarked.

"I don't think Wharton ought to tell fibs just to throw discredit on my powers as a thought-reader—— Ow!"

Wharton's finger and thumb fastened on Billy's fat ear.

"You don't think what, Billy?"

"I don't think you would tell fibs under any circumstances whatever," gasped Billy Bunter. "That's what I meant to say."

"Quite sure?"

"Oh, yes, Wharton. Please let go my ear."

Harry Wharton laughed as he released him.

"Now, look here, Billy. Your thought-reading is all humbug, like your hypnotism and your other isms. I wasn't thinking about you, and I certainly haven't any intention of making you a present of ten shillings."

"You as good as promised——"

"Nothing of the sort. We should have raised the money among us—half-a-crown each—if Quelch had allowed us to pay Mrs. Mimble——"

"Well, I've no objection to your raising it that way," said Bunter eagerly. "I'm a reasonable chap. Look here, make it two bob each—that's letting you down lightly—and I'll stand a feed——"

"Oh, cheese it, Billy! You make me tired."

"Well, I must say I think you're playing it rather low down on me, that's all," said Bunter; and he walked away with an extremely discontented look.

Harry Wharton glanced at Levison. He had taken up his book, but he was not reading. Wharton hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"It was awfully decent of you to help Bunter out like this, Levison."

"Thank you!" said Levison.

"We should have done it among us, if Quelch hadn't forbidden it."

"You were bound to obey orders, of course; you always do."

"It was a peculiar case. Quelch made me promise."

"A promise that was quite useful to you—eh?"

Wharton bit his lip.

"No good coming any humbug with me, you know," said Levison. "I'm not the chap to be foozled, you know."

Wharton turned very red.

"I think you are an utter cad sometimes, Levison," he said quietly. "Only a cad wouldn't have helped Bunter out of his fix. I must say, though, that your manner is against you."

And Wharton walked away. He left Levison staring after him with a rather curious look on his face.

"I wonder," muttered Levison—"I wonder——" He did not finish the reflection, but took up his book again.

———

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Carries the Basket.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the Remove cricketers were busy at the nets on the junior ground. Billy Bunter came down to the ground with a worried look on his plump face, but it cleared a little as he caught sight of Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry looking on at the batting, and talking.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Oh, take a little run!" said Bob Cherry. "We're talking cricket. Hazeldene won't make what you'd call a first-class batsman, but he has a late cut that I rather like, and ——"

"I say, Wharton, I've got something rather important to say, and I don't see what Cherry wants to talk all that piffle for. I've been disappointed about both my postal orders, and——"

"And now you're booked for another disappointment!" grunted Bob Cherry. "We're not lending anything this afternoon. You'd better come and get in some batting, Harry; unless I'm mistaken, there's going to be rain."

"I say, I've been disappointed about my postal-orders."

"Well, can't you be disappointed quietly?"

"No, I can't, Bob Cherry. I'm hard up, and after Wharton leaving me in the lurch as he did on Monday, I think he ought to stump up."

Harry felt in his pockets.

"How much?" he asked.

"Well, there's the half-crown you owe me——"

"I owe you half-a-crown!"

"Yes, the half-crown you were going to contribute to the ten bob, you know. If you are likely to stump up something extra as well, I sha'n't say no. I want to get a book——"

"Another book on thought-reading?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"No; I am thinking of giving up thought-reading. It doesn't seem to go down very well, and fellows are so obstinate, they keep on denying that I have read their thoughts correctly. I read them in the most unfailing way, and then the rotters pretend that they were thinking something else all the time."

"Perhaps they are right."

"Oh, no, that's impossible, as I go upon the exact methods of Monsieur Jong Bong, and I can't make a mistake. But there's no fun in reading their thoughts when they won't own up. I read Bulstrode's thoughts this morning, and told him that he was thinking of standing me a feed in the tuck-shop—I thought it was a jolly good suggestion, you know, even if it didn't exactly hit off his thoughts. And he said it was quite wrong, and that he was thinking that I was a greedy little pig——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't see anything to laugh at myself. But about that three-and-six, Wharton——"

"That what?"

"The half-crown you owe me, and the extra shilling."

"What extra shilling?"

"I thought something was said about something extra. I'm in want of tin, because Herr Ratz's book on ventriloquism costs one-and-six, and there's the postage. I'm rather hungry, too."

"Well, if Herr Ratz's book will keep you quiet for a time, it's worth the money," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It happens that I had a tip from my uncle this morning, and you can have the half-crown."

"Thank you, Wharton. I always like a fellow to pay up his debts promptly. I always do myself. This ventriloquism book will be very useful to me, as I know that I have wonderful powers in that direction, even more than in hypnotism and thought-reading. Would you like to hear me throw my voice?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, perhaps I had better leave it till I've had some practice. This is only a half-crown you have given me."

"Did you suppose it was going to be a fiver?"

"What about the other shilling?"

"Oh, cut off!"

"I don't like a fellow to be mean. This will leave me only tenpence-halfpenny. I want a bit of a feed this afternoon. I really depended on you. Levison and Bulstrode are going to picnic on the Pike this afternoon, and I could have gone with them."

"Well, there they are," said Bob Cherry, nodding towards two juniors who were crossing towards the gates. "It's not too late."

Billy Bunter blinked round.

Levison and Bulstrode were clad in norfolk jackets and knickers, and each carried a stick. The Black Pike was a difficult mountain to climb, and very few of the boys of Greyfriars had ever been to the top. Some of the more adventurous spirits had performed the feat, including Harry Wharton and his friends. But, in Harry's opinion, at least, it was a task above the weight of Levison.

The latter was carrying a large lunch-basket, which was evidently heavy. Billy Bunter's eyes glimmered at the sight of the lunch-basket. He started off to intercept the two adventurers.

There was a shade on Harry Wharton's brow.

"They are fools to go up there this afternoon," he said, in a low voice.

"Well, we did it on Saturday," said Bob Cherry carelessly.

"Yes; but we are good climbers, and stronger than Levison, at any rate. Bulstrode has never been up before. Nugent was with us, and he had been up with Wingate last term. As likely as not they'll lose their way."

"Tell them."

Wharton hesitated.

"You know how Levison receives anything I say to him. It's not only that, you know; but there's rain coming on, and the Pike is fearfully dangerous when the mists come

up from the valley—and the mists always follow rain. Fellows have been frozen to death up there, after losing their way, I have heard."

"Well, I'll speak to the silly asses."

"It won't do much good, but you may as well. If I said anything, that obstinate rotter Levsion would only go all the more."

"I know that, Harry."

Bob Cherry crossed to the two juniors, quickening his pace to intercept them. Bulstrode and Levison halted.

"This basket is jolly heavy," said Levison. "I think you might as well take the first turn at carrying it, Bulstrode."

"Not much," said Bulstrode

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I hear that you chaps are going up the Pike!"

"What about it?" said Levison.

"Nothing; only as neither of you know the way, you won't be getting down again as easily as you get up, that's all."

"I dare say we shall be able to manage."

"And it's going to rain."

Levison swept the blue sky with his eyes, and smiled sceptically. There was only a little cloud over the river, and the afternoon looked very fine.

"Setting up as a weather prophet?" he asked.

"No," grunted Bob Cherry; "but I know the weather, and I know there will be rain before dark. And when it rains there are mists on the Pike."

"I've been in a mist before."

"Not a Black Pike mist, I expect. I warn you that it's dangerous, that's all."

"Oh, rats! You can't scare me with a cock-and-bull story like that. Come on, Bulstrode."

And Levison walked on towards the gates. Bulstrode, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

"Well, I've warned you!" called out Bob Cherry. "Come on, Harry, and let's get some batting before it rains."

Billy Bunter followed Levison and Bulstrode to the gate. Levison glanced round and saw the fat junior.

"What do you want, Bunter?" he asked.

"I'd like to carry your basket for you, if you like, Levison," said Bunter. "You did me a good turn the other day, you know."

Levison laughed.

"You mean you'd like to sample the contents at the first resting-place," he said.

"Oh, really, Levison!"

"You can carry it if you like, kid, and have a feed when we stop. It's jolly heavy; but, mind, you won't have a bite till we take the first rest at the foot of the Pike."

"That's a jolly long way."

"Well, I'm not asking you to carry the basket."

"Oh, I'm glad to do anything for you, Levison!"

"Yes, if there's a feed at the end of it!" grinned Levison. "Here you are!"

He handed over the basket, and Billy Bunter laboured along under its weight, while Bulstrode and Levison strolled on carelessly, swinging their sticks.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Black Pike.

THE morning had been hot, but the afternoon, though fine, was much cooler, and there was a trace of dampness in the wind. But that was welcome to the three juniors tramping along the dusty road. Bunter was hot enough, and he was glad when they turned from the road into the sheltered footpath under the trees.

"I suppose you'll be taking a bit of a rest before going through the wood," he suggested.

"Then you suppose wrong," grinned Bulstrode. "Keep on."

"This basket is heavy."

"I didn't say it wasn't."

"I suppose there's no objection to my taking a snack now, to keep up my strength?"

