GRAND, COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE.

THE SCHOOLBOY VENTRILOQUIST CAUSES TROUBLE!

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The Schoolboy Dramatists!

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale, Dealing with the Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Storm.

"PHEW! How it's blowing!"

It was blowing great guns.

The old trees in the Close of Greyfriars bent and groaned under the fierce wind, and the windows shook and rattled. In the distance could be heard the sound of the breakers booming upon the rocky shore.

A group of juniors were looking out of the Hall window into the wind-swept Close at the swaying, groaning trees and the torn leaves whirling in the wind. Lessons were over at Greyfriars for the day, but the fellows did not venture out. Billy Bunter, of the Remove, had made a desperate effort to get across to the tuckshop, and had been fairly blown over, and had been glad to crawl back again to the shelter of the house. Only one of the Remove, the Lower Fourth, was out of doors—Harry Wharton, the captain of the Form; and his chums were looking out anxiously for him.

Crash!

A tile, torn away by the wind, came crashing down from the roof, and was shattered to pieces on the ground outside the window.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I wish Wharton would come in. Where the dickens is he all this time?"

"May be staying at Cliff House till the storm's over," said Frank Nugent.

"The storm won't be over to-night."

Harry Wharton had gone to tea at Cliff House, the girls' school near Greyfriars. He had matters in connection with forthcoming amateur theatricals to discuss with Marjorie Hazeldene, and a rough wind was not enough to keep him in. But since he had gone the storm had increased in violence, and his chums were anxious for his safety if he should return through it. They watched from the window, wet with rain. Johnny Bull uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Here he comes!"

It was growing dark. The sun was not gone, but thick clouds were massing over the sky. Through the dimness of the Close the figure of the junior could be seen struggling against the fierce wind that sought to whirl him off his feet. Nugent ran to the door. There was a sharp call from Wingate of the Sixth as he put his hand on the latch.

"Don't open that door, Nugent! It couldn't be shut again in this wind!"

"Wharton's just come back!"

"Oh, blow Wharton!' growled Wingate.

"He's being blown already!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Open the window for him," said Wingate. "You can't open that door. It was trouble enough to get it shut when it was opened before."

"Oh, all serene."

Nugent returned to the window. He tapped on it to draw the attention of the junior out in the windy Close. Harry Wharton came on at a run, and stopped outside the little window, and Bob Cherry raised the lower sash a little. A fierce blast of wind came in at the opening and howled along the passage.

"Come in this way, Harry!" shouted Bob Cherry. "I'll open the window for you."

Wharton, clinging to the window-sill to keep his feet, shook his head. Through the window the juniors could see that his face was white.

He put his face close to the opening, and called through it, shouting to make his voice audible above the roar of the wind.

"I'm not coming in. I want you fellows to come out!"

Bob stared at him.

"Come out in this storm? Are you off your rocker? Come in, you ass, and get into some dry clothes!"

Wharton shook his head again.

"There's a schooner ashore in the bay, and the crew can't get off!" he gasped. "We may be able to help. You fellows must come! I've come back for you!"

"Oh!"

That altered the case. Wrecks were not uncommon in stormy weather on that iron coast, and more than once before the chums of Greyfriars had lent good aid. Bob Cherry looked round cautiously. Wingate had gone back to his study, and there were only juniors in the hall. If a prefect had been there, he would certainly have stopped the juniors from going forth on such an adventure. But there was no time to lose; Wingate or Loder or Courtney might come along at any moment.

"Better get our coats!" said Johnny Bull.

"No time," said Bob. "We shall be spotted! Never mind your caps, either. We must go as we are, or not at all. Come on!"

"The come-on-fulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian junior. "The readyfulness of my esteemed self is terrific."

Bob Cherry pushed the window up. The wind roared through, and howled in the passage, and there was a clattering of doors and a yell of remonstrating voices.

"Shut that window!"

"You silly young asses!"

"Who's got that window open?" roared Coker of the Fifth, coming down the passage in great wrath. "Are you looking for a thick ear apiece, you silly kids? Close that window at once! Do you hear?"

"Oh, you go and chop chips!" said Bob Cherry.

And Bob rolled out of the window into the Close. Frank Nugent followed him in a twinkling, and then went Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Coker rushed up to the window.

"Come in, you young lunatics!" he shouted. "You'll be blown to bits! Come back!"

The Removites did not reply. They were tramping away across the Close, battling with the wind. Coker stared after them blankly, till a fierce gust of wind smote him, and he staggered back from the window.

Loder of the Sixth came along in a fury.

"You idiot, Coker! What have you got that window open for?"

"Idiot yourself!" said Coker. "I didn't open it! Some of the kids have gone out."

"Gone out!" roared Loder.

"Yes. They'll get into trouble. Call 'em back!"

Loder jammed down the window savagely.

"If they've gone out they can stay out," he growled. "The house will be blown inside out if that window's kept open."

And Loder strode away.

"The silly young asses!" said Coker. "They're looking for trouble."

Coker was probably right there. But if the juniors were looking for trouble, they were undoubtedly finding it. The wind swept them to and fro as they tramped across the Close, and they had to cling to each other to keep their feet. They reached the school gates, and Wharton opened them. Gosling, the porter, roared from his lodge at them.

"Shet them gates, do you hear?"

As a matter of fact, they did not hear. The wind carried Gosling's voice far away. The juniors staggered through the gates into the windy road, and Wharton jammed the gate shut after them.

It was impossible to speak. It was difficult even to breathe in the gale. The juniors followed Harry Wharton's guidance.

They hurried down the lane towards the fishing village of Pegg, on the bay. Louder now and more menacing sounded the boom of the sea on the shingly beach and on the great rocks of the Shoulder.

Buffeted by the fierce gale, they struggled on their way, trampling through broken branches torn from the trees by the wind and scattered in the lane.

The sea burst on their sight at last, as they came out on the beach, breathless and almost exhausted. They were drenched with rain, and the wind cut through their clothes like a knife.

Angry and sullen, the sea rolled and heaved under the tearing wind, and through the clouds of spray the great Shoulder loomed up dimly.

The boats had been dragged far up the beach out of reach of the thundering waves. On the shore a group of fishermen stood, looking out to sea. Far off over the dusky waters a small vessel could be seen dimly, jammed on the rocks a quarter of a mile from the shore. Round the stranded vessel the waves broke and roared, pounding the timbers to pieces.

The little schooner had evidently but a short time to live; ere long the waves would have smashed in the timbers. Like ants in the distance three figures could be seen clinging to the wreck.

Bob Cherry clung to a big rock and gasped for breath.

"They're done for!" he said.

Wharton caught the arm of a big fisherman who was holding on to the rock. The man looked down at him.

"Can't you do anything, Trumper?"

The fisherman shook his head.

"No boat could live in that sea, Master Wharton."

"But you can't leave them to die."

Trumper shook his head hesitatingly. But his wife was there, and she caught his arm and held him back. She was speaking, wildly and hysterically, but the wind carried away her words. But her meaning was clear. Her husband should not go.

Wharton drew back with his chums into the shelter of the big rock, where they could speak. His face was white and set.

"It's horribly risky!" he said. "They can't go; they've got their wives and children to think of!"

"It would be chucking their lives away!" muttered Johnny Bull. "It's not fair to ask them to do it."

"I know that. But——"

"But what?" said Bob uneasily.

"There's nobody dependent on us, Bob," said Harry, in a low, steady voice. "It's frightfully risky, I know; but——"

"You want to go?"

"Yes."

The juniors were silent. The wind roared round them, and a dash of spray drenched them with salt water. Wharton peered round the rock again. He saw a fragment of canvas waved from the wreck. It was a mute appeal for help, and it went straight to his heart.

"We can't see them drown," he said. "It's up to us, you fellows! I want two of you to come with me. Two will be enough."

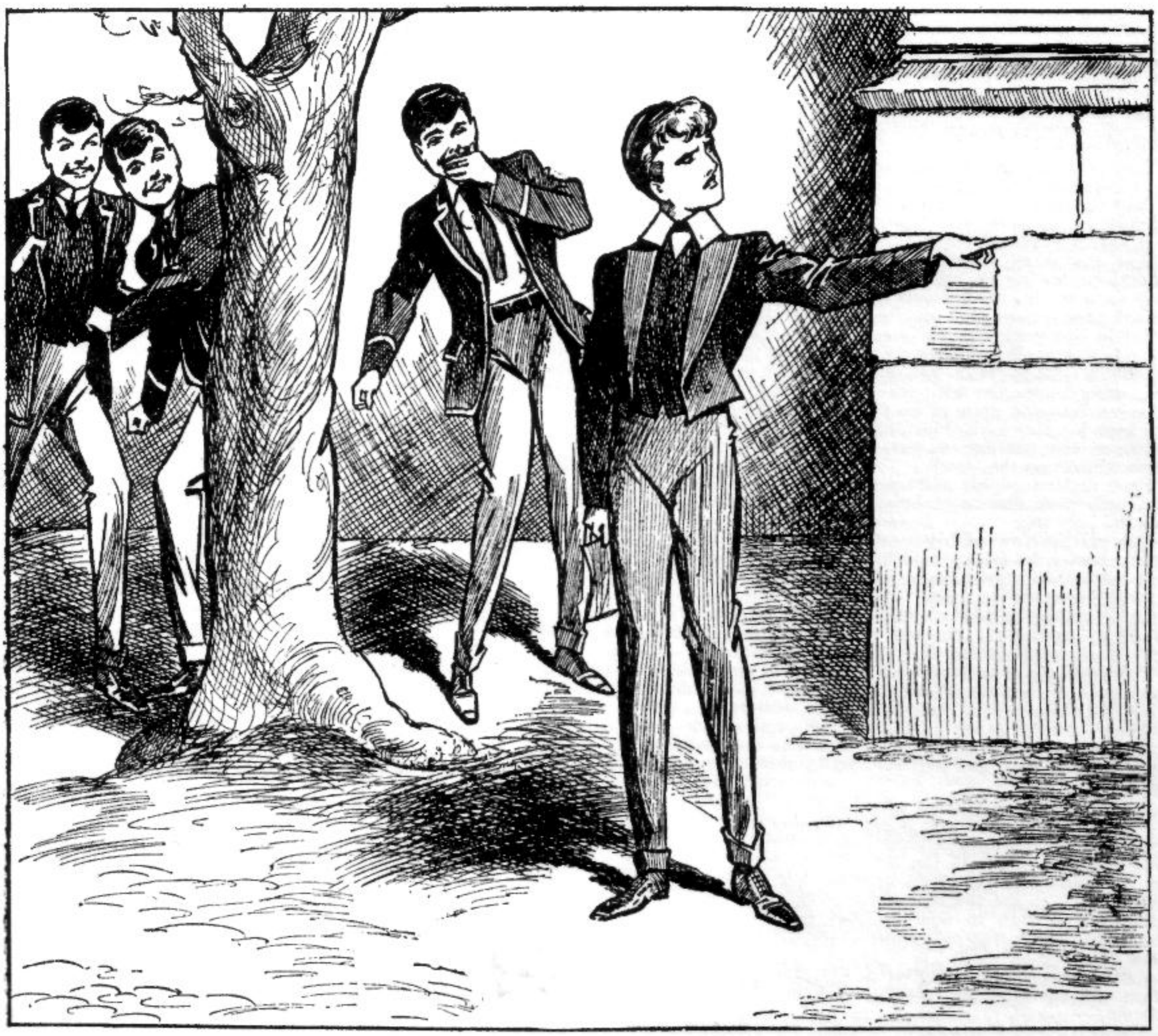
"They'd stop us if we tried to take a boat out!" muttered Johnny Bull, with a nod towards the group of fishermen.

"I know But there's the Cliff House boat in the cove up the shore yonder. We could get it out, and it's a chance."

Another long silence. Well the juniors knew what it meant—life or death—with the chances against life! But they were made of the right British stuff.

"We'll do it!" said Bob. "Heaven help us!"

No more was said. They scrambled away over the rocks towards the little cove where the Cliff House boat was securely moored from the wild waves—the little skiff in which they had rowed many a time with Marjorie and Clara,



"'When I strike my foot upon the bosom of the ground,' cried Bob Cherry, 'rush forth!'" Coker, Potter, and Greene of the Fifth stared. Bob Cherry had a scribbled sheet of paper in his hands, and was learning his lines under the elms in the Close; but his powerful voice had made itself heard at a distance, and Coker & Co. had come up to see what was the matter. "He's got it!" said Greene. "He's mad!" (*See Chapter* 11.)

when the bay was calm, and the sea blue and sunny. The skiff was going upon a different mission now. The rocks hid them from the sight of the fishermen before they reached the cove.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Rescue.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. lost no time.

They had made up their minds what they were going to do; and having done that, they ceased to count the risks.

In the little cove the skiff lay above high-water mark. Great waves came thundering into the cove, and broke in volumes of foam and spray, filling the air with deafening sound. Only three fellows could go in the boat, if room was to be left for the three castaways on the wreck. Wharton selected Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry to accompany him, and the others aided in launching the boat. They had to watch their opportunity carefully. If an incoming billow had struck the boat, it would have been smashed like an eggshell, and its occupants dashed to death upon the rocks.

The juniors stood ready, and ran the boat out as a great wave receded. Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh rushed behind the skiff, launching it successfully upon the retiring wave, blinded by foam and spray, deafened by the roar of the waters. They stood dashing the water from their eyes, and gazing with horrible anxiety after the dancing skiff.

Wharton and Johnny Bull were at the oars, and Bob Cherry had the baler in his hand. The boat whisked away like a cockle-shell. Then came the roar of the returning wave. It came on thundering, and Nugent and Hurree Singh had to race up the cove to get away from it, and even so it overtook them, struck them, and hurled them half stunned on the shingle.

They clung to the shingle, gasping, and the waters receded once more, and left them drenched and dazed. But they did not think of themselves as they scrambled to their feet. They stared out on the wild waters, searching with their eyes for the boat. They fully expected to see it bottom upwards, the sport of the waves, and their comrades struggling in the water—or vanishing beneath it.

Nugent gave a choking cry as he pointed.

The boat was dancing on the waters—swept to and fro by the mighty billows—but still living in the sea.

The launching, at least, had been successful. Wharton and Johnny Bull had the oars out, and they were pulling for the wreck, and Bob Cherry was baling as fast as he could bale.

"Heaven help them!" muttered Nugent; and the nabob, whose teeth were chattering, could not speak at all.

The faces of the juniors in the skiff were white and set.

The little craft was tossed like an eggshell upon the waves, and the wonder was that it was not overturned at every surging billow.

But it rode the waters like a bird, disappearing now into the trough of the sea, and now emerging into view again upon the crest of a wave.

And all the time the juniors were pulling for the wreck on the rocks that lay strewn, half submerged, along the base of the great cliff.

They could not speak. The roar of wind and water would have drowned their voices.

They laboured on, Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull tugging at the oars, and Bob Cherry baling out the water that nearly swamped the boat.

Now the three castaways on the wrecked schooner had seen them tossing on the waves in the growing dusk, and they were waving their hands wildly and shouting for help—though their voices could not be heard.

Round the grounded schooner the wild waves dashed and reared, and as the juniors drew nearer to her, they could see that a close approach was impossible. The skiff would have been dashed upon the schooner and crushed to fragments.

Harry Wharton drew in his oar, and stood up in the boat. He kept his feet with difficulty, as the little craft rose and fell upon the whirling waters. He waved his hand to the three seamen on the wreck.

They understood his gesture. They were to jump for it, and take their chance of being dragged into the boat. It was the only way.

One of them waved his hand in response, and with grim determination let go his hold upon the rigging, and plunged into the sea, as a great wave rolled back from the side of the schooner towards the boat.

He came up within a couple of yards of the skiff, and Wharton reached over for him. He made another effort and their hands met, and he was dragged into the boat.

The skiff danced and rocked, and the three juniors had hard work to keep her afloat; all three of them baling furiously while the rescued man lay exhausted at their feet.

Then Wharton waved his hand to the wreck again.

Another seaman let himself go, and was dragged into the boat, half drowned and half stunned by the thumping of the waves.

But the last man did not take his chance. He saw Wharton's gesture, but did not jump. He was a lascar, as they could see by his dark-skinned face and rolling black eyes. The stunning force of the waves now breaking over the schooner had probably partly deprived him of his senses. He was clinging to the shrouds, and holding on for his life, with just sense enough to hold on, but not enough to understand that there was only one chance for him—to gain the little boat.

"He won't jump!" muttered Bob Cherry. "We can't stand this much longer, Harry. We may be under at any minute."

The two rescued seamen were baling now, but every wave that broke round the boat sent more water into her. It was touch-and-go all the time; grim Death was hovering over the juniors of Greyfriars.

Wharton looked towards the schooner. The man would not jump; but to go back and leave him to his doom was hard.

A wave rolled past the boat, making it oscillate wildly, and rolled on over the schooner, completely submerging her.

As the water subsided again they saw that the wreck had sunk lower, and they hardly expected to see the lascar again. He had disappeared for the moment under the rolling wave. But there he was, as the water passed, still holding on to the shrouds.

Wharton set his teeth.

"I'm going to try to get him off!" he said.

His chums did not hear him, but they understood. Bob grasped his arm.

"You can't!" he roared.

"Give me the rope!" said Harry.

He uncoiled the rope that lay in the bottom of the boat, and tied one end to his arm. Bob grasped the other, and tied it round his waist. Then Harry Wharton, waiting till a great billow was rolling upon the half-submerged schooner, let himself go with it, taking his life in his hands.

The wave swept him on, and he caught at the torn rigging, and clung there till the water rushed on and left him clinging there above it, close to the lascar.

The man stared at him stupidly.

It was impossible to speak. Wharton untied the rope from his arm, and tied it round the lascar under his armpits.

Then he signed to the man to let go.

The man was too scared and stunned. He held on frantically to the shrouds, while the schooner was grinding to pieces under his feet. There was no time to waste. Wharton grasped him, and dragged him from his hold, and they plunged into the water together, the junior clinging to the rope.

But for the rope they would have been swept away; but Bob Cherry was dragging upon it, and they came sweeping up to the boat.

The juniors dragged them in.

The lascar sank down insensible under the thwarts. Wharton sat, panting and gasping. The boat whirled away on the waters towards the shore. The oars were not needed now; the thundering waves rushed them shoreward.

The fishermen on the beach had seen them, and were waiting and watching to help. As the boat was dashing upon the beach at the mercy of the waves, the big fishermen plunged in waist-deep, and grasped the juniors and the rescued seamen. The boat went to pieces in the surf, but the fishermen dragged the occupants ashore, and out of reach of the hungry waters.

