The Ventriloquist's Pupils

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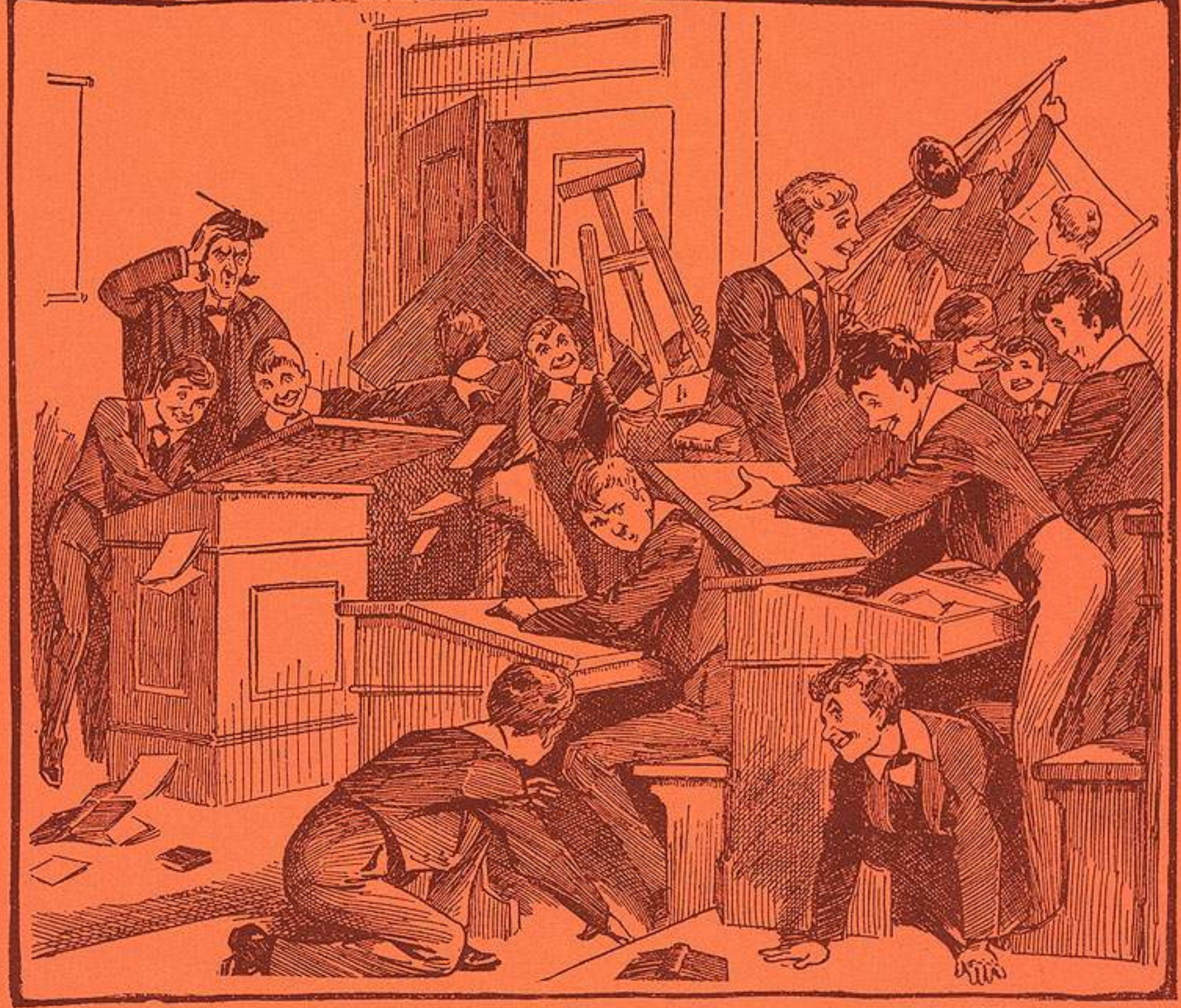
COMPLETE STORY FOR ALL

Grand School Tale of

HARRY WHARTON & CO.

By FRANK RICHARDS



ALL THE JUNIORS THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THE HUNT FOR BILLY BUNTER'S VOICE.

The Ventriloquist's Pupils

A Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bunter is Absent-Minded.

"BUNTER!"

There was no reply. The morning sun glimmered in at the windows of the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars, upon a busy class and a busy master. Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove, was taking his pupils upon a personally-conducted tour among Latin verbs, and the juniors were all at attention—with one exception.

The exception was William George Bunter.

Bunter sat in the back row, within easy reach of the wall; and he had allowed his plump form to lean back against that support, his spectacles had slid down his nose, and his expression showed that he was lost in thought.

Thinking was not much in Billy Bunter's line, and perhaps he ought to have been encouraged when he did any; but the Remove-master was perhaps justified in considering that the Form-room, and the middle of the Latin lesson, were not the proper time and place for it.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch rapped the name out a second time, his eyes turning upon the fat junior in a kind of basilisk glare.

But Bunter was too preoccupied to hear. Weighty thoughts were evidently passing through his mind, to the exclusion of everything else—even of the Latin lesson and the angry Form-master.

Several juniors tried good-naturedly to attract Bunter's attention, to wake him to his surroundings; but the Form-master gave them no time. He brought down his pointer upon a desk with a crash that sounded like a gunshot, and every fellow in the room jumped; and Billy Bunter came out of his reverie with the biggest jump of all, and a startled gasp.

"Ow!"

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir! Did you speak, sir?"

"I have spoken to you three times!" shouted Mr. Quelch. "You appear to have something more important than your lessons to think about, Bunter."

"Yes, sir—I—I mean no, sir."

And the Remove could not help chuckling.

"Bunty's in for it this time," Bob Cherry whispered to Harry Wharton. "Quelch is on the warpath. He's seeing red!"

And Harry nodded. He was rather concerned about Bunter. The owl of the Remove was always getting into scrapes, and Harry usually had the task of getting him out of them again. But this time he could not help the fat junior.

"Stand up, Bunter!"

Bunter stood up.

"You have not been listening to me, Bunter."

"Yo-es, sir. I have heard every word, sir. I—I was just

thinking it out very carefully, sir, because—because I was so deeply interested."

Mr. Quelch smiled grimly.

"Then you can, of course, tell me what I have just told the class."

Bunter looked dismayed. He had been thinking about another matter entirely, and he had not the faintest idea what Mr. Quelch had just told the class. He looked at the ceiling, and he looked at the floor, but failed to draw inspiration from either. Finally, he looked at Mr. Quelch again. The Form-master was waiting grimly.

"Well, Bunter?"

"You—you—you—you were saying, sir——"

"Go on."

"That—that—I—I—I——"

"You were not listening, Bunter."

"Yes, sir; I—I was listening, only—only I sometimes have sudden fearful attacks of deafness, sir!"

"You said just now that you had heard every word!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Ye-e-es, sir, so I did," stammered Bunter. "That is to say——"

"I was telling the class how to define a deponent verb."

"Yes, sir," said Bunter. "Of course, sir. That's what I was going to say, sir, only—only you interrupted me, sir!"

"Ah! Then please define a deponent verb, Bunter!"

"I—I—I——"

"Do you hear me, Bunter?"

Bunter racked his brains. He was the most backward boy in the Lower Fourth, as far as lessons were concerned. He was a ventriloquist, and a wonderful cook; but his powers in those directions were useless in the Form-room. He had a faint recollection of a previous instruction on the same subject, but could not quite recall what it was.

"You may go on, Bunter."

"Yes, sir. A—a—a deponent verb is—is—is——"

"Well?"

"A deponent verb is normal in form," said Bunter desperately, "and abnormal in meaning."

"WHAT!"

"I—I—I mean, sir, that it's transitive in form and intransitive in meaning!"

"Bunter!"

The Remove giggled—they could not help it. Bunter grew redder and more confused. Mr. Quelch took a tighter grip on his pointer.

"I—I—I mean, sir, that—a——"

"A deponent verb," said Mr. Quelch, "is passive in form and active in meaning."

"Yes, sir: I—I—I was just going to say that, sir!"

"You will write out that sentence fifty times, Bunter."

"Oh, sir!"

"And if you allow your thoughts to wander again during lessons, Bunter, I shall be compelled to recall them with an application of the pointer."

And Mr. Quelch rapped the desk again to give emphasis to his words. And the lesson proceeded.

Billy Bunter looked extremely worried. He evidently had some great scheme in his mind that required thinking out, and the Latin lesson interfered with it. The old maxim "If work interferes with amusement, give up work" was one that went right to the heart of Billy Bunter. But Mr. Quelch was not the kind of man to be argued with. He kept a keen eye on the fat junior for the rest of the morning, and Bunter strove to fix his attention upon the work in hand.

Glad enough was the fat junior when the class was dismissed.

With alacrity he put his books away and jumped up. He was frowning thoughtfully behind his spectacles as he followed the rest out of the Form-room.

"I shall expect the fifty lines after tea, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch.

Billy gave a start.

"If you please, sir, could you let me leave them till to-morrow, as I have a most important matter to attend to."

"Certainly not."

"It's a great wheeze, sir—I mean, it's most important business, and involves very extensive financial considerations!"

"You may go, Bunter."

Mr. Quelch's hand wandered towards the pointer, and Bunter went. He looked gloomy as he quitted the Form-room, but his countenance brightened again as he turned over in his mind the wonderful idea that filled it.

A heavy hand dropped on his shoulder, and his spectacles nearly fell off as he jumped.

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "It's not Bulstrode, ass. What were you playing the giddy goat in class for, Bunty?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—I say, you fellows, stop a minute. I want to speak to you. It's fearfully important!"

The Famous Four stopped round the fat junior. Bunter adjusted his spectacles and blinked at them—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur—four of the finest fellows in the Lower Forms at Greyfriars.

"What is it?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing. "I could see you were thinking out some wonderful scheme in the lesson."

"It's a jolly good scheme," said Bunter. "You'll see what it is later. I'm going to put up a notice in the hall."

The chums of the Remove stared at him.

"You're—going—to—put—up—a—notice—in—the—hall?" said Bob Cherry, in measured tones.

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I?"

"No reason at all why you shouldn't, if you've got anything to say," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But what's the wheeze?"

"You'll see that soon enough," said Bunter mysteriously. "I'm going to write out the notice in the study at once."

"Well, what did you stop us for, then, ass?"

"I—I wanted to ask you if you chaps would mind doing your prep. to-night in the Form-room or the common-room. I want the study."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Another ventriloquial entertainment, eh?"

"Well, not exactly; I want the study——"

"You want a thick ear, too, I think," remarked Nugent. "You'll get one, too, if you propose to turn us out of our study again."

"Oh, I say, you fellows——"

"My dear duffer," said Wharton, "you can't expect to turn us out of our study. What the deuce do you want to do it for, too?"

"Well, it's awfully important. I say, you fellows, could you have tea in Hall to-day, then, and I'll use the study during tea-time?"

"Yes, that's likely, when we've got sausages and chips for tea," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, very well; I shall have to hold the class while you are there, then!"

"The class—what class?"

"You'll see when you read the notice," said Bunter loftily; and he marched off with his little fat nose in the air.

The chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"Off his rocker!" said Nugent.

"The off-fulness of his honourable rocker is terrific," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, it's only some new scheme, I suppose—nothing in it. Let's get down to the footer."

And the Removites were soon punting a ball about the Close, enjoying themselves keenly in the brisk March weather; while Bunter, with a frowning brow and inky fingers, was busy in Study No. 1, seated at the table with pen, ink, and paper.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Professor Bunter.

"HALLO! What's on now?"

The juniors were coming in to dinner, and a dozen pairs of eyes fell upon Billy Bunter, standing before the notice-board in the hall, his hands in his pockets, and looking up at the board with great satisfaction.

The fat junior had just pinned a notice up, among the host of others that filled the available space, and he was evidently much pleased with his work.

A group of juniors halted to read what he had written.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Skinner. "This is good. Look here, you chaps!"

And the Removites were soon reading the notice and chuckling over it. It ran as follows:

"NOTICE!

"William G. Bunter is open to give instruction in the art of ventriloquism to pupils on exceptionally reasonable terms.

"Full course of lessons given for the fee of five shillings, paid in advance.

"Proficiency guaranteed, if a sufficient number of lessons taken.

"Single lessons, 6d. each.

"All fees payable strictly in advance.

"(Signed) WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER,
"Professor of Ventriloquism."

"Lessons in ventriloquism," grinned Stott. "That's good! Where are you giving the lessons, Bunty?"

"In No. 1 Study."

"And when?"

"Oh, I suit my pupils' convenience as much as possible," said Bunter loftily, quite as if he were an old professor already. "You can have the lessons practically any time you like out of school hours, if you pay in advance."

"If we pay in advance, it's precious little lessons we shall get," grinned Skinner.

Bunter blinked at him indignantly.

"Oh, really, Skinner! I suppose you can rely upon my honesty."

"Ye-es, I don't think!" said Skinner.

"We should jolly well want to be sure that you can ventriloquise yourself before we let you start teaching us," said Bulstrode.

"I think I've proved it," said Bunter.

"Oh, he can ventriloquise," said Bob Cherry, joining the crowd. "He was a jolly long time learning, but he can do it now—sometimes. But is that what you wanted the study for, Bunty?"

"Yes; I must have somewhere to receive my pupils."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at, Cherry. You know what a jolly ripping ventriloquist I am. Why shouldn't I teach others?"

"Certainly; why not?"

"And the fact is, I'm pretty hard up," said Bunter confidentially, in a lower tone. "I told you I was expecting a postal-order this morning, Cherry, and you refused to lend me half-a-crown on the strength of it."

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, it hasn't come; there's been another delay in the post, and I haven't received it. I am thinking of writing to the Postmaster-General about it. This isn't the first time I've been disappointed over a postal-order."

"Ha, ha! I know that."

"But in the meantime, I'm stony. Of course, there's the home work I'm doing for the Patriotic Home Work Association. I am expecting to be getting in three pounds a week shortly from that. But——"

"But it hasn't started yet," grinned Bob Cherry.