"Wrong again; there is."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"Keep on, you greedy young pig! You took this job on of your own accord, and now you've got to stick it out."

Bunter grunted, and shouldered the basket again. It seemed to be growing heavier with every step. The path ran through the wood to the foot of the hill, and then the slope of the Pike began, gently at first, increasing in steepness higher up. The juniors pressed on, Bunter changing the lunch-basket from one hand to the other, and resting it on his shoulders, and grunting and gasping with exertion. It was a great relief to him when the first slopes of the

Pike appeared in view. He bumped the basket down on the grass.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed.

"No, we're not!" grinned Bulstrode. "There's another half-mile yet."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"It's all right," said Levison "I feel as if I could sit down myself. You can open the basket, Billy."

"More fun to make the fat young rotter go fagging on up the hill," said Bulstrode.

"Not if I have to fag after him."

"Ha, ha! Something in that!"

"Let's have something to drink. I'm as dry as lime. It's jolly hot, and that fellow Cherry said there was going to be rain. Rot!"

"I expect it was rot. Stop guzzling that lemonade, Bunter, and hand it over here"

"I'm thirsty."

"So am I, and I come first. Hand it over."

Bunter unwillingly parted with the lemonade. The lunch-basket was well stocked. Bulstrode always had plenty of money, and Levison's credit was good at the tuck-shop. The juniors rested and feasted in the grateful shade of the beeches.

"Just the day to climb the Pike," said Levison. "It's not nearly so hot as it has been."

"I feel jolly hot," grunted Bunter.

"You've been carrying that basket. Go easy with the cream puffs. Sandwiches are good enough for you, as you want such a lot. You can have as much of the bread-and-butter as you like. We've got another feed to come yet, on top of the Pike," said Levison. "Is there anything in what Cherry said about the mists, Bulstrode?"

"I've heard so, when it rains."

"Well, it won't rain to-day."

"There was a tramp frozen to death on the Pike last winter," said Bulstrode. "He lost his way there. It's all right in summer."

"I suppose those fellows were japing us, and would have had a good chuckle if they had been able to frighten us off."

"Very likely."

"Well, I'm going on, anyway. You know the road?"

"Everybody knows it half-way up. After that there are cuts on the trees to show the track. I expect it will be easy enough."

"Shove those things into the basket, Bunter!"

"I haven't finished eating yet, Levison."

"Yes, you have!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "We're not standing a special picnic for you, you young cormorant! Fasten up that basket!"

"But, really——"

"Fasten it up, I tell you!"

Bunter unwillingly obeyed. The lunch-basket was fastened, and Bunter shouldered it.

"Are you coming on further?" asked Levison.

"Well, I want to oblige you, Levison, and——"

"And to be in at the next feed," said Bulstrode.

"Oh, really——"

"Well, you can come, if you like to carry the basket."

"I'm sincerely sorry that you should suspect me of interested motives, Bulstrode. I'm perfectly willing to carry the basket, and should be just as willing if there weren't anything to eat in it."

"Liar!" said Bulstrode cheerfully.

The juniors tramped on. The path still ran between trees and underwoods, but the ground was rougher, and there were thick weeds and nettles in the grass. The ascent grew steeper with every dozen yards covered.

Bunter was soon perspiring and grunting. About every hundred yards he suggested a rest, a suggestion which was peremptorily negatived by the others, who were walking very much at their ease, without loads of any kind, and assisting their progress with their sticks.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up, and get on!" said Bulstrode.

"I say, I'm fagged out. I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to keep on."

"Go back, then."

"But I'm hungry!"

"Well, you'll be at Greyfriars in time for tea, if you hurry!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode, I think I ought to rest and have a snack now——"

"I think I shall brain you with this stick if you open that basket!"

"Do you want me to drop down a pallid corpse before your eyes?"

"I don't mind."

"Oh, really——"

Levison jerked the basket out of the perspiring junior's hand. He hoisted it on to his own shoulder and strode on.

"You can cut back, Bunter," said Bulstrode.

"Oh, rate!" said Levison. "Let him come!"

"What's the good of him, if he's not going to carry the basket?"

"What's the good of you, if you come to that?" said Levison, in his unpleasant way.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Levison——"

"Bosh! Let's get on!"

They got on. Bunter still thinking of the feast to come, tramped along patiently. Levison carried the basket without complaint.

Steeper became the path, wilder the scenery round it. The foliage was thicker and darker, and the ferns of a larger growth. Edges of rough rock cropped up in the path, more than once causing the juniors to stumble.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Bulstrode at last.

Billy Bunter gave a grunt of relief.

"Going to picnic here?"

Bulstrode grinned ill-naturedly.

"No, ass! We're going to picnic on top of the Pike. That's another mile and a half yet. This is the end of the lower road. It's climbing after this."

"Better not go any further," suggested Bunter. "It would be awful fun picnicking here in the shade of the trees!"

"Come on!" said Levison.

"You're going to rest here, anyway, surely?"

"Of course not! We've got to get to the top and down again before dark."

"Well, it gets dark very late, and——"

Levison did not wait for Bunter to finish. He followed Bulstrode, who was tramping on without a pause. The three crossed a level plateau in the shade of the trees, a spot to which the explorers of Black Pike often came, and where black patches on the grass showed that camp-fires had been lighted at different times. Beyond the level the upper Pike rose abruptly.

Now it was climbing in real earnest. The trees were growing fewer and thinner, and the sky could be seen more clearly. The vegetation was of a more stunted growth, the soil harder, dustier, rockier. The path was very ill-defined, but here and there marks on trees and rocks showed them that they were going aright.

Levison threw down the basket again with a grunt.

"By Jove, that's too heavy! Take your turn now, Bulstrode!"

"Rats!" said Bulstrode. "If that young cormorant is coming along for a feed, he can carry the grub!"

"I don't see why you can't take a turn!"

"I will if Bunter goes back."

"Oh, I say, Bulstrode, it's no good my going back after coming so far. I really think you ought to carry the basket a bit."

"No fear!"

"Get hold of it, Bunter," said Levison.

"Wouldn't you like to carry it a bit further, Levison?"

"No, I wouldn't!" snapped Levison. "I'm fagged to death now! Carry it, or clear!"

"Oh, I'll carry it with pleasure! I'd do anything to oblige you, Levison!"

And the fat junior shouldered the basket again. The three juniors pressed on, halting now and then to make sure of the ill-defined path. The trees grew scantier, and from the bare slopes they had a far view of the countryside. Far away they could see Greyfriars School, with its ivied tower.

"Splendid view from here," Bulstrode remarked.

"I say, you fellows, this is a ripping view, and I suggest that you should picnic here instead of going to the top of the Pike."

"Oh, cheese it!"

Levison kept on. The slopes were stony and hard and dusty, patched here and there with stunted bushes. The ground was broken into gullies and rifts, and the path wound among the irregularities in a puzzling way. False paths branched off in all directions, and the juniors several times followed a wrong track, and had to retrace their steps. Bunter was growing more fatigued, and he lagged considerably behind the other two.

"Come on, you young ass!" called out Bulstrode, from far in advance.

"I'm coming, Bulstrode!"

"Mind you don't miss us!"

"I'll be careful!"

Bulstrode and Levison were turning the corner of a swelling knoll, and they disappeared from Bunter's view for a moment. Billy Bunter put the basket on the ground and sat on it.

"I really think I ought to have a rest!" he murmured. "I'm getting quite fagged! I'm afraid it will be bad for my constitution if I over-exert myself."

"Come on, Bunter!"

It was Levison's voice ringing through the bushes far in advance.

"I'm coming!" gasped Bunter.

He groaned as he rose and picked up the basket again. He pushed on, and came to a branch in the way, and halted, irresolute. Whether Levison and Bulstrode had gone on through the bushes, or rounded the knoll, and turned to the left along the ridge, he had not the faintest idea.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "Where are you, Levison?"

"Come on!" rang a shout from the distance.

"I'm coming!"

The shout was no guide. There was a choice of ways towards the shouter, and Bunter did not know which one to take. He chose the easiest, and plunged on by what looked like a beaten track through the thickets. He had not gone twenty yards before the track—if track it was—ended abruptly in a mass of impenetrable bushes.

Bunter halted. The day was close, and here, as it happened, grew a large tree, towering over the thickets. The shade was welcome to Bunter, and he staggered under the wide-spreading boughs, and sank upon the grass with a gasp of relief.

Through the silence of the mountain rang a distant sound, like the faint echo of a far-off shout. Bunter did not heed it. He sat gasping for breath, and fanning himself with his handkerchief.

"My word, but it's hot!" he murmured. "They've missed me! How lucky that I have the lunch-basket with me! I had better have a snack to keep up my strength ready for when they find me."

The thought of setting out to find the others never even occurred to Bunter. He was quite content to remain where he was till they found him. The lunch-basket was with him, and that was the most important point.

Bunter opened the basket, and began to sample the contents. In this pleasant occupation he quite forgot Levison and Bulstrode, and everything and everybody else. He was quite happy, and the supplies in the basket diminished at an alarming rate.