Harry Wharton felt all grow dark about him, but he felt dimly that he was being dragged through the deafening surf, that he was laid upon the sand, that someone placed brandy to his lips, and he gasped and choked with the fiery liquid.

He opened his eyes.

Nugent and Hurree Singh were bending over him.

"Harry, old man, you're safe!" The tears were streaming down Nugent's cheeks. "Safe, old chap!"

"The safefulness is terrific, my noble chum!"

"Bob and the others?" gasped Wharton.

"All serene!"

"Oh, good!"

And then Harry Wharton's eyes closed again.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Bunter is Willing.

"WHARTON!"

No answer.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove at Greyfriars, looked annoyed.

The Remove-master was taking evening call-over, and this was the fifth name he had called without receiving the usual "Adsum" in reply.

Bull, Cherry, Hurree Singh, Nugent, Wharton—all the five had failed to respond to their names!

Considering the terrific storm that was raging over Greyfriars, it was certainly not a time for junior boys to be out of doors.

"Does anyone know where these boys are?" asked Mr. Quelch, looking at the Remove fellows.

"Sure, I think they're gone out, sir," said Micky Desmond.

Mr. Quelch closed his lips tightly.

"Gone out—in this storm?"

"Yis, sorr. Can't get back because of the weather, sir," said Micky. "It's very windy, sir."

Mr. Quelch stared at the Irish junior. As the wind was almost rocking the old school upon its solid foundations, Mr. Quelch was quite aware that it was windy. Micky wanted to make excuses for the missing juniors, but he had not succeeded.

"I am aware that it is windy, Desmond," said Mr. Quelch stiffly. "I am not deaf."

"No, sorr," said Micky.

"The boys should certainly not have gone out in this weather. I shall punish them severely when they return. I——"

Mr. Quelch was interrupted. Trotter, the page, came into the hall.

"If you please, sir, Dr. Locke wishes to see you in his study."

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch.

And the annoyed Remove-master proceeded to the Head's study, while the assembly broke up, most of the fellows discussing the absence of the Famous Five, and wondering what had become of them.

Dr. Locke was standing by the telephone in his study when Mr. Quelch came in, and there was a very startled expression upon his kind old face.

"You have taken call-over, Mr. Quelch?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"All the boys are not present?"

"No, sir. Five members of my Form have absented themselves," said Mr. Quelch. "It is very reckless of them to go out in this storm, and I shall have something to say about it when they return."

"Ah! That accounts for it!" said the Head.

"For what?"

"I have just had a telephone message from Pegg. The

landlord of the Anchor tells me that the boys are quite safe, and have been put into bed with hot-water-bottles, to prevent them from catching cold, and will return later."

"What are the boys doing at Pegg?" asked Mr. Quelch, in amazement.

"I am afraid they have been getting into trouble," said the Head. "I gather that there has been a shipwreck, and the boys have lent aid."

Mr. Quelch's face cleared.

"Wharton once did a very brave thing at a shipwreck in Pegg Bay, sir," he said. "If this is another thing of the same sort, I suppose he must be excused, though I do not like the boy taking these risks."

"Quite so. I will ring up the Anchor again, and ask for further information," said the Head. "I was very much surprised to hear that the boys were there, as I did not know any were missing."

And the Head rang up again.

"Is that the Anchor Inn? What are the names of the boys with you?"

"Wharton, Nugent, Bull, Cherry, and Hurree Singh, sir," came back the gruff voice of the landlord of the Anchor. "Five of 'em, sir."

"What have they been doing?"

"Taking out a boat to rescue three seamen from a wreck, sir."

"Dear me! Did they save the seamen?"

"Yes, sir; reg'lar heroes they are."

"And they are not hurt?"

"No, sir—only wet."

"Very good. Thank you very much for taking care of them."

The Head turned to Mr. Quelch.

"I do not think we need be very severe with the boys for missing call-over on this occasion," he said, with a smile. "They have brought credit upon Greyfriars College."

"I agree with you, sir."

It was not long before Greyfriars knew the story. Wharton's friends were anxious about him, and they asked Mr. Quelch if anything was known of where he was, and the Remove-master told them. Then the school was buzzing with it.

"Just like those bounders," said Lord Mauleverer, as the Remove discussed it excitedly in the common-room. "Might have guessed somethin' of the sort, begad."

"Queer how they're always getting into the limelight, isn't it?" said Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, with a curl of the lip.

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode. "They've acted rippingly."

"Splendidly!" said Mark Linley.

"I guess they ought to have told me they were going," said Fisher T. Fish, the American junior. "They needed a galoot like me with them. Yes, sir. If I had been on the beach——"

"You'd have stopped there!" grinned Russell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess——"

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, "they'll be jolly hungry when they get in. It's up to us to stand them a feed, you know. I'm expecting a postal-order, but the postman hasn't arrived, owing to—to the state of the weather. If you like to hand me the cash, I'll try and get across to the tuckshop——"

"I dare say you will!" said Bulstrode. "But you're not going to have any of my cash."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode! I should settle it up, of course, as soon as my postal-order comes. It will arrive as soon as the storm's over."

"If the storm lasts till your postal-order comes, I fancy it will be the longest storm on record."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter turned his back on Bulstrode.

"I say, Mauly, old man," said the fat junior persuasively, "you know how jolly hungry they will be when they get in. If you like to hand me ten bob, I'll get across to the tuckshop. It won't be easy, I know; but I'd do more than that for fellows I like."

"Begad, it's not a bad idea, you know," said Lord Mauleverer. "But I haven't got any change. Will a sovereign do?"

Would it?

Billy Bunter's fat fingers closed like a vice upon the sovereign, and he made for the door. But the door was locked, and he had to leave by the window. He opened the hall window, and plunged out into the windy Close. A powerful gust of the gale caught him and rolled him over, and he gasped and panted. The juniors watched him from the window, and roared with laughter.

"Go it, Bunter!"

"Buck up!"

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet. It was no easy task to face that wind, but Bunter would have faced the Russian guns at Baladava if there had been a tuckshop behind them.

The Owl of the Remove righted himself, and plunged on, the wind beating on him and causing him to cross the Close in a series of tacks. He zigzagged away into the dusk, and disappeared.

"Begad! It won't be easy to carry the grub back in this wind," Lord Mauleverer remarked.

"Easy enough, the way Bunter will carry it," grinned Tom Brown.

"Begad! How will he carry it, dear boy?"

"Inside!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was not much doubt what Billy Bunter would do with Lord Mauleverer's sovereign. He would certainly expend it upon tuck, as agreed; but he would take so many "snacks" before he started back that there would not be much left for Harry Wharton & Co.

Billy Bunter was having the fight of his life with the wind in the Close. A gust sent him staggering again, and he rolled on the wet ground, and tacked away towards the gym., and rested there under the lee of the building for some minutes. Then he started again, and tacked away towards the porter's lodge. A third tack brought him to the tuckshop, and the wind bumped him on the door. He opened the shop door, and rolled in, gasping for breath, and the wind rushed in after the fat junior, and there was a clatter of falling articles as it swept round the shop.

Mrs. Mimble came in a hurry out of her little parlour.

"Close the door!" she shrieked.

Billy Bunter struggled with the door. With the fierce wind beating upon it, it was not easy to get it closed. Mrs. Mimble came to his assistance, and between them the door was shut once more.

Mrs. Mimble did not look pleased. She was generally glad to see customers, but Bunter was not a desirable customer. And the gust of wind in the shop had worked havoc. Packets of tea had been blown into the butter and the treacle, and paper bags were whirling all over the shop.

"Now, what is it, Master Bunter?" said Mrs. Mimble, with great asperity. "If you have come to ask me for goods on credit again——"

"I haven't," said Bunter, with dignity. "I have come to expend a sovereign—ready money, Mrs. Mimble. Just trot out some tarts to begin with."

"Just show me the sovereign to begin with," said Mrs. Mimble tartly. She knew Bunter!

Bunter grunted. It was hard to have his word doubted, when he really was in possession of money for once. He groped in his pocket for the sovereign, to confound the doubting Mrs. Mimble by the sight of the golden coin.

The sovereign was not there.

Bunter groped carefully through the pocket, and then through all his other pockets. He came back to the first pocket again, and groped in it, and turned out the lining. But the sovereign was not to be found. The dreadful truth dawned upon Bunter—in his unintentional gymnastics in the Close, in buffeting against the wind, he had dropped the sovereign.

"Oh, lor!" groaned Bunter. "I've lost it!"

Mrs. Mimble had watched his vain search for the sovereign with a sarcastic smile. She did not believe in the existence of the sovereign at all. She was too much accustomed to Billy Bunter's little ways.

"It's all right, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter. "I've dropped it in the Close somewhere; but I shall find it to-morrow in the daylight, and then I'll settle up. I'll have some tarts!"

"You will have nothing, Master Bunter. You are a dreadful, untruthful boy."

"I tell you I've dropped the sovereign!" roared Bunter.

"I do not believe you, Master Bunter. I know you never have a sovereign of your own."

"Mauleverer lent it to me!" roared Bunter.

"Then Lord Mauleverer was very foolish to trust you. I do not trust you. Please go back, Master Bunter, and I hope you will be ashamed of trying to impose upon a poor widow."

"I tell you——" yelled Bunter.

"I shall complain to the Head if you tell me any more stories, Master Bunter."

"I've lost the sovereign!" shrieked the unhappy Owl of the Remove. "I tell you——"

"Nonsense!"

Bunter snorted. There was no convincing Mrs. Mimble, and the Owl of the Remove opened the shop door again, and

rolled out into the quad, in the faint hope of being able to extract another sovereign from Lord Mauleverer. Mrs. Mimble wrestled with the door, and shut it after him, and murmured things uncomplimentary to Bunter as she went back, red and flustered, to her little parlour.

And Billy Bunter, heedless and disconsolate, tacked away across the Close, and reached the School House at last in a state of exhaustion and exasperation, to find fresh troubles awaiting him there.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Way of the Transgressor.

"HERE they come!"

There was a rush of the juniors to get the door open now, wind or no wind. Five youths wrapped up in thick overcoats, with sea-boots on, had arrived. The Famous Five, provided with a change of clothes at the Anchor, had returned to the school.

The great oaken door swung open, and the Famous Five came in, with the wind behind them, breathlessly.

They were surprised to find Greyfriars already in possession of the news.

"Three cheers for the giddy heroes!" roared Tom Brown. And they were given with a will.

"Hip, hip, hurray!"

The door was shut, after a struggle. The juniors surrounded the five heroes, who looked queer enough in huge sailor clothes and sea-boots.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you duffers chirruping about?" asked Bob Cherry.

"We've heard!" explained Bulstrode. "They telephoned from the Anchor. We know all about the giddy rescue. Hurray!"

"Yaas, begad! Hurray!"

"The hurrayfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The hungerfulness of our esteemed selves is also great."

"We're going to stand you a feed, begad," said Lord Mauleverer. "Bunter's gone for the grub now. He'll be back by the time you've changed."

"Bunter may be back, but I'm doubtful about the grub!" said Bulstrode.

"We'll scalp him, begad, if he has wolfed it!" said Lord Mauleverer.

The Famous Five went up to the Remove dormitory, and changed their clothes. They came down with keen appetites for tea. They had not suffered from the effects of their adventure, only, as Bob Cherry remarked, it had made them extra hungry. They were fully prepared to do justice to Lord Mauleverer's feed.

"Where's the giddy spread?" asked Bob Cherry, as they joined the juniors downstairs.

"Bunter hasn't got back yet," said Tom Brown.

There was a loud knocking at the hall window.

"Here he is!"

The window was opened, and Billy Bunter was dragged in. He collapsed upon the floor, and gasped for breath. The juniors surrounded him. There was no sign of a parcel about the fat junior.

"Where's the grub?" demanded Lord Mauleverer.

"Ow! I'm winded! Ow!"

"Got the tommy?" asked Nugent.

"Ow! No!"

"Couldn't get across to the tuckshop, I suppose," said Hazeldene. "Never mind. Hand over the quid, and let somebody else try."

"Ow! I got there, but Mrs. Mimble wouldn't let me have the things."

"What rot!"

"Rats!"

"Produce the quid!"

"I've lost it!" gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"Bosh!"

"Rats!"

"I tell you I've lost it, and Mrs. Mimble wouldn't trust me——"

"Shows her sense, anyway," said Bulstrode.

"Begad, that's rotten!" said Mauleverer.

"The fat bounder!" growled Johnny Bull. "He's scoffed the grub, and made up this yarn. I know him!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"I said he would bring the grub back inside!" grinned Tom Brown.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," roared Johnny Bull, shaking the fat junior by the shoulder, "we're hungry. We've come back with a top-notch appetite. Understand? Produce that grub!"

"I—I—I——"

"Up-end him, and shake him by the feet, if you want to see the grub produced," suggested Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I tell you I lost the quid—I really lost it. I—I'm not telling fairy-tales this time."

"You can't expect us to believe in a sudden change like that," said Nugent. "Now, Bunty, did you, or did you not, go to the tuck-shop."

"I've told you I did!" roared Bunter.

"Then what have you done with the grub?"

"There wasn't any grub. I lost the quid, and Mrs. Mimble wouldn't trust me with the tommy," said Bunter. "My word wasn't good enough—huh!"

"That sounds true enough," said Johnny Bull. "I know Mrs. Mimble is a sensible woman."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the same, you can't expect us to swallow yarns about lost quids," said Bob Cherry. "It's too thick!"

"The thickfulness is terrific!"

"I suppose you can take my word for it!" grunted Billy Bunter.

"We want grub for it, not your word. You'd better produce that grub, or——"

"How can I produce it, when I haven't got it?" roared Bunter.

"Turn him inside-out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny Bull shook a threatening finger at Billy Bunter.

"You say you haven't eaten the grub?" he demanded.

"Ow! No!"

"Have you hidden it in your study?"

"No!" yelled Bunter furiously. It was particularly exasperating to the Owl of the Remove to have his word doubted, when he was, as a matter of fact, telling the truth for once. But he could not expect the juniors to believe him. As Bob Cherry remarked, they would want a lot of evidence before they believed that a leopard could change his spots, or a Ethiopian his skin, or that Bunter would tell the truth.

"Well, if you haven't eaten it, it can be produced," said Johnny Bull. "If you haven't got it into our study in five minutes, we'll scalp you!"

"The scalpfulness will be terrific, my honoured and esteemed and disgusting Bunter."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Bunter, and he rolled away. Johnny Bull called after him.

"Five minutes, mind."

Five minutes elapsed without the feed being placed on the table of No. 1 Study. The Famous Five were exasperated. The keen wind had given them specially good appetites, and they wanted that feed badly. Lord Mauleverer was ready to stand another sovereign if somebody could be found to make the perilous voyage to the tuck-shop. But the chums of the Remove did not see it. They did not believe for a moment that Bunter had lost the sovereign. They did not think, either, that even Bunter could have stored away a sovereign's worth of food at one sitting. It followed, therefore, that he had concealed the tuck for a future feed, and they meant to make him disgorge.

Billy Bunter had taken refuge in his study. He trusted to the protection of Peter Todd, his study-mate, who was a wonderful fighting-man. But Peter Todd was not disposed to take up the cudgels for Bunter. He did not believe the story of the lost sovereign any more than the others did, and he was inclined to help the Famous Five to deal severely with the Owl of the Remove.

When six or seven angry faces glared into the study in search of Bunter, the fat junior promptly placed himself behind Peter Todd. Peter Todd equally promptly caught him by the collar, and spun him across the study, so that he fell into the arms of the avengers.

"Hold on!" roared Bunter, as they grasped him. "Hold on! That is to say, let go! Yow! I say, Todd, you beast, stand by a fellow, can't you?"

"Not unless you produce the grub," said Todd cheerfully. "I'm not going to have a grub-hunter and plate-licker in my study. Own up, and be decent."

"I tell you——"

"Whoppers!" said Peter Todd.

"Look here, you beast—yarooh! I say, you fellows, I'm telling the truth—the whole truth, and nothing but the—yow—truth——"

"Then you must be ill," said Bob Cherry. "Perhaps a bumping will set you right."

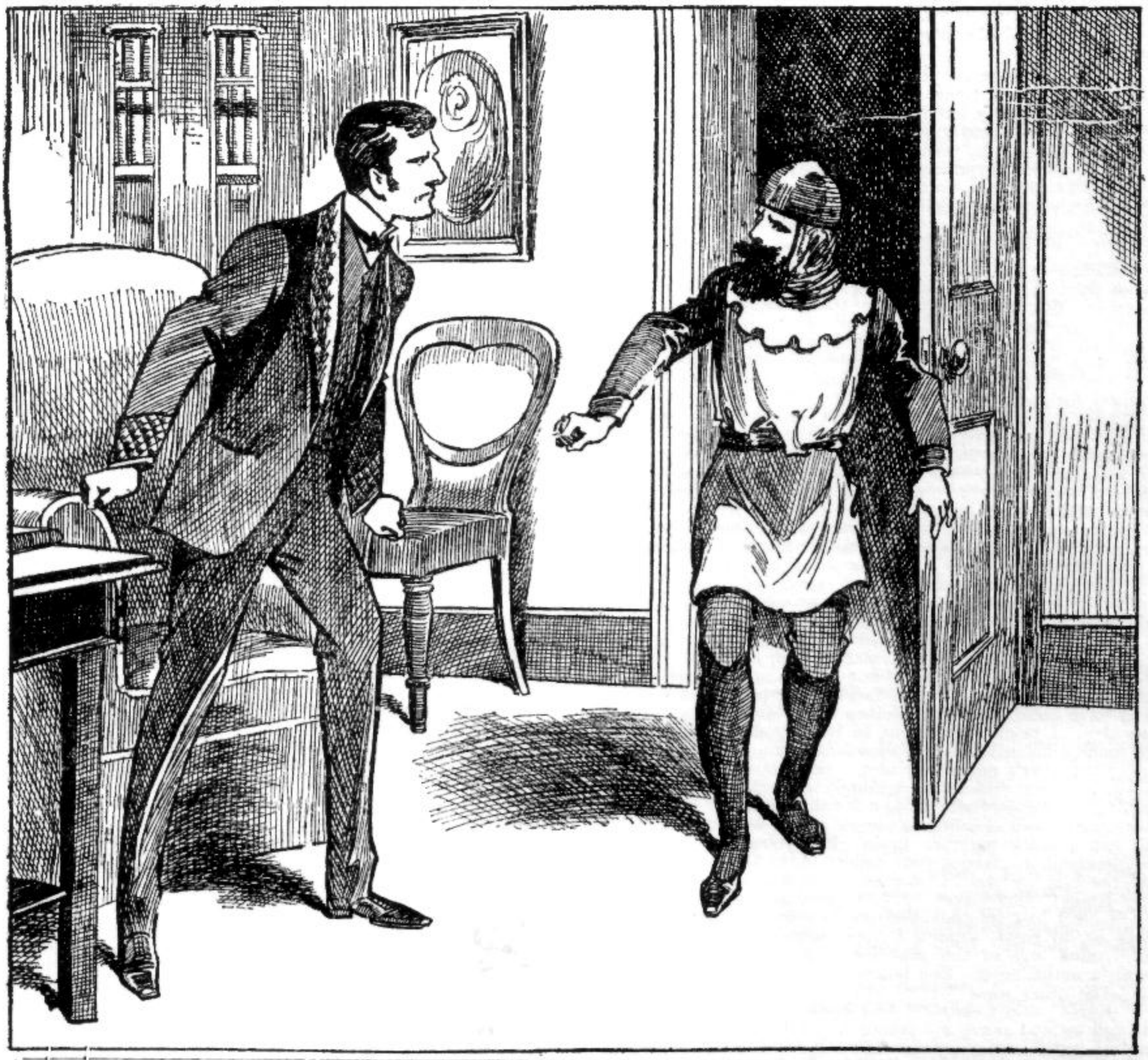
"Ow! Oh! Yah! Beasts!"