"No. You see, the postcards I've coloured for them so far are not quite up to their standard of quality. It's rather disappointing, especially as I had to send them six shillings for the colour-box. Still, I suppose they have to be careful what they place on the market. Blessed if I can see what you're cackling at, Cherry. Look here, do you want to put your name down as a pupil?"

"Not to-day!"

"I say, Wharton, shall I put your name down?"

"Some other time!"

"Yours, Nugent?"

"Not this afternoon!"

"Oh, I say, you fellows, you might just let me put your names down, to encourage the others," said Bunter entreatingly. "The kids are like a flock of sheep, you know—where you chaps lead they all follow. Suppose I put your names down for single lessons at sixpence each?"

"Tanners are scarce."

"Oh, of course, it's only a matter of form, just to encourage the rest."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, go ahead, then—put 'em down."

And Billy Bunter scribbled the names in his little book. Then he asked for further offers, but the Removites did not seem eager to come forward. Skinner offered to take a course of lessons free, and Stott offered to owe the money. Both offers were refused by the ventriloquist. But no others were made at all.

"We'll see you do some ventriloquism first," said Ogilvy. "So far as I'm concerned, I've only heard you talk about it."

"Oh, that's easy enough. I'll show you some——"

"Hallo, dinner's ready!"

"I'll show you——"

"Come on, kids—I'm hungry!"

And Billy Bunter's canvassing for pupils was cut short by the rush for the dining-room. During dinner Bunter's face wore a thoughtful expression. The great idea was working in his brain.

Bunter was always short of money. He borrowed a great deal in various quarters, and never repaid it; but it went as fast as it came, and he was always in a state of wanting more. Many and various were his devices for raising the wind. The home work idea had only cost him money so far; but he had hopes for the future. Meanwhile, if he could get pupils, there was money to be made as a professor of ventriloquism. How to get the pupils was the question.

And Billy Bunter was so wrapped up in his meditations on this important subject that he actually forgot to ask for a second helping.

After dinner, while the juniors were spending their leisure time in the sunny Close, Bunter was still thinking over the scheme, and the wrinkle was still in his brow. He was giving the matter much and intense thought.

Buried in thought, the short-sighted junior walked along the passage with his hands in his pockets, and ran blindly into a tall and elegant Sixth-Former who was coming from the opposite direction.

A grasp of iron on his collar brought the junior with a jump out of his meditations.

"Oh! Oh, really, Wingate——"

It was not Wingate, the burly, genial captain of Greyfriars. It was Ionides of the Sixth—the Greek who was the most unpopular fellow in the Upper Forms at the school. Ionides was very particular about his dress, and always looked elegant; and the school had not forgotten the discovery that his curling locks were improved by pins of a night. Wun Lung, the Chinee, had succeeded in showing up the senior on that point, and Greyfriars still chuckled over the remembrance of it. Bunter had finished his dinner with a chunk of toffee, and as he clutched at the Sixth-Former to save himself from falling, he left a sticky set of finger-marks upon his elegant waistcoat.

Ionides shook him savagely.

"Pig!" he muttered, gritting his teeth. "Blind owl! Why did you run into me?"

"Ow! I'm sincerely sorry, Ionides—I didn't see you!"

"What do you wear glasses for, then, idiot? Go!"

And with a swing of his arm Heracles Ionides sent the fat junior spinning. Bunter crashed on the floor with a bump, and sat there looking dazed, and the Greek strode on savagely. It was a brutal action, and the fat junior was hurt. His eyes were gleaming vengefully when he staggered to his feet.

"Beast!" he muttered. "You—you rotten alien! I'll make you sit up for that!"

And Billy Bunter's meditations took a different direction. He was still thinking over his wrongs when the bell rang for afternoon lessons. But the fat smile upon Bunter's countenance seemed to hint that he had come to some satisfactory decision.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Trouble in the Form-Room.

THE Remove were unusually meek for first lesson that afternoon. Mr. Quelch, their Form-master, was a stern man, but kind hearted, and the Remove knew exactly how they could treat him.

With Mr. Maddox, the mathematics-master, who was taking them for first lesson this afternoon, the case was different. Mr. Maddox was a man of great attainments in his own particular line, but he knew little of boys, and was not an expert in managing them. When he flew into a temper—which happened about a dozen times, as a rule, during a lesson—he would shower penalties right and left, with very little regard for justice. The Form disliked the mathematics lesson intensely, simply because they knew that some of them, at least, were certain to get into trouble before it ended. The greatest meekness could not always save them, while any unruliness was certain to bring down the vials of wrath upon their devoted heads.

When Mr. Maddox came in, the Form were very quiet. Mr. Maddox was a thin gentleman, with a bluish nose, which turned to purple in the cold weather. He never took any exercise, and consequently he felt the cold weather keenly, and it always had a bad effect upon his temper. On cold days he suffered from cold feet; and cold feet always made him irritable. When the weather was at all sharp, therefore, the Remove knew what to expect, and they expected it. Sometimes they were extra meek, sometimes extra troublesome, according to their mood. On the present occasion they were very meek. Mr. Maddox's nose was imperially purple, and it meant trouble for somebody.

He looked over the class with an unpleasant expression. The juniors were as still as mice. But when a master is determined to find fault, it would be odd if he found nothing to seize upon in a class of nearly forty boys.

"Cherry!" rapped out Mr. Maddox.

Bob Cherry jumped at the sharpness of the exclamation.

"Yes, sir."

"Is it a matter of utter impossibility for you to wear your necktie straight?"

Bob Cherry turned red. Mr. Maddox's sneering, sarcastic way of speaking was harder to endure than the raps he sometimes gave over the knuckles with his pointer.

"No, sir—yes, sir!" stammered Bob.

"You are not quite explicit, Cherry. The science of mathematics should tend to clear the mental faculties, and teach one to be explicit above all things. Is it or is it not impossible for you to wear a straight necktie?"

"It always seems to go crooked, sir," said Bob Cherry, jerking the offending necktie into place.

"H'm! I do not approve of slovenliness, though I suppose it is useless to expect anything else of the Lower Fourth," said Mr. Maddox. "When did you wash your face last, Bunter?"

"Me, sir? This morning, sir."

"I approve of economy," said Mr. Maddox. "Economy of soap can, however, be carried too far. I detest a slovenly class."

Harry Wharton's eyes began to gleam. No boy likes to be called slovenly; and if Bunter was so, that was no reason why the whole class should be stigmatised. But Mr. Maddox never paused to be just.

"We will now proceed," he said, in a tone that implied that he didn't think it of much use to attempt to teach the Remove anything.

Bunter's eyes were gleaming, too. Certainly, he was economical of soap and water on cold mornings, but he didn't like being told of it before a grinning class. And the amateur ventriloquist of Greyfriars had already marked down the mathematics-master as his victim.

Mr. Maddox had put his hand on his desk, and was about to open it, when a sudden sound was heard in the still class-room.

Mew-miau-mew!

Mr. Maddox started.

"Dear me, there is a cat in my desk! Boys!" He turned a purple face towards the astonished class. "Boys! Which of you has dared to place a cat in my desk?"

There was no reply. The Remove were silent from sheer amazement.

"Answer me!" thundered the mathematics-master. "There is a cat in my desk! Wharton, I shall call upon you as head boy of the class, to answer. Stand up!"

Harry Wharton stood up.

"Wharton, did you place a cat in my desk?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know which boy in the class has done so?"

Wharton's eyes flashed. If the trick had really been played on Mr. Maddox, it was not "playing the game" to ask him to give away the joker. But as he knew very well that there was no cat in the desk, he had no hesitation in replying.

"I don't think anyone has done so, sir."

"I do not ask you what you think, Wharton! I ask you what you know. Have you seen any boy place a cat in my desk?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! I shall question the whole class, one by one, and—oh!" Mr. Maddox broke off, with a start, as he opened the desk and looked in.

There was no cat there!

There would not have been much room for a cat, anyway. Mr. Maddox stared at the books and papers as though he could scarcely believe his eyes. He had distinctly heard that painful mew, and yet there was no trace of a cat in the desk. He rubbed his eyes.

The class were watching him with keen interest. Mr. Maddox shut down the desk with a bang, and turned an ill-tempered face towards his class. He was about to speak, when the wail of the invisible cat was heard again. This time, it came from the midst of the class.

"Miaw-miaw-mew!

Mr. Maddox turned perfectly scarlet with rage.

"There is a cat in the room," he cried. "Which of you has brought a cat into the class-room?"

Silence!

"What boy has the cat there now?"

Silence!

Mr. Maddox compressed his lips.

"I will find out!" he said. "I warn the delinquent to beware."

He took his pointer and came amongst the forms. His eyes were like gimlets, and if any of the boys had had a cat there, Mr. Maddox would certainly have discovered it.

But there was no cat to be discovered.

The mathematics-master looked very puzzled.

Unless his ears were deceiving him, he had certainly heard a cat mewing. The door was closed, and so it could not have escaped from the room. Most of the Removites were as puzzled as the master, and they were looking about them in perplexity.

"I cannot find the animal," said Mr. Maddox, ceasing his search at last, looking very red and savage. "I call upon the culprit to confess."

There was no answer.

"Very well, I shall discover——"

"Miaw-mew-s-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z."

The mathematics-master jumped clear of the floor.

The snapping at his heels was distinct, and he swung round in the full expectation of seeing a cat there.

But there was no cat to be seen.

Mr. Maddox wiped his fevered brow.

He began to think that his senses were wandering.

The Removites were staring and grinning, and Billy Bunter had his face bent over his desk. His eyes were glimmering behind his spectacles. The Famous Four winked at one another. They had guessed that the trouble was caused by Billy Bunter's ventriloquism, and they were enjoying the joke.

"Miau-miao-mew!"

The sound came from the desk again.

The excited master tore the lid open and banged it back. There came a mew from under the desk, and he stooped down and glared under. Then the mewing came from the Forms, and then from the direction of the grate. The mathematics-master glared round and round.

"This—this is intolerable!" he panted. "The lesson cannot proceed while this—this fiendish animal is in the room!"

The Remove chuckled. They were quite willing for the lesson not to proceed, for, as Bob Cherry murmured, Mr. Maddox hopping about in search of an imaginary cat was funnier than mathematics.

Mr. Maddox glared at the class.

"Silence! The next boy to laugh will be sent in to the Head."

The Remove became grave again at once, though it cost them a struggle. The mew came again from the direction of the chimney. Mr. Maddox rushed to the grate, and then there was a long-drawn miau behind him from under a form.

He swung round with a scarlet face.

"Boys! Look for the cat; work cannot proceed till it is found! All of you leave your places, and look for that troublesome animal! It must be found! I—I will reward the boy who discovers it."

With one accord, the Remove rose to the occasion.

Gladly enough they joined in the hunt for the cat.

The search was thorough. The Removites left nothing unturned; literally! They turned out books and maps from the bookcase in hunting along the shelves for the mysterious cat. They turned Mr. Maddox's desk out, scattering all sorts of things over the floor. There was not a recess in the room that was not explored; nothing packed away anywhere that was not added to the general litter.

Then the miau was heard among the forms again, and they were dragged out of their places and over-turned, such of them as were not clamped to the floor, in the eager search for the cat.

Mr. Maddox mopped his perspiring brow.

All through the search the plaintive miau-miau was heard at intervals, but always the mysterious feline eluded the searchers.

The Form-room soon assumed a wrecked and gutted aspect. The juniors fairly entered into the spirit of the thing.

Suddenly, in the midst of the wrecking, the door opened.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, looked in—and started back in blank astonishment at what he saw.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Mystified Master!

MR. QUELCH knew his Form pretty well, and the Remove did not often surprise him; but he was surprised now. He looked at the littered, wrecked Form-room in blank amazement, hardly crediting his eyes. Forms were over-turned, the master's high chair lay sprawling across an easel on the floor, the black-board was half-hidden by scattered books and maps. The whole place looked wrecked, and for the moment the Form-master naturally imagined that the Remove had broken into a riot, and did not observe the presence of the mathematics-master.

Thunder-clouds gathered upon the Form-master's face.

"Boys!" he thundered.

The Removites ceased their dire work at once, and stood at attention. They felt a strange sense of righteousness. They had wrecked the room, and escaped the lesson they disliked most. And yet Mr. Quelch could not possibly punish them, or even blame them, when he knew the facts. And the Remove looked half-meek and half-gleeful as they realised the strength of their position.

"Boys! How dare you? Wharton, I am amazed to see you taking a part in such riotous proceedings! Yes, amazed—disgusted!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Not a word! I shall——"

"But, sir——"

"Nothing can excuse this riotous conduct! You look as if you have been bear-fighting instead of studying. I—dear me!"

Mr. Quelch broke off as he caught sight of the mathematics-master.

He had naturally imagined that Mr. Maddox had gone, and that the Form had taken advantage of his absence to break out into riot.

He stared at Mr. Maddox blankly.

"Dear me! Er—ah—what——whatever does this mean, Mr. Maddox? I did not know that you were here! I—I did not see you for the moment!"

The mathematics-master gasped for breath. He looked very red and excited and dusty. He had been glaring into the dusty cupboard in search of the elusive cat, and upsetting a pile of old papers in his eager quest. A suspicion—unjust, but quite natural under the circumstances, rose in Mr. Quelch's mind as he looked at him.

"I—I—I am sorry you should find your Form-room in such a state of confusion, Mr. Quelch," panted the mathematics-master.

"May I enquire what is the cause of it?" asked Mr. Quelch, icily.

"Certainly—yes—certainly. There is a cat in the room——"

"A—a—a cat?"

"Yes, sir. I really do not see anything for you to look amazed at in that!" said Mr. Maddox, irritably. His temper had not been equable to begin with, and the late events had ruffled it still more. "I have been intolerably troubled by the presence of a mewing cat in the room, and I told the boys to find it. They have been looking for it."

"It seems so," said the Remove-master, drily. "I hardly think it was necessary to turn the room into a pandemonium, even if there were a cat to be found."

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly; the boys have certainly done more damage than was necessary; I might have expected that," said Mr. Maddox, venemously. "I should recommend caning the whole class——"

"I can hardly cane the whole class for doing what you yourself told them to do," said Mr. Quelch, coldly. "It would scarcely be just."