A sudden swishing in the branches overhead made him pause and look up at last. Heavy drops of water splashed down upon his fat face. He started to his feet.

"Rain!"

Bob Cherry had been right, after all. It was rain—and a sudden, heavy rain! It came down in sweeping gusts, and in a few minutes the dry, dusty hillside was weeping. Bunter scrambled closer to the trunk of the big tree for shelter, and stood there dismayed, still mechanically eating jam-tarts.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Summit of Black Pike.

"WHERE'S that young grampus got to?"

It was Bulstrode who grunted out the question, as he paused on a high point of the Black Pike and looked backwards. Bunter had been out of sight for some time, but the two Removites had had no doubt that he was following. But Bulstrode had grown uneasy at last.

"Oh, don't stop!" said Levison. "Let's get on to the top. It's not more than another quarter of a mile, I should say."

"Yes; but where's Bunter?"

"Hang Bunter!"

"That's all very well; but it would be no joke to get to the top, and have all the way to go back on an empty stomach," said Bulstrode uneasily. "I know this part, and you don't."

"Bunter is following us."

"I haven't seen or heard anything of the young rotter for nearly half an hour. It's occurred to me that he may have stopped to have a feed."

"Shout for him, then," said Levison, leaning up against a stunted fir to rest.

"Bunter! Billy Bunter! Bunt-t-t-ter!"

Bulstrode yelled and shouted and raved, but no reply came back, save the echo of his own voice. It was evident that the fat junior was not within hearing.

"The young cormorant! I thought so!"

"Well, I'm going on!"

"I'm not. It's a good step to the top, and there are miles back, and—and—— By Jove!"

"What's the matter now?"

Bulstrode pointed to the north.

"Look there!"

Levison looked. The cloud they had seen at starting was thicker and blacker, and had extended over half the horizon. The peculiar glimmer of the sun showed that it was raining there, some miles away.

"The rain's coming down," said Bulstrode, "and it's

"What are you putting up with that rat's insolence for, Wharton?" said Bob Cherry.

coming this way. Bob Cherry was right. We're going to have a rainstorm on the Pike."

"Who cares for a little rain?"

"I do, for one," said Bulstrode promptly. "Why, we haven't got even a coat with us, and no grub! Don't be an ass! We've got to get out of this just as quickly as we can. There's no getting down the Pike in the rain."

"Why not?"

"The mist comes up from the valley. You can't see a foot before you, and then the ground is slippery when it's wet. Look here, there's danger!"

Levison laughed.

"Oh, why don't you say you're fagged out, and want to give in, and have done with it, Bulstrode? That would be more sensible."

"I'm not so fagged as you are."

"Then come on!"

"The rain will be here in a quarter of an hour at the farthest."

"Blow the rain!"

"You confounded ass!" exclaimed Bulstrode angrily. "I'm not fooling you! Do you know you risk losing your life if you're caught in a rain-storm on the top of Black Pike?"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Well, I'm going back."

"I'm going forward. Harry Wharton and his lot reached the top of the Pike on Saturday afternoon."

"It was a fine day, and they had plenty of grub with them."

"I don't suppose they would have turned back for a little wet. Anyway, I'm not going to be outdone by Harry Wharton. Nice pair of asses we should look if we went back now, and told the fellows we had set out to do what Wharton did, and turned back because we were afraid of getting our jackets wet."

"I suppose it's no good talking to you," said Bulstrode; "and there's no time. I'm going back, and you'll come, too, if you're not a confounded fool."

"Well, I'm not coming!"

"Then stay!"

Bulstrode swung away, and his footsteps rang down the stony hill.

Levison looked after him with a sneer on his lips.

"I say, Bulstrode," he called out, "if you see Bunter, hurry him up with that basket!"

Bulstrode did not reply. He disappeared from sight in a few moments, and Levison was left alone on the mountain.

For a moment the boy's obstinacy wavered. The solitude of the Pike was oppressive, and as he looked at the rainy

sky, he could not doubt that the rain was approaching the Pike.

But it was scarcely possible to go back now. He knew how Bulstrode would gibe at a surrender after all that he had said. Levison set his teeth, and tramped forward up the dusty slopes of the Pike.

Higher and higher, till it seemed to the lad that he was piercing the clouds, and the trees on the lower slopes of the Pike seemed to be dwarfed to the size of ferns. He paused on the last slope, and looked round him.

Then he gave an uneasy start.

He was looking in the direction of Greyfriars, but the old school was no longer visible. A thin, white mist was creeping up from the valley, and already it was surrounding the Pike. Even as he looked it was creeping closer, and wrapping the trees of the lower slopes in its chill embrace. It shut off the countryside, it shut off Greyfriars, it was shutting off the Lower Pike.

Levison was uneasy now. But it was too late for retreat. The mist was creeping up the Pike, and he would have to pass through it in his descent to reach the earth again. Perhaps it would clear off when the rain ceased?

Levison did not turn back. The chief thought in his mind was that he would not fail where Harry Wharton had succeeded. He tramped on up the last slope, though the exertion of the ascent had fatigued him so much that he could scarce put one foot before the other.

Still forward; till the last ascent was crowned, and the summit of the Pike lay before him.

A rugged, rocky plateau, patched with stunted trees and ragged bushes.

Levison staggered out upon the level, and sank into the ferns at the foot of a rock. On the rock, where his glance fell, two initials had been cut: "H.W."

"Harry Wharton!" muttered Levison. "Well, I have climbed the Pike, too; there's no getting out of that! I'll put my initials next to his."

He opened his pocket-knife. There was a gust of wind over the Pike, and rain-drops dashed into his face.

He started. The drops were a warning of what was coming; and it came the next minute—a black shadow on the sky, and a pelting of heavy rain.

Levison rose, and looked round him with scared eyes. On the summit of the Pike there was no shelter; he was exposed to the full force of the beating torrent. In a few seconds he was wet to the skin. And round the rainy Pike the white mist was creeping on, folding the hill closer and closer in its chill embrace, creeping closer and closer to the forlorn lad as though seeking to envelope him, and shut him off from the outer world.

Closer and closer, like a creeping animal, till the white vapour was round him, and he could not see his hand before his face—could see nothing, could hear nothing but the pelting of the heavy rain.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
To the Rescue.

"RAIN!"

There was a hurrying and a scurrying at Greyfriars for shelter. The rain came down suddenly, and some of the juniors were still at the nets. Some of them had their flannels soaked before they gained the shelter of the pavilion.

Bob Cherry came rushing in with his bat under his arm, and bumped against Nugent, who was standing looking out into the field.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob cheerfully. "Nice weather, ain't it? I say, Inky, buck up!" he went on, turning, and shouting to the nabob, who was running towards the pavilion. "Get in, you ass, or the colour will begin to run!"

The nabob arrived, panting and dripping.

"Oh, it's all right," said Nugent, grinning. "Inky's complexion is done up in fast colours, isn't it, Inky?"

"The excellentfulness of the esteemed joke is only equalled by the sublime fatheadedness of the honourable joker," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Cricket's all over for to-day—and to-morrow, too, I expect," remarked Hazeldene. "This is going to be a soaker."

"The soakfulness is terrific."

"Wherefore that pensive brow, Wharton? Are you mourning for the cricket, or have you lost a threepenny-bit? Where's Billy Bunter to read his thoughts?"

But Wharton did not smile.

"I'm thinking of those fellows who've gone up the Pike," he said.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"My hat! I'd forgotten them! They're in for it!"

"They are, and no mistake!" Nugent remarked. "If they're on the Pike now, I pity them. Did Bunter go along?"

"Yes; he went to carry the grub."

"Ha, ha! He will get a wash this time."

"Perhaps they've come in?" said Hazeldene comfortably. "I know I'm going in."

Most of the juniors put their collars up, and cut across to the house. But the famous four remained in the pavilion.

They were looking serious. They knew that the explorers of the Black Pike had not come in, and they were anxious.

"They're a pair of cads," Bob Cherry remarked; "but it's a serious business being caught on the Pike in a rainstorm."

"There's Billy Bunter, too," Harry Wharton said; "he would be less able to stand it than either Levison or Bulstrode."

"Surely they'd have sense enough to turn back when the rain came on?"

"They might have gone too far."

"I don't see what we can do," said Nugent. "Not much of weather for going out to look for anybody; and, as a matter of fact, I don't feel inclined to go and look for Levison. You know what we should be likely to get. You know how he greeted us that time we yanked him away from the gipsies."

"The ungratefulness of the rotter was terrific."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I dare say they're under shelter," said Bob Cherry. "Anyway, it's no good bothering. Let's get in."

The juniors made a run through the rain to the schoolhouse. There they changed their things, and then Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Nugent settled down to a game of chess in the common-room. The room was thronged with juniors the rain had driven indoors.

Harry Wharton went up to No. 1 Study, the window of which overlooked a part of the close, and stood at the window looking out. The driving rain blurred the glass, and he could dimly see the old trees. From time to time some unlucky fellow, who had been spending the afternoon on the road, would come in on a drenched cycle, soaked to the skin, and muttering uncomplimentary things about the weather.