Bump!

"Now, then," roared Johnny Bull, "Where's the grub?"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-owp!"

"Master Wharton," exclaimed Trotter, the page, hurrying



"What does this ridiculous garb mean, Bulstrode?" asked Mr. Quelch sharply. "I'm a murderer, sir." "What! If this is a joke, Bulstrode——" "Not at all, sir. I'm the First Murderer in 'King John,' sir."
(*See Chapter* 12.)

along the passage, "Mrs. Kebble has got tea all ready for you. She thought you would be hungry, and——"

"Hurrah!" said Bob Cherry. "Mrs. Kebble is a giddy brick. Come on, you chaps, we can let Bunter off, under the circs."

"Yaas, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "You can keep the grub now, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter sat on the floor, gasping for breath. He put his spectacles straight on his little fat nose and glared at the juniors.

"You rotters!" he roared. "I haven't got the grub."

"Ass!" said Harry Wharton. "You can own up now—you can keep it."

"I haven't got it!" yelled Bunter.

Bob Cherry gave a whistle of astonishment.

"Blessed if I don't believe he's telling the truth for once!" he exclaimed. "My only summer hat and sainted Aunt Maria! Some chap said the age of miracles was past! He was offside!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors walked away chuckling, leaving Billy Bunter boiling with indignation. Mrs. Kebble, the housekeeper, had a very nice "high tea" ready for the heroes, and they did full justice to it.

Later that night, when the wind had fallen a little, a fat form might have been seen groping about in the shadowy Close, and peering through a pair of very large spectacles into all sorts of holes and corners. It was Billy Bunter in search of the lost sovereign.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Coker's Idea!

THE next day the storm had passed off, and the sun shone on Greyfriars again. There was still a high wind, and the waves rolled heavily upon the rocks of the Shoulder. But the storm-clouds had rolled by, and the sun shone brightly on the old school. Gosling, the porter, and the gardeners were busy clearing up the branches that had been torn from the trees by the wind of the night before. After morning lessons many of the Greyfriars fellows visited the shore to see what was left of the wrecked schooner. Only a fragment of the vessel showed above the water at low tide, and great masses of wreckage had been washed ashore. The three men who had been rescued were still at the Anchor Inn, and, as they were destitute, some of the fishermen had made a collection for them to pay their immediate expenses.

Coker of the Fifth went over among the others, and when

he came back an idea was working in the mighty brain of Horace Coker. He met the Famous Five in the Close, and nodded to them very genially and condescendingly.

"That was a jolly plucky thing you kids did yesterday," he said.

The juniors took off their hats all at once, and bowed to the ground before Coker.

"Thanks, mighty lord!" said Bob Cherry.

"It is a sufficient reward to have gained the notice of your noble lordship!" said Frank Nugent.

"The rewardfulness is terrific, great and ludicrous Coker!" Coker frowned.

"Don't play the giddy goat!" he said. "It was a plucky thing, though, of course, really, any fellow would have done it!"

"Of course any fellow would!" agreed Wharton. "You'd have done it yourself, Coker, I know, if you'd had brains enough. But if you had gone out catching crabs, as you usually do, there would have been a Coker the less——"

"And we should have had to sing to one another: 'Oh, dry those tears!'" said Nugent, with a sob.

"And we should have put on the esteemed sackcloth and rashers for the august Coker!"

"Look here," said Coker, "don't be funny! I was going to say that you saved the lives of those chaps, and it's very creditable for you mere kids in a Lower Form. I've talked to the three chaps—their names are Johnson and Jones, and John Charles Henry, the nigger. They seem three decent sorts, and they've lost all their kit in the wreck. As the captain was the owner, and he went down, they're not likely to get any compensation. You didn't think of getting their traps ashore——"

"We didn't," agreed Wharton sorrowfully. "We were under the impression that there was no time for it. You see, we were in a hurry to catch the boat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I expect I should have managed it somehow if I had been there," said Coker; "but as the matter stands, the chaps are destitute. They've lost their traps, and their wages, and have nothing but the clothes they stand up in. I've got an idea. I think they ought to be helped. And I'm going to make a collection in the school for them."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," said Harry. "If we were in funds, we'd whack out willingly enough. We've got to find the tin somewhere to pay for the Cliff House boat. It was pretty well smashed to pieces, and it will cost a good bit to get it stuck together again. I'm going to write to my uncle about it. About your collection, Coker, old man, we'll do the best we can. I suppose every little helps."

"Right!" said Coker. "I've got a money-box with a key to it. I'll lock it, and hand the key to Wingate, so that it will be all right, though I hope nobody would suspect me of boning any of the tin. I'll stand the box in the hall with a notice on it. You fellows can tell the other kids——"

"The other what?"

"Kids!" said Coker. "And I shall expect all the fellows to roll up and chuck something in. I'll go up and make the notice now."

And Coker, with a lofty nod, walked away to the School House. The chums of the Remove exchanged a grin.

"Kids," said Nugent reflectively, "Coker isn't exactly tactful when he's looking for subscriptions, is he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a jolly good idea to help those sailor chaps," Wharton remarked thoughtfully. "Sailormen don't get too well paid, you know, and a wreck like this leaves them stranded if they can't get compensation. They ought to be helped. But I think we ought to have the handling of the matter, not Coker. Coker's an ass!"

"A frabjous, burbling ass!" the other fellows agreed heartily.

"It isn't his business, anyway. After all, we fished the three chaps out of the sad sea waves," said Harry. "It's our bizney to raisé a fund for them. Only my idea is that the fund won't amount to much. Pennies and twopences won't do much good. Something ought to be done to raise the wind—you get more cash by giving people something for their money than by asking for it for nothing."

"Charity bazaar?" suggested Nugent.

"Bazaars are off—and I shouldn't wonder if the Rev. Lambe has one in Friardale, too. Something in the line of a concert or a play——"

"A smoking concert?" grinned Johnny Bull.

Wharton laughed.

"Why not a play?" he asked.

"Ahem!"

"We're the chiefs of the Junior Amateur Dramatic Club, and we're all jolly good actors," persisted Harry.

"So we are—so we is!" agreed Bob Cherry. "The other chaps don't think so, but they're asses. We're the salt of the earth, the cream of the amateur stage, the——"

"Oh, cheese it, Bob! I think we might get up a play, all expenses to be borne by us, and the proceeds to go to a fund for helping the sailor chaps. Is it a go?"

"We'll think it out," said Nugent. "Keep it dark for a bit. Coker would think nothing of borrowing the wheeze and trying to work it. Of course, he would make a muck of it. Let's see how Coker's collection works out first."

Whether Horace Coker's collection was to be a success or not, the great man of the Fifth was certainly losing no time with it. When the Famous Five went in, they found the money-box on the hall-stand, with a notice pinned over it, in the sprawling handwriting and entirely original orthography of Coker of the Fifth. Coker had a minor who was uncannily clever, and was in the Sixth Form at Greyfriars. But Coker's acquaintances said that all the brains handed out to the Coker family had been bestowed on Reggie Coker. Certainly Coker had reached the Fifth Form without mastering the mysteries of English spelling. His notice ran:

"NOTICE!

"Rally! Rally! Rally!

"The under-sined Horace Coker is inawgurating a Fund for the Bennefit of the sufferers from the resent shipwreck in Pegg Bay. Three British sailormen are quite desstitute, and the Chaps of this Colege are called upon to subscribe to give them a start. Smallest contribewtions thankfully received; larger ones in proportion. The Key of this Box is in Wingate's hands, and the box will be opened in the presence of all the prefects, to prove fair play.

"Roll up!

"Raly! Raly! Raly!

"COKER OF THE FIFTH."

So ran the notice. Apparently Coker of the Fifth was in some doubt as to the exact allowance of "l's" in "rally," for he had put two in the first place, and only one in the second, getting one lot right, at all events.

The juniors chuckled gleefully over Coker's notice.

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Bolsover major. "I've got a shilling I'm going to put in. I've tried to pass it on Mrs. Mimble, and she won't take it—and I offered it to Gosling as a tip, and he wouldn't take it. I was going to keep it as a gift for a blind beggar, but I don't mind giving it to Coker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter as Bolsover major extracted his bad shilling from a recess of his pockets, and dropped it into the money-box.

Clink!

The sound of the falling coin reached Coker's ears, as he came down the passage. Coker looked very pleased.

"So you've started the ball rolling, you chaps!" he said heartily.

"Yes; I've begun with a shilling," said Bolsover major blandly. "I've been saving up that shilling for some occasion like this, and the fund is more than welcome to it, Coker!"

"Good for you!" said Coker heartily. "It's a noble object, my infants—to give those destitute sailormen a start, you know."

"Hear, hear!"

"It would give your Form-master a start if he saw your spelling," grinned Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker frowned.

"You let my spelling alone," he said. "That's all right. Besides," added Coker, with a hurried glance at the notice, "I know as well as you do that there are two 's's' in 'presence,' but I don't trouble about trifles like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shouldn't!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Do you know that there are two 'z's' in notice, Coker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Coker. "Roll up with your subscriptions, and let the spelling alone. Hallo, Reggie! Got something for the fund?"

Reggie Coker, the great Coker's younger brother, came along with his gentle smile. Coker minor was in the Sixth, but there were few fellows in the Remove who could not have knocked him into a cocked hat in a "scrap," hence he received scant respect from the juniors. Fags in the Third would tap Coker of the Sixth on the shoulder, and call him Reggie—when Coker of the Fifth was not by.

Reggie Coker admired his major's brawn and muscle, as much as Horace admired his minor's great brain powers. The brothers were very greatly attached to one another, and Horace fought all Reggie's battles. They would never have been fought at all if Horace had not fought them.

Coker of the Sixth dropped a half-crown into the box.

"Good for you, Reggie!" said Coker, giving his minor a friendly tap on the shoulder that made him stagger. "There's an example for you fellows from the Sixth!"

"Rally!" said Bob Cherry. "I mean raly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And—perhaps under the influence of Coker minor's example—a good many of the fellows rolled up, and contributions clinked into the money-box—many and varied contributions, consisting chiefly of trousers buttons, with a mingling of shirt buttons and pen-nibs and battered and defaced coins that had been refused at the tuckshop.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Rallying!

"I SAY, Mauly!"

Lord Mauleverer quickened his pace a little. Mauleverer, the champion slacker of the Remove, generally proceeded at a stroll, even when he was late for lessons or call-over—as he frequently was. But he quickened his pace whenever Billy Bunter was on his track. The dread of being buttonholed by Bunter was the only thing that could make the slacker of the Remove buck up.

But Billy Bunter was not to be shaken off easily. He quickened his pace, too, and caught Mauleverer by the sleeve.

"I say, Mauly, old man, stop a minute!"

"Oh, begad!"

Lord Mauleverer was Mauly to his friends, but he did not count William George Bunter among the number. But Billy Bunter was pally with his lordship, whether his lordship liked it or not. Bunter did not see that it required two to make a bargain.

"About that quid, Mauly," said Billy Bunter. "I suppose, if I find it, I may regard it as a loan until my postal-order comes?"

"Yaas."

"Thanks. I've been looking for it again, but it hasn't turned up," said Bunter. "Of course, it's bound to come to light in the long run."

"Yaas."

"So I suppose it wouldn't make any difference to you, Mauly, if you handed me another quid now, and I hand you back that one when I find it."

"Yaas."

"Eh?"

"Yaas."

"Look here, Mauly. Will you hand me another quid now, and I'll go and look for that one again presently? You know, I want to make a contribution to Coker's fund. It's a very deserving thing, you know—destitute sailormen and things. Don't you think so?"

"Yaas."

"Then you won't object to handing me the quid now?"

"Yaas."

"Look here, you ass!" bawled Billy Bunter. "Do you mean to say that you won't trust me with a quid?"

"**Yaas.**"

And Lord Mauleverer gently detached his arm from Bunter's fat fingers and walked away, leaving the fat junior blinking after him angrily.

"Well, of all the rotters!" growled Bunter. "After all I've done for him, too. Pah!"

And Bunter rolled away, disconsolate. He had hunted high and low for that lost sovereign, but he had not succeeded in finding it. Doubtless it had rolled into some hole or cranny, where the short-sighted Owl of the Remove failed to perceive it. And he did not know exactly where he had dropped it, either, and the Close of Greyfriars was a wide ground to cover with a minute search. It would have been much simpler to get another sovereign from the schoolboy earl, and it was very exasperating that Lord Mauleverer did not see it in the same light.

Billy Bunter brightened up at the sight of Coker in the Close. He bore down upon Coker with an agreeable grin on his fat features.

"I say. Horace, old man——" he began.

"Rats!" said Coker, surveying the Owl of the Remove with great disdain. "If you call me Horace, I'll dot you on your nose, you cheeky young rotter!"

"Ahem! It's about the fund, Horace—your fund for the destitute sailormen——"

"Oh!" said Coker, his expression altering a little. "If you want to make a contribution, you'll find the box in the hall."

"Good! I know where to find the box, but I don't quite know where to find the money," Bunter explained. "I've got a postal-order coming to-morrow, but that will be too late. I'm strictly opposed to borrowing, as a rule; but I thought I might borrow ten bob of a fellow, and let him

have my postal-order for it to-morrow. Do you think I should be justified?"

"Certainly!" said Coker.

"Then you'll lend me the ten bob?"

"Eh?"

"Lend me the ten bob——"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Coker.

And Coker playfully knocked Billy Bunter's cap over his spectacles, and walked away. The Owl of the Remove replaced his cap, and set his spectacles straight, and snorted. He was still snorting when the Famous Five came by, and Bob Cherry gave him a gentle dig in the ribs that made him gasp.

"Wherefore that frowning brow, Bunter darling?" asked Bob.

Bunter growled angrily.

"It's that beast Coker! I want to make a contribution to his fund, and he won't lend me ten bob, though I've promised him my postal-order to-morrow for it. I want to make a contribution, you know. I don't want to be left out of this. It's in the cause of charity, and you chaps know what a charitable chap I am!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You'd borrow anything for the poor and needy, wouldn't you?" grinned Bob Cherry. "But there's only one poor and needy person—W. G. Bunter."

"Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, I want to put in something, you know. Have you fellows been making contributions?"

"Yes."

"You might lend me something to contribute, then."

"You'd like to put in the same as I've done?" asked Bob.

"Yes; that would do." Bunter's eyes involuntarily wandered towards the tuckshop as he spoke. It was pretty evident where his contributions would be made if he succeeded in raising a loan. "Hand me ten bob."

"I didn't put in ten bob."

"Well, give me as much as you put in."

"The same thing will do?" asked Bob.

"Yes, yes!"

"Exactly the same thing?"

"Oh, certainly! Yes," said Bunter eagerly, and he held out a fat hand.

"Right-ho; I'll do that!" said Bob. "You're sure you're going to put it into the box for the fund, and not take it to the tuckshop?"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Well, you shall have it."

Bob Cherry searched through his pockets. Bunter watched him eagerly. He could hardly believe in his good luck.

"Here you are!" said Bob, finding at last the object he was in search of. He placed it in Bunter's fat palm.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at it. It was a bone jacket button.

"W-w-w-what's that?" gasped Bunter.

"Same as my contribution to Coker's fund," said Bob Cherry blandly.

And the chums of the Remove chuckled and walked away, leaving Billy Bunter still staring blankly at the button in his palm.

"How's the fund getting on, Coker?" Harry Wharton asked, as they met Coker of the Fifth.

Coker gave a beaming smile.

"Ripping!" he said. "Nearly every minute you can hear the box clinking. Fellows are simply rolling up with their contributions."

"Oh, good! You'll be able to buy old age pensions for sailormen."

"Well, it won't quite run to that," said Coker; "but there will be pounds and pounds. Have you fellows put something in?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Of course we don't expect much from you fags," said Coker condescendingly. "But shillings and sixpences count up, in the long run, you know."

"I hope you don't mean to insinuate that you think I put in a shilling or a sixpence, Coker," said Bob Cherry indignantly.

"I suppose you didn't put in a quid?" said Coker, laughing.

"Well, no, not a quid. Still, it wasn't a sixpence, or a shilling, either."

"Well, the more the merrier," said Coker. "It will be a pleasant surprise for the sailormen when they get what's in that box, won't it?"

And Coke rnodded, and went into the House to see how his fund was getting on. The chums of the Remove grinned at one another.

"It will be a surprise for the sailormen when they get

what's in that box, I've no doubt about that," Nugent remarked. "I'm not so sure about the pleasantness of the surprise, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink!

That pleasant sound greeted Coker's ears as he entered the House. Skinner of the Remove was at the money-box. Coker tapped him on the shoulder, and Skinner looked round quickly and turned rather red.

"Piling it in—eh?" said Coker good-humouredly.

"Ye-es," said Skinner.

"That's right! It's for a good cause, kid."

"That's why I'm doing it, Coker," said Skinner solemnly. "I'm glad you're pleased."

Coker looked very pleased as he walked away. He had not expected fellows to rally round the fund in this generous way, especially fellows like Skinner. Skinner of the Remove was not supposed to be generous with money; in fact, he had a reputation for being rather mean. It only showed that you never really knew a fellow, was Coker's reflection. Here was Skinner of the Remove, supposed to be a mean chap, dropping contributions galore into the money-box for the fund. It was really quite touching.

Skinner looked after Coker with a grin.

"It's so pleasant to make one's schoolfellows happy, isn't it, Bolsover?" he remarked, "and especially if you've happened to find an old bunch of keys. Fancy pleasing Coker by dropping half a dozen old keys into his money-box! Queer world, ain't it?"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Curious Collection!