"They—they deserve it! It must have been one of them who brought the cat into the room," said the mathematics-master, heatedly. "The brute is still here; it has caused me great inconvenience—great trouble——"

"You had better go to your room, Mr. Maddox," said the Remove-master, lowering his voice significantly.

The mathematics-master stared.

"To my room—why?"

"I should advise you to lie down a little."

"To lie down?" repeated Mr. Maddox, dazedly. "Lie down?"

"Yes, sir; certainly!"

"Why—why should I lie down, Mr. Quelch? I have to go directly to the Fifth Form-room from here, to take the Fifth in mathematics."

"I should strongly recommend you not to go to the Fifth Form-room in your present state," said Mr. Quelch, meaningly.

"My—my—present state! What—what do you mean?"

"You are—well, excited. I should recommend you to go to your room, and stay there till—well, till you are calmer."

Mr. Maddox jumped as the truth dawned upon him

"What! You—you suspect——"

"Hush! Before the boys——"

"I will not hush!" roared the exasperated mathematics-master. "I have been worried and driven by an unruly class, whom their Form-master ought to keep in order!"

"Sir!"

"I repeat it.—whom their Form-master fails to keep in proper order," shouted Mr. Maddox. "Now you dare to insinuate that I am intoxicated!"

"Pray be quiet!"

"I refuse to be quiet! I will complain to the Head! I will——"

"You can please yourself about that; please leave this Form-room!" rapped out Mr. Quelch, his own temper beginning to rise.

"I—I—I," Mr. Maddox was fairly stuttering with rage. "I—I—I shake the dust of your Form-room from my feet, sir! I despise your insinuations! I regard you, sir, as——"

"Will you kindly leave the room?"

"Yes, sir; I will gladly leave the room, but before I go, I repeat——"

Mr. Quelch held the door open, with a glitter in his eyes that subdued the mathematics-master. Mr. Maddox strode from the room, and the Remove-master closed the door.

The Remove was silent now. Mr. Quelch was a master of a very different calibre, and they knew it. The Form-master gave them one glance.

"Put the room tidy, and go to your places."

It was done without a word.

The Remove had never been so meek in their lives before.

Then lessons were resumed as if nothing had happened. Mr. Quelch was severe, but he was just: and the Remove were careful not to provoke his wrath just then. The rest of the afternoon passed in a state of tension, but without any explosion. Needless to say, the cat was heard no more in the Remove-room.

But when the class was dismissed at half-past four, the juniors crowded round Billy Bunter in the wide flagged passage. Bob Cherry thumped him on the back, and Nugent slapped him on the chest—unfortunately, at the same moment. A gasp like escaping steam came from Billy Bunter.

"Good for you, Billy!"

"Bravo!"

"Ripping!"

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry! I—I sincerely wish you wouldn't be so rough! You've—you've nearly winded me! Ow!"

"Oh, that's all right. Billy, you did the Mad Ox beautifully. I never saw such a ripping rag in my life."

"Faith, and it's right ye are!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "Sure, it was worth a week's pocket-money to see the Mad Ox hoppin' about."

"The hopfulness of the esteemed Mad Ox was terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Billy Bunter blinked contentedly.

"I thought it was rather ripping," he said. "I suppose you fellows will believe now that I'm a ventriloquist."

"Well, it was jolly good," said Skinner. "I suppose you can imitate sounds. I remember you imitated my voice once, and I never licked you for it."

"Look here, Skinner——"

"All right; I'll take lessons from you in ventriloquism——"

"Good! I'll put your name down."

"Instead of giving you the licking," said Skinner. "No fee in my case."

"Oh, really, Skinner——"

"Faith, you can put my name down," said Micky Desmond. "It's worth a tanner for a trial lesson, anyway. I'll pay ye next week."

"All fees are payable strictly in advance."

"Sure, I don't see why we shouldn't put it the other way—all lessons strictly teachable in advance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Desmond——"

"It's all very well," said Ogilvy. "Bunter can imitate a cat mewing, but I haven't heard him throwing his voice about yet; and that's what a ventriloquist is supposed to do. I want to see him do that before I plank down any tanners."

"I'll jolly soon show you——"

"Out of the way, you whelps!"

It was Ionides, the Greek. He was coming along the passage with his coat and hat on, as if just going out. And Bunter's eyes suddenly glittered behind his big spectacles with the light of battle.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Ionides Hears Voices.

IONIDES scowled at the juniors as he shoved them rudely out of the way. Between the Greek and the Remove was a long-standing feud. Ionides had been a prefect, and it was chiefly due to Harry Wharton & Co. that he had lost the post. The Greek never forgot a grudge, and in many an underhand way he had made the Removites feel his enmity.

The juniors were certainly filling up the passage now, but they would have made way at a polite request. Ionides preferred to scowl and shove. He pushed the juniors aside, and strode on.

"Cad!" muttered Nugent.

Billy Bunter cleared his throat.

"Ionides!"

The Greek stopped. He was just passing an open study door, and the study belonged to Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. The voice that spoke was so like Mr. Prout's, too, that if the Fifth Form-master had heard it he might have doubted whether he had not spoken.

Ionides made a gesture of impatience; he wanted to go out. But a Form-master was not to be neglected, and he looked into the study.

"Yes, sir?"

Mr. Prout's Form had been dismissed earlier than the Remove, and the Fifth Form-master, as it happened, was in his study, about to smoke a cigar after the labours of the afternoon. He turned his head and looked at the Sixth-Former

"Did you speak to me, Ionides?"

Ionides stared.

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I—I—I—you called me, sir."

"I—I called you!"

"Yes, sir, as I was passing your door."

"I certainly did nothing of the kind," said Mr. Prout drily "It must have been somebody else."

"It was your voice, sir; but I suppose I was mistaken, as you say you did not call me," said Ionides, very much puzzled. It was certainly a puzzling matter, for there was really no mistaking Mr. Prout's rather metallic, high-pitched voice. "I—I beg your pardon, sir."

Mr. Prout nodded, and Ionides left the study. He had not gone three paces when the voice of the Form-master was heard again.

"Stay! Come in a moment, Ionides!"

Ionides grunted, and turned back into the study. From the group of juniors up the passage came a joyous chuckle.

Mr. Prout looked at Ionides as he came in.

"Well?"

"You—you called me, sir," said the Sixth-Former, in bewilderment.

"Are you mad, Ionides?"

"Do you mean to say that you did not call me, sir?" almost shouted the Greek.

"Certainly not. If this is intended for deliberate impertinence, I can only warn you——"

"I—I am sorry. I suppose I was mistaken."

Ionides gritted his teeth as he strode along the passage. A chuckle from the Removites followed him, and he scowled savagely, but did not turn his head. The juniors trod softly along the passage after him.

Blundell and Bland of the Fifth were standing at the door, looking out into the Close. The March days were drawing out, and the chums of the Fifth were debating whether there was light enough for some practice at footer.

"Here's that cad Ionides!"

Blundell did not turn his head, but it certainly seemed to be Blundell who spoke. Ionides halted, quivering with rage. His temper was disturbed enough already, and he was in no humour to pocket a wanton insult.

"Ah! take that!" he muttered.

His sudden grip on the back of Blundell's collar astonished the Fifth-Former. Before he knew what was coming, Blundell found his ears boxed right and left by the angry Greek.

It was hardly the way to treat the top boy of the Fifth, but Ionides' passionate temper had quite got the better of him.

"Hallo!" roared Blundell, "what on earth are you up to? Lemme alone!"

"Take that—and that!"

"You—you bullying beast! Rescue, Bland!"

"What ho!" exclaimed Bland, rushing to the aid of his chum. He dragged Ionides back, and Blundell, tearing himself loose, turned on the Greek like a tiger. Right and left his fists came out, and Ionides went down heavily. Blundell danced round him, brandishing his fists.

"Get up!" he yelled. "Jump up, you cad! I'll teach you to lay your paws on a Fifth-Former! Come on!"

"Ah! I will—I will kill you!"

"Come on, and start the killing! I'm ready for you."

Ionides sprang up, his whole form quivering with rage. But ere they could close in strife, Mr. Prout came hurrying up.

"What is this? How dare you fight here?"

"He jumped on me like a wild beast!"

"He insulted me!"

"I didn't! I never said a word till you collared me. I didn't even know you were there."

"It is false! You said to Bland——"

"Rats! I didn't!"

"I tell you——"

"Is there anything wrong with you, Ionides?" asked Mr. Prout. "A few minutes ago you imagined that I spoke to you, when I certainly did not."

"I—I—I——"

"Calm yourself. You must be ill; perhaps it is too much study. In that case I will excuse you, but you had better see a doctor."

"I am not ill! I——"

"You must not speak to me in that tone," said the Fifth Form-master severely. "You are going to Friardale?"

"Yes."

"Then call on Dr. Mumby while you are there, and tell him your symptoms."

"I will not! I——"

"You will do as I tell you, Ionides," said Mr. Prout unpleasantly. "Mind, I shall speak to Dr. Mumby about you, so you will neglect my directions at your peril."

And he went back to his study. Ionides stood panting with rage, and suddenly he strode away into the Close, muttering something in Greek between his teeth. Blundell and Bland stared after him, utterly amazed, and convinced that the Sixth-Former was going "off his rocker."

The Removites grinned with glee.

"Well, what do you say now?" demanded Bunter importantly, when they were safe from other hearing. "Can I sling my voice—eh?"

"By Jove, you can!" said Skinner.

"I give in," said Ogilvy. "It's all right. But, I say, could you teach a chap to do that—honest?"

"Of course I could! My wonderful abilities as a ventriloquist are only equalled by my splendid gifts as a teacher."

"I like a chap to be modest," said Ogilvy. "All right; I'll come! Lemme see; what is the fee? Sixpence for a term's lessons?"

"Oh, really, Ogilvy! It's sixpence for a single lesson, and five shillings for a course of lessons."

"How many lessons in the course?"

"I—I haven't settled that yet: say a dozen."

"I should want a reduction for quantities," said Ogilvy. "Say, four bob for a course of a dozen lessons."

"You're getting a reduction already, but I'll make it fifteen lessons for five bob," said Bunter. "That is treating you generously."

"I say," broke in Morgan. "Suppose I take a single lesson for a tanner—look you, will that be any good?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. You see, to a chap of ordinary quick intelligence, one lesson would really be sufficient."

"Then I'm blessed if I take a course at five bob," said Ogilvy.

"Er—well, not exactly that. You see, a course of lessons would make all sure."

"H'm! I'll try a tanner's worth, and settle afterwards."

"All fees are strictly payable in advance."

"Oh, rot! We want to see what the lesson's like first."

"I'm sincerely sorry I can't budge on that point," said Bunter firmly. "Under my system, all fees are strictly payable in advance."

"Young Shylock!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, here you are," said Ogilvy, extracting a sixpence from his waistcoat pocket. "You'd better give me a receipt."

"I suppose you can trust me with sixpence, Ogilvy."

"I suppose I can't."

"Oh, very well; I'll make out the receipt."

And Bunter made it out on a leaf of his notebook, in due form: "Received of D. Ogilvy the sum of sixpence, in payment of single lesson in ventriloquism.—W. G. Bunter, professor."

"Good," said Ogilvy, pocketing the receipt. "When am I to come for the lesson?"

"Six o'clock."

"Right-ho."

Half-a-dozen more juniors paid up their sixpences and received receipts, and were told to turn up in Study No. 1 for their lessons at six. And Billy Bunter, very well satisfied, strolled away with three shillings and sixpence in his pocket.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Enjoys Himself.

BUNTER walked out into the Close. He dodged a football that Bob Cherry was passing down the path to Harry Wharton, and strolled on meditatively, with his hands in his pockets. It was getting near teatime in the studies, and some of the juniors were going in, but for once Bunter showed no alacrity to get in to tea. Provisions were not plentiful just then in No. 1 Study, and Bunter was hungry. And the three shillings and the sixpence were burning holes in his pockets.

Nugent clapped him on the shoulder as he neared the tuck-shop. The fat junior jumped.

"Oh, really, Russell——"

"Ha, ha, ha! I say, Bunter, are you standing a feed in the study? We've run out of things for tea."

"Oh, really, Nugent! I should be awfully glad to stand a feed, but as a matter of fact the postal order I was expecting hasn't come yet."

"What about the home-work you're doing? You're getting three pounds a week, aren't you, from the Patriotic Humbug Home Work Association?"

"I—I'm not getting anything yet. I'm expecting the first three pounds next week. Then I shall stand a series of extensive feeds——"

"Never mind; there's your fees as ventriloquial professor."

Billy Bunter wriggled.

"Well, you see, Nugent, I've got to have a snack to keep up my strength before giving the ventriloquial lessons, and three and six won't go far. I say, though, if you chaps had tea in Hall, that would leave the study clear for me."

Nugent laughed and walked away. Bunter went into the school-shop, and was greeted anything but cheerfully by Mrs. Mimble. She knew Bunter of old, and was prepared to refuse a demand for credit. But her aspect became a little more amiable as Bunter, with an air of conscious grandeur, planked three shillings and sixpence down upon the counter.

"What can I do for you, Master Bunter?" asked the good dame, with an amiable smile.

"Lemme see," said Bunter reflectively.

The money was too precious to be spent carelessly. With scientific knowledge of the subject, cramming into each shilling the most that could be got for it, Bunter expended his first fees as a ventriloquial professor.

The pile of eatables rose on the counter before him, and the mere sight of them made his mouth water. He borrowed a bag of Mrs. Mimble to carry them to No. 1 Study, and he arrived safely in his quarters with the valuable cargo.

The study was empty; the chums of the Remove had not yet come in. But even as he laid down the heavy bag with a gasp, Bunter heard their footsteps in the passage. To thrust the bag out of sight under the table, and to throw himself into an attitude of careless rest in the easy chair, occupied but a moment.

The door was thrown open, and the Famous Four came in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Any grub going?"

"Eh! Did you speak, Cherry?"

"What are you squatting there for, letting the fire go out? Anything for tea?"