Harry Wharton started a little as he felt a tap on his shoulder. He looked round, and saw Nugent.

"Finished your game?" asked Harry.

"Yes; Inky mated me, all through my moving my knight when I ought to have pushed up a pawn," said Nugent. "It was rotten! If I had moved my knight, and if Inky had moved his queen instead of his rook, and if he hadn't seen what I was after, I should have had him in four moves."

Wharton smiled.

Nugent was a beginner at the great game of chess, and a shockingly bad player, but he always imagined that he was very near to victory when he was beaten, and he was always quite sure he would have won if about four or five "if's" had come to pass.

"Inky is tackling Bob, now," said Nugent. "He's taken on Bob and Hazeldene together. I wondered where you were. What are you up to—meditating on your sins, or composing a poem on the weather, or an ode to a rotten afternoon?"

"No; the fact is, old man——" Wharton paused.

"Oh, out with it," said Nugent, laughing. "You're thinking about that ungrateful pig, Levison."

"Well, it's the truth. He is several sorts of a pig—and so is Bulstrode; but you know what it means to be caught in a storm on the Pike. And we're bound in a way to look after Bunter. He's with them."

"He wouldn't be if he wasn't such a greedy young cormorant."

"Still, he is out in this, as a matter of fact. It's getting dark, old chap, and there is no sign of them yet."

"They're on the Pike, right enough."

"And if they're on the Pike, what chance have they of getting off it, now that the mist is on the mountain?"

"None at all!"

"That means that they're booked to stay there till the morning?"

"I suppose so," said Nugent gravely; "and that's rough on them."

"It may be worse than rough on them—a night in the open in weather like this," said Wharton quietly. "They have no coats, even. It might mean——"

Nugent shivered a little.

"Suppose we tell the Form master; he can think of something to be done."

"What can he do that we can't do ourselves?"

"You're not thinking of going out in this, Wharton?"

"I am," said Harry quietly. "Look here, I've been up the Pike more than once, and I know the path well. You

know it better than any other fellow in the school. If we tell Mr. Quelch, he can only send a search-party; and who can he send? Nobody who's likely to do the business better than we could."

"Something in that, but——"

"Well, what?"

"They're not worth the trouble and risk!"

"Perhaps not; and I know I've no right to ask you to go."

"Rats!" said Nugent cheerfully. "If you go, I'll go. That's settled! What about Bob and Inky?"

Wharton shook his head.

"No need to drag them out. If anything can be done, we can do it."

"Yes, that's so. Jolly weather for an excursion, I must say," grunted Nugent. But I'm game, if you are. But what about telling Quelch?"

"It's calling over in a quarter of an hour now, and he'll know then. No need for us to tell him. He would forbid us to go out, if he knew we were going."

"True. The sooner we're off, the better!"

"That's so. Let's get our things together—coats, and gaiters, and some grub, in case we get stuck up there."

"Right-ho!"

The preparations of the two Removites were soon made. They left the house quietly, only Skinner, who was in the hall, observing their departure. He called after them in amazement:

"Where on earth are you chaps going?"

"Going to see if it's raining," said Nugent cheerfully.

Harry Wharton looked back for a moment.

"We're going to look for the chaps on the Pike," he said. "You can tell Quelch at calling-over."

"But, I say——"

But they did not listen to what Skinner had to say. They strode on, and the rain and the mist swallowed them up from sight.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Terrible Task.

THE rain drove furiously in the faces of the two Removites as they left the gates of Greyfriars, and tramped up the road. They had thick gaiters on, overcoats buttoned up round the neck, and caps with flaps down over their ears, but still the driving rain found them out.

"Wet, ain't it?" grunted Nugent.

Wharton did not reply. They tramped on, and turned into the footpath through the weeping wood. The rain dashed down, and the trees were streaming with water, the grass swimming under their feet.

But the two juniors tramped on doggedly. They came on the lower slopes of the Pike, and then Wharton suddenly stopped. Nugent halted, too, looking at him. The mist was round them now, like a dim, white veil, shutting off the view in every direction.

"Fagged?" asked Nugent.

"No. I heard something."

"You hear such curious things in this mist," said Nugent. "It's full of echoes, and you never know what the sounds are, or where they come from. What do you think you heard, Harry.

"A footstep, I think."

The juniors listened intently. A dull sound came through the mist.

"Better shout!"

"Good! Both together!"

The juniors shouted. To their relief a shout came back from the mist, and a heavy, staggering footstep echoed on the soaked ground.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

"Hallo!"

"It's Bulstrode's voice," said Nugent, with a grunt of relief. "They're here. We sha'n't have to go up the Pike."

"It's only Bulstrode's voice," said Wharton.

"I suppose the others are with him."

"We shall soon see."

Wharton shouted again, and Bulstrode answered, and a minute later he loomed up through the mist. He was soaked with water, and almost sinking with exhaustion.

"Who's that?" he exclaimed. "Is that you, Levison?"

"No!" said Harry.

"My hat! Wharton!"

"Where is Bunter—and Levison?"

"Blessed if I know!" gasped Bulstrode, sinking down from sheer weariness. "I'm done up. I've been wandering about for hours, but I couldn't find my way in the mist. How did you fellows come here?"

"We came to look for you."

"You must have been in want of something to do," said Bulstrode. "Blessed if I'd go out and look for anybody in this weather. Where are we now?"

"Just off the footpath through the Friar's Wood."

"Thank goodness, then I'm right down at last!"

"How far up have you been?"

"Nearly to the top. I left Levison on the last lap. I could see that the rain was coming on, but the silly ass wouldn't turn back."

"Did he keep on when you left him?"

"Yes; though I warned him what it meant, the obstinate idiot!"

"What about Bunter?"

"He missed us soon after we had passed the half-way plateau. He was lagging on behind with the grub-basket. I shouldn't wonder if he missed us on purpose, to tuck into the grub. Hasn't he turned up yet at Greyfriars?"

"No!"

"Then I suppose he's lost, and so is Levison. Have you chaps got anything to eat with you? I'm famished!"

"Here's a sandwich."

"Thanks! Are you coming back to Greyfriars now? You can lend me a hand; I'm almost too fagged to drag along. The rain takes it out of you."

Bulstrode did indeed look a pitiable object. He was soaked to the skin and covered with mud from head to foot.

"We're not coming back," said Harry quietly. "We're going on to find Bunter and Levison. You'll get to Greyfriars all right now. Once in the footpath, you can't miss the way, and the mist is all on this side of the wood."

"Right you are. You'd be much more sensible to come back, too, though. You can't find them in the mist."

"We're going to try."

"Don't be an ass! They have wandered from the path, for a dead cert. And how are you going to look for them over a couple of square miles?"

"Come on, Frank."

Bulstrode was still remonstrating, when Wharton and Nugent tramped on, and left him to grumble alone. He finished the sandwich, staggered to his feet, and tramped on wearily through the wood towards Greyfriars.

The chums felt a little relieved in their minds as they pressed on through the mist. One of the absentees had been found, and was safe, and that was something. And they had learned enough to guide them somewhat in their search for the other two.

"We know now that they're past the plateau," Harry Wharton observed. "We can keep right on past that, then, and then begin to search."

"They may have come down."

"Not likely, in the mist. If Levison was going on, when the rain started, he couldn't possibly have got down to the plateau again. As for Bunter, I imagine that he would stick just where he was when the rain started, and not make a move at all. He wouldn't know which way to turn."

It was hard work getting up to the plateau. There was little wind, but the steady pouring of the rain was hard to face. In spite of their thick coats, the juniors were very wet. Their caps were soaked through, and were as limp as if they had been dipped in the river. They came out on the plateau at last, and Nugent sank down on a rock.

Harry Wharton halted.

"Feeling done up?" he asked.

"Pretty well," gasped Nugent. "This beastly mist chokes one, too. I feel as if I had my head in a sack."

Wharton looked around him. There was no sign of the mist clearing off. It rose like steam from the valley, thicker and thicker. He could hardly see Nugent.

"We shall have to take care not to get separated," he said quietly. "We should never find each other again. I think the rain is clearing off a little."

"Yes, it seems thinning down; but the mist is getting thicker."

"No chance of that clearing off much before noon to-morrow," said Harry ruefully. "Still, it's something to have a little less rain."

He sat down on the rock beside Nugent. He was fatigued himself, but he was standing the test better than his chum. Harry was one of the best athletes in the Greyfriars Remove, and he was always in the pink of condition.

"Blessed if I think I shall be able to get to the top," said Nugent, with a gasp. "It took it out of us pretty well last Saturday, you know, and it was fine weather and daylight. Still, we'll stick it out as long as we can."

"I'm ready to go on when you are."

"I'm ready."

Nugent rose with something of an effort, and they faced the ascent again. It was not easy to pick up the path across the plateau in the mist, and it was slow work. But they did it, and were at length on the steeper upper slopes of the Pike.

"Now we shall have to look out for Bunter," said Harry.

Looking was not of much use. They shouted at intervals,

and the mist echoed and rolled back their shouting. Their progress was slow, and growing more and more laborious. The rain was passing off to the South, but rivulets were running down every hollow of the hill, and every gully was a stream. The ground was wet and slippery, the mud deep and clinging.