MR. PROUT, the master of the Fifth, found Coker very inattentive that afternoon in class. Coker was never distinguished for his scholastic attainments, and he had never been celebrated for attention to work. But just now he was quite indifferent to class business, and he turned a deaf ear to Mr. Prout, and that gentleman called him to order at last.

"May I beg you to observe, Coker," said Mr. Prout, in his tone of the most polished sarcasm, "that you are in the Form-room now, and not on the cricket-field? It is a common custom, when in class, to pay some slight attention to lessons. Some slight attention, you will observe—a mere trifle, of course, in comparison with the thought you bestow upon getting runs in a cricket-match."

And the Fifth chuckled, as in duty bound when their Form-master made a joke.

"Eh!" said Coker. "Did you speak to me, sir?"

"Really, Coker," said Mr. Prout, with great asperity, "this is intolerable!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Coker. "I was thinking!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Prout. "I am glad to hear it—very glad. Such unaccustomed exercise of your mental powers, my dear Coker, is greatly to be commended. I suppose it would be too much to hope, however, that you were thinking of your lessons?"

The Fifth did not chuckle this time, not being sure that this was a joke.

"It's about my fund, sir," said Coker. "The fact is, sir, I am getting up a fund for the shipwrecked sailors at Pegg, sir, and I've been thinking out what ought to be done with the money. Perhaps you'd give me some advice, sir."

Mr. Prout softened.

"Well, that is certainly a very good and generous action, Coker," he said. "I shall be very pleased to give you advice. But pray leave the consideration till after lessons. There is a time for all things."

But Mr. Prout was very gentle with Coker after that. And when the Fifth were dismissed, Coker stayed behind a minute or two to speak to the Form-master.

"You—er—wished for my advice, Coker?" said Mr. Prout.

"Yes, sir," said Coker. As a matter of fact, Coker didn't. But, after all, it gave the fund more eclat to have a Form-master concerned in the affair. "You see, sir, I expected only a small sum to be collected, but the fellows have been rolling up like anything. I've seen even small kids in the Third and Second putting things into the box. Of course, mostly coppers, I suppose; but every little helps."

"Quite so, Coker. And you think that the collection will amount to a sum of considerable magnitude?"

"Yes, sir. That's what I was thinking about. As there is a large sum raised, instead of the small one I expected, I don't know whether it ought to be handed over in cash to the seamen. You see, sir, they might be tempted to blue it on riotous living, especially as they are now living in a public-house. I thought perhaps it might be invested for them, and made quite safe."

"A very good idea, Coker," said Mr. Prout—"a very good idea indeed. I shall be very pleased to help you decide when the amount of the collection is ascertained."

"Thank you very much, sir! I think the box ought to be opened now. Every fellow has had a chance of putting in his little bit. Wingate has agreed to open it in the prefects' room, in the presence of the prefects, sir, as a guarantee of fair play. Perhaps you would not mind being present?"

"Certainly, Coker."

They proceeded to the hall. Bolsover minor of the Third Form was bending over the money-box, cramming something in which was apparently too large for the opening. The fag skilfully concealed a curtain-ring in his sleeve as he caught sight of Coker, and vanished. Coker lifted the box. It was a good-sized box, and it weighed a great deal now that it was full—and it was evidently full. Coker beamed.

"Feel the weght of it, sir," he said.

Mr. Prout felt the weight of the box.

"Very heavy!" he said.

"Even if it's mostly coppers, sir, there will be a good bit of money in that," said Coker.

"Undoubtedly."

"I'll carry it to the prefects' room."

And Coker marched off with the prize. There were smiles among the fellows who saw him go. They anticipated a surprise for Coker when the box was opened.

Wingate of the Sixth had the key, and he had agreed to open the box. Two or three good-natured prefects had assembled to witness the ceremony.

The box was placed on the table.

"Will you open it, Wingate, please?" said Coker.

"Right!" said the Greyfriars' captain.

A crowd of juniors were looking in at the open door. They were smiling. Loder made an angry gesture to them.

"Clear off, you kids!" he said.

"We want to see the show!" said Johnny Bull.

"Look here——"

"Oh, let them remain," said Mr. Prout generously. "Naturally, the juniors wish to know how much money has been raised by their generous efforts, Loder."

Loder growled under his breath, but he could not gainsay a Form-master. The juniors remained at the doorway, looking on with great interest at the opening ceremony. Wingate produced the key and inserted it in the lock of the money-box.

Click!

"Now look out for the circus!" murmured Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Prout looked round in surprise at the juniors.

"My dear boys," he said, "this is not a laughing matter. Coker's idea was a noble and generous one, and it seems to have been responded to in the same generous spirit by the boys of this school. Pray be serious."

The lid of the box was raised, and the contents poured out on the table.

There was a gasp from Coker, and a chuckle from Wingate. The prefects looking on all grinned.

"Oh, my hat!" said Coker.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Prout.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a curious collection.

There were several coins—a couple of half-crowns, two or three shillings, some sixpences, and a little heap of coppers.

But the greater part of the collection consisted of buttons of all sorts and sizes, and there were a considerable number of old keys, broken pen-nibs, curtain-rings, fragments of pencils, and pebbles.

The total value of the cash was about ten shillings.

The value of the rest—the greater part of the collection—was nothing at all.

Coker's dreams of forty or fifty pounds faded away all of a sudden.

The Fifth-former's face was a study as he gazed at the collection.

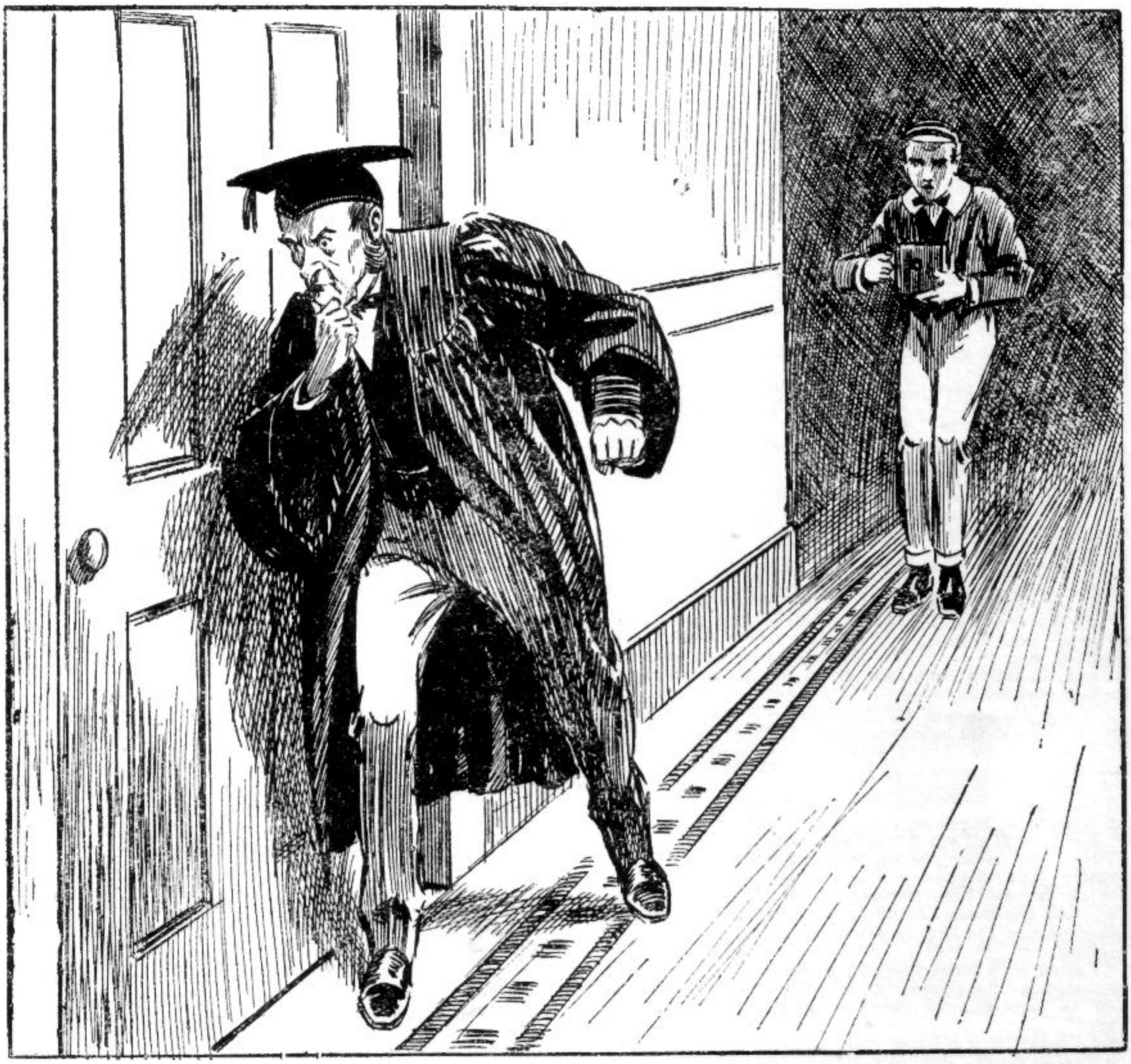
Mr. Prout was very pink.

"Ahem!" murmured Mr. Prout. "There seems to have been—ahem!—something humorous in the ideas of the—ahem!—contributors, Coker! I do not think—ahem!—that it will be possible to find an investment for that collection, Coker."

And Mr. Prout rustled away.

Coker could not speak for a moment.

"Ten bob!" said Loder, with a laugh. "Well, that will



The Housemaster paused outside the door, and bent his head to listen to what the juniors inside the study were saying. "He hasn't got on to the telephone paper yet!" "We'll make the old bounder sit up!" came the voices from the interior, and Mr. Ratcliff, in his excitement at his discovery, failed to hear three sharp clicks along the passage. *(For this exciting incident, see the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, entitled "THE SCAMPS OF THE SCHOOL!" in our companion paper "THE GEM" LIBRARY. On sale on Wednesday. Price One Penny.)*

provide the destitute sailormen with drinks all round, Coker."

"It's a shame!" said Wingate, laughing. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "The—the rotters! Oh! That ten bob was nearly all put up by my minor and me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take that rubbish away!" said Wingate. "I'm afraid you're not exactly the person to make a successful collection for a charity, Coker. You had better take a plate round next time, so that you can see what the fellows contribute."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker glared at the grinning prefects, and glared at the collection. Then he gathered up the money and the money-box and stamped away.

"Don't leave this rubbish here!" called out Loder.

Coker snorted.

"Oh, you can have that!" he said.

And he stamped out of the prefects' room. He glared at the juniors, who were howling with laughter.

"You rotters! You young rascals! I—I—I'll——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Coker," said Bob Cherry consolingly, "this job's rather above your weight, you know. We're going to take it in hand, and make a success of it."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific, my esteemed and ludicrous Coker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker charged at the crowd of juniors, who scattered, still yelling with laughter. And then the hero of the Fifth stalked away to his study, in great dudgeon. And in ten minutes all Greyfriars was chuckling over the story of Coker's collection.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Dramatists.

"COKER has made a muck of it, as usual!" Nugent remarked, in No. 1 Study, where the chums of the Remove had met in council. "But something is going to be done."

"Hear, hear!"

"And it's up to the Remove—that is to say, us!" said Harry Wharton.

"Our noble, esteemed, and ludicrous selves!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The best idea on hand is a charity performance by the Junior Dramatic Society," said Harry Wharton. "All agreed?"

"Hear, hear!"

"I've called the members together," said Harry. "They'll be along here soon. I don't see why a really good play, really well played, shouldn't be a howling success."

"Why not?" said Johnny Bull. "Only what about the takings?"

"They will all go to the fund for the destitute sailors, of course."

"I don't mean that. I mean, will there be any takings?"

"Of course there will, ass, if we charge for admission."

"If anybody comes!" said Bull.

"If Bull is going to throw cold water on the scheme at the start——" began the president of the Junior Amateur Dramatic Club warmly.

"Not at all," protested Johnny Bull. "But we ought to arrange about the audience before we rehearse a play. No good playing a really good play really well, to a set of empty chairs, you know."

"Well, the good of the cause will make a lot of the fellows roll up," said Harry, "and if we give them their money's worth, why shouldn't they pay for admission?"

"We'll give them Shakespeare, done as Shakespeare should be done," said Nugent.

"Hear, hear!"

"But Wharton suggests giving them their money's worth!" said Johnny Bull.

"Won't Shakespeare be their money's worth, fathead?" roared the incensed members of the Amateur Dramatic Club.

"I don't think they'll think so. Shakespeare is above their heads—and mine! If you want to get in the money, and I suppose you do——"

"Yes, ass."

"Well, then, have something comic, with ragtime in it."

"Rats!" said all the dramatists together.

There was certainly a slight doubt as to how Greyfriars would receive Shakespeare from the Junior Dramatic Club. But to descend from Shakespeare to ragtime was asking altogether too much. It would be from the sublime to the ridiculous, and the bare idea was not to be entertained for a moment.

"I think we'd better settle on Shakespeare," said Wharton, with dignity. "I suppose no member of this club wants to give an exhibition of the Turkey Trot or the Gargoyle Glide?"

"No fear!"

"The play's the thing," said Bob Cherry. "Shakespeare of the higher drama."

"I admit that some of the fellows are fed up on Shakespeare," said Wharton. "What about the higher drama?"

"Ahem!" said the members.

"Where do you get higher dramas?" asked Johnny Bull suspiciously.

"Might be able to get them on hire-purchase," suggested Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The president frowned.

"This is not a funny meeting," he said.

"Isn't it?" said Johnny Bull, in surprise. "My mistake! Go on!"

"Look here, Bull——"

"Look here, fathead——"

"Well, you know my opinion," said Johnny Bull obstinately. "Ragtime is the thing to catch the public—comic songs and things. Every fellow who's going to be allowed to join in the chorus will pay to come in. But you won't get anybody to lay down a bob to hear Nugent ask Bob wherefore he is Romeo."

"You're a Philistine," said Wharton—"a fatheaded Philistine! There's something due to the dignity of the dramatic art."

"Oh, crikey!" said Johnny Bull.

There wa a bump at the door, and the other members of the Junior Amateur Dramatic Club came in. There were a good many of them, and the study was pretty well crowded when they were all inside.

"Any gentleman got any suggestions to make for the play to be given in aid of the fund for the destitute sailormen?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, rather!" said all the members at once.

"Don't all speak together—take it in turns," said Bob Cherry.

"Well," said Bulstrode, "I was thinking of 'Hamlet.' I should be willing to play the part of Hamlet."

"Go hon! Next!"

"'Othello' was my idea," said Elliott. "I know Othello's part, and I could do it down to the ground—though I say it."

"Next!"

"Sure, I was thinking of 'The Merchant of Venice,'" said Micky Desmond. "I've got Shylock's part by heart, and sure I'll give ye a specimen——"

"Next man!"

"Hould on! I'll show ye how I do it, and you can decide whether it's first class or not," said Micky, his tone implying that it was first class in his opinion, and that he was prepared to disregard all other opinions.

"'I'll have me bond; spake not against me bond.

"'Sure, I've sworn an oath that I will have me bond——'"

"Shut up!" said all the members together.

"Sure, and I——"

"Next man in!" roared Wharton.

"What about a sketch of Lancashire life?" asked Mark Linley, who came from that great county. "I could coach you in the dialect——"

"Thanks! Next man!"

"I've got a better idea than a rotten play," said Ogilvy. "Why not a series of Scotch dances and songs—the special point about the performance to be that it is entirely Scotch?"

"Go home! Any more ideas, you fellows?"

"Leave it to me," said Morgan. "I saw some recitals when I was in London last vac., and it struck me that a recital might be given here with splendid effect."

"What do you mean by a recital?"

"One chap does it all, you know, or nearly all—gives songs one after another. I have a set of Welsh songs, look you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, we're likely to sit round like hens in a barnyard and leave you all the show,' said Nugent wrathfully.

"But look you——"

"Br-r-r-r-r! Rats!"

"Get out!"

"Cheese it!"

"Gentlemen," said Wharton, "all the suggestions we have received from members of the club turning out to be piffle——"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's up to the president to put it through. I think we're bound to stick to Shakespeare or the higher drama, at all events."

"You'll have to pay the fellows to come in," said Johnny Bull, "and what good will that do the fund?"

"Order!"

"And I may say," said Wharton, with a glare at Johnny Bull, "that I think the higher drama is the thing. Shakespeare, like the poor, is always with us! It would be the right thing to give the higher drama a leg-up, so to speak."

"Hear, hear!"

"But what the dickens is the higher drama?" asked Bulstrode.

"My dear chap, if you don't know what the higher drama is——"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Bulstrode.

"The higher drama," said Wharton—"the higher drama is—is the higher drama, of course."

"Oh, I see!" said Bulstrode sarcastically. "That's quite clear."

"Something really modern," explained Nugent, "without any plot or action, and hardly any characters. What characters there are simply talk to one another and argue over social problems that only exist in books."

"That's it," said Harry. "You write a play round a problem. F'rinstance, a mill-owner owns a mill. His eldest son becomes a strike leader. What ought they both to do under the circs? They talk to one another through three acts, and don't get any nearer a solution at the end than at the beginning. That's the higher drama."

"Sounds to me like silly rot!" said Tom Brown.

"Well, I suppose it is rot, when you come to think of it," admitted Wharton. "But it catches on, you know, as a change from the common-sense that people have been accustomed to for a long time."

"Why not play something of Ibsen's?" said Nugent. "It would give the Dramatic Club a lot of kudos to play Ibsen."

"Hum! I don't think the Head would allow it," said Harry. "Ibsen's subjects are rather—rather beastly, besides

being idiotic. But we might write a Higher Drama ourselves."

"My hat!"

"On the lines of a Norwegian drama, you know," said Harry, eagerly. "Quite up to date, and bristling with problems in chunks. F'rinstance, look here! I could write it. In fact, anybody could write an Ibsen drama."

Harry Wharton took a pen and a sheet of impot paper, and sketched out a scene for the drama. The juniors watched him curiously. Most of them had heard of Ibsen, but they had never read the works of the great Scandinavian. Wharton had seen some volumes by chance at his uncle's house, and had looked through them on a rainy afternoon in the holidays. Hence his unexpected knowledge of the Higher Drama. Wharton's pen moved rapidly over the paper, and the scene grew.

"Read it out," said Nugent.

"Listen, you fellows!" And Wharton read out his Ibsen drama. "Scene one. Scene: A Fiord in Norway.