"There's the bread in the cupboard, and there's a bit of cheese."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That won't be much among five. Isn't there a cake?"

"No; I finished that after dinner."

"Well, there's the sardines," said Nugent. "I suppose we can make a meal of bread and sardines. Chaps have eaten worse."

"You can't."

"Eh! Why not?"

"There—there aren't any sardines! I—I ate them after dinner."

"You young cormorant! What about the salmon—where's that?"

"I suppose you don't want me to starve to death, Frank Nugent. You know jolly well that I've eaten the salmon."

"Then what is there left, you young octopus?"

"There's some bread, and there was a bit of cheese! No, I remember now, I finished up the cheese. There's some bread."

"We'd better go down and have tea in Hall this time,"

said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Come on—half a loaf won't go far among us."

"H'm! Better get a muzzle for Bunter, I think, out of our next pocket-money," growled Bob Cherry. "That chap's enough to make a famine in the county. I suppose we'd better grub in Hall. You coming, Bunter?"

"N-n-no, I think I'd better not come just now."

The Famous Four stared at him. There was no food—so far as they knew—in the study; and yet Bunter was going to remain there instead of going down to tea.

"Gone off?" asked Bob Cherry politely. "Do you understand that you'll be missing a meal?"

"I don't mind, Cherry. I—I've got to prepare for the ventriloquial lesson, you know; the chaps will be here soon after six.

"Well, I'm blessed if I understand it," said Nugent. "I've never known our prize porpoise to miss a meal before. Not ill, Bunty?"

"No, I'm not ill," said Bunter with dignity. "You fellows are ways hinting that I am a greedy chap! I'm not greedy, though I admit I like a lot. But when I'm deeply in earnest over anything, I forget such things as meals. There are such things as the claims of the ideal, as Ibsen says—I forget whether it was Ibsen or Dan Leno, it was some chap like that; and there's a lot in it. You see——"

"Blessed if I can understand it," said Bob Cherry.

"The blessedfulness is terrific."

"Well, I'm hungry, at all events," said Wharton. "You can stay here to your meditations, Billy. I only hope you're not ill."

And the Famous Four quitted the study. Billy Bunter grinned and drew out the bag from under the table. He stirred the fire into a cheerful blaze, and lighted the gas. Then he opened the bag, and spread out the good things in tempting array.

"After all, I couldn't ask four chaps to feed on such a little as this," he murmured to himself, as if his conscience pricked him slightly. "There's enough for me, and a little bit over, but it would be nothing among the lot. And I'm jolly hungry; and I've got work before me."

And Bunter was soon busy.

To fry the bacon, and warm up the sausages and the rabbit-pie did not take him long; he was an old hand at the work.

In ten minutes he was sitting down in solitary state to a gorgeous feed.

An appetising scent filled the study, the fire glowed cheerfully, and the eatables almost made Bunter's mouth water as he spread them out enticingly. He filled a large plate and started.

When he had really a well-supplied table, Bunter could do wonders in this line. He travelled through the provisions in splendid style.

Helping after helping disappeared, until even his generous appetite slackened, and he ate more slowly, and more slowly still, until the last remains of the feast ceased to tempt him.

His cheeks were red and puffed, his face shining with greasy satisfaction by the time he had finished, still leaving a few crumbs of that great feed on the table.

He settled himself down in the easy chair for a rest. He could not spare much time now, for his pupils might come in at any moment, and the remains of the feed required clearing away, and chairs arranging for the class.

But the fat junior, who had put such a strain on his digestion, was in a lazy mood now, and extremely disinclined to move.

He looked at the warm glowing fire, till the bars and the glowing coals drifted before his eyes, and slumber stole over him.

In a few moments he was asleep, lying back in the easy chair, and at intervals an unmusical snore proceeded from the depths of the chair.

There was a tap at the door, but Billy Bunter did not hear it. The door opened, and the pupils came in, but still Professor Bunter did not stir.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Professor at Home.

OGILVY looked round the study in some surprise. The high back of the easy chair concealed the fat junior from view, and the pupils of Professor Bunter naturally imagined that the room was empty.

"He's not here," said Ogilvy.

"The young bounder," growled Hazeldene. "I suppose he's in the tuckshop blowing our fees on grub."

"Faith, and it's right ye are."

B-r-r-r-r-r.

"Hallo! What's that?"

"Sounded like some animal in the room," said Russell.

"It's something in that chair, I think."

"B-r-r-r-r."

"It's a snore!"

Ogilvy looked round into the big chair, and uttered an exclamation.

"Here he is!"

Bunter lay there, his face very red from the heat of the fire, his eyes closed behind his spectacles, and his mouth wide open. The juniors gazed at him, and grinned at one another.

"The young pig," said Morgan. "He's been feeding here

look you, and now he's gone to sleep instead of getting ready for the lesson."

"I'll wake him up," grinned Ogilvy.

He took the inkpot from the shelf, and calmly started to put the contents into Billy Bunter's open mouth.

The juniors chuckled. It was an effective mode of waking the sleeper. Billy Bunter moved and gurgled, and started into wakefulness.

"Gr-r-r-r—ow! What the—br-r-r-r-r!"

"Thought I'd wake you up!"

"Ow! You beast! Oh, really, you fellows! Ow, I'm poisoned."

"We're ready for the lesson."

Bunter clutched out his handkerchief, and wiped his mouth. He glared at the juniors in wrath. But sleepiness was still heavy upon him, in spite of the ink. He blinked behind his glasses.

"I'm jolly tired," he began.

"So are we—tired of waiting. Just you start off with that lesson, or return the fees. Catch me paying in advance again."

"All fees are strictly payable in advance——"

"Well, I suppose the lesson ought to follow then," said Hazeldene. "Wake up, you sleeping beauty, and start."

"Come on, now; on the ball."

"I think upon the whole it would be better for you to come later," mumbled Bunter. "I—I'm turning it over in my mind, and—I—br-r-r"—snore.

"My only Aunt Sempronia! He's asleep again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ogilvy drew a pin from his jacket, and touched Bunter with the point. The fat junior came to himself with a wild yell.

"Ow! Oh! Wh-what was that?"

"Wake up! We're waiting for the lesson."

"You're a set of inconsiderate beasts. You can wait half an hour for your beastly lesson, I suppose."

"Return the fees if there's to be no lesson, porpoise."

"Fees are not returnable under any circumstances."

"Then go ahead with the lesson, or I'll jolly well start on you with the poker!"

Bunter groaned, and yawned, and sat up in the chair. He was terribly sleepy, and he wished his pupils in any place but No. 1 Study, but there was evidently no help for it.

"Well, this is how you begin," he said. "The first lesson in ventriloquism is to make the ventriloquial drone——"

"Yes; I remember you droning about the passages when you were learning," grinned Hazeldene. "Shall we have to make the unearthly row you used to make?"

"Oh, really, Vaseline! You see, you place your throat like this, and you make a drone like that, and you keep it up for a considerable time."

"Like this?" asked Ogilvy. And he allowed a terrible groan to escape him. The other fellows stopped their ears.

"Oh, no!" grunted Bunter peevishly. "A drone, not a groan. This is the way. Now, you chaps can go to your own studies and practice that for half an hour."

"And what then?"

"Then the first lesson will be over."

And Bunter settled himself back in the easy-chair, with the evident intention of going to sleep again. The pupils glared at him, and then with one accord they hurled themselves upon their professor, and yanked him bodily out of the chair.

"Hold on!" roared Bunter. "I mean, leggo! What are you up to! You'll make my glasses fall off, you dummies, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them!"

Ogilvy jammed him against the wall with a jar that made his teeth rattle.

"Now you just stand there," he said determinedly, "and give us a lesson! You're not going to rope in the tanners so easily as all that, I promise you."

Bunter grunted discontentedly. But there was no chance of getting to sleep again, and the pupils were certainly determined to have their money's worth.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "I'll give you a half hour's lesson, but you're getting a lot for your money. Now, all of you drone together, like this."

There was a chorus of grunts and groans.

"Ow! Not like that. Like this."

And Bunter droned in the true ventriloquial fashion. One by one the juniors caught it up, and in a short time they were droning away in good style. The droning was in full blast when the study door opened, and the Famous Four came in.

Wharton and his friends stopped on the threshold, staring in amazement at the crowd of pupils in the study, all droning away for all they were worth.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What the dickens——"

"Ha, ha! It's Bunter's class."

The fat junior blinked round at them.

"Please don't interrupt, you fellows," he said. "I'm just in the thick of it. Perhaps you would like to join the class, though. I can give you single lessons at sixpence each. All fees are strictly payable in advance."

"We've come in to do our prep."

"Well, be as quiet as you can, then. Now, you chaps sustain the sound a little longer, and——"

"Here, you dry up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "Do you think we can do our prep. with that unearthly row going on?"

"The unearthfulness of the honourable row is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I say, you fellows, the lesson's over now, as these chaps want the study," said Bunter. "Keep up that practice. The more you do the better, and you can do it anywhere—in your studies, or the passages, or the class-rooms——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "There'll be ructions if they start doing it in the class-rooms, I fancy."

"And we'll arrange about the next lessons, too," went on Bunter. "Are you all taking the full course? That will be five bob each."

"I'll see how this pans out first," grinned Ogilvy. "Five bob is five shillings. I dare say I shall soon pick it up."

And Ogilvy went out of the study—droning! The others followed him—also droning! And fellows came to their study doors on all sides to stare at them, and wonder what on earth was the matter. But the budding ventriloquists heeded not. They droned away manfully

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Good News.

"A LETTER for you, Hazeldene," said Bob Cherry, after morning school the following day, tapping the junior on the shoulder, in the hall.

"Where?" asked Hazeldene.

"In the rack. I was looking for one for myself," explained Bob, "and I happened to notice it. Thought I'd mention that it was there."

"Thanks," said Hazeldene carelessly.

He strolled away to the letter-rack, and Bob Cherry strolled with him. Hazeldene wondered why Bob had taken the trouble to mention the matter to him, but he understood when he saw the letter. For the superscription was in the hand of Marjorie Hazeldene.

Marjorie was a great friend of the Remove chums, and they were always glad to have news of her. Bob Cherry especially was interested. He looked at Hazeldene enviously as the junior slit open the letter. Bob Cherry had no sister, and he could not help thinking that the fates had been rather unjust to him when he thought of Marjorie.

Hazeldene read the letter, and looked surprised; and then he grinned with satisfaction. Bob Cherry was watching his face.

"Good news?" he asked. Then he coloured. "Excuse me. Of course it's no business of mine; but if Miss Marjorie is coming down——"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, coming along. "Your sister coming down, Vaseline?"

"No," said Hazeldene shortly.

Bulstrode looked at him bitterly. Hazeldene had been his dutiful toady once, before Study No. 1 took him up and made a decent fellow of him. Bulstrode had never forgiven either him or them.

"So you can't tell me the news?" he said savagely.

"Oh, yes, certainly!" said Hazeldene uneasily. "I suppose you chaps have noticed the new building they're putting up near the bay—Cliff House it's called, I think? Well, what do you think? It's to be a girl's school!"

Bob Cherry whistled, and Bulstrode grinned. Harry Wharton joined Bob, in time to hear Hazeldene's words.

"A girl's school!" he exclaimed. "Cliff House a girls' school! Well, that's news! It's not ten minutes' walk from here, too!"

"What rot!" said Bulstrode. "Fancy planting a school of cackling girls down here close to Greyfriars! Beastly, I call it!"

"Oh, rats!" said Wharton.

"And I think we'll jolly well show 'em we don't like it!" went on Bulstrode, raising his voice. "At least, some of us will! There's an academy of aliens just across the way, and they're bad enough. Now to have a cackling girls' school—pooh! it's sickening! But I know some of us will jolly well rag them!"

"You won't," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"We shall! You remember the wheeze you played on the alien academy the day it was opened, I dare say—well, I shall work up something of the sort for the girls' school. A lot of chaps on the spot to kick up a row when they open the place will be a ripping wheeze!"

"You won't do anything of the sort, Bulstrode! I know you're cad enough, but there are decent chaps in the Remove who will stop you."

Bulstrode scowled savagely.

"Well, you'll jolly well see!" he exclaimed. "And as for you, Wharton, if you're going to set yourself up as a defender of everybody and everything that's unpopular, you'll get into trouble, I warn you. You've constituted yourself the champion of that mill cad who came here on a scholarship, and now you're going to take a set of cackling girls under your wing——"

Smack!

Bulstrode stopped suddenly, reeling as Harry's open hand smote him across the mouth. It was only the open hand, but the smack was like a pistol-shot, and the bully of the Remove staggered against the wall.

He recovered himself in a moment, and leaped at Wharton like a tiger.

But before he could come to blows a sharp voice rapped out:

"Stop!"

It was the voice of Mr. Quelch. Bulstrode stopped, scowling, black with fury. The Form-master's stern glance, however, cowed the blusterer of the Remove, in spite of his rage.

"Bulstrode, I heard the words that called forth that blow, and you richly deserved it, and more," said Mr. Quelch. "I am very glad to see that there is a boy in the Lower Fourth who will not allow blackguardly expressions to be used in his presence. You spoke like a cad, Bulstrode. I hope you will reflect upon it, and see it yourself. Go!"

Bulstrode strode away, gritting his teeth, and Mr. Quelch went into his study. Harry Wharton looked red and uncomfortable. The approval of the Form-master was not exactly pleasant to him. It was repugnant to his nature to appear in the light of a "good boy" of a story-book.

"Quelchy's all right," said Bob Cherry. "Go on, Vas—I mean, Hazeldene. Any more news from Miss Marjorie?"

"Yes," said Hazeldene brightly. "She's coming to Cliff House when it opens."

"Hurrah!"

It was an involuntary shout from Bob Cherry, and he executed a war-dance on the spot. Hazeldene stared at him.

"You seem to take a jolly lot of interest in my sister," he said.

Whereupon Bob Cherry turned as red as a beetroot, and ceased his terpsichorean exercise.

"Ye-e-es," he stammered. "Of—of course, it will be jolly to have her a near neighbour, won't it? You see, she's—she's such a ripping girl, you know!"