Soon it was only Harry who shouted into the mist. Nugent's breath had failed him at last, and it was all he could do to keep up with his hardier companion.

"Hark!" exclaimed Harry Wharton suddenly.

They listened intently.

There was a faint sound through the mist. Was it the echo of Harry's last shout? No; it was repeated, and faintly they made out the word:

"Help!"

"Thank goodness!" gasped Nugent. "That's one of them, at any rate. Let's get on."

"The sound came from the left, I think."

"Then it's in these bushes. That's leaving the path!"

"Well, we know that Bunter left the path, from what Bulstrode said."

"True. Come on!"

They plunged into the dripping thickets. That they were upon the right track was soon proved. The shout rang feebly through the mist again, this time clearer and nearer, and unmistakably in the voice of Billy Bunter.

"Help!"

They plunged on through bush and mud and rain, blindly in the mist. Nugent bumped against the trunk of a tree, and stopped. Wharton halted also as he caught the outlines of a form stretched on the ground in the wet grass, whimpering.

It was Billy Bunter!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
The Rescue of Bunter.

"BILLY!"

Bunter sat up and whimpered:

"I say, Levison, is that you? I think it's about time you came back for me! I'm jolly well soaked. Boo-hoo!"

"I'm jolly glad we've found you!" said Harry Wharton, while Nugent sank down exhausted at the foot of the tree.

Bunter gave a jump.

"That isn't Levison! Is it you, Wharton?"

"Yes, Billy!"

"How on earth did you get here?"

"We have come to look for you."

"I wish you had come a bit sooner, then," said Bunter; "I'm soaked! Did you think of bringing a coat for me?"

"We've found it hard enough to get along without anything to carry," said Harry quietly. "But you can have my coat."

"Oh, rot!" said Nugent. "I'll give the fat young oyster mine!"

"No, you won't!"

Nugent, as a matter of fact, was too exhausted to move. Harry Wharton stripped off his coat and wrapped it round Bunter, who was trembling and shivering. The night was growing bitterly cold, and the mist had a clammy, chilly grip. Bunter was soaked with rain, shaking in every limb. He grunted with satisfaction as he felt the coat put round him.

"That better?" asked Harry.

"Yes, it's better, Wharton, but I do wish you had thought of bringing a waterproof! How the dickens am I to get back to Greyfriars?"

"Haven't you tried to get back?"

"No. I've been under this tree ever since it started raining," said Billy Bunter, whimpering again. "It seems a jolly long time! I don't know the way down the mountain, and I can't see anything in this mist. The beastly stuff is sticking to my glasses, too, and it's worse with them on than with them off!"

"Have you seen anything of Levison?"

"Not since I lost them on the path—a fearfully long time ago! It was lucky I had the lunch-basket with me, or I might have been starved to death!"

"Has Levison nothing to eat with him?"

"Not that I know of. I haven't either, for that matter! I've finished up all there was in the basket, to keep up my strength. I'm beginning to get hungry again, and I'm c-c-cold!"

Harry Wharton was silent and troubled. Levison, in a much more exposed part of the mountain, must have felt the force of the storm more than Bunter, and he had nothing to eat! He remained to be found, and the task seemed hopeless. But hopeless or not, Harry meant to see the matter through.

The difficulty was, what to do with Bunter. It seemed impossible to leave him alone, and, indeed, Nugent was in no state to continue the ascent. Wharton thought it out and made up his mind.

"Nugent, old chap, will you stay here with Bunter?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going on to look for Levison."

"You're not going alone," said Nugent, staggering to his feet; "I'm coming with you!"

Bunter gave a whimper.

"I say, you fellows, you can't go on and leave me alone here! I shall be frozen to death! I don't know the way down the mountain! I'm f-f-frightened!"

"Cheese it a minute, Billy!"

"I won't! You can't leave me! If you had cashed up the ten bob you owed me I shouldn't have come up the Pike at all to picnic with Levison! Jolly sort of picnic this is! If you leave me my death will be at your d-d-door!"

"Quiet, Billy; we're not going to leave you alone!" said Harry Wharton. "You see how it is, Frank? One of us will have to stay with Bunter. I'm not so knocked up as you are, and I'll keep on."

"But——" began Nugent uneasily.

"It's the only thing to be done. As soon as you're rested a bit, you can find your way down the mountain with Bunter."

"I say, that's a really good idea!" said Bunter. "Only it would be better for you to come as well, Wharton! You can't possibly find Levison in this mist, and if you come, you'll be able to take an arm each and help me along!"

"Dry up, you fat young rotter!" growled Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"I suppose there's nothing else to be done?" said Nugent. "I couldn't keep on up the hill—or down it, either—till I've had a rest. But I don't like your going on alone, Harry!"

"That's all right."

"Look here, take my coat, then; you're not going like that!"

"Rats! I'm all right! It's easier to climb without a coat, and I can't get much wetter than I am!"

"You'll have a rest before you go on?"

"I've had a bit of a rest now. I think I'll push on. You don't know where Levison may be, or in what state I may find him—if I find him at all!"

Nugent was silent. It was evidently the only thing to be done, but his heart was heavy at the thought of his friend going on alone into the thick of the mist.

"I—I suppose you must go, Harry?" he said, with a gulp in his throat. "Heaven help you both up there! Take care!"

"I shall take care."

"There are precipices, and the gullies are full of water. Where it was dry on Saturday, it's deep enough now to drown you if you tumbled in!"

"I know. I shall look out, old chap!"

"Look here; suppose we fix Bunter up comfy under the tree, and I come with you?"

A howl from Billy Bunter interrupted Nugent. The fat junior caught hold of his sleeve in his terror of being left alone.

"You can't—you sha'n't! Wharton, tell him he's to stop!"

"Look here, you young ass," began Nugent wrathfully; "you're all right! You——"

"I won't be left alone—I won't! Ow—wow!"

"Shut up, Billy," said Harry; "Nugent is going to stay! I shall be all right, old chap! Stay here and rest a bit, and then get Bunter down the mountain!"

He gripped his chum's hand in the gloom with a hard grip. Both knew that that parting might easily be the last. Then Wharton plunged away through the thickets and resumed the ascent of the rugged steep.

Nugent sank down exhaustedly into the wet, clinging grass, and listened with a heavy heart to the crashing of the thickets growing fainter as Harry pushed. The sounds died away at last, and silence closed upon the mountain again—silence broken only by the lashing of the rain.

"Heaven help him!" murmured Nugent.

Billy Bunter whimpered.

"I say, Nugent, I think we ought to be getting down the mountain, you know! Do you think you could carry me?"

"Yes, if you want to break both our necks!" growled Nugent.

"I don't see how I can walk; still, if you hold me up by the arm, I think I can manage. I feel that this will have a terrible effect upon my constitution! Are you ready, Nugent?"

"I'm resting."

"I think it's rather selfish of you to rest when I'm soaked to the skin and ready to make an effort!" said Bunter.

Nugent staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" he said.

"Hold my arm so as to guide me, and if you could let me lean my weight on you, it would save my strength."

"If you lean your weight on me, I'll shove you into the first gully!"

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"Come on, you fat young pig!"

Nugent grasped Bunter by the arm, and the descent of the Pike commenced. Billy Bunter enlivened the way with endless grumbling, which Nugent endured with all the patience he could muster.

Neither lad ever forgot that terrible descent in the mist and rain. They frequently had to stop and rest in the open, or under the weeping trees, and many and many a time Nugent had to retrace his steps, having missed the track in the blinding mist.

Bunter ceased to grumble at last, being too exhausted to utter a sound, and he staggered blindly along, grasping Nugent's arm convulsively.

"I—I can't go any further!" he gasped at last. "I—I'm dying, I think!"

And he sank in a helpless heap to the ground. Nugent paused, exhausted—bewildered. His own senses were swimming and leaden weights seemed to be dragging on his limbs.

"Make another effort, Billy!" he gasped. "We can't be far from the bottom now!"

"I—I can't!"

Nugent bent over him and lifted him in his arms. Bunter was no light weight and Nugent was exhausted. He had not carried the fat junior more than a dozen paces when he sank down, overcome.

They lay on the wet grass, with the rain beating upon them. Nugent had but a hazy idea of where they were. How long had they been in the descent—hours, or years? It seemed like years. What time was it—where were they? He had no idea. He was conscious now only of an overpowering desire to snuggle in the wet grass and sleep—sleep—sleep!

But he knew that it might be a sleep from which there would be no waking. Suddenly he started from the deadly drowsiness. A sound had echoed through the blinding mist—the sound of a human voice!

"Hallo!"

Faint, far-away, but unmistakable. It was borne in upon Nugent's dazed mind that there were searchers on the Pike—that help was at hand. He sat up in the rain and shouted huskily:

"Help, help!"

An answer came back, and another and another. Lights glimmered dimly through the mist.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

It was Bob Cherry. He flashed his lantern upon Nugent and Billy Bunter.

"Nugent!"