"Characters: The Banker Skagrack, the banker's wife, and Slackrags, the clerk.

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'It is now ten years ago!'

"Mr. Skagrack: 'Ten years.'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'Yes. Ah, yes!'

"Mr. Skagrack: 'Ten long years.'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'Precisely ten years.'

"Mr. Skagrack: 'Ah!'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'Oh!'

"Mr. Skagrack: 'For those ten years, Elsa, we have been together, you and I.'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'You and I—you and I! Ah, Eyolf! Should you not rather say, I and you?'

"Mr. Skagrack, giving a sudden start: 'I and you, Elsa.'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'Is it not so, Eyolf?'

"Mr. Skagrack: 'Indeed you are right. Yet should we not rather say, neither I and you, nor you and I, but both? For who can truly say, Elsa, that the self—the Ego—should ever take the precedence of the inwardness of the Other. Yet why should the Other be before the One? Is it you who are with me, or I who am with you? Are we both with one another, or are we, indeed, one another with both? Who shall solve that problem, Elsa?'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'Who indeed, Eyolf?'

"Mr. Skagrack: 'Ah!'

"Mrs. Skagrack: 'Oh!'

"That's all I've done, so far," said Wharton, pausing and gazing at the astonished juniors. "Of course, anybody can write the Higher Drama as fast as his pen can go, or if you do it in shorthand you could do it a hundred words a minute. That's the best of a really up-to-date drama, you know. It doesn't bother you to do any thinking, or any inventing, or—in fact, or anything. You've simply got to write it down, and then the actors learn it by heart, and talk it on the stage. It's quite simple."

"But does it mean anything?" demanded Bulstrode.

"There's supposed to be hidden meanings in it," explained Wharton. "It's symbolical. It can symbolise anything you like. Every chap in the audience has a different idea as to what it symbolises, so all are satisfied. And the more empty it looks, the deeper it's supposed to be. People who don't like it are supposed not to have intellect enough to understand it. See?"

"Oh!"

"The only thing is, it might be above the heads of our audience," said Wharton musingly.

"Perhaps we'd better stick to the Lower Drama, then," said Bulstrode sarcastically. "Chaps are old-fashioned, you know, and might like to have something with some meaning in it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, it's either the Higher Drama or Shakespeare," said Harry Wharton. "I leave it to the club to decide."

And the club decided with one voice:

"Shakespeare!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
"The Play's the Thing!"

IF the immortal William had been still in the land of the living, he would certainly have been very pleased by that unanimous testimonial on the part of the Greyfriars Junior Dramatic Club. There was no sort of doubt that the Remove fellows preferred Shakespeare to the latest thing in dramas. The president bowed his head to the general opinion, and the "scene from a modern drama" was promptly consigned to the fire.

"So it's Shakespeare?" said Harry.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Very well. Now the question arises, which play?" said Harry Wharton. "Don't all of you suggest plays because you think the title-role will suit you. Title-roles are for the president of the club."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I suggest the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,'" said Johnny Bull thoughtfully.

"Well, there are some good parts in that," agreed Wharton.

"I mean, there is incidental music to it," Johnny Bull explained.

"We should have to leave that out. We can't get up an orchestra as well as play."

"I was thinking——"

"My dear chap!"

"I was thinking it would give us a chance to introduce ragtime," Johnny Bull persisted. "Instead of playing Mendelsohn's incidental music on a band, we could have a ragtime chorus, with tin-whistles and mouth-organs."

The amateur dramatists glared at the Philistine.

"Squash him!" said Bob Cherry.

"Sit on his head!"

"Bump him!"

"Jump on him!"

"Gentlemen," said Harry Wharton, "I suggest that the Amateur Dramatic Club passes a new bye-law on the spot that any member mentioning the word 'ragtime' shall forthwith be bumped hard."

"Hear, hear!"

"Passed unanimously!"

"Now which play is it going to be?" said Harry Wharton. "What price 'Hamlet'?"

"Twopence!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Shut up!" roared the dramatists.

"I have the honourfulness to suggest 'Othello,'" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "because I should be able to playfully take the part of the esteemed Moor without making up for it. Also I know many of the lines, as I have muchly studied poet Shakespeare." And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh forthwith declaimed:

"'Of antres vast and idleful deserts,
Roughful quarries, rocks, and hills whose honourable heads touchfully reached the heaven,
It was my esteemed hint to speak.
She loved me for the dangerfulness I had passed,
And I lovefully regarded her for the esteemed reason that she did pity them!'"

There was a yell of laughter as the Nabob of Bhanipur rendered Shakespeare in his beautiful English.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a comedy!" explained Nugent. "When we want to make the audience laugh, we'll shove you on, Inky."

"My esteemed chum——"

"They want to make 'em cry, you know," Johnny Bull remarked sarcastically.

"Order!"

"What about 'Julius Cæsar'?" said Harry Wharton. "Mark Antony's oration always goes down well. 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!'"

"We've done that once," said Nugent. "Something fresh."

"Shakespeare is always fresh," said the president severely. "Still, we might give Julius a rest."

"We're fed up on him in lessons," said Bulstrode. "It was the same chap who did the Gallic War, you know, and I think he was an ass. I don't see why he couldn't go to war without writing a lot of blessed Commentaries on the subject, to bother chaps two thousand years after he had kicked the bucket."

"What about 'King John'?"

"Plenty of excitement in that," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "Nugent would do for Prince Arthur, with his giddy milky complexion. I could do Hubert. 'Heat me thoso irons hot, and look thou standest within the arras——"

"What!"

"'Heat me those irons hot——'"

"What irons?" demanded Nugent.

"He's off his rocker!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ass!" roared Bob. "That's a line from the play."

"Oh, I see! Blessed if I didn't think you were wandering in your mind!" said Nugent. "Well, I wouldn't mind playing Prince Arthur."

"And I could do King John," said Wharton, "and we'd make Johnny Bull play Faulconbridge. Bulstrode can be a murderer——"

"Eh?" said Bulstrode.

"You would make a good murderer."

"What!" roared Bulstrode

"I think so, really. Bulstrode will be a murderer."

"If that's a joke——" began Bulstrode.

"It's not a joke," said Wharton, in surprise. "There will be two murderers wanted in the play."

"Oh, in the play!" said Bulstrode.

"Yes, ass! First and Second Murderer. You can be First Murderer, and Bolsover major can be Second Murderer. Marjorie Hazeldene can be the queen."

"Good egg!"

"I really think that 'King John' will do," said Harry. "It's a good play, and it isn't hackneyed to death like most of the others. Of course, we shal lhave to make cuts. We shouldn't have time to do the whole business from the kick-off to the finish."

"I dare say the audience will get as much as they want," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Order!"

"Any chance for introducing anything taking or up-to-date in the play?" asked Bull. "Could you work in a sing-song—say with Hubert and King John and Prince Arthur doing a Turkey trot?"

"Shut up!" roared the dramatists.

"Or you could have a wandering minstrel, Blondel, or somebody, doing some ragtime on a harp, and——"

At the word ragtime the amateur dramatists rose as one dramatist, and fell upon the Philistine, and carried into effect the recently-passed by-law.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Oh—oh—ow!" roared Johnny Bull.

Then the meeting broke up, to search high and low throughout the school for copies of "King John," to read up the script, as Wharton called it in professional language.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Genuine Drama!

"'HEAT me those irons hot!'" roared Bob Cherry.

"Hallo!"

"'And look thou standest within the arras!'"

"What?"

"'When I strike my foot upon the bosom of the ground,'" pursued Bob Cherry, "'rush forth!'"

Coker, Potter, and Greene of the Fifth stared. Bob Cherry had a scribbled sheet of paper in his hand, and was learning his lines under the elms in the Close, after school. Bob Cherry had a belief that he could learn lines better in the open air; in fact, he was never out of the open air if he could help it. Bob had withdrawn to a secluded part of the Close, but his powerful voice had made itself heard at a distance, and Coker & Co. had come up to see what was the matter.

They were astounded. They could not make out what Bob meant by his remarks, apparently addressed to the empty air, and his gesticulations made them fear for his sanity.

"He's got it!" said Potter.

"Absolutely got it!" said Greene.

"Mad!" remarked Coker compassionately.

Bob Cherry did not even look at them. He went on:

"'Rush forth and bind the boy whom you shall find with me fast to the chair!'"

"Look here, what's the little game?" demanded Coker.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, breaking off. "What do you Fifth-Form bounders want? Buzz along, and don't worry!"

"But what are you up to?" demanded Coker.

"I'm learning my part."

"Your what?"

"Part, fathead!"

"Part of what?"

"The play."

"What play?"

"You'll see it all on the notice-board," said Bob Cherry. "Go and read it. Wharton's put the notice up! Run away and play!"

"We don't read Lower Fourth notices," said Potter loftily.

"No fear!" remarked Greene, with emphasis.

But Bob Cherry did not listen. He declaimed:

"'Rush forth and find the boy whom you shall bind with me—I mean, bind the boy whom you shall find with me——'"

"Getting mixed, ain't he?" said Coker.

"'Fast to the chair!'" roared Bob. "Be heedful! Hence, and watch!'"

"Well, I don't mind hencing, if you're going to roar at a chap like that," said Coker. "But what are you kids playing at doing a play for?"

"For the cause of charity," said Bob. "We're going to raise a fund for the destitute seamen in Pegg."

Coker jumped.

"Why, you cheeky young rotter! They're my destitute seamen!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I was raising a fund for them."

"They can't live on shirt-buttons and old curtain-rings," grinned Bob. "Your fund wasn't any good, Coker."

"I was thinking over a new dodge, and now you kids have had the cheek to bag it before I could even think of it!" exclaimed Coker.

"You wouldn't have thought of it in a month of Sundays."

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Three drenched and dirty, furious, be-draggled Fifth-Formers crawled out of the ventilator, one after another. The juniors greeted them with roars of laughter, and Coker & Co. crawled away, too utterly "done in" even to speak! *(See Chapter 7.)*

"The fact is, I was just going to think of it—in fact, had almost thought of it—already," said Coker. "It's a good idea, and we'll carry it out."

"You'll be carried out yourself, if you try to chip in, in our play," said Bob. "Sorry, Coker, but we can't let you have a hand in this. It's rather above your weight."

"Why, you—you——" began Coker wrathfully.

"'Heat me those irons hot——'"

"Look here, Bob Cherry——"

"'And look thou standest within the arras!'"

"You cheeky young bounder! I tell you we won't allow anything of the sort," roared Coker. "They're my destitute seamen——"

"'When I strike my foot upon the bosom of the ground——'"

"This matter belongs to the Fifth, and we're going to——"

"'Rush forth——'"

"I tell you——"

"'And bind the boy whom you shall find with me——'"

"Look here, Bob Cherry, you cheeky ass——"

"'Fast to the chair!'"

"Oh, bump him!" said Coker.

The three Fifth-Formers laid violent hands upon Bob Cherry, and the Remove dramatist was bumped on the ground. He struggled violently, and hit out, and Potter gave a yelp as a particularly hard set of knuckles jammed on his nose. But they were too many for Bob. They bumped him, and rolled him over, and jammed his scribbled part down the back of his neck, and left him gasping.

Then they walked away. Potter and Greene were grinning, but the mighty brow of Horace Coker was severe and sombre.

"Cheeky young cubs!" said Coker, at last. "We'll have a look at their notice, after all. Fancy bagging my idea like that!"

"Your idea!" said Potter.

"Yes; my idea to raise a fund for the destitute seamen—my destitute seamen. I hadn't thought about a play; but that's only a detail."

"Ahem! Yes!"

"Look here, Potter, if you don't agree with me——"

"Oh, I agree with you," said Potter. "Anything for a quiet life. But I don't see how the kids can be prevented from playing the giddy goat if they want to. They won't get any tin for the fund, either—nobody will pay to see them."

"I don't know. Fellows might go to laugh, if they're doing a tragedy," said Coker. "We're not going to be left out of our fund. No fear! If there's going to be a play in aid of my destitute seamen, I'm going to play the title-role."

"Fellows would pay to come and laugh then," murmured Potter.

"Eh—what did you say?"

"I say it would be a striking performance."

"Well, I can play, you know," said Coker. "I'm really an all-round chap. I can play on the stage quite as well as I play cricket."

"I've no doubt about that," agreed Potter, quite sincerely.

"No doubt at all," said Greene.

"It's not a bad idea, come to think of it," said Coker. "I rather fancy myself as Brutus, you know. Have you ever heard me do Mark Antony's oration?"

"Brutus doesn't do that, does he?" asked Greene, in surprise. "I should have thought that was up to Mark Antony."

"I can do both parts, fathead! Listen to this: 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!'" said Coker. "'I come to bury Cæsar, not to raise him.'"

"Is that quite right?" asked Potter.

"Of course it is. Do you think I don't know the lines?"

"Well, I thought it was: 'I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him!'" said Potter meekly.

Coker sniffed.

"That shows how much you know about Spokeshave—I mean Shakespeare. 'I come to bury Cæsar, not to raise him'—that's sense."

"Is it?" murmured Potter.

"Yes, it is," said Coker angrily. "If you think you know Shakespeare better than I do——"

"I don't think!" murmured Potter.

"'The evil that men do lives after them,'" resumed Coker. "'The good is oft interred with their groans.'"

"Their what?"

"Groans," said Coker, almost ferociously.

"I thought it was bones."

"Ass! You'd better get a copy of Shakespeare, and read him up," said Coker. "It's a good time since I've read 'Julius Cæsar,' but I know those lines well. If we do the play, I'll coach you fellows. I don't mind taking a lot of trouble to help young amateurs. Here's their giddy notice."

The three Fifth-Formers stopped before the notice-board in the hall. There was a paper pinned on it, in the handwriting of Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, and president of the Junior Amateur Dramatic Club:

"NOTICE!

In Aid of a Fund for the Relief of the Seamen recently Shipwrecked in Pegg Bay,

A PERFORMANCE will be given by the Junior Dramatic Society, of 'KING JOHN,' by William Shakespeare.

Permission to use the lecture-hall has been kindly granted by Dr. Locke, Headmaster.

Performance on Saturday evening. Curtain at 7 sharp.

Prices of Admission: Stalls, 2s. 6d., Pit, 1s., Gallery, 6d.

Lovers of the Genuine Drama are promised a Treat! All admirers of the Mercantile Marine should roll up for the good of the cause! All expenses borne by the Junior Dramatic Club, the whole of the receipts being devoted to the Fund. Roll up in your thousands! Support the Fund! Support the Genuine Drama! Support the Immortal Swan of Avon! Roll up!

(Signed) H. WHARTON,
President, J.D.C.

P.S.—Roll up! P.P.S.—Roll up!"

The three Fifth-Formers read that notice through, and sniffed. Coker frowned. Potter and Greene, having sniffed to show their contempt, grinned to show their amusement. But Coker did not grin. Coker was incensed.

"The nerve of it!" said Coker. "My idea——" Coker was quite convinced by this time that it was his idea. "My idea—bagged like this! We won't stand it! Besides, those kids will make a muck of it. I can't have my destitute seamen left destitute because these kids want to play the giddy ox. We shall have to take it out of their hands."

"The Junior Dramatists bear the exes," said Potter, with a chuckle, "and the audience will have to bear the Junior Dramatists. I'd rather bear the expenses myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The genuine drama!" hooted Coker. "Genuine nerve! Genuine neck, I must say! Come on, you chaps, we're going to put a stop to this at once!"

And Coker & Co. marched off in search of the President of the Junior Dramatic Club.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
Coker Makes a Good Offer.

HARRY WHARTON was very busy in his study.

The President of the Junior Dramatic Club had plenty to do; being not only president of the dramatists, but player of the title-role, stage-manager, property-man, and general coach.

In the intervals of learning his lines, Wharton arranged scenery, and coached the other fellows, encouraging with one hand and chiding with the other, so to speak.

He had made merciless cuts in the play—an act of sacrilege which could not be helped. Audiences in the spacious days of good Queen Bess had more patience than their descendants of the present day. And the Remove tragedians did not expect to be able to hold their audience for more than a couple of hours. A couple of hours of Shakespeare was, as Johnny Bull said, as much as anybody could reasonably be expected to stand.

Wharton looked up from a very much mutilated copy of "King John" as Coker and Potter and Greene came into the study. He gave them an absent sort of nod.

"Sorry—I'm busy!" he said pointedly.

Coker grunted.

"I've come to speak to you," he said.

"Sorry!"

"Nothing to be sorry about, unless you don't see reason," said Coker. "What's this rot of yours on the notice-board?"

"No rot of mine there," said Wharton, in surprise.

"Didn't you put it there, then?"

"Certainly not."

"Oh," said Coker mollified, "I suppose it's a joke, then?"

"Maybe. Good-bye!"

"But you've seen it, haven't you?"

"No."

"It's a notice, signed with your name."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Harry calmly. "That notice is all right. You were alluding to some rot——"

"That notice is the rot I'm alluding to!" roared Coker, turning rather red as he realised that the junior had been gently pulling his leg.

"Oh, that isn't rot!" said Wharton cheerfully. "That's my notice to the school, about our dramatic entertainment on Saturday, Coker. Are you coming?"

"C-c-coming!" spluttered Coker.

"Yes; half-crown for the stalls, bob for the pit, and a tanner for the gallery," said Harry. "As seniors, you ought to make it stalls, and you can afford the half-crown, as it's a good cause. You tried to do something for the same cause yourself, you know, and though you made a muck of it, it shows you've got a good heart, whatever your head may be like——"

"Wha-a-at!"

Wharton took out a notebook and pencil.

"Can I put your names down for three stalls?" he asked, in a business-like manner.

Coker simply gasped.

"Well," he stuttered, "the cheek——"

"The face!" said Potter.

"The neck!" said Greene.

"Oh, make it stalls!" said Wharton, affecting to misunderstand. "Still, you can have pit seats, if you like. We're booking seats in the pit, to save having a theatre queue outside the lecture-hall on the night——"

"Yes; you're likely to have a queue," said Potter sarcastically. "I fancy I can see all Greyfriars rushing to see 'King John' done by a gang of fags in the Lower Fourth——"

"Well, we expect a crowd," said Harry. "The seats are going pretty well already, I may tell you, and if you don't book now you may have to stand at the back. Even the standing room may be taken up."

"May be," grinned Potter; "but I wouldn't bet on it."

"Well, if you don't want seats, this interview is closed," said Harry. "You must excuse me, if I remark that I'm very busy. As stage-manager——"

"Look here!" roared Coker. "Are you going to give up this wheeze?"

"Give it up!" said the captain of the Remove, in surprise. "What for?"

"It's my idea."

"Yours! My hat!"