"Of course she is," said Wharton, "and it will be jolly. We ought to get up some sort of a celebration, I think."

"I—I—I suppose we couldn't stand them a feed," said Bob Cherry doubtfully. "That would be all right if they were a boys' school. Blessed if I know what we could do for a welcome to a girls' school!" He wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. "Could we have a sewing-bee, or something?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I don't suggest it!" said Bob hastily. "But we ought to get up some celebration of some sort, and of course it ought to be something that girls take an interest in."

"Suppose we gave 'em a musical welcome," suggested Nugent, who had joined the discussion. "I suppose they'll come down in a body when the school's opened. We might meet them at the station, and march with them to Cliff House, playing a triumphal march, or something."

"What should we play it on?" asked Harry, laughing.

"Well, I can do the 'Conquering Hero' on the mouth-organ——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I can see you marching in front of a girls' school playing the mouth-organ!"

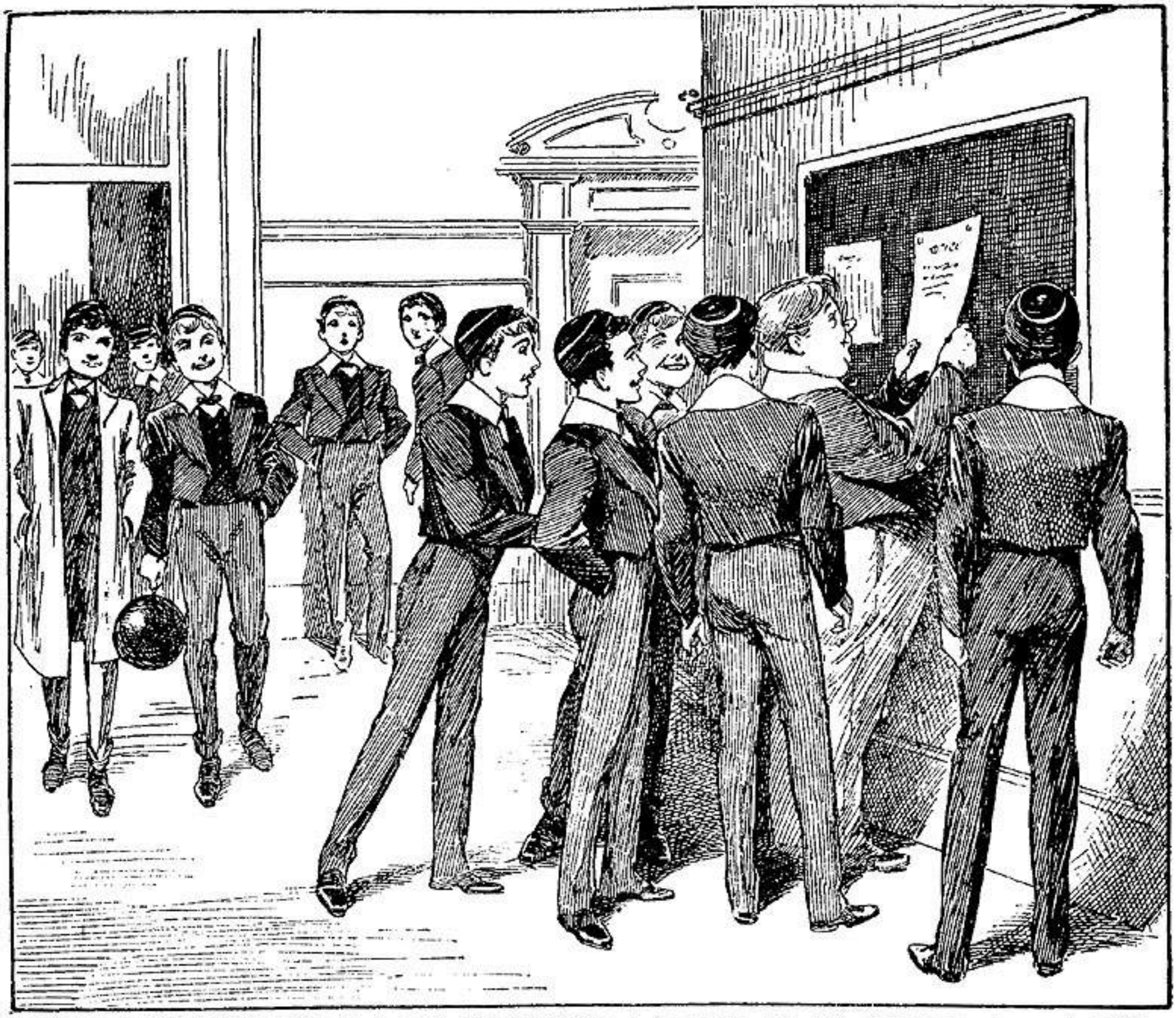
"Of course, you fellows would have to back me up. You could bring your violin, and Bob his tin whistle."

"And Inky could take round the hat," grinned Bob Cherry.

"My worthy self would be pleased to do anything to welcome the charming misses," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I would gladly welcome them in any way, from the shaking of the esteemed hand to the august kissfulness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hazeldene put his letter into his pocket, and walked away with a very bright look on his face. There was a strong bond of affection between him and his sister Marjorie, and the girl's influence had more than anything else to do with Hazeldene's late endeavours to "run straight." He was glad to think that Marjorie would be in future a near neighbour of Greyfriars, and his satisfaction was fully shared by the chums of No. 1 Study.



"'Lessons in ventriloquism, by Professor William George Bunter'! That's good!" grinned Stott. "Where are you giving the lessons, Bunty!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
The Mystery of the Packing Case.

"FRENCH first," said Nugent, as the Removites entered their class-room. "Hallo, Mossoo's not here!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Who says leap-frog?" said Bulstrode. "Can't waste the time waiting here for a beastly alien."

"I say, you fellows, if you like I'll give you some more ventriloquial instruction," said Billy Bunter. "If you like to have single lessons, I'll——"

"Go ahead!" said Skinner.

"All fees payable strictly in advance——"

"Rats!"

"I say, Wharton, don't you think you'd like to study ventriloquism? I'll take you four at reduced fees, as you're friends of mine."

"The reducefulness will require to be great, my worthy chum."

"Well, look here, I'll take you at half-a-crown, payable in advance, of course."

"Not good enough."

"Go ahead with the lesson," said Ogilvy, "I'll take the course on the instalment system—a bob a week for five weeks."

"Very well, Ogilvy, as a special concession to a promising pupil——"

"Very promising," grinned Hazeldene, "if he keeps the promises——"

"Listen to me," said Bunter, taking up Mr. Quelch's pointer, and assuming the manners of a master in charge of a Form.

"Go it, professor."

"On the bawl."

The Removites entered into the joke. The boys took their places on the forms, and Bunter stood before the class, pointer in hand.

Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, was not punctual as a rule, and even if he discovered the Remove in the midst of the joke they did not care much.

Mr. Quelch was a man who would not be trifled with; but Mossoo was a tame little fellow, and his unruly pupils were in the habit of ragging him to their heart's content when he displeased them.

"Now, then," said Bunter, "you put your throat like this—so——"

"So," repeated the class.

"And you make a drone—so——"

Drone.

"No-o, not like an old cow coughing," growled Bunter. "It has to be a drone like a bee, and that prepares the organs for producing the ventriloquial voice."

Drone!

"That's better. Now keep that up till old Charpentier comes in, and——"

A hand fell upon Billy Bunter's shoulder. He whirled round.

"Old Charpentier" had come in in time to hear the disrespectful allusion to himself.

"Ah!" said Monsieur Charpentier. "It is zat you mock

yourself of your master, garcon? Vat is it zat you do viz ze pointer?"

"If—if—if you please, sir——"

"It is zat you give him to me."

Bunter handed the pointer to the French master.

"Zat you hold out your hand, Buntair."

"Oh, really, sir——"

"Zat you hold out your hand," shrieked the little Frenchman.

He was unusually angry, and perhaps the fact that he was dealing with the Owl of the Remove made him additionally determined. If it had been Bulstrode, Mossoo would probably only have told him to go to his place.

"Don't do it, Owl," came a voice from the class.

Mr. Quelch would have had the speaker out in the twinkling of an eye, and thrashed him there and then; but poor Mossoo only pretended not to hear. He was not up to the form of the Remove in a struggle.

Bunter unwillingly held out his hand; but Mossoo only gave him a flick. He was a soft-hearted little man.

But Bunter gave a howl that might have been heard at the end of the passage. He did not like pain.

"Ah! Stop zat noise, Buntair!"

"Ow! I'm hurt!"

"Zat you go to your place."

"Ow-w-w-w-w!"

"And stop zat ridiculous noise viz yourself."

Bunter went to his place.

The little Frenchman opened his books, and jerked the easel and blackboard into place. Then Bulstrode, in a spirit of mischief, started the ventriloquial drone, and the whole Form took it up joyously.

Drone!

Monsieur Charpentier whirled round to the class. The noise ceased at once. The little Frenchman was red and angry.

"Zat you are quiet," he cried.

The class was quite quiet till Mossoo turned his back again. Then the drone burst forth once more. It filled the room with buzzing sound, and the little Frenchman almost jumped with rage.

"Ciel! If zat noise not stop I call in Monsieur Quelch!" he exclaimed.

The threat was enough. Mr. Quelch was busy that afternoon, and if he were bothered with his Form in the French lesson the Remove knew the kind of humour he would be in. The ventriloquial drone ceased as if by magic.

"Little cad!" muttered Bulstrode.

"Oh, rats!" said Trevor. "The poor little beast can't handle us. Let him alone!"

Bulstrode did not reply, but he whispered across to Billy Bunter.

The fat junior nodded and grinned. He had been so successful in the experiment with the mathematics-master that he was encouraged to try the same little game with Mossoo.

"Right you are, Bulstrode!" he murmured.

"There's that box of books in the corner," whispered Bulstrode. "You catch on?"

"He, he, he! Yes, rather!"

"Somevun vas talking," said M. Charpentier. "I vill have silence in my class viz me, you hear?"

The next moment M. Charpentier jumped nearly clear of the floor. A deep groan rumbled through the Form-room.

"Ciel! Vat vas zat?"

The sound was repeated.

All eyes were fixed upon a large packing-case standing in the corner of the room. It was a very large case, addressed to Mr. Quelch. Gosling, the porter, had dumped it down in the Form-room that morning, and from the labels the boys knew that it contained a consignment of books for the Remove.

M. Charpentier stared at the packing-case in blank amazement. So far as he could judge the groan proceeded from the packing-case, and yet he could hardly believe his ears. The packing-case had come down from London by the railway, and had not yet been opened.

The French master stared at the case, and then looked at his class. They were all staring at the packing-case too, with preternaturally solemn faces.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bulstrode, in a stage whisper. "There's somebody shut up in the packing-case!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Skinner. "He must be suffocating!"

"Ciel! It eez impossible!"

"Listen!"

The groan, fainter than before, came from the packing-case.

M. Charpentier ran towards it with an agitated countenance.

"Ciel! Is zere somevun zat is shut up in zis case?" he exclaimed.

There was a faint moan.

"Great goodness! Zere is somevun in ze case!"

"'Elp!"

"Mon Dieu!"

"I—I—I'm suffocating!"

"Merciful heavens! Zis is terrible! Ze unhappy man is dying in ze packing-case! How is it zat he is packed up in ze books? Ciel!"

"'Elp!"

"Helas, pauvre garcon! I vill help you! I vill have you out in ze jiffy!"

And M. Charpentier tore frantically at the packing-case. But it was a strongly-made one, and nailed firmly together, and the little Frenchman had no chance of getting it open.

He gazed around him wildly. The suffocated voice still pleaded for aid.

"'Elp! I'm suffocating! Let me out!

"Ciel! Vat shall I do? 'Eavens!" gasped M. Charpentier. "Skinnair, run to ze portair and borrow ze hammair and ze chisel. Quick!"

"Certainly, sir," said Skinner, springing up, and he dashed out of the Form-room.

He came back in a minute or so, with a hammer in one hand and a chisel in the other.

"Here you are, sir."

"Zank you, Skinnair! Help me viz zis!"

And monsieur hammered away, and Skinner chiselled, and the Remove giggled. They could not help it. The little Frenchman was so terribly in earnest.

But M. Charpentier never noticed the giggles. He was slaving away at the packing-case; but he was unpractised with tools, and Skinner lent him little aid.

"Ciel! Fetch in ze portair, Skinnair!'

"Certainly, Mossoo!"

And Skinner cut off again.

Gosling, the porter, grumbling at the interruption of his work, followed the Removite into the school-house. In the passage they met Mr. Maddox, just coming out of a class-room.

"Dear me, what is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Man dying in the Remove-room, sir," said the veracious Skinner.

"Goodness gracious!"

And Mr. Maddox rushed into the Form-room with Skinner and the school porter.

M. Charpentier was hammering away at the packing-case, and a pleading voice was pitifully begging to be let out.

"'Elp! I'm—I'm suf-suffocating!"

"Goodness gracious! It is evidently an uneducated person, but he must not suffocate!" exclaimed the mathematics-master. "Break open the packing-case, Gosling."

Gosling scratched his head, and stared at the case.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, sir," he said. "I don't understand it. I brought that there packin'-case into this 'ere room myself, and there wasn't nobody in it then."

"You can hear that there is somebody in it now, Gosling."

"It do sound like it, sir, but——"

"'Elp! Let me out!"

"Ciel! Zat you vaste no time!" shrieked the French master. "Ze poor garcon is dying vile zat you talk viz yourself."

"If he's been in there all the time the case was on the railway, he can't be in a hurry," grumbled Gosling, as he set to work.

He wrenched the nailed pieces off the top of the case with a din and clatter that could be heard far and wide.

The two masters watched him anxiously, while the Remove giggled.

Mr. Maddox glanced at them frowningly.

"Utterly heartless young ruffians!" he muttered. "They can laugh while a fellow-creature is expiring before their eyes. Wretched boys, be silent!"

But the Remove could not help it.

"There don't seem to be nobody 'ere," growled Gosling, as he dragged out the packing round the books. "Look 'ere, sir."