"Bob! Thank Heaven! You are not alone?"

"No; there's a party of us—Quelch and Wingate, and Dabney and Temple—and they let Inky and me come because we know the way up the Pike. We've been hallooing for hours! We met Bulstrode, and he told us—— But where's Wharton? Further back?"

"He's on top of the Pike."

The lantern nearly dropped from Bob Cherry's hand.

"What?"

The others were gathering round now, and every face went pale as Nugent gasped out the words:

"He's on top of the Pike, looking for Levison!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Night on the Pike.

HARRY WHARTON was indeed on top of the Pike!

After leaving Nugent, he set himself steadily to the ascent of the last slopes of the mountain, feeling his way step by step through the blinding vapour that enveloped the mountain.

More than once he missed his footing on the rough stones and fell; and once he rolled into a deep gully, where the water splashed over his head as he fell. But he struggled out and resumed his way—dripping, exhausted, but invincibly determined.

Steeper and steeper grew the rugged way, thicker the mist. The rain was not coming down so heavily, but it was still thick. Wharton felt his strength failing him, but he struggled desperately on. At last, aching in every limb, he crawled out on the level and lay exhausted, exposed to the beating rain, on the summit of Black Pike.

For full a quarter of an hour he lay, hardly conscious of the wet and the chill, while his spent strength came slowly back to him. Then he slowly gained his feet, breathing hard and deep.

He was upon the summit of the Pike, but was Levison there? Had the lost junior attempted the descent in the mist and wandered away into the trackless thickets, or fallen into some cleft or gully? Harry had shouted at intervals in his ascent, but there had been no reply, save the distant echoes. He stood on the summit of the Pike now and shouted into the mist.

"Hallo! Ho-o-o-o-o! Hallo!"

The echoes rolled back from the mist, multiplied a hundred times. Again and again he shouted, and still there was no other reply.

His heart sank.

The summit of the Pike was not extensive, and if Levison had been there he should have heard.

"Hallo-o-o-o-o!"

The shout rang again through the mist. But only echo replied, and he desisted at last, with a heavy and troubled heart.

He moved slowly forward, peering through the mist, feeling his way. Scarce a dozen paces forward, and he stumbled over something that lay on the wet ground—something soft to the touch.

Harry Wharton bent down with a beating heart.

"Levison!"

It was a boy who lay there in the soaking rain; and though he could not see a feature of the cold face, Harry knew who it must be.

With a chill of fear at his heart, he groped over Levison's breast, to feel if there was a beating of the heart yet to tell of life.

He drew a deep breath of relief.

Levison's heart was beating; his body was warm. He was alive! And as Harry's touch stirred him, there came a moan from the prostrate lad.

"Levison!" cried Wharton.

There was a groan. Harry raised the fallen junior in his arms. Levison was half submerged in a pool of water. The junior was unresisting in his grasp.

"What is it?" muttered Levison huskily. "I—have I fainted?"

"I suppose so; or else you've been asleep. Thank Heaven I have found you!"

"Where am I?"

"On the summit of Black Pike."

"Ah, I remember! How did you come here?"

"I came to look for you."

"What?"

"Never mind talking now. Are you up to a try to get down?"

Levison groaned.

"I have been trying. I fell over something, and rolled into a gully; the water was more than my depth, and I thought I should be drowned. Then I was afraid to try to descend the Pike again. I tried to find a shelter from the rain, but there wasn't one. I—I don't remember any more."

His whole weight hung upon Harry Wharton. It was evident that he was too exhausted to move, and Harry was far too worn out to aid him much. It was clear that there was no getting Levison down from the summit of the Pike without help.

"We can find some shelter," said Harry quietly. "There's an overhanging rock somewhere here. I think I can find it. Lean on me."

Levison was leaning upon him heavily. The cold, sneering manner was gone from him now; he was exhausted, and only Harry Wharton stood between him and death, and he knew it. And that knowledge was not without its effect.

Harry moved slowly through the mist, with Levison leaning upon him. He had some idea of the position of the rock he had spoken of, but in the vapour it was difficult to find. Levison spoke no word.

A dark mass loomed up from the mist. Harry gave a gasp of relief.

"Here we are!"

The rock was something of a shelter from the pouring rain. They plunged under the shadow of it, and the incessant drops no longer beat upon them. Both sank exhausted to the ground, leaning up against the rock.

"Have—have you anything to eat?" muttered Levison. I'm famished! We lost Bunter with the grub. Have you seen Bunter?"

"He is safe, and so is Bulstrode. I've got some tommy here—sandwiches and cake. Here you are."

Levison ate almost voraciously. It was a late hour of the night now, and he had tasted nothing for six hours or more. Harry ate a sandwich, for the first time becoming conscious of hunger himself. Levison leaned his head back against the rock and closed his eyes. Then he started again.

"I say, are you there, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"You came out to look for me?"

"Yes; you and the others."

"You can't get me down."

"I'm afraid not."

"Do you think help can get here?"

"I hope so."

Harry Wharton tried to speak cheerfully, but in his heart he knew that the rescuers, even if they were already on the

way, could never reach the summit of the misty Pike before morning.

"That means that you don't expect help," said Levison, in something of his old tone, "I understand. Look here, it's no good your staying."

"Do you want me to go?" asked Wharton quietly.

"Of course I don't. It would be horrible to be left alone. But, look here, this is a serious business. You had better get home."

"I am not going to leave you."

"You'd better. What's the good of two sticking it out instead of one? This may mean—you know what it may mean. Death!"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, are you going?"

"No!"

Levison was silent for some minutes. Harry did not speak. There was no sound, save the lashing of the rain through the mist.

"Wharton!"

"Well?"

"I—I—I've got something to say. I've been a rotten cad! I—I own up. If we get out of this alive, I'll try to make up for it."

"That's all right, old chap," said Harry quietly. "Don't worry."

"I'll make up for it, though, somehow."

Levison's head sank back again. Harry drew it upon his shoulder, and the junior slept. He slept the sleep of utter exhaustion, but his slumber was broken by starts and shivers and tremblings. Harry Wharton quietly, and without waking the sleeper, stripped off his jacket, and wrapped it round Levison, and the calmer sleep of the junior that followed showed how beneficial was the warmth.

Sleep was overcoming Harry Wharton now. Still supporting Levison, he leaned his head back against the rock, and the wet and cold could not keep him awake.

. . . . . .

And so the searchers found them, when the morning sun was glimmering through the clearing mists of the Black Pike. The searchers, themselves muddy, soaked, exhausted, came upon the two juniors at last, and looked down upon them—Levison, wrapped in Harry's jacket, leaning on the captain of the Remove; Harry, in his shirt-sleeves, blue with cold, sleeping, and shivering and trembling in his sleep. Bob Cherry gave a great gulp as he saw them.

"Is he—is he——Oh, Mr. Quelch!"

"They are both alive," said the master of the Remove. "We must carry them down the mountain, and get them to bed."

Neither junior awoke during the transit to Greyfriars, so deep was the sleep, or, rather, insensibility, they had fallen into. They came to themselves in the school hospital first, and were amazed to find themselves there, with Nugent and Bulstrode and Billy Bunter, sitting up in neighbouring beds and eating broth.

And it was some days before either Wharton or Levison left the school hospital. It was not a bad time for them, after the first day, when it was certain that they were in no danger. Their friends were allowed to come in as often as they liked, and the convalescence was pleasant enough. And there was another source of satisfaction for Harry Wharton.

He had succeeded in his self-imposed task.

Levison was changed.

That terrible night on the summit of Black Pike had changed him, and, though he did not say much about it, the change was very apparent. From that night forward Harry Wharton would never have a truer friend than the boy who—though in many respects still the same flippant, cynical Levison—never forgot that Harry Wharton had saved his life at the risk of his own.

THE END.

(Another grand tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next week. Order your copy of the "Magnet Library" in advance. One Halfpenny.)

GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.

READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father (Colonel Sir Harry Dashwood), Jack Dashwood finds to his astonishment, that he has been practically disinherited in favour of his uncle, Dominic and Cousin, Leonard. He consequently enlists in the 25th Hussars, under the name of Tom Howard, and soon becomes a corporal. Unfortunately for Jack, however, his Cousin Leonard is attached to the 25th as second lieutenant, and, with the aid of a bullying trooper named Sligo, succeeds in getting Jack deprived of his stripes. By the death of his father (Dominic), Lieutenant Dashwood is at first prevented from accompanying the 25th to India; but he subsequently joins the troopship at Port Said, having travelled there overland. While at Port Said he bribes a Greek gambler named Constantinidi, to kidnap Trooper Howard, whom he sends ashore on a false errand. Our hero is attacked and stunned, and wakes to find himself a prisoner. An examination of his prison-house reveals a Windsor chair, a lamp, and a box of matches. (Now go on with the story.)

A Surprise Visit.

"That's something," said Trooper Tom Howard. "If there is going to be any night attack, I shall be ready for them!"

And he slid the lamp under the divan, close to the chair.

"By gad, that Greek's a cool fish!" he thought. "Fancy holding an Englishman to ransom within a stone's-throw of the Suez Canal, through which British ships are passing all day long! Ah, here he comes!"