"Yes. Those destitute sailormen are practically my private property," said Coker. "It was my idea to raise a fund for them."

Well, raise one," said Harry. "Nobody's stopping you. I'll contribute to it, too—if I can find some more trousers' buttons."

Potter and Greene chuckled at the remembrance of Coker's collection. Coker gave them a glare, and they looked awfully serious immediately.

"It's my idea," persisted Coker, "this play is only a detail. However, I'm not going to stop the play from being given—I don't mean that."

"You're too good," said Harry.

"But it will have to be in our hands!" said Coker.

"Our play——"

"My play, you cheeky fag."

"That's it," said Potter. "It's practically Coker's idea, and you fags have bagged it. You have got to hand it back again."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We'll let you kids come into it," said Coker condescendingly.

"Go hon!"

"We'll take the same play, and use all the scenery you've arranged, and have the lecture-hall for Saturday night just the same," said Coker. "The only difference will be a new cast for the play—all the leading roles taken by Fifth-Form fellows. But you fags can come on in the crowd, as soldiers, and murderers, and statesmen, and princes, and things."

"And a jolly good offer, too!" said Potter.

"Jolly good!" echoed Greene.

"Yes, considering that it's all my idea," said Coker. "I'll put myself down for the part of King John. Potter can be Horatio——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

Coker glared at him suspiciously.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"Nothing; only Horatio is in 'Hamlet,' not in 'King John.' Of course, that's only a detail," added Wharton.

"Ahem! It was simply a slip of the tongue—I meant that Potter would be suited for the part of Benedick——"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's in 'Much Ado About Nothing,' not 'King John.'"

"I—I meant the part of—— Oh, never mind all that, we can settle the parts afterwards," said Coker. "I shall be King John—or, rather, King Richard. Richard Cœur de Lion will make a part just suitable for me."

"But he doesn't appear in the play," said Potter gently.

"Why not? He was King John's brother. Why shouldn't he appear in the play?" Coker demanded warmly.

"Well, he was dead before John became King John, you know——"

"We could make some alteration in the play," said Coker. "Shakespeare is always altered by people who know better than Shakespeare did. We'll put in Richard Cœur de Lion, and I'll take the part. You can have King John, and Greene can be Prince Arthur. Suppose King Richard was only supposed to be dead, and turned up unexpectedly and rescued Prince Arthur from his wicked uncle. What price that? It would be an improvement."

"Would you mind improving Shakespeare in your own study?" asked Wharton politely. "I'm rather busy."

"Are you going to hand that play over to us?" demanded Coker.

"Is that a conundrum?"

"I want an answer."

"All right; because one rode a horse and the other rhododendron," said the junior.

"What?"

"That's an answer. Isn't it the right one?"

"Look here," shouted Coker, "I'm fed-up——"

"It must be catching," said Harry. "I've been fed-up for some time. Good-bye!"

"Are you going to place that play in our hands?" demanded Coker. "I'm giving you a chance for the last time to do the right thing. Are you going to play that place—I mean, place that play in our hands?"

"Ask me another."

"Yes or no?" bawled Coker.

"No!"

"Then we're jolly well going to stop it, and stop you kids from mucking up Shakespeare," said Coker, "and we may as well begin now. Collar him!"

Wharton jumped up and seized a cricket-bat, and flourished it.

"Hands off!"

"Yarooh!" roared Coker, as the end of the bat came into violent contact with his watch-chain, and he staggered back. "Ow! You young imp—ow!"

"Put that bat down!" shouted Potter.

"Here you are!"

Wharton put it down—across Potter's head, with a gentle tap. Potter jumped away. Greene made a spring to avoid a swing of the bat, and bumped into Coker, and sent him reeling.

"Ow! You fathead——"

"Gerrout, you chump——"

"I give you two seconds to get out of this study," said Wharton. "Then I shall charge, and if you get hurt you'll have yourselves to thank. Now, then! One—two—three——"

He charged, flourishing the bat. The three Fifth-Formers had to bolt, or they would certainly have been hurt. There was no arguing with a cricket-bat swung by a pair of muscular hands. Wharton closed the door behind them, and locked it. He tossed the bat into a corner, and returned cheerfully to his labours.

Outside, in the passage, Coker & Co. regarded one another with sickly expressions.

"Cheeky young rotter!" said Coker.

"Cheeky beast! Better let him alone!" said Potter.

"Yes; might as well let the thing slide," said Greene. "We don't want those cheeky fags round us like a hornets' nest."

Horace Coker snorted.

"I'm jolly well not going to let it slide!" he said. "I'm jolly well not going to have my play bagged! I'm jolly well going to shove those fags out of it somehow, and play it myself, if I have to do it all on my own! You hear me?"

It would have been difficult not to hear Coker. His voice sounded the length of the passage.

"Yes," said Potter meekly. "Let's go and have tea."

And they went and had tea, and over tea Coker further developed the things he jolly well intended to do. And Potter and Greene listened to them with great patience—not because they had any special admiration for Coker's schemes, but because Coker was standing the tea.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Going Strong!

THE Greyfriars dramatists did not allow the grass to grow under their feet.

Rehearsals were frequent as soon as the parts had been apportioned. Fellows learned their lines in and out of season. They took copies of their parts into the class-rooms, and hid them under their desks and surreptitiously studied them. Attention to lessons was not improved thereby, and lines fell upon some of the more ardent dramatists. They would take their copies with them on to the cricket-field, and pause in the middle of practice to declaim a few lines. Johnny Bull seemed to have least enthusiasm, and he was given the part of Second Murderer, as all that he was fit for. The more attractive part of Faulconbridge was assigned to Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, who really had a gift for acting, and did the part of the reckless, dashing adventurer very well. Tom Brown entered into the character so thoroughly that he almost became Faulconbridge, and he replied to everyday remarks in the language of that character. When Bolsover minor shoved him in the passage, Tom Brown astonished him by exclaiming, "Get thee hence, knave!" And when Billy Bunter tried to extract a loan from him, on the supposition of a postal-order that was coming, Tom Brown bade him begone for a scurvy varlet.

Mr. Quelch noticed that a good many members of the Remove seemed to have something on their minds which prevented them from taking that interest in lessons which good, industrious boys really ought to have taken.

And a morning or two after Harry Wharton's famous notice had appeared in the hall, Mr. Quelch grew quite cross about it.

"Cherry!" he exclaimed for the second time, Bob not having answered to the first.

Bob Cherry started, and hastily slipped into his pocket a paper he had been studying under cover of the desk.

"Yes, sir?" said Bob.

"I have spoken to you twice!"

"Yes, sir—I mean, sorry, sir!"

"You were reading something, Cherry!" said Mr. Quelch severely.

"No—yes—sir," stammered Bob.

"What were you reading? I trust you have not been impertinent enough to bring a book into the Form-room other than your class-books?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then what is it?"

"I—I was studying Shakespeare, sir."

"H'm! It is very meritorious to study Shakespeare, Cherry. But it is not a time to study Shakespeare in a geography lesson."

"I—I suppose not, sir."

"You will write out 'I must not read Shakespeare during lessons,' fifty times, Cherry!"

"Very well, sir!"

"You, also, seem very remiss this morning, Brown," said Mr. Quelch, turning to the New Zealander, after having thus disposed of Bob Cherry.

"What sayest thou?"

Mr. Quelch jumped.

"Brown!"

"What dost thou say, sir?"

"Brown!" roared Mr. Quelch. "What do you mean?"

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!" stammered Tom, coming back to everyday life all of a sudden. "I—I've been studying Shakespeare, sir."

"Indeed! You will kindly not answer me in high-flown language, Brown!"

"Assuredly not, fair sir—I mean, certainly not, sir!"

"Take fifty lines, Brown!"

"As thou sayest, so let it be," said Tom Brown, who was so deeply imbued with his part that he could not remember that he was Tom Brown and not Faulconbridge.

"Take a hundred lines!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Bulstrode!"

"Ye-e-es?" stammered Bulstrode.

"What are you reading under your desk?"

"My lines, sir."

"Lines! I have not given you any lines!"

"I mean my lines from 'King John,' sir. I—I'm studying Shakespeare."

Mr. Quelch looked astounded.

"There seems to be an epidemic of Shakespeare study in this Form," he said. "I am glad to see that the literary taste of the Remove appears to be improving. At the same time, even the study of Shakespeare cannot be undertaken in a geography lesson. You will put those lines away, Bulstrode, and write out fifty from Virgil after lessons!"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

And there was no more Shakespeare study that morning.

But when the class was dismissed, Harry Wharton lingered behind to speak to the Form-master. He had a little bundle of tickets in his hand, nicely got up, and printed at the local printer's.

"May I ask you to look at these, sir?" said Wharton modestly.

"Certainly, my lad. What are they?"

"Tickets, sir. We're giving a performance of 'King John' on Saturday evening, in aid of the fund for the destitute seamen at Pegg, and I thought you might like to take some, to encourage the others."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Complimentary tickets are entirely suspended, sir, as it's a charity," explained Wharton. "We hope all the masters will be present, to encourage the genuine drama, and to help on the fund for the destitute seamen. There is a special row of reserved seats for masters, at five shillings each."

Mr. Quelch looked hard at Wharton, and then smiled.

"Very well, Wharton, if it is for a good cause. Who is in charge of the fund, by the way?"

"We hoped you might take charge of the money, sir," said Wharton. "All the receipts are to be devoted to the fund, as we're standing the expenses ourselves."

"Very good. I will do so with pleasure. You may put my name down for a five-shilling seat, and I shall come in if possible, at all events for a time."

"Thank you so much, sir!"

And Wharton went on his way highly elated.

Five minutes later he had added another line to the notice on the board in the hall:

"UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF H. QUELCH, ESQ., M.A., MASTER, LOWER FOURTH."

An addition to the notice which had a very impressive effect.

Hobson having been given the part of the Dauphin of France, he interested the Shell fellows in the scheme, and obtained a subscription from the master of the Shell.

Coker might have done the same in the Fifth; but Coker, like Achilles of old, was sulking in his tent.

Coker persisted that the idea was his idea—or so near that it made no difference—and he announced his intention of taking it out of the hands of the juniors, an announcement which was received with utter disdain by those lively young gentlemen.

Exactly how Coker was going to do it was not apparent.

The genuine drama was going strong.

Fellows in all sorts of weird guises chanted lines in the Remove passage.

Historical garb was carefully studied for the occasion, and between specimens borrowed from the school museum and "props" hired from the costumier's in Courtfield the amateur dramatists seemed likely to do well.

Bulstrode was clad in a buff jerkin and a steel cap when he received an urgent message from Mr. Quelch that evening, ordering him to go to the Form-master's study at once. Bulstrode had forgotten all about his lines from Virgil, in his keenness to learn lines from Shakespeare. Mr. Quelch was not a gentleman who could be kept waiting, so Bulstrode went as he was.

Mr. Quelch started up from his chair as a villainous-looking ruffian in steel cap and buff jerkin and black beard came into his study.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Remove-master. "What—what——"

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Bulstrode!"

"Yes, sir. I—I thought I'd better not keep you waiting, sir," said Bulstrode meekly.

"What does this ridiculous garb mean, Bulstrode?" the Form-master exclaimed sharply.

"I'm a murderer, sir!"

"What!"

"I'm a murderer."

"Bulstrode!"

"Bull's the other murderer, sir; but I'm the first murderer!"

"If this is a joke, Bulstrode——"

"Not at all, sir! I'm First Murderer, and Bull's Second Murderer in 'King John,' sir."

"Oh! In the play, you mean?"

"Of course, sir!" said Bulstrode, in surprise.

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"You have not done your lines, Bulstrode. Upon the whole, as you seem very busy, I will excuse you. But you must not think of these matters any more in class-time!"

"Thank you, sir!"

And the First Murderer marched away. Mr. Quelch laughed. But he resumed his usual severe expression as there was another tap at his study door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Quelch.

Bob Cherry came in, with a paper in his hand.

"My line, sir," he said.

"Your what?"

"My line, sir."

"Your lines, I suppose, you mean, Cherry?" said Mr. Quelch, somewhat tartly.

"No, sir; my line!" said Bob Cherry innocently, laying the paper on the desk.

Mr. Quelch looked at the paper, and his eyes opened wider as he read what was written there. For this is what Bob Cherry had written: "I must not study Shakespeare during lessons fifty times!"

"Cherry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"This is not what I told you to write!"

"Oh, yes, sir—word for word!"

Mr. Quelch looked long and hard at Bob Cherry, wondering whether it was possible that the junior had misunderstood him to that extent. Bob waited, with an expression of beatific innocence upon his face.

"You may go, Cherry!" said Mr. Quelch at last.

"Thank you, sir!"

And Bob Cherry went. Outside the study, he winked solemnly at the desert air.

Inside the study, Mr. Quelch murmured: "Is that boy a fool, or a young rascal?" And he could not find a conclusive answer to that question.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
Bunter is Left Out!

"YOUNG lad, come forth!"

Thus Bob Cherry.

Mark Linley looked up in surprise. Mark Linley was a French Nobleman in the play; but at present he was a Lower Fourth junior doing his preparation. Bob Cherry was looking in at the doorway, with a dramatic gesture.

"Young lad, come forth!"

"The fourthfulness is terrific!" said Huree Jamset Ram Singh, looking up from his work. "But why should not the esteemed Marky come thirdfully?"

"Ass! I said forth, not fourth!" said Bob Cherry. "Young lad, come forth! I have to say with you!"

"Off your rocker?" asked Mark.

"Ass! You ought to say 'Good-morrow, Hubert!'"

"Oh! Good-morrow, Hubert!" said Mark, laughing.

"Good-morrow, little prince!" said Bob Cherry. "How do you think it's going?"

"Does Hubert say that in the play?" asked Mark. "It doesn't sound to me like Shakespeare."

"Fathead! Hubert doesn't say that—I say that! How do you think it's going?"

Mark laughed.

"Oh, rippingly! I must say you're getting up the prison scene first-rate, Bob."

Bob Cherry looked complacent.

"Well, I think I don't make a bad Hubert," he remarked.

"But the esteemed Hubert is supposefully considered to be bad," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It is necessary to make a bad Hubert, my worthy chum."

"My dear Inky, what you don't know about the English language would fill big volumes!" said Bob Cherry. "I shall make a good Hubert because I make a bad one! See?"

"The seefulness is not terrific!" said the nabob, with a shake of his head.

"Nugent is getting on all right as Prince Arthur," said Bob. "He is quite pathetic when he asks me not to put out his eyes, and he will move the audience to tears when Johnny Bull and Bulstrode come in, heating the irons hot. Nice old customs they had in the good old times, hadn't they? But come on, you chaps; it's time for rehearsal!"

Mark Linley and Hurree Singh put away their work, and followed Bob Cherry from the study. Billy Bunter met them in the passage. There was an expression of unusual determination upon William George Bunter's fat face.

"I say, you fellows——" he began.

"Sorry can't stop!" said Bob genially.

"But I say——"

"Sit down!" said Bob, as Bunter caught his sleeve.

And he gave the Owl of the Remove a gentle push, which deposited him on the linoleum.

Bunter sat there gasping, and Johnny Bull, hurrying down the passage for the rehearsal, nearly fell over him.

"Ow!" roared Bunter.

"Oh! What are you sitting there for, ass?" growled Johnny Bull.

"That beast Cherry pushed me over! He's broken my ribs!" groaned Bunter.

"Which side?" asked Bull, glaring at him.

"This—this side!" said Bunter, pressing his hand to his right side. "Ow! The pain is awful! Yow!"

"Then I'll break one on the other side, and make it even!" said Johnny Bull.

Biff!

"Yarooh!" roared Bunter, as Bull's boot-toe smote him in the ribs. "Ow! Help! Yah!"

Johnny Bull walked on.

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet with remarkable agility for a fellow whose ribs were broken.

"Beasts!" he growled.

Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, came down the passage, with a battered morion from the school museum on his head and a rusty breastplate over his waistcoat. Fisher T. Fish had been given a part in the play. He had claimed the part of King John to begin with, and had successively offered to take the parts of Prince Arthur, Hubert, Faulconbridge, Pembroke, the Dauphin, and several others, and had finally accepted the part of a Soldier, which was all the stage-manager would trust him with. As a Soldier, Fisher T. Fish had to walk on and off the stage in morion and breastplate, and say nothing, along with a crowd of other Soldiers, Attendants, Pages, and Noblemen.

"So you're in it, too, Fishy?" growled Bunter.

"I guess so!" said Fish. "I guess the play wouldn't amount to much if I were left out of it, Bunter! Just a few!"

"They're leaving me out!" growled Bunter. "I should play Prince Arthur ever so much better than Nugent! But——"

"Prince Arthur in spectacles!" grinned Fisher T. Fish. "My dear chap, they hadn't any in those days! Besides, you are an ass! But I'll tell you what. I'll make you my dressing attendant, if you like!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Billy Bunter drifted along to the Rag—the room on the ground floor where the rehearsal was to be held. Billy Bunter was exasperated. He wanted a big part in the play, but he would have taken a small part rather than have been left out of it. But there was not even a small part for him.

Wharton, who wanted to be kind, had considered whether he couldn't put in Bunter as a Statesman or a Messenger; but it was agreed that the appearance of Bunter on the stage would make the whole thing look funny. Johnny Bull said it would be funny enough without that. So Bunter had

to be left out, and he had refused disdainfully the offer of a post as scene-shifter.

Peter Todd came along to the Rag, and Bunter button-holed him at the door. Peter Todd was Pembroke in the play—not a big part, but as much as he could get. After all, only one person could take the title-role.

"I say, Toddy, old man——"

"Sorry—can't stop!" said Peter.

"Look here, Number Seven Study always sticks together!" said Bunter. "You've said so yourself. If they don't take me in you ought to stand out!"

"This is in the cause of charity," explained Peter Todd. "I'm going to help them out. They ought to have at least one good actor!"

"They've refused a jolly good one!"

"Who's that?" asked Todd, in surprise.

Bunter snorted.

"Me, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Todd——"

"Bunty, old man, you're a good cook and a jolly good ventriloquist, but you can't act for toffee! If it was a comedy, you'd do—without making-up! But you'd make a tragedy too tragic! This is where you lie down."

And Peter Todd shook off Bunter's fat hand, and went into the Rag.

Nearly all the dramatic company had assembled there now—most of them in costume, as it was a dress rehearsal. The window of the Rag was open, letting in the fresh summer air, and the gnats and moths, as the gas was lighted. The furniture had been pushed back to give room for the rehearsal. All of the junior actors looked very busy and serious. Billy Bunter made a last appeal to Wharton.

"Wharton—I say, Wharton——"

"All non-members of the company outside!" said Harry.