M. Charpentier and Mr. Maddox stared into the packing-case in dumbfounded astonishment. It was packed to the brim with books—books—and nothing but books.

Where was the suffocating victim?

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch Comes Down Heavy.

"CIEL! I do not comprehend viz myself!" murmured M. Charpentier. "I hear ze voice of ze person who suffocate, and zen zere is no vun in ze box."

"It is—is amazing!" gasped Mr. Maddox.

"Perhaps he's lower down, sir," suggested Skinner.

"Zere vould not be room under ze books."

As if to give the lie to the French-master, a faint expiring voice was heard.

"'Elp! Let me out!"

M. Charpentier jumped.

"Mon Dieu! He is zere—it must be some ferry small garcon, zen, crushed under zese books! Zat ve clear zem away, zen."

"Quick!" cried Mr. Maddox. "Help here, you boys! Cannot you lend your aid when a fellow-being is suffocating before your eyes!"

"Yes, rather, sir!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

And the Remove rushed to the aid of the rescuers. Many hands made light work. The juniors dragged the books out of the case in double-quick time, hurling them right and left in their hurry.

Books and books, and more books. Right and left they went till the floor was thick with them, and the searchers went deeper into the packing-case.

At length it was plain that it was physically impossible for any human being, however small, to be packed in under the books. But the juniors did not cease their efforts. They dragged out the books, and scattered them far and wide with right goodwill.

"Zat you stop!" gasped M. Charpentier at last. "I—I am amaze! I am astonish! I am bewilder!"

"It—it is certainly inexplicable," murmured Mr. Maddox. "There—there was certainly a—a voice. Hark!"

"'Elp! I'm suffocating!"

"Ciel! He is zere—but zere is not room for him! Is it zat I dream!"

"'Elp!"

"Mon Dieu! It is not zat he is in ze box at all, but undair ze floor," said the French-master. "You see, undair ze floor of ze Form-room! How is it zat he got undair ze floor?"

"It—it is someone in the cellar playing a trick!" gasped Mr. Maddox.

"Ciel! I did not zink of zat."

Mr. Maddox rushed out of the room on vengeance bent, and Gosling grumbled and departed. M. Charpentier wiped his fevered brow. That someone was in the vault below—someone playing a trick under the Form-room floor, was the only explanation that occurred to him. He looked round at the scattered books in dismay, and then at the clock. It was time for Mr. Quelch to take his class. The half-hour that should have been devoted to French was gone.

The Remove did not mind; but the little Frenchman was much distressed. His discomfort increased when Mr. Quelch strode in, and stopped in amazement at sight of the endless litter on the floor.

"What—what does this mean?"

"Excusez-moi!" stammered Mossoo. "Zat you excuse me, M. Quelch? It is zat zere has been a trick played, and I zink zere vas a person in ze packing-case."

Mr. Quelch looked at the French-master keenly. The same suspicion that had crossed his mind before, in connection with the mathematics-master, crossed it now.

But he looked at the grinning Remove, and something else flashed into his mind.

"Very good, Monsieur Charpentier," he said quietly. "I will take the class now."

"I am ferry sorry zat——"

"It is nothing."

And M. Charpentier left the room, looking very bothered and flustered. There was a peculiar gleam in Mr. Quelch's eyes—a gleam that the Remove had learned to know. They waited rather uneasily for him to speak. They had wrecked the cargo of books, but they were perfectly in the right—they were as perfectly in the right as upon the previous occasion. But they felt uneasy.

"You may pick up the books, and pack them in the case again," said Mr. Quelch.

It was done. Then the juniors returned to their seats. Mr. Quelch looked them over, with a grim smile upon his face.

"I understand," he said, "that the French lesson has been missed, owing to this disturbance in the class-room?"

"Yes, sir," said Wharton.

"The mathematics lesson was missed on a previous occasion owing to a somewhat similar cause."

"Yes, sir."

"It is very curious, because you juniors appear not to have been to blame in the slightest on either occasion," pursued Mr. Quelch blandly.

The juniors looked more uneasy than ever. Mr. Quelch was so bland that they knew he saw it all, and was going to make them sorry for themselves.

"Nobody is to blame in the least," went on Mr. Quelch. "Both unfortunate occurrences are inexplicable; but one fact appears to be established—that you are not to blame in any way. It will perhaps appear unjust to you if I punish you when you do not appear to be to blame. But perhaps you know the old proverb which says that appearances are deceptive."

The Remove were silent.

"You have missed the French lesson," said Mr. Quelch. "You will kindly come into the Form-room after tea, and remain here for two hours, during which time Monsieur Charpentier will instruct you in that beautiful language. I shall personally request Monsieur Charpentier to devote two hours to you this evening, so that your pursuit of knowledge will not suffer, but rather benefit, by these unfortunate and inexplicable occurrences."

The Remove simply glared.

"And now we will proceed," said Mr. Quelch, with the same dangerous blandness.

Bulstrode stood up in his place.

"If you please, sir——"

"Have you anything to say, Bulstrode?"

"Yes, sir," said Bulstrode sulkily. "It's not fair, sir, to punish us for—for helping Mossoo to clear out a packing-case when he asked us to."

"Certainly not, Bulstrode. I am not going to punish you. I am simply going to take measures to insure that your studies are not interfered with by these accidents. If you do two hours extra French this evening, I have an idea that there will be no more of these curious and inexplicable happenings in the Form-room."

"But, sir, there—there is no connection——"

"Of course not. But if anything of the kind happens again I shall keep the whole Form in for a half-holiday under Mr. Maddox."

Bulstrode sat down. There was no arguing with Mr. Quelch. The prospect of a whole half-holiday at mathematics under the ill-tempered Mr. Maddox was enough to scare the boldest of the Remove. Fellows were already whispering to Bunter that if he dared ventriloquise in the Form-room again they would skin him alive.

"Rank injustice, of course," grinned Bob Cherry, as the Remove came out after lessons. "But he gets there all the same. The Quelch-bird is a cute beast."

And his chums ruefully agreed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

M. Charpentier is Not Happy.

THE Remove came out from their lessons in a decidedly bad temper.

French was not popular as a study, but, as Skinner said, they could stand it in the regular doses. But to have two extra hours of French was unspeakable. And the fellows had plenty of things to do after tea, too.

Some of them had impositions to do, others had planned to sprint for exercise, some wanted to go to the gym, and others to a meeting of the Operatic and Dramatic Society. But Mr. Quelch's word was law.

They were doomed to turn up in the Form-room at half-past six, and continue there till half-past eight—a prospect that was dismaying to the stoutest heart.

"It's—it's unspeakable," said Nugent wrathfully. "Why, we sha'n't have time to do our own prep. unless we give up every minute between half-past eight and bedtime, or do some of it before tea."

"The unspeakableness is terrific."

"Of course, it's all Bunter's fault!" said Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner——"

"Of course it is," said Bulstrode. "Bunter ought to go to Mr. Quelch, and own up, and get the Form off."

"Why, it was you suggested to me——"

"Oh, don't jaw!"

"Bunter needn't do that," said Harry Wharton. "It wouldn't do any good. As a matter of fact, we've called the tune, and we've got to pay the piper."

"It's rotten injustice!"

"Stuff! Quelch knew very well that it was a rag. He's got no proof, but he knows it, and we know it."

"Of course, you back up Quelch," sneered Bulstrode. "You make it a point to jib against the Form every time."

"Nothing of the sort; but there's precious little good in jibbing against Quelch over this," said Wharton, shrugging his shoulders. "We're in for it, and we've got to go through it."

"Faith, and what price the Operatic Society, darling?"

"It will have to stand over."

"Oh, hang it," said Trevor, "I'm not going to stand it! Can't some of you suggest some way out of it? You call yourself captain of the Form, Wharton!"

Wharton flushed. It was not "all lavender" to be captain of the Remove. The Form captain was expected to effect all sorts of possible and impossible things.

"Jolly ripping captain," sneered Bulstrode. "Of course he can't think of anything, except to tell us that we're naughty little boys, and jolly well deserve all we get. Perhaps we do, but that's no reason why we should put up with it."

"Faith, and it's right ye are."

"Look here," said Wharton hotly. "what's the good of grousing? I suppose we know we ran a risk when we ragged the master? You yourself put Bunter up to his tricks this afternoon. If you've got any suggestion to make, I'm willing to follow your lead. But you know as well as I do there's no bucking against a man like Quelch."

"But we're not dealing with Quelch. Mossoo's the detention master."

"Faith, and why shouldn't we rag Mossoo, and make him glad to let us off intirely?" exclaimed Micky Desmond.

There was a shout of approval at once. The idea caught on.

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Bulstrode immediately. "Of course, we can't expect Wharton to think of anything as good as that. I second the motion."

"And I third it!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "Anything's better than sitting down in the Form-room like a lot of silly sheep."

Wharton frowned a little. Bulstrode was watching him, and he burst out at once.

"Oh, of course, Wharton's up against it."

"I don't like the idea of ragging Mossoo," confessed Wharton. "He's such a poor little worm, and he isn't up to our Form."

"Didn't I tell you so! He's against it, of course."

"Oh, shut up! I'm willing to join in if the majority decide for it. I only said I didn't care for the idea."

"Faith, and it's an illigant idea intirely."

"I should say it is," exclaimed Bulstrode emphatically. "I happen to know that Quelch is going out this evening, and we'd never have a better chance. We'll rag Froggy till he doesn't know whether he's on his head or his heels, and he'll be glad to dismiss us before the two hours are up."

"The goodness of the worthy wheeze is terrific."

The Remove were keen on the scheme at once. There was a very great probability of success, though Wharton could not help foreseeing that there might be trouble with the Form-master to follow.

But, like many lads in similar positions, Harry allowed himself to be led into recklessness rather than appear to hang back where others ventured.

The juniors discussed the scheme gleefully, and all kinds of preparations were made for the intended rag.

Some of the fellows put tin whistles in their pockets, and some of them had fireworks of various descriptions. The chums of No. 1 Study entered into the spirit of it, though it was against Wharton's better judgment. But there could be no doubt that there would be fun in it.

There were excited whisperings and mutterings during tea in Hall, and after tea the Remove prepared to go to the Form-room to take their detention.

They were in a state of suppressed excitement, which would have warned any master but M. Charpentier that something was on the tapis.

But the little Frenchman was unsuspicious.

He only wanted to get on good terms with his class, and have a quiet time in the Form-room, and he was willing to put up with anything, almost, for that purpose.

Just as the juniors were going into the Form-room, Bulstrode caught sight of Mr. Quelch with his coat and hat on in the hall.

The Remove bully had had a doubt that the Form-master might change his mind about going out, under the circumstances; but it was evident that Mr. Quelch had not done so.

The juniors heard the door close behind him, and grinned gleefully. The "rag" could proceed now without danger of interruption.

Mossoo was too weak to deal with them; Mr. Quelch was gone, and it was hardly likely that the French-master would venture to disturb the Head in the bosom of his family in the evening.

Everything, in fact, was going swimmingly for the raggers, and the polite and ingratiating smile with which M. Charpentier received them did not soften the hearts of the Remove.

In fact, it encouraged them, for the little Frenchman's manner was a sufficient indication of the uneasiness he felt.

The juniors took their places at the desks with exemplary quietness, and M. Charpentier's hopes rose.

His smile widened, and he spoke in his most amiable tones, as he stood before the class, his thin figure tightly buttoned in a somewhat threadbare frockcoat. Mossoo was not a rich man, and he did not dress so well as the other masters; a fact that occasioned a great deal of amusement to some of the worse-natured boys in the Remove.

"Ah! I am sorry for zis detention," said M. Charpentier, "but if ve have our leetle shoke, ve pays for our leetle shoke, eh? I tink ve takes ze first shapter of Madame Stael's Considerations——"

He looked at his books. The moment his eyes were off the class, Bulstrode started the ventriloquial drone.

In a second the whole Form was buzzing.

M. Charpentier looked up quickly. But the buzz did not cease. The juniors droned on under the very eyes of the master.

The Frenchman looked helpless for a moment. He realised now that the Remove meant mischief, and that their quiet behaviour hitherto was a delusion and a snare.

"Garcons! Mes garcons!"

Buz-z-z-z-z-zzz-z-z!

"Silence!" shouted M. Charpentier. "Zat you keep silent viz yourselves!"

Buz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z!

The little Frenchman looked inclined to tear his hair. Instead of that, however, he clutched up a pointer.

"Ze next boy zat buz-z-z I will giff him ze pointer," he shrieked.

The buzzing ceased.

"Helas! Vy is it zat you vill not keep ordair," said M. Charpentier plaintively. "Zis extra lesson is not pleasure to me, mes garcons, any more zan it is to you."

"Then why don't you let us go?"

"It is by your Form-master's ordair zat you are detained, Bulstrode."

"It's not fair."

"You may discuss that viz M. Quelch. Now you vill attend to lesson, or I shall giff you ze caning!"

Bulstrode was not likely to discuss it with Mr. Quelch. He would probably have discussed it just as willingly with a lion in a cage. But he had no fears of the little Frenchman.

Monsieur opened his book, and they started. But never were Madame de Stael's valuable Considerations upon the French Revolution received with less respect.

The sudden blast of a whistle was heard, and the whole class burst into a roar of laughter.

M. Charpentier threw his book down upon a desk.

"Ciel! Who blew zat chistle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Zat you cease for to laff! You hear?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

M. Charpentier tore his hair and glared. Then he grasped the pointer again and came among the boys. He rapped knuckles to right and left, and the howls of laughter were changed into howls of pain.

"Ow! Groo! Hold on! Ow! Oh!"

M. Charpentier panted.

"I not like to punish you," he gasped. "But you drives me to him. I zink zat now ve shall perhaps have a leetle more quiet."

But Mossoo's hope was ill-founded.

Another whistle rang out, from a different quarter, and when M. Charpentier rushed off in search of the delinquent, a mouth-organ brayed out behind him.

He whirled round, just in time to see Bulstrode jamming a mouth-organ back into his pocket. Rather unexpectedly he grasped the Remove bully by the collar and yanked him out before the class.

"Mon Dieu! It vas you, you pad garcon."

"Lemme go!"