Suddenly the door of the prison moved a little, and slowly opened outwards. Instinctively Tom Howard's hand grasped the chair, and he rose to his feet.

The next moment he put the chair down, and his astonishment increased. The door had opened and closed again, and, standing in the room, with one hand on the lock, and one finger pressed to her lips with a gesture of warning, was an extremely beautiful girl, with her large black eyes bent upon the prisoner.

Trooper Thomas Howard, by sheer force of habit, came stiffly to attention, and then, remembering himself, bowed to his fair visitor. There was something of a softness in the Greek girl's face, and she coloured a little shyly as he looked at her.

"Hush!" said Irene Constantinidi. "Do you speak French?"

"A little," said our hero, mentally hoping to goodness she would avoid the irregular verbs. "Tell me, mademoiselle, what have you come here for?"

"To save your life," she said, her face growing white again. "For seven days you will stay in this room, and on the seventh Mustapha the Arab will come and kill you!"

"The dickens he will!" said Jack Dashwood, laying his hand on the back of the Windsor chair. "Why do you tell me this?"

"Because I am sorry for you," answered Irene, lowering her eyes for a moment. "Because this is my father's house, and I do not wish bloodshed here—there has been too much already—and because I do not want you to be killed."

"THE GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST."

Another Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars, By FRANK RICHARDS. NEXT TUESDAY.

"That is very good of you, mademoiselle," said Jack, not unnaturally suspicious; "but I don't know why you should take all this trouble to save a private soldier."

His suspicion betrayed itself in his voice, and the girl's eyes flashed.

"If you do not wish me to help you," she said, "I will go!"

"No, I say, don't do that!" said Jack, starting forward. "But the whole thing is so absolutely strange, I don't know whether I am standing on my head or my heels; and, you know, I never saw you before."

"And when you have gone," she said, in a low voice, looking down at the ground, "you will never see me again." And she glanced shyly at him.

"Well," said Jack awkwardly, "I don't know whether this place offers me any inducement to return." She turned her face away, and he saw that her profile was extremely beautiful. "Will you tell me one thing?" he said quickly. "Do you know how I was brought here?"

"You were brought by Mustapha and Selim the Nubian, and my father."

"Yes, I know; but I mean, why?" A sudden idea came to him. "Have you ever seen one of my countrymen, tall and dark, dressed entirely in black?"

"There was such a one. He came several times, and talked with my father, but he went yesterday to the troopship."

Jack clenched his hands, and his face crimsoned with passion.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered, under his breath.

"Ah, that man is your enemy!" said the girl quickly.

"By gad, I should rather think he is!" said our hero.

"Then I am all the more your friend," said the girl. "I did not like the look of him. When my father goes out I will come again. There is danger if I stay now; but only trust me, and you shall be free."

She did not wait for thanks. In fact, he was so astounded that he could only stand there looking at her; and, throwing open the door, she vanished, leaving him still standing and staring at the place where she had been.

* * * * * * *

There were angry voices in the garden. The solid gold watch of the English prisoner had most mysteriously vanished, and all three rascals accused each other of having secreted it.

"You ten thousand times accursed dog of an infidel!" cried the Greek. "You have stolen the thing under my very nose!"

"Son of a burnt father," said Mustapha, with his eyes burning redly and his hand seeking his knife, "may I broil in Tophet if I have laid a finger on the thing!"

"Then it's Selim!" cried Constantinidi, turning on the Nubian and kicking him violently.

Selim, whose senses were numbed by haschich, smiled sweetly and came out of his golden dream, as the Greek passed his hands deftly over him, with a thoroughness that bespoke long practice.

Then they searched the kiosque, looking under the table and among the coffee-cups and dominoes; but the watch had certainly gone, and there was no trace of it.

The Arab gathered himself up with great dignity, while the excited Greek still continued his search, and there was consequently suspicion and bad blood between the two villains.

Then Mr. Constantinidi, having inquiries to make, and very little time to make them in, went upstairs to his prisoner's door, tried it, and found that it was safe, and went out into the streets of Port Said, blinking in the blazing sunlight, and picking his way among the groups of Arabs who played their perpetual dominoes, and the stalls of the Levantine money-changers, and the garish fronts of the cafe chantants.

In his heart of hearts he was convinced that Mustapha had stolen that watch, and would have been very much astonished could he have peeped into the bosom of his daughter's gown as she stole upstairs when the door had closed upon her amiable parent.

When she was half-way up she paused and listened. The slow, shuffling tread of Mustapha sounded below, and, with a frown contracting her white forehead, Irene descended to the ground floor, and saw, to her great annoyance, that Mustapha had taken up his position on a pile of cushions in one of the card-rooms immediately opposite the doorway.

She glided back again like a white shadow, and the next moment was in the presence of the prisoner once more.

"My father has gone out," she said, "but Mustapha, the

Arab, is below, and he is ever wide awake as a watch dog. I think your attempt must be made by night, when the house is full of guests. Now, listen to me, and pay great attention to my words. Once outside the door, a few paces to the right will bring you into the main street of Port Said, and to the right again will bring you to the basin where the great ships lie. When you are free, what will you do?"

"Make straight for the British Consul, mademoiselle," said Jack.

"Then you will never leave this house alive!" And all the sweetness went out of the girl's face, her mouth hardening, and her eyes fixing upon him a look of piercing intensity.

"Why so, mademoiselle?" said Jack, not understanding.

"Because the British Consul would come hither with the police, and we should be ruined. I am my father's daughter, and to me he is everything. Before I help you, you must promise to me on the word of an Englishman that you will say nothing. Surely your life is worth that little word?"

Jack found himself looking fixedly into those two great eyes, which grew suddenly soft again.

"Come, Sir Harry Dashwood, will you promise me?"

Jack started.

"How do you know my name?" he said.

"I will show you," said Irene. And, putting her hand into her gown, she drew out his watch.

Jack involuntarily stretched out his hand.

"That was my father's," he said.

"You loved your father?"

"By Jove, I should think I did!" said the lad, flushing hotly.

"And I love mine," said the Greek girl. "This is yours—take it. And I ask you again, will you give me that promise?"

Jack paused a moment, and then put out his hand.

"Yes, Miss Constantinidi, I will," he said.

And for a moment her hand lingered in his; then she withdrew it quickly.

"I know I can trust you," said Irene. "Now, listen. To-night the house will be full of men, who come to play cards and roulette, and all the other foolish games by which they lose money and make my father rich. There will be noise and some laughter, and wine, and music, and people passing to and fro. I shall bring you a disguise." And her woman's eye took in the details of his figure. "A coat such as the French wear, long and tight fitting, and a fez. They will go well with the dark blue of your dress, and will not attract attention. Do not drink all your coffee to-night, but keep some to darken your face with; and when you come forth, walk slowly. Do not hurry, but just make for the door, as if nothing were happening. Once outside, I cannot help you any more."

"You are helping me nobly, mademoiselle," said Jack impulsively. "I don't know how to thank you. In fact, I don't know why you should take all this trouble over me."

"And I don't think I shall ever tell you," she said, in a low voice; and then the door closed again.

Once more Irene entered that room later in the day, laid a bundle on the floor, and vanished, with a wave of her hand; and Jack, picking up the things which she had brought, found a frock-coat and a red fez, which he immediately concealed underneath the divan.

"The plot thickens," he said, with something of a smile. "But I wish I hadn't have had to give her that promise. I don't like leaving this nest of ruffians without some punishment."

When Mr. Constantinidi returned to his nefarious establishment, he was in a high good humour. At one of the hotels he had consulted a volume of Debrett, and under the initial "D" he had found what he sought—"Dashwood, creation 1643, of Dashwood, Berkshire," followed by certain heraldic information that was more than Greek to him—a brief record of the late baronet's distinguished military career, the date of his prisoner's birth, the fact that the family's seats were Dashwood Hall and a certain number in Park Lane, and Sir Harry's club the United Service. All this Constantinidi had copied carefully out, and he approached Mustapha with triumph in his eye.

"What did I tell you, unbeliever?" said the gambler to the Arab, who had never stirred from his cushions. "A

great family—a great, wealthy, English family—who will pay for that boy's weight in gold. I go, my friend, to write myself to this same Dashwood, and I write three letters—one to each address, and one to his club. To my brother also I write, who is an interpreter in London. And yet, Mustapha, you would cut yonder boy's throat, would you? Not while Ionides Constantinidi is awake!"

Mustapha smiled lugubriously.

"As you like," he said, filling the long chibouque he was smoking. "For my part, I shall sit here and watch that door."

The Greek laughed aloud, and called to his daughter to bring him writing materials in another room; and then for several hours the wily rascal cudgelled his brains until he had concocted a letter, which he copied three times and duly directed. He did not know that the peerage he had consulted was an old one, and that no earthly letter would ever reach the man to whom he wrote.

Baffled!