"Look here, Harry, old man——"

"I'll 'Harry, old man' you if you don't travel!" said Wharton.

"I give you a last chance," said Bunter. "If you want to make the play a success, you want a good actor in it—one at least! I'm willing to play King John!"

"Are you willing to go out of that door?" asked Wharton.

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Then you'll go out of the window! Drop him out, somebody!"

"Yah! Oh, leggo! Yoooooop!"

Bob Cherry and Bolsover major picked up the fat junior, swung him through the window, and dropped him on the ground outside. The ground was only a few feet below the window, and Bunter was not hurt. But he groaned as though at the point of death.

"Clear off!" roared Peter Todd.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Buzz off!"

"I—I can't move! My leg's sprained!" groaned Bunter. "Lend me your spear, Fishy; I'll give him a dig with it. Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's gone!"

Bunter had not waited.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Dress Rehearsal!

HORACE COKER was feeling exasperated.

The Remove play was going strong.

And Coker—the great Coker—was not in it.

Coker had come down off his lofty perch, and had offered to take a part in the play, and leave the management in Remove hands.

It was a huge concession for the great Coker to make.

To his amazement, it was not accepted.

The Remove fellows hadn't a part to assign to Coker. Wharton, in a moment of good-nature, offered to make him Extra Murderer, if he liked. Coker didn't like!

Coker was exasperated. He was strolling in the Close with Potter and Greene, confiding to his somewhat bored chums his exasperation and indignation.

From the open window of the Rag came the sound of voices speaking in Shakespearian language.

Coker & Co. halted to listen.

"Hark at the young sweeps!" said Coker. "Offered me the part of Extra Murderer! Me!"

"They seem to be going on all right," Potter remarked. "Wharton is doing the King John bizney well. I hear they've sold all the seats."

Coker sniffed.

"Fellows have taken the seats to help on the charity, of course—subscribing money for the destitute seamen—my destitute seamen! They don't want to see those Remove kids playing the giddy ox."

"And I hear that all the fags are going in at a tanner a time," said Greene. "The takings will be big."

"Under the patronage of Quelchy, too!" said Potter. "Wharton's got his head screwed on his shoulders the right way, Coker. With old Quelch present, no chance of a rag."

"That's his game, of course," growled Coker. "He suspected that some of us in the Fifth might come along and kick up a row."

"Wouldn't be good form, as it's for a charity."

"It wouldn't make any difference to the charity, as the audience have paid in advance, fathead! But I don't see how we can rag them, with the masters present."

"Too risky."

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter loomed up in the gloom. "Do you hear those silly asses spouting in there? Rotten, ain't it?"

"Rotten isn't the word!" said Coker.

"They've left me out," said Bunter.

"Well, that shows that they're not wholly idiots," said Coker.

"Oh, really——"

"Listen to that!" growled Coker. "That's Bob Cherry! He's been spouting that stuff all over the school for a week!"

Bob Cherry's deep voice came booming out of the open window of the Rag:

> "'Heat me those irons hot,
> And look thou standest well within the arras.
> When I strike my foot upon the bosom of the ground
> Rush forth, and bind the boy whom you shall find with me
> Fast to the chair!'"

"They offered me the next bit," growled Coker. "Bulstrode's doing it. Listen to him!"

'I hope your warrant will bear out the deed,'" said Bulstrode, in his character of Murderer.

Then came Bob's deep tones:

"'Uncleanly scruples! Fear not you! Look to it!'"

Billy Bunter burst into a sudden chuckle.

"You fellows, come along, and you'll see some fun!" he said, starting for the window of the Rag. "I'm going to give 'em some ventriloquism."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Fifth-Formers followed Bunter. Outside the window, in the darkness of the Close, they could look into the lighted room and see without being seen. Billy Bunter cleared his throat with a little preparatory cough.

Bob Cherry, in the costume of Hubert, was standing before Frank Nugent, as Prince Arthur. The Rag was supposed to be a dungeon for the nonce.

"'Young lad, come forth! I have to say with you!'" said Bob Cherry.

"Good-morrow, Hubert!'" said Nugent.

"'Good-morrow, little Prince!'"

"'As little Prince, having so great a title to be more prince, as may be!'" said Nugent. "'You are sad.'"

"'Indeed I have been merrier,'" said Bob gloomily.

"'Mercy on me! Methinks nobody should be sad but I.'"

"I guess that's rotten!"

Nugent broke off his speech, and glared at Fisher T. Fish. Fisher T. Fish was looking on, leaning on his spear, and quite unconscious of the fact that the ventriloquist of the Remove, outside the window, had borrowed his voice.

"What's that?" roared Nugent. "You fathead, Fishy! What do you know about it?"

"Eh?"

"Don't interrupt, Fishy," said Wharton.

"I guess I wasn't interrupting."

"Well, shut up!"

"I guess——"

"Order!" said the stage-manager, rapping on the table. "Any fellow who interrupts the rehearsal, especially with personal remarks, will be bumped!"

"Hear, hear!"

"But I guess I wasn't—I didn't—I——"

"Order!"

"'Methinks nobody should be sad but I,'" went on Nugent, when order had been restored.

"'Yet I remember when I was in France,
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night
Only from wantonness! By my Christendom,
So I were out of prison, and kept sheep——'"

"I guess that's piffle."

"What!"

"I guess you can't do it."

"Bump him!" roared Wharton.

"Hallo!" yelled Fisher T. Fish, as the angry crowd of Soldiers, Statesmen, Noblemen, Attendants, and Pages closed upon him. "I guess—what's the row?—I reckon—— Yah!"

Bump! Bump!

"Now, you shut up!" said Wharton.

Fisher T. Fish sat on the floor, and gasped, more amazed than hurt.

"Look here!" he roared. "I——"

"Order!"

"But I guess——"

"Silence!"

"I guess you're all potty! I never——"

"If he says another word, jump on him!" said Wharton.

Fisher T. Fish did not say another word. He scrambled away, and withdrew to the end of the room, bristling with indignation, and greatly astonished. Frank Nugent, somewhat disturbed himself by the interruption, resumed his speech:

"'Yet I remember when I was in France,
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,
Only from wantonness. By my——'"

"Faith, and we've had that, Nugent darling!" said the voice of Micky Desmond.

"I'm doing it again," roared Nugent, "because that Yankee ass interrupted me! And if you interrupt me, Desmond, you'll get the same as Fish!"

Micky Desmond looked astounded.

"Sure, I wasn't interruptin' ye!"

"Well, don't do it again!"

"But, sure, I——"

"Silence!"

"'By my Christendom,'" resumed Nugent,

So I were out of prison and kept sheep,
I would be as happy as the day is long.
And so I would be here, but that I doubt my uncle
practices more harm to me.
He is afraid of me——'"

"ROT!"

"Who said that?" demanded Wharton, looking round.

"Find out!"

"Who's that? Who is it?"

"Rats!"

Wharton looked very angry.

"Look here, the fellow who's speaking had better come forward and say so! I tell you——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You said that, Bolsover?" yelled Wharton.

Bolsover major jumped.

"I? That I never!"

"You did! I heard you!"

"I didn't!"

"It was your silly voice, you silly ass!"

"Silly ass yourself!" retorted Bolsover major. "I didn't speak!"

"You did!"

"Liar!"

There was nothing more said. King John rushed at the King of France, and clasped him round the neck, and began to pommel him. Bolsover major replied in kind, and the rest of the dramatic company gathered round, all speaking at once, in great excitement.

There was a yell of laughter outside the window. The

Fifth-Formers and the Remove ventriloquist were enjoying the scene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that?" roared Bob Cherry. He rushed to the window. "Bunter! You—you—you fat villain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it, you silly asses!" shouted Bob, addressing King John and Bolsover major. "It was Bunter's ventriloquism——"

"Oh!"

The two kings separated, both looking considerably the worse for their combat.

"I said I didn't speak!" growled Bolsover.

Wharton dabbed his nose with his handkerchief.

"Well, it was your voice," he said.

"Oh, you're an ass! You ought to have known——"

"Look here——"

"Let's find Bunter, and slaughter him," said Johnny Bull.

There was a rush to the window. But Wharton called back the angry dramatists.

"Hold on; you can slaughter Bunter afterwards. Shut the window, and let's get on with the giddy rehearsal!"

The window was slammed down. Outside, in the Close, Coker & Co. chuckled gleefully. Inside, the voice of Prince Arthur again took up the tale:

"He is afraid of me, and I of him!
"Is it my fault that I was Geoffrey's son?"

Etcetera! And the dress rehearsal finished without any further interruptions.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
Coker is Equal to the Occasion!

"I'VE got it!" said Coker.

Saturday had arrived.

The Remove dramatists were in a state of great excitement and expectation.

After morning lessons were over, they did not go out to cricket as usual. The weather was brilliant, and the green playing-fields called to the juniors—but for once they called in vain.

The play was the thing!

Every spare minute now was devoted to the final preparations for the performance.

The lecture-hall was to be the scene of the representation of "King John," by William Shakespeare, and the juniors had been very busy in the lecture-hall.

All the seats were numbered and reserved, and all had been sold.

The goodness of the cause, if not the goodness of the acting, had attracted all Greyfriars, and the fellows had bought seats liberally. The Head himself had taken a five-shilling seat, and promised to look in a little while personally.

The back of the hall contained standing room at sixpence a head, and the fags had nearly all promised to come.

There was no doubt that, financially, the performance would be a success, and there would be a substantial little sum to be handed over to the shipwrecked seamen.

That was a comfort to Coker, who was really a good-natured fellow, and would have been sorry to spoil any effort to help the destitute seamen. But as the financial side of the business was now assured, Coker felt himself at liberty to take a hand in the other aspects of the case. His idea had been bagged—Coker was perfectly convinced on that point by this time. It was up to him, therefore, to stop the Remove play, and frustrate their knavish tricks, as he described it.

Coker had consequently given the matter a great deal of thought, and hence his triumphant announcement to Potter and Greene, on Saturday afternoon, that he had "got it."

Potter and Greene looked politely interested.

"Got what?" asked Potter.

"Remittance from Aunt Judy?" asked Greene, with growing interest. "If it's a postal-order, Coker, you can cash it with Mrs. Mimble. She won't mind changing it. I'll come with you, if you like."

Coker snorted.

"I've got the idea!" he explained.

"What idea?"

"It's up to us to stop those Remove kids from collaring our scheme, and making the giddy play a success," said Coker.

"Well, the cheeky young beggars ought to be put in their place," said Potter. "But I don't see how——"

"That's because you haven't got my brains, my son," said Coker loftily.

"Thank goodness!" murmured Potter.

"Eh! What's that?"

"Jolly few chaps have got brains like you, Coker, old man," said Potter blandly. "What's the idea? I'm as keen as anything about it. So's Greene. Aren't you, Greene?"

"Frightfully keen!" yawned Greene.

"Get it off your chest, Coker. We'll help you!"

"They're going to give the play in the lecture-hall," said Coker. "There's a raised dais at the end of the hall, as you know, and they're going to use that as a stage. They've got a curtain rigged up in front of it, and scenes arranged for the wings."

"Yes, I've seen it."

"Do you know what is under the stage?" asked Coker.

Potter stared.

"Nothing, I suppose. It's raised about three feet above the lecture-room level," he said. "There's nothing underneath, excepting cobwebs and things, I suppose?

"Exactly!" said Coker. "That's what I've been thinking about. Now, there's a ventilator under the stage, of course."

"I know that. But what on earth——"

"The ventilator is a large one, and there are bars across it. It looks out on the passage beside the house, between the schoolhouse and the gym.," said Coker. "If the bars were got away, a fellow could get through, and crawl right under the stage."

"Rather a dusty job," said Greene.

"I suppose a chap needn't mind a little dust, when it's for the honour of his Form, and to put those cheeky kids in their place?"

"Ahem! No! But how are you going to do any good by sneaking into a ventilator and getting under the stage?"

"Three chaps under the stage could muck up the play. We're going to sneak in there, and take a megaphone with us."

"A—a what?"

"A megaphone—thing that makes a frightful row, you know. They use it in Wagner's operas to make a giant's voice, you know. Fafnir is the chap's name. Well, if Fafnir started bellowing under the stage when they're doing their giddy play, I fancy it would turn the whole thing into a giddy joke. What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can hire a megaphone in Courtfield," went on Coker, grinning with glee over his great idea. "I'll cut over there on my bike, and bring it back this afternoon. You fellows can file through the bars on the ventilator, and get them away. There are only two bars, and they're old and rusty, and won't take you ten minutes. When the performance begins we'll be under the stage, all ready. I'll have the megaphone, and you two chaps can have bike horns."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ripping!" said Greene.

"Gorgeous!" said Potter heartily.

Coker chuckled.

"I fancy it will take the edge off the giddy tragedy, my infants. They'll be sorry they bagged our idea, and left us out of it."

"What-ho!"

While the Remove fellows were busy making their final preparations in the lecture-hall, the chums of the Fifth were equally busy outside it.

Potter and Greene had no difficulty in filing away the bars of the ventilator unobserved. A little later, Coker came in on his bicycle, with a large parcel.

The performance was booked for seven.

At a quarter to seven, Coker, Potter, and Greene strolled round the schoolhouse with an air of exaggerated carelessness, which would certainly have put the Remove fellows upon their guard if they had observed Coker & Co.

But they were all busy indoors.

Coker peered into the ventilator, from which the bars had been removed. Inside was a dark hollow, with a very musty smell.

"Doesn't look nice, does it?" murmured Potter.

"That's all right—we can stand it!" said Coker.

"I'll tell you what, Coker," said Potter, as if struck by a sudden brilliant idea. "You can go in and make a row with the megaphone, and we'll keep watch outside, in—in case anybody should come, you know."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Greene heartily. "Coker will manage it all right, and we—we really ought to look after Coker, by—by keeping watch."

Coker frowned.

"You get in first, Potter!" he said.

"But I—I'm going to keep watch!"

"You're not; you're going in!"

Potter submitted to the inevitable, and crawled in, with some difficulty, through the opening. He snorted and sneezed when he was inside. There was a sound of a bump as he knocked his head on the under side of the stage.

"Ow! Gr-o-oh!"

"What's the matter?" growled Coker.

"Ow! I've knocked my napper! Oh!"

"Don't be a careless ass, then. You get in next, Greeney!"

"Hadn't I b-b-better keep watch outside, Coker?" stammered Greene.

"Get in!" roared Coker.

"But, I—I say——"

"Are you going to get in, fathead?"

Greene gave a groan, and crawled in after Potter. Then Coker handed in the megaphone, and followed his chums into the dark aperture.

"Grooh!" muttered Potter. "There's a spider on my neck! Grooh!"

"Blow the spider!"

"Look here——"

"Shut up! Don't want them to hear us till we're ready—ow!"

"What's the matter with you, Coker?"

"Ow! I've bumped my beastly head—yow!"

Potter chuckled.

"Don't be a careless ass, then," he said.

"Oh, shut up!"

Overhead there was a sound of many feet. The Remove players were getting ready. The lecture-hall was already filling with the audience.

"Jolly near time!" said Coker, rubbing his head. "It's worth while. I know it ain't comfy here, you fellows!"

"Ow! It jolly well isn't!"

"But we'll make them sit up!"

"More than we can do here!" growled Potter. "No room to sit up."

"Oh, don't grumble! Think of what they'll look like when the megaphone and the bike horns start!" chuckled Coker.

And Potter and Greene chuckled, too! Their chuckle was echoed without, but they did not hear it. And Billy Bunter, who had watched them from a distance with great interest, rolled away, chuckling.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
Very Wet.

"CURTAIN goes up in five minutes," said Bob Cherry in the green-room, partitioned off at the back of the stage.

"We're all ready!"

"The readyfulness is terrific."

Harry Wharton looked round him with considerable satisfaction.

He had worked hard as coach and stage-manager, and he was satisfied with the results of his labours.

A peep from behind the curtain showed that the hall was already filling.

The audience was arriving, and all was ready for beginning the performance in time.

The Greyfriars tragedians were pleased with themselves.

Marjorie Hazeldene, who was to play the part of Queen Eleanor, had arrived with Miss Clara, and she was in costume now, quite ready, and Miss Clara was her maid of honour, and looked very pretty in the part.

"It's going to be a regular success," said Bob Cherry. "I had an idea that Coker would try to muck up the show in some rotten way. But he's taking it lying down."

"The honourable Coker is not up to our esteemed weight," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"No fear!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Get out, Bunter, old man," said Wharton. "Only members of the company are allowed here."

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I say, Wharton——"

"Buzz off!"

"Roll out!"

"On second thoughts, I'm willing to take a small part," said Bunter. "I'll go on as a councillor or a statesman, if you like. I've got the things."

"You'll go off as a silly ass!" said Bob Cherry. "Clear!"

"Then you'll jolly well have the performance mucked up!" said Bunter.

Bob Cherry took the fat junior by the ear.

"If there is any ventriloquism, Bunty, old man, you will be squashed on the spot. Young Penfold has undertaken to keep a special eye on you, and at the first sign of any of your tricks you're going to be hammered hard. See?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Now clear off!"

"All right—I won't say a word, then, and you can let Coker bust up the show," said Bunter.

And he rolled away with a grunt.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that about Coker?" demanded Bob quickly. "Is Coker up to any tricks?"

"I'm not going to say anything."

"Collar him!" shouted Bob.

King John and the King of France and Prince Arthur seized Bunter at once. The fat junior was promptly rolled back again.

"Now, then, what's that about Coker?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really——"

"Is Coker playing any game on us?" asked Nugent.

The Owl of the Remove chuckled.

"Yes, he is. I happened to hear him speaking to Potter, and I happened to see him."

"Yes, we know how you happen to hear and see things!" growled Bob Cherry, with a curl of the lip. "Tell us what it is?"

"Not unless I'm given a bit in the play!" said Bunter firmly.

"He's spoofing," said Bulstrode. "He wants to spoof us into putting him on. Kick him out!"

"Hold on!" said Wharton. "I fancy there's something in it. Look here, Billy, you know you can't act. But if you've spotted Coker in any game, and you help us stop him, we'll let you come to the feed after the play."

Billy Bunter considered.

"Good spread?" he asked.

"Oh, ripping!"

"Well, it's a go. Of course, you ought to put me in the cast. You need at least one really good actor to make the thing go."

"What is it about Coker?"

"Honour bright about the feed?" said Bunter suspiciously.

"Yes, yes! Get on; it's close on time for the kick-off now."

"Well, I know where Coker is!" grinned Bunter.

"Where is he?"

Bunter pointed downward. The juniors followed the direction of his finger, and stared at him in surprise.

"On the floor?" said Tom Brown.

"Ha, ha! No. Under it!"

"Under the floor!" yelled the Removites.