"Hold out your hand."

"Don't do it, Bulstrode," shouted a dozen voices.

"Zat you obey me, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode put his hands into his pockets. The little Frenchman danced with rage. There was no hand forthcoming, and he suddenly seized Bulstrode by the collar and began to thrash him with the pointer.

Bulstrode roared with pain, and the Form with laughter. The Removite was a burly fellow, quite as big as the French master and much heavier and stronger. He jerked at his collar, and as M. Charpentier refused to let go, the Frenchman was jerked about the floor.

The sight of the burly Removite jerking away, and the little Frenchman clutching him and hopping after him, was inexpressibly ridiculous, and the Form simply shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Go it, Bulstrode!"

"Go it, Froggy!"

M. Charpentier was tired before Bulstrode was. He let the burly junior go, and Bulstrode, grinning, went back to his seat. He was not much hurt, and the French master was panting and exhausted.

"Ah! You vas determine to give mischief zis evening," he panted. "I zink zat I keep you in ordair, you vicked poys. Ve vill now resume——"

"Cock-a-doodle-do!"

"Ciel! Which garcon make zat ridiculous noise?"

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Zat you stop for to laff. I repeat zat I vill have ze vork done, or I vill know ze reason vy. Stop zat noise."

The fellows at the back of the class were stamping their feet on the floor, and in the din it was quite impossible for the lesson to proceed.

The little Frenchman rushed round to the back row, pointer in hand, but the noise ceased before he reached the spot.

Then the fellows in another quarter started, and poor Mossoo rushed back again, red with rage and bewilderment.

His utter helplessness to deal with his rebellious class encouraged the juniors, and matters naturally went from bad to worse. From threats and expostulations the little Frenchman proceeded to entreaties, but such a confession of weakness was all the Remove wanted to make them throw off all restraint.

They stamped, they shouted, and they cat-called, and the din was growing, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh truly said, terrific.

M. Charpentier gave it up.

He stood looking worn out and bewildered, not knowing what in the least to do with his unruly class.

"Garcons! I appeal to you—I——"

"Oh, hang it," exclaimed Harry Wharton, "this has gone far enough!" He sprang to his feet: "Stop that row!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Drops the Professor.

WHARTON'S voice rang above the din in the Form-room. Some of the fellows stared at him, and calmly went on cat-calling and stamping.

Some of the more timid ones left off. Wharton's eyes were flashing, and he was in a mood that was not to be trifled with.

"Will you stop that row?"

"No, we won't!" said Bulstrode. "If you're showing the white feather, that's no reason why we should. Mind your own business."

"I speak as captain of the Form. This has gone far enough."

"Ciel! Zat is ferry true," said M. Charpentier. "I appeal to you, mes garcons, zat you be quiet."

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

Bulstrode restarted the stamping with extra vigour. Harry Wharton wasted no more breath in words. He seized the Remove bully by the collar, and dragged him out bodily from his seat, before the class.

Bulstrode roared and struggled. With a twist of his arm Wharton sent him rolling on the floor.

The Remove ceased their disturbance in sheer astonishment.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's been enough ragging! Stow it!"

Bulstrode sprang to his feet.

Careless of the presence of the helpless, bewildered French-master, he charged at Wharton like a mad bull.

Harry was ready for him.

He met the bully of the Remove with a right-hander that stopped his furious rush, and followed it up with his left, that laid him on his back with a bump that seemed to shake the floor.

Bulstrode lay for some seconds, dazed. Then he jumped up again, and again rushed in. This time he closed with Harry, and the two reeled about in a savage grapple.

"Let go!"

"Chuck it!"

A dozen juniors crowded round to interfere. Some dragged at Wharton and some at Bulstrode. It was not surprising that some were soon punching on their own account.

Nugent closed with Skinner, and Bob Cherry was quickly sparring away with Trevor. Micky Desmond, too highly excited to know or care with whom he was fighting, was pommelling away at everybody within reach of his fists.

M. Charpentier hopped and shrieked in his excitement.

There were a dozen or more juniors fighting now, fellows taking sides according to their humour, and those who were not fighting were shouting or stamping.

Harry's attempt to restore order had, unfortunately, the directly opposite result, and only made confusion worse confounded.

"Ciel! Vat is it zat I sall do!" muttered the unlucky little Frenchman. "Ah, zat I had nevair taken zis detention class! Mon Dieu! Vat is it zat I sall do?"

The question was abruptly decided for him. A rush of the combatants overwhelmed him, and he went down in the midst of a struggling mass of juniors.

"Helas! Help! A moi! Save me! I am crush! I am keel!"

The door of the Form-room opened.

Wingate of the Sixth looked in. The din had penetrated to his study, and he had come along with righteous wrath in his countenance and a cricket-stump in his hand.

The Sixth-Former was accustomed to many outbreaks on the part of the most unruly Form at Greyfriars, but he had hardly expected to see the Form-room made the battle-ground of rival factions, with the detention master sprawling and screaming under the fighting juniors.

For a moment or two he stood and stared, hardly able to believe his eyes.

Then, without wasting time in words, he waded in with the cricket stump.

The yells of the combatants had been loud, but as nothing to what they now became, when Wingate got fairly to work with the stump.

The captain of Greyfriars laid on with the stump as if he were hammering nails, and the juniors received the lashes across their legs and backs, and yelled in dead earnest.

The factions separated in a wonderfully short space of time, the juniors rushing to and fro to escape the lashes; but Wingate was not satisfied yet. With great impartiality, he thrashed every junior he could get within reach of, and the unfortunate Removites made a desperate break for the door.

In a few minutes the Form-room was empty. Then Wingate, a little breathless from his exertions, gave a helping hand to M. Charpentier, who was still sitting on the floor, looking dazed.

"All right, I hope?" said the senior cheerfully.

M. Charpentier rubbed his head as if to make sure that it was still upon his shoulders.

"Ye-e-es, I zink so," he murmured. "I zink zat I was keel at first. I am ferry much disturb——"

"No wonder! I'll report the young rascals to Mr. Quelch."

"Non, non! Some of zem vas trying to keep ordair—Vharton and some ozzers. I not vish zem to be punish for trying to keep ordair."

Wingate laughed.

"A jolly way of keeping order! But still, it would be rough, if they meant well. You don't know which were which, I suppose?"

"I zink not—I zink zat I punish none of zem," said M. Charpentier. "I zink, too, zat I dismiss ze class now."

The class had dismissed itself. Wingate grinned, and left the Form-room. Some of the juniors were in the passage, and they scuttled off at the sight of the captain of Greyfriars with the cricket-stump in his hand.

A crowd of breathless juniors gathered in the safety of the Remove passage. Bob Cherry flung himself upon the easy-chair in No. 1 Study, and roared. He had received several whacks, but he never bore malice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton laughed, too. After all, the detention had been escaped; and that was something. But most of the Removites were sore and furious. Billy Bunter, who had been careful to keep out of the way of hard blows, came along the passage, blinking at the suffering juniors.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Ow! I got one on my funny bone!" groaned Skinner.

"The beast's nearly busted my back!" grunted Bulstrode.

"I sha'n't be able to sit down for a week," said Trevor plaintively.

"Faith, and it's aching all over, I am."

"I say, you fellows, if you'd like another ventriloquial lesson now, I can spare the time," said Billy Bunter, blinking round. "I have decided, if I can get a large class of pupils, to reduce the fees. I can do single lessons now at threepence a time, all fees payable strictly in advance."

"You—you fat young rotter!" grunted Skinner, rubbing his tingling funny bone. "It's all your fault from beginning to end."

"Oh, really, Skinner——"

"Of course it is!" said Hazeldene, rubbing a black eye that was growing more prominent every moment. "If you hadn't started your silly ventriloquial wheeze, and ventriloquised the masters, we should never have been detained."

"Oh, really, Vaseline——"

"It's all Bunter's fault!" shouted Bulstrode, glad of a victim to wreak his wrath upon. "Collar the fat young rotter!"

"Oh, really—ow!—I'm sincerely sorry—ow!—ow!"

Bunter dashed off, running the gauntlet, with the juniors dashing after him. He tore into No. 1 Study, collided with the table, and rolled on the floor, with a heap of books and papers and an inkpot rolling over him.

"Ow! Keep them off!"

But the pursuers had stopped at the door. Billy Bunter sat up with his face streaming with ink, and groped for his spectacles, and adjusted them on his little fat nose, and blinked indignantly at the grinning chums of the Remove.

"That's what comes of trying to teach fellows things," he grunted. "I'm going to give up teaching them ventriloquism, and stick to home-work to make a little extra money. I shall shortly be making three pounds a week, so I sha'n't miss their rotten fees. Blessed if I can see what you fellows are cackling at!"

THE END.

GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.

READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father, 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. Dominic Dashwood's death occurs just as the 25th are sailing for India. On their arrival there, Leonard joins the Ploughshires. A frontier war breaks out, and the 25th receive orders to mobilise for the front. A trooper named Sligo is bribed by Dashwood to drug Tom Howard one night while the young corporal is on picket duty. Tom falls asleep at his post and is told that in due time he will be court-martialled. One day Sligo has a letter from his wife, describing how, while cleaning out a certain set of offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, she discovered a dusty document under a safe, relating to Tom Howard's affairs, and that Sergeant Hogan, a former servant of Colonel Dashwood's, with whom Mrs. Sligo was acquainted, had joyfully affirmed that it established Jack Dashwood's claim to the Colonel's estates. This letter Sligo maliciously shows to Leonard Dashwood, who manages to destroy it, together with one from Sergeant Hogan to Tom Howard, who has been promoted to sergeant. An I O U for £95, which Dashwood had given to Sligo as hush-money, falls into Colonel Greville's hands.

A general advance is now ordered, and the column moves into the difficult Mahmund country. Sir Ponsonby Smithers, with three squadrons of the 25th Hussars and four companies of the Ploughshires, while pursuing Ali Khan with a small band of tribesmen, is surprised in the rear by the Mullah himself with a large force, and obliged to fall back along an ancient Buddhist causeway. Round the camp-fire that night Sir Ponsonby relates how he and Sir Harry Dashwood, in the days of the Mutiny, cut their way through to the relief of the garrison of Tung, only to find their ammunition exhausted. Dashwood crept out from the fort, saying: "If you don't have plenty of ball-cartridge in half-an-hour, it will be because I am dead!"

(Now go on with the story.)

A Strange Interruption.

"In vain did we others try to dissuade him," continued Sir Ponsonby Smithers. "When Harry Dashwood had set his mind on anything, it was impossible to turn him; and then things happened just as he had prophesied. About an hour before dawn, we made a noose at the end of the rope, and, slipping his arm through, dangled him down on to the scrub at the edge of the nullah below.

"From bush to bush he crept, gaining the shelter of the compound wall; and with our hearts in our mouths, we saw him run across a strip of open, and gain the cantonment unobserved. They had taken our horses and tied them up to the verandah on which the arms were piled with the filled cartouche boxes hanging upon them. And in an agony of suspense, we waited, the moon sinking slowly towards the jungle top

"'He'll wait until she's gone!' I remember Paddy O'Brien saying, pointing to the silver disc. But all at once the report of an Enfield rifle rang out from the verandah, followed by the clap of a revolver, and the next moment, as the mutineers came rushing from the village, and the guard at the pagah gate ran yelling towards the cantonment, we saw a figure suddenly emerge from the verandah, lying low on his horse's neck, and leading a spare mount.

"Galloping over the moonlit compound, Dashwood and his led horse took the wall flying, and disappeared into the strip of jungle on the other side."

A low murmur of admiration broke from the officers round the camp fire, and the listening sergeant could hear his own heart thumping inside his chest.

"Ay," said the general, smiling, his eyes gazing at the firelight, with a far-away look, "you should have heard us cheer, up on the top of that confounded fortification! It meant life or death to us, for if the mutineers should attack us, we had only half a dozen cartridges left, and the result was a foregone conclusion. There was one civil servant, named Paget, who had his wife and two little golden-haired daughters in the tower with us. And I remember the look in that man's face, and I knew what he intended to do if the mutineers should break in.

"The morning came, and the long day of intolerable thirst, for the water that remained was, of course, left for the ladies and the little ones, and we men just sucked pebbles, and roamed round the fort like caged lions hoping against hope.

"About an hour before sunset Paddy O'Brien gave an Irish howl, and almost flung himself over the parapet in his excitement.

"'He's dunnut, he's dunnut!' he shouted.

"And there, sure enough, their swords flashing in the sunset, and their white helmets very conspicuous amid the faded green of the jungle, came the old twenty-fifth, with their colonel at the head of them, and Harry Dashwood showing them the way.

"By Jove"—and Sir Ponsonby Smithers's voice grew husky at the recollection—"I never saw such a sight in my life! It's a fact, gentlemen, for I saw it with my own eyes, that Dashwood alone, after all he had gone through—our seventy miles with the Bangalore sowars, and the one hundred and twenty he had covered that day, came up as fresh as paint, and cut down fourteen of the scoundrels with his own hand."

"Fifteen, sir!" cried a voice out of the darkness. "You have forgotten the big havildar he pitched down the well!"

Every head turned and looked in the direction of the speaker, and Sir Ponsonby's grey eyebrows lifted with astonishment.

Tom Howard was sitting bolt upright just behind the circle of officers, looking terribly ashamed of himself.

"You're quite right, sergeant," said Sir Ponsonby. "I had forgotten the havildar. But how on earth do you come to know?"

"Sir Harry Dashwood told me, sir," said Tom, getting to his feet, saluting, and wishing the ground would open below him; and to the surprise of the whole circle, the general rose also, and, making one stride in the firelight, held out both hands.

"My dear lad," he cried, "now I know where I have seen you before. You are little Jack Dashwood—Sir John, I should say. No wonder you know the story, when the golden-haired child that clung trembling to my neck was destined in after years to become your own mother!"

"A worthy son of a gallant father," said Colonel Greville. "There's no doubt about it, general, we breed some very fine men in the 25th! You can't say I've not kept your secret, my lad; but you have let the cat out of the bag now yourself!"