Trooper Tom Howard lay at full length on the mouldering divan. He was bareheaded, for his sea cap had come off in the previous night's scrimmage, and he was dressed in his blue serge, with yellow striped overalls, looking a little incongruous in that Oriental attic, which had nothing European about it, save—I beg its pardon—the Windsor chair. He had begun to regret that he had not asked Mademoiselle Irene to add a weapon to her many other favours. And, as he sat and sipped, smoking an Egyptian cigarette, he studied the chair closely, and decided that, with a little manipulation, one of the back legs would make a bludgeon by no means to be despised.

The parallel line of sky showing through the iron shutter told him that it was still light, and, in case the Greek should visit him again, it was not safe to assume his disguise at present. Still, the chair was such an insignificant object that he might very well start operations on that. Accordingly he took it up, and as he grasped it in his strong hands, and bent and strained at it in his efforts to pull it apart noiselessly, he could have wished that windsor chairs were made somewhat weaker. However, at length he wrenched the spindle out, and got the whole of the back of the chair away, snapped the top away, and found himself provided with a strong beech club. He stowed the fragments under the divan, then lay back again, and sipped some more coffee.

The astonishing glow of the Egyptian sunset now flamed in through the shutter, and our hero knew that the moment must be approaching when he would have to risk all at one stroke. The little item of the key did not trouble him. He knew that his fair confederate would see to that, and he got the lamp out, trimmed the wick, lighted it, and saw that it burned with a very tolerable flame; after which he put it out with his wet fingers, and popped it under the divan again. None too soon, indeed, for Mr. Constantinidi appeared in the doorway, holding that ivory handled revolver somewhat ostentatiously.

"I am sorry," he said, with a mock smile, "that I must leave you in darkness, but there is no help for it. In the morning you shall have newspapers; and in the meantime, it may interest you to know that I have written to your admirable father, to whom I have urged the necessity of a very speedy reply. Ah, no, don't make any mistake—not to me here. I see you are thinking of the British Consul. My brother in London will conduct these very delicate negotiations, and it will not be until I get word from him that I set you free. Now, I hear my guests calling me below, and I wish you pleasant dreams, Mr. Englishman."

Tom Howard made a pretence of scowling at the man as he was speaking, but directly the door was closed the frown broadened into a smile, and, stripping off his serge, Tom stood a moment in his military grey-back, and then pulled out the frock-coat. It was a tight fit, but he did not care for that. His first object in life was to find himself on the outside of the door of the gaming den, after which coats mattered very little.

He had no particular plan, and he found his future movements considerably embarrassed by the promise he had given. But when Jack Dashwood had given a promise, wild horses would not have induced him to break it.

The sunset glowed crimson and green and golden yellow, and then faded out into purple very quickly, after which the night came—the still, deep, blue-black Oriental night. Through the shutter he could see some stars, looking larger and more luminous than those in our latitudes, and he began to grow very impatient. Then he poured what remained of the coffee into the saucer, and rubbed it on his face. Having no glass, he could not tell what the result was, but in reality he had considerably darkened his skin, and might reasonably pass for a young Egyptian, saving only that the Egyptians do not possess the stern, square jaw of the Dashwood family. From somewhere outside there came the strains of music and the crash of cymbals. There were dancing girls and singing in a cafe chantant not far away, and the wail of a discordant chorus came to him.

When he had grown tired of pacing backward and forwards, he sat down again on the divan, feeling very uncomfortable in his tight garment, and watching the door like a terrier watches a rat hole. After a while it opened—so silently that he would not have noticed it in the gloom, if a low voice had not whispered:

"I've unlocked the door. In one hour the rooms below will be full, and you must make your escape. My father will be very busy. We shall all be very busy, but say not a word to any man when you get below."

Then the door was closed gently to, and Tom Howard's heart began to thump wildly.

He struck a match and looked at his watch, only to find that it had stopped for want of winding up. So he began to count up from one to sixty, and in that way consumed the better part of half an hour.

Creeping on tip-toe to the door, unable any longer to restrain his curiosity, he opened it without sound, and, looking out, saw that the staircase was in complete darkness.

While he stood listening, he thought he heard English voices below, but there was such a babel of conversation in many tongues, interspersed by curious lulls of silence, that he could not tell whether he was mistaken or not.

"I cannot wait any longer," thought the lad.

And, possessing himself of the chair-leg, he struck a match and lit the lamp. On the landing outside he waited; and then, holding the light high above his head, began to descend the stairs. He paused a moment when he was outside the door; but recovering his composure, and clutching his improvised cudgel, began to descend. He could hear the buzz of the gamblers downstairs.

Lower and lower he crept, hardly daring to breathe, and ready to extinguish the lamp at any moment; and presently out it went, and he laid it on the floor, it having served its purpose.

Peering anxiously round the angle of the wall, he looked down into the entrance-hall, lighted by sconces on the wall and hanging lamps. Several dark-skinned boys passed in and out of the rooms, carrying brass trays with coffee, and little filigree silver holders; and there was a strange blending of the East and West about the scene.

A Frenchman in evening-dress came in, and turned into the room on his right hand. Oriental rugs carpeted the hall, and Tom looked down through a blue haze of tobacco smoke, which floated everywhere.

(Another long instalment of this splendid tale of Army Life next Tuesday.

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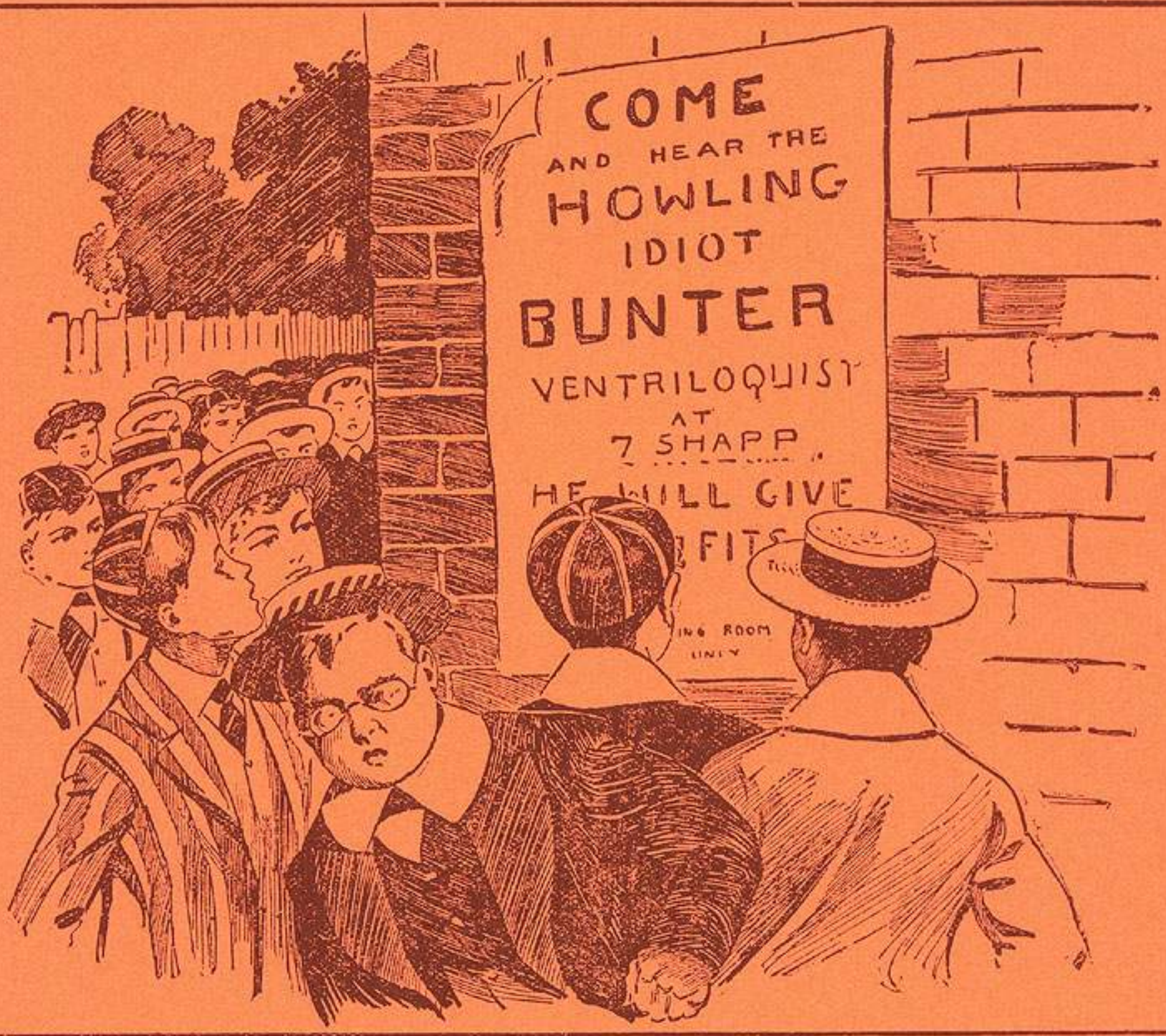
Saturday, September 12th, 1908

"The Greyfriars Ventriloquist."

By FRANK RICHARDS,

is the title of our next story.



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