What Tom Howard might have said—if, indeed, he would have said anything in his confusion—was lost to posterity, for across the hills which surrounded that bivouac, there came the sound of firing, and every man sprang to his feet.

How Our Friends Found the 2nd Brigade in a Tight Corner.

The little force under Sir Ponsonby Smithers' command stood to arms and listened anxiously. The crash and rumble, that echoed among the hills, was firing, too, and everyone, from the general to the youngest bugler, was nonplussed. They had lost count of the distance that they had traversed from the Cave of the Winds to the spot where they bivouacked, and they did not know that they had been approaching the 2nd Brigade of the Malakand Field Force, under the command of Brigadier-General Jefferies, C.B.

The enemy, who had hung upon their rear so persistently, had vanished altogether; in reality, the Mullah, finding Sir Ponsonby's rearguard so decidedly on the alert, had crept away with his followers by a goat-track through the hills, intending to fall unexpectedly upon his front with the first streak of dawn. But a great surprise awaited that rebellious follower of Mahomet, for, as they clambered down a ravine that opened on to the Nawagai Valley, they became aware that a British force was encamped at the foot of the Rambat Pass, and the Mullah, reconnoitring their position in the bright moonlight, determined to take advantage of this opportunity.

General Jefferies, who had intended to climb the Rambat Pass at daylight, had sent the Buffs to hold it, and had encamped with his own force on the plain below, not, perhaps, in the best position, but one that was justified, as they expected no attack.

Looking down from the dark recesses of the hills, the Mullah and his men saw the Service camp spread out before them—the men in a square, with tents and baggage-animals in the centre, and a low parapet hastily thrown up, surrounding the camp. Fires burned brightly along the parapet, where laid the rifles of the infantry, their bayonets glittering in the moonlight; and beyond the wall, at intervals of twenty-five yards, a line of sentries stood watching, motionless.

Suddenly, when the officers had just finished dinner, the silence was broken by three rifle-shots close to the square occupied by the Infantry of the Guides. The shots were a signal, and were immediately followed by very heavy firing. This was the sound that alarmed our friends at Sir Ponsonby's bivouac, and for hours it was destined to continue, as a very heavy attack was made by the enemy.

About ten o'clock one of the enemy's buglers sounded the "Retire," and the firing died down to a few sniping shots, the affair seemingly finished.

The order was now given to strike the tents, and a rampart of grain-bags and biscuit-boxes was made. The air was alive with bullets, and it was dangerous work sending messages to the firing-line. Captain Tomkins, of the Dogras, fell, shot through the heart, and a few minutes later Lieutenant Bailey, the adjutant, was also killed. Lieutenant Harrington, while trying to get his comrades to the improvised hospital, was shot in the back of the head, and eventually died; and for a long time the position was very critical, the enemy's attack being determined, and their fire well-sustained.

Meanwhile, Sir Ponsonby Smithers had ordered his gallant little band to march with all speed in the direction of the shots, and, as the faint dawn broke, he came in sight of the scene of action at the moment when the enemy, not wishing to be caught by daylight, were removing their dead and wounded, and sneaking away as silently as they had come.

"It must be Jefferies," said Sir Ponsonby. "In which case we have come a long way out of our route."

"I see something like a movement among his cavalry, sir," said Colonel Greville. "Those Lancer fellows are coming out of the square. Will you let me take my squadrons down, and join in the pursuit?"

"By all means!" said the general.

And the colonel instantly gave the word to trot, although there still remained a long stretch of mountainside to negotiate.

The Hussars gave a loud cheer as they got under way—a cheer which found an echo from the men of the 2nd Brigade. And as Captain Cole, with a party of the 11th Bengal Lancers, wheeled out of the camp, the head of the Hussar Squadrons joined him, and together they scampered over the plain, where the enemy could be seen making off with all speed. Neck and neck they raced, the dark-skinned sowars and the eager Hussars, and the Mullah found that he had lingered a little too long, as the bright swords flashed among his flying followers.

The grey dawn was growing brighter every moment, and the pursuing cavalry scattered with loud hurrahs over the valley—now leaping down into a nullah and sabreing half a dozen Mahmunds who had taken shelter there; now chasing some bold chief who had stood at bay round and round a boulder, and generally putting fear into the hearts of the rebels. The Bengal Lancers alone killed twenty-one before the bugle sounded the "Recall," and Jim Clavering had just reined his mare in, and was returning when, above a pile of rocks, he saw a turbaned head which bobbed down suddenly.

Jim reined in, and countermarched round the boulders, and, reaching the other side, saw the whisk of a red sash disappearing. The sergeant pulled his mare round, and, retracing his steps, came full upon Ackbar, who had thought to get away unseen.

The lust of slaughter which had been in Ackbar's eyes when he had led his men up the eastern slope of the Cave of the Winds, had given place to a look of terror, and now, in the early morning light, there suddenly loomed upon him a brown-moustached, good-looking sergeant, well-mounted, with a sabre in his hand that already bore signs of having been well-used.

Ackbar threw his shield well forward, and crouched down, and Jim Clavering, shortening his reins, rode warily at him at a foot-pace, just as at the tournament you may see the mounted man circling round his antagonist on foot. But now the weapons were sharp, and there were no judges to mark the hits on the leather jackets.

Far away to the left the Lancers were streaming back towards the camp, and the Hussars were forming up some distance away. Clavering was alone, and was beginning to regret that he had not charged down on the man, for Ackbar, mistaking the wary circle for hesitation, found his own courage restored, and suddenly sprang upon the sergeant with a bound like a mountain-cat.

Clavering parried the blow with his sword, but the weapon snapped off short an inch or two from the hilt, and Ackbar, whose own weapon had flown from his grasp, tossed his shield away, and sprang upon the mare, pinning Clavering's arms to his sides with a grip of steel. In vain did the sergeant struggle to try and seize his adversary. Ackbar held on, and the mare, startled, as well she might be, began to plunge.

"She'll bolt in a minute!" thought Clavering, conscious that the Mahmund's right arm was loosening its hold, preparatory to drawing the keen knife that lay in the folds of the red sash. "If he gets at his pigsticker, I'm done!" thought the sergeant. And, throwing himself suddenly backwards, he bore on his near side rein, bringing the mare's head round in the direction of the boulders, and, ramming in his spurs, he set her at the rocks with a squeal of surprise and pain.

It was a desperate alternative; but there was nothing else for it. The mare made a wild leap at the black boulder, lost her footing, as was only to be expected, and, rearing up, fell back on the two men. Clavering drew his feet from the stirrups, and the two rolled over and over, clear of the saddle, the mare picking herself up and bolting straight back for the camp.

Ackbar's hand went like lightning to the hilt of his knife. But Jim Clavering was too quick for him, and before the murderous weapon could fly from its sheath he had seized his wrist, snapped his forearm, and got a grip of the lean, muscular throat, and when he let go—which was not until after much writhing on the part of the chief—Ackbar lay still enough, with his head twisted to one side.

Jim Clavering rose panting to his feet.

"It's not altogether cricket," he said, "but it was his life or mine!"

And, picking up the Mahmund's sword as a memento of his escape, he ran towards the mustering squadrons as half a dozen men were coming out searching for him.

Exit Alf Sligo!

As soon as the sun was up, the Buffs in the Rambat Pass heliographed to Sir Bindon Blood that General Jefferies had sustained a night attack, and that several officers had been killed. A little later an officer and ten sowars of the Bengal Lancers galloped in with further intelligence, and Sir Bindon Blood sent them back with an order to Jefferies to leave the Rambat Pass alone for the time being, and to enter the Mahmund Valley and give the tribesmen a severe lesson.

This information found the 2nd Brigade in the entrenched camp at Inayat Kila, or Fort Grant, where they had built a barricade more than three feet high. It was then afternoon, and at sunset the Buffs came down the pass, raging at the fact that they had been out of the scrimmage.

As the night came on a sniping fire began again, but beyond that no attack was made, and presently the weary men, who had had no rest the previous night, lay down in their shelters and fell asleep.

The morning of September 16th dawned, and the brigadier-general marched out of his camp and entered the Mahmund Valley. Every village in their vicinity was to be burned or blown up, and it was hoped that on the 17th the

brigade would be able to reach Nawagai, and assist in the attack which was to be made on the Bedmani Pass, which Sir Bindon Blood had arranged for the 18th.

As events proved, however, there was to be some very hard fighting, although the country seemed to be deserted, and there was a rumour that the tribesmen were demoralised, and would not stand.

The bugles went at half-past five, and half an hour later the brigade was under way. It was divided into three columns. The right, formed of the 28th Dogras and some native sappers, was to attack the village of Domodolah. The left column, under Major Campbell, which had five companies of the Guides and some more sappers, was to march against a cluster of villages at the western end of the valley. The centre column, under Colonel Goldney, was by far the strongest. Six companies of the Buffs, six companies of the 35th Sikhs, half a company of sappers, four guns of No. 8 Mounted Battery, and a squadron of the 11th Bengal Lancers made up its numbers, and these were reinforced by Sir Ponsonby Smithers, with his Hussars and the companies of the Ploughshires.

They had the longest march before them, and their objective was the two villages of Badelai and Shahi-Tungi. The guns and some infantry companies were in the camp, and the total force employed in the subsequent action was only about a thousand men, not counting Sir Ponsonby Smithers' detachment.

The 5th Hussars and the 11th Bengal Lancers cantered away up the valley, until someone cried out that the enemy were in sight on a conical hill. Out came the glasses, and on the little terrace that seamed the hillside a strong force of tribesmen, some in blue and some in white garments, were seen squatting like hares, with the sunlight glittering on their weapons.

Word was sent back to Colonel Goldney, and the infantry stepped out, all eager to engage.

The mountain became alive with tiny puffs of white smoke, for we had succeeded in drawing their fire, and for about an hour—with very slight loss on either side, as a matter of fact—the firing continued.

Through the clouds of dust behind us the infantry now came up, the gallant Buffs marching upon the village of Badelai, while the 35th Sikhs swung along towards a ridge, beyond the corner of which was the village of Shahi-Tungi. As the infantry columns straggled across their front, fatigued with their forced march, the Bengal Lancers and the Hussars got the order to mount, and went off to reconnoitre the enemy to the north-west.

The Bengal Lancers had in the meantime come back with the information that the enemy was in great numbers at the north-west end of the valley, and the brigadier sent a galloper to Major Campbell with orders to come up at once.

After a dusty march of five miles, the left column got into touch with the enemy, and there was some heavy firing, the Buffs being brought back from Badelai.

A very determined attempt was now made by the enemy, and as we had no supports within a mile, and they threatened our line of retreat, we were ordered to retire; and no sooner had this movement commenced than the tribesmen came springing from terrace to terrace in apparently overwhelming numbers, taking cover as they came.

Little bands of twos and threes could be seen running from boulder to boulder, firing and coming on again, and a great number of them were soon gathered behind the shelter of the rocks little more than a hundred yards away from us.

The ground was very difficult, and at the place where the Sikhs were retiring it consisted of three rocky knolls, rising in a series of steps, the farthest one commanding the second, and the second the first.

Between the knolls lay stretches of open ground, and the Sikhs, commencing their retirement, reached the second knoll in safety, only losing a couple of men, who were brought along with the rest.

No sooner had they taken cover on the centre knoll than the alert enemy climbed on to the highest one, and opened a heavy fire on the spot where Lieutenant Cassells and eight men were covering the retirement of the others, the main body having crossed the first open space in safety. They called back to the lieutenant, and he gave the word to retire to his men.

It was at that moment that the adjutant, Lieutenant Hughes, was shot dead, and several men toppled over. Lieutenant-Colonel Bradshaw ordered a couple of sepoys to carry the bodies away, and as they commenced to do so, a mob of the enemy came bounding over the top of the hill, brandishing their swords and whirling great stones down upon the wounded.

It was touch and go, and if the Mahmunds had pressed their charge, there would have been great slaughter in our ranks; but they held back, and we retired step by step. We made half a dozen attempts to stand, but the enemy, thanks to the nature of the ground, had complete advantage, and it was not until we had reached the bottom of the spur that the remnants of the two companies turned and faced them with their bayonets fixed.

It seemed even then as if nothing could prevent a complete annihilation of the Sikh companies, for Ali Khan and his followers, in great numbers, came rushing down until they were within thirty yards of us, when their courage evaporated, and they contented themselves with yelling like mad, and firing their rifles and brandishing their swords.

The Cavalry were a long distance off, retiring in squadrons, and the Buffs were a mile away. The Sikhs stood at bay, the colonel himself reformed them, and then all at once the bugler sounded the "Charge!" repeating it a dozen times at least, and everybody seemed to suddenly go mad, the officers waving their swords in the good old-fashioned way, and the whole party shouting itself hoarse.

. . . . . .

While the Sikhs were struggling so gamely in their retirement from the ridge, other things—and serious things, too—had been happening on our left, where the tribesmen had made a general attack—some two thousand of them, principally armed with rifles.

Campbell's Guides were coming in. There were the two supporting companies of the 35th Sikhs and the little cavalry force to meet them, and though we poured in a heavy fire, the blue and white figures came steadily on, spreading out in a wide skirmishing line, with standards waving and loud yells. One of the Sikh companies was hotly pressed, and the Lancers and the Hussars got the word to move forward.

The ground under them was seamed with hollows and nullahs; but, if the Sikhs were to be rescued, the thing must be done at once, and the bugles sounded the "Charge!" With a low roar the lance-points came down, and the turbaned sowars put their horses to a gallop, dipping in and out of the open ground, with the Hussars on their right flank.

"Steady, men!" cried Tom Howard, as "B" Squadron lost its head a little in its eagerness.

And the next moment they plunged into a deep nullah, into which the enemy had retreated with precipitous haste. There was a great jumble of tulwars and turbans, and the gaudy cummerbunds, and a perfect forest of waving sword-blades, into which the Hussars rushed with a loud cheer.

Colonel Greville, leaping his black horse into the thick of it, closely followed by Mr. Blennerhassett, Tom Howard, and Bill Sloggett, whose cat-call rang as usual above the clamour. The 25th had become so used to it that they listened unconsciously for it, and smiled when they heard the ear-piercing sound.

(To be continued.)

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