"Yes."

"My hat! What on earth——"

"They've filed the bars off the ventilator, and crawled in under the stage," Bunter explained. "Coker's got a megaphone, and Potter and Greene have taken bike horns. They're going to start making an awful row in there when the play begins. You fellows won't be able to hear one another speak; and the audience—— He, he, he!"

"Oh, stop your he-he-he-ing, you fat chump!" growled Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"And they're under the stage now?" said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath.

"He, he! Yes."

"And the play's timed to start in three more minutes," said Nugent.

"It's rotten!"

"Too bad!"

Wharton's jaw set grimly.

"We'll have 'em out!" he said. "Suppose you go on and tell the audience we start in ten minutes, Marjorie. They'll take it nicely from a nice girl."

Marjorie smiled.

"With pleasure," she said.

"Ten minutes will be enough," said Harry. "Keep the audience in a good temper. You fellows come with me."

"But we can't crawl under the stage and tackle 'em," said Bulstrode. "It will muck up our costumes."

"It must be horribly musty and dirty under there; and if they fight——" began Johnny Bull.

Wharton shook his head.

"We're not going under the stage," he said.

"But they won't come out if we call 'em."

"I know they won't!"

"They'd be only too glad to get us underneath there, and muck up our costumes, and spoil our form for the parts!" growled Nugent.

"What are you going to do, Wharton?"

"More ways than one of killing a cat and catching Coker," said Harry Wharton. "They'll be jolly glad to come out before we've finished with them."

"But what?"

"I know what to do. Come on."

Wharton led the way, and a crowd of fellows followed him in puzzled dismay. It looked as if Coker & Co. would have the matter all their own way. Without ruining the costumes they had prepared for the play, the juniors could not tackle them in their dusty retreat. And if they stopped to change first, and changed again afterwards, the play would be

delayed long past the patience of the audience. Besides, the three Fifth-Formers could easily hold the fort, if they chose, and keep their assailants from getting in at the narrow entrance. How Coker & Co. were to be dislodged was a mystery.

But Wharton explained as he hurried out at the head of his queer-looking followers. Soldiers and princes and kings looked very odd in the open Close of Greyfriars.

"The garden-hose!" Wharton said briefly. "Gosling left it in the Head's garden, and we can get it here, and connect it up in the Close. When we turn the water on them——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

King John & Co. roared. There was no doubt that the garden-hose was an argument that the Fifth Form japers were not prepared to deal with.

Coker & Co. were just preparing for business. Seven o'clock had sounded from the old tower of Greyfriars.

"Here goes for a start!" said Potter. And he emitted an ear-splitting note from the bicycle-horn.

"Tooo-ooot!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Coker. "Look out!"

A face was looking in at the open ventilator.

It was not an easily recognisable face, as it was made up to imitate his Majesty King John. But the Fifth-Formers knew who it was. Coker chuckled.

"Hallo, Wharton! Not playing yet?"

Wharton smiled. Coker & Co. grinned cheerfully, feeling that they were masters of the situation. But their grins suddenly died away as the nozzle of a garden-hose was thrust through the opening of the ventilator.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Coker, sober all of a sudden. "W-w-what's that?"

Whiz! Splash! Sploosh!

"Yah!"

"Grooogh!"

The stream of water shot in at the ventilator, and fairly smote the Fifth-Formers hip and thigh!

King John & Co. roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you wet, Coker?"

"Does it feel damp?"

"The dampfulness must be terrific!"

"Ow—ow!" roared Coker. "Stoppit! Chuckit! Yow! I'm drenched! Ow! Stop it! Grooh!"

"Leave off!" shrieked Potter, as a fresh stream played upon him. "I give in! I give you best! Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Splash! Splash! Sploosh!

"Hold on!" gasped Coker at last. "Stop it, you young fiend! We'll give in! We'll stop the game! We'll—— Yow-ow! We'll do anything you like! Ow! Chuckit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll come out, make it pax, and promise honour bright not to do anything to interrupt or spoil the play in any way whatever?" demanded Wharton.

"No!" roared Coker.

"Right-ho! There's plenty of water. Have some more?"

Coker had some more. He rolled over in the stream, roaring. Potter and Greene were fairly yelling for mercy.

"Ow! We promise!" spluttered Greene.

"Yow! We promise!" spluttered Potter.

"Ow!" groaned Coker. "I—I—p-promise! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The water was turned off. Three drenched, dirty, furious, bedraggled Fifth-Formers crawled out of the ventilator one after another. The juniors greeted them with roars of laughter. Coker & Co. crawled away, too utterly "done in" even to speak. But when they received their voices, later, the things that Potter and Greene said to Coker were simply lurid.

. . . . . .

The play was not "mucked up" after all.

There were no interruptions from Coker & Co.

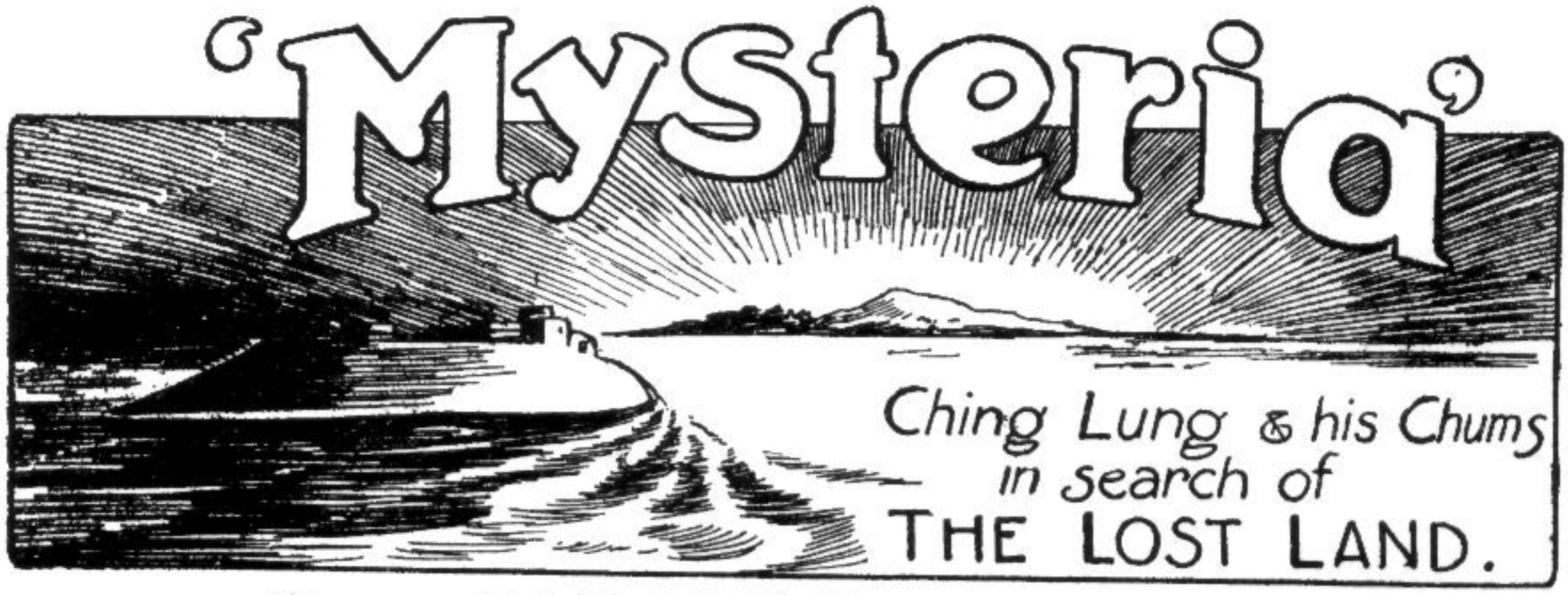
The commencement was a little late, but that was all. And the play went with a swing from first to last. The Head himself applauded, and when the curtain finally went down after the last act, the schoolboy dramatists had to take several calls.

It was a triumph for the Junior Dramatic Club, and there was a substantial sum realised for the destitute seamen, which they received with much thankfulness. Coker & Co., for once, had to hide their diminished heads, and to admit that all the honours were with the Schoolboy Dramatists.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Monday, entitled "QUITS," by Frank Richards. In the meantime, try your hand at "POPLETS" in "The Penny Popular." Out on Friday. Price One Penny.)

OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY. START TO-DAY!



—By SIDNEY DREW.—

READ THIS FIRST.

Ferrers Lord, the famous multi-millionaire, is surrounded in his magnificent London residence by his friends Ching-Lung, Barry O'Rooney, Gan-Waga the Esquimo, and Prout & Co.—the stalwarts of the millionaire's famous submarine, the Lord of the Deep. After a period of inaction there is a rumour afloat that Ferrers Lord is about to start upon one of his great expeditions again. Meantime, the millionaire himself is devoting all his attention to a curiously carved narwhal's tusk, which he has picked up in an East End curio-dealer's shop. The tusk proves to be hollow, and to contain some gold coins, and a small wad of parchment, which bears a strange message from the sea. This tells of a mysterious floating island, inhabited by strange monsters, which Ferrers Lord determines to go in search of. Thurston immediately christens the phantom island "Mysteria," in advance. All hands board the Lord of the Deep, which slips out of its secret cave on its mysterious new quest. Ben Maddock, who has been over the side tapping the cable, makes a big catch of lobsters, which he bestows in a locker to await the pot. Gan-Waga locates them, however, and fetches Ching-Lung to pick the lock of the locker.

(Now go on with the story.)

Gan-Waga and the Lobsters—The Chef Gets Angry.

His Highness crossed to Joe's tool-chest, and returned with a piece of wire. After a little poking and twisting the lock yielded. There were only seven lobsters there, for some, of course, had been handed to the chef to be cooked for the saloon. Gan-Waga, his eyes sparkling, dumped them into a pillow-case—Tom Prout's property—and patted himself on the back.

"Yo' getses me a snosspans, Chingy," he gurgled. "I cooks 'em butterful, lovely."

"Oh, go and get a giddy saucepan for yourself!" said Ching-Lung. "I'm not going to trot about after you."

"Not likes dat chefs," said Gan. "Too much ugly 'nough in de chivvy fo' me."

"My dear youth," said the prince severely, "it is the height of vulgarity to refer to a man's face as his chivvy. You should say dial, jimmy, or something polite like that. I, who have often been presented at Court——"

"Police-court, hunk Ching?"

"No, you overgrown son of a muffin-toaster!" said Ching-Lung. "Not police-court. I have never been near such a place, except to bail you out. Let that pass. Say, fat and gentle one, why aren't you like that lobster, that light-coloured one; and why are you like it?"

Gan-Waga scratched his lank hair in perplexity.

"Not him him, Chingy. Is it a riggles, hunk?"

"It is a riddle. Oh, give me a coughdrop! Did you think it was a flatiron? Bend down that thing you call an ear, and I'll tell you. That lobster is green. That's why you're like it. When it's boiled it will be red. That's why you're not like it. Whether boiled, baked, fried, stewed, or grilled, Gan, you'd still be green—green as the beautiful grass. Farewell! I have work to do."

With a wail of anguish, Gan-Waga flung his arms about the prince.

"Good-byes, Chingy!" he sobbed. "I never see yo' alives no more. Ifs yo' do works yo' drop deads. Ow, ow! Kisses me onces, Chingy."

"Avaunt, base caitiff!" thundered Ching-Lung. And, with folded arms and a majestic frown on his brow, he strode out of the fo'c's'le.

Gan-Waga had not been favourably impressed by Herr Schwartz, but Gan-Waga wanted a saucepan, and he meant having one, even if he had to eat the German chef beforehand. He poked his head round the galley with great caution. A coffee-mill, with the little chef at the handle, was whirring away noisily. The Eskimo crept in on tip-toe, seized a large saucepan, and stole away undetected.

"Diddled ole Germans snissidges dats time," he thought, as he turned on a sea-cock and filled the saucepan with salt water. "Ho, hoa!"

He stepped back into the fo'c's'le in time. Herr Schwartz, clanking his keys, trotted out and made his way to the cold storage-room to obtain some meat for lunch. Gan nimbly darted back to the galley, secured a basket of lettuces, radishes, and beetroot, a bottle of vinegar, a bottle of salad-oil, pepper, salt, and forks. He crammed several eggs into the basket, and fled.

He had the billiard-room all to himself. As he placed the loot on the floor, he kicked his own ankle so hard that he had to rub it for quite a minute.

"Oh, yo' silly fat faces!" he growled, addressing himself. "Yo' silly bad 'nough donkeys! Yo' forgotteded stoves!"

There were plenty of electric stoves and grills in the galley, but the billiard-room radiator was useless for cooking purposes. Gan made a third raid. His luck was still in. He fixed the wire to a wall plug, and placed the pot on the stove he had borrowed.

Gan was neither a great respecter of persons nor of their goods and chattels. When the luckless lobsters were fished out of the pot, red and steaming, Gan laid them on the waterproof cover of the billiard-table to drain. All the time he purred like a cat that had just eaten the canary, just to show that he was at peace with the world. His eye roved to the wall above the piano. There hung an ancient Chinese dish, decorated with hideous blue dragons and other cheerful monsters.

"Ooh! Butterfuls!" said the Eskimo. "Do a treatses."

As a rare specimen of ancient Chinese pottery, the dish was probably worth fifty guineas. Values did not worry Gan. He climbed upon the piano, reached down the dish, gave it a polish, and started business in earnest.

In twenty minutes he had concocted a huge and marvellous lobster salad. Raising the lid of an ottoman, he concealed the feast. With many a chuckle, he gathered up the empty lobster-shells, and returned them to Joe's locker.

"Ole Joe laughs hisselfs to deaths when he seeses thems," tittered the son of the North. "Ho, ho, hoo!"

He tittered once more on his way to the swimming-bath. Herr Schwartz, having suddenly missed his salad and his saucepan, bounced out of the galley.

"Ach! Der tiefs—der tiefs!" he yelled. "Dunder und

blitzen! I robbit haf been! Oh, mine Vaterland, dere vas on poart tiefs! Vat? Der togs, dey steal mine salats, yes! Bolice, bolice! I vas rob! Bolice! Ach! B-r-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Are you ill, poor fellow?" asked a kind and sympathetic voice.

The chef stopped dancing, yelling, and gesticulating, but there was a lurking glance of suspicion in his little eyes as they surveyed Ching-Lung.

"Dunder! I vas stole of mine salat and mine zosspan!" he growled.

"Shocking!" said Ching-Lung, aghast. "Be calm, my dear sir. I entreat you not to agitate yourself. You may not be aware of it, but I am second in command here. This is a terrible affair. It has just come to my knowledge that another of the crew has also been robbed. But I have a clue. A man who will steal a saucepan is a black-hearted villain. Come closer. I suspect a man. Have you noticed a red-faced fellow with whiskers under his chin?"

"Ja, ja!"

"His name is Barry O'Rooney."

"Der name of der mans is Parry O'Rooney!" hissed the cook, "mit viskers on his chin. Ja! I know der tog. He vas Irish, is ud?"

"You have got it," said Ching-Lung gravely. "Come with me. Don't breathe, don't wince. Be utterly silent."

He took the cook gently by the arm, and led him past the swimming-bath. It was rather dark and gloomy, and there was a faint smell of soap and steam.

"S-sh!"

They peered forward. An electric light blinked through a cloud of steam. Barry O'Rooney, his sleeves rolled up, was bending over a tub of suds, industriously washing shirts and socks. Perspiration dripped from his classic brow, but he was in a merry mood. As he splashed and rubbed, he warbled:

"Ould Widdy Burke, wid a wart upon her nose,
Niver washed hersilf, though she washed the lodger's clothes.
Whin yez slam the soap on, don't forgit the blue.
Hi-ri-ranty! Och! Hoo-ra-roo!"

Ching-Lung squeezed the chef's arm. Barry began to splash terrifically. Then the prince—prince also of ventriloquists—imitated Barry's voice.

"Whisht!" soliloquised the Irishman. "Did Oi? Oi did. Phwat'll the ould ham-faced Jarmin organ-groinder say whin he foinds his sasspin and greens have kersloped, Oi wondher? Ha, ha! Oi'd loike to twist the nick of the ugly baste into shoe-laces! Dunder und blitzen! Was iver such a freak borrn aloive afore? Stale his sasspan and greens, wud Oi? Oi'll stale the horrid face off him wan o' these days, and paste ut on a garden koite!"

Barry had heard, too. He clapped one soapy hand to his head, and, with wide-open mouth and bulging eyes, glared at the iron plates above him.

The enraged chef broke from the prince's grasp. As if shot from a catapult, he hurled himself through the steam.

"Tog, tief, gif me mine salats and mine zosspans!" he yelled.

"Eh? Phwat's that?" asked Barry dazedly. "Did yez spake? How are yez this afther-evenin'?"

Herr Schwartz, purple in the face with rage, bounced up and down like a ball fastened to a piece of thin elastic.

"Mine salats—gif dem me! Blitzen! I am rob! Gif me mine salats and mine zosspan. B-r-r-r-r!"

O'Rooney rubbed his nose with a soapy finger. He had now recovered from the shock of hearing his own voice. Maddock turned the corner with a couple of soiled shirts on his arm. Benjamin halted at the sight of the bouncing figure of the cook.

"Souse me, Barry," he remarked, "'as it got jumpin' crackers in its boots? What's hup?"

"Mine salats and mine zosspans!" shrieked the little man. "Gif dem pack, or I shall mit der vist of me bunch you. Br-r-r-r-r! Tog, tief! Bah!"

"Oi think yez had betther feel his pulse, Ben," said Barry. "Oi can't understhand the reptoile's lingo. Is ut dancin' he is at all, at all? Phwat's he sayin'? Troth, he may be singin' 'Erin on the Rhoine.'"

"Mine salat!" squeaked the chef. But Ben's big hand seized him, and held him fast.

"Whoa! Gently, Sceptre," said the bo'sun soothingly. "Don't do it. Souse me! You ain't a parched pea in a fryin'-pan. What d'ye want to wear your boots out for? Be a good little boy, or, by jingo, I'll smack you 'ard, d'ye see, and put you to bed! What's hup?"

"Tog! Tief!" shrieked the chef, pointing frenziedly at Barry. "He haf stole mine zosspan and mine salat. B-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Phwat, in the name of goodness, is the ould lunatic yelpin' about, Ben?"

"He says, souse me," answered the bo'sun, "as you've pinched his salad and his silly saucepan."

"Does he, the spalpeen?" growled O'Rooney. "Oh, does he? Tell him, bedad, to go and pinch a coffin, quick!"

"Tog! Tief! I vait no more!" roared Herr Schwartz. "I hit you on der nose mit mine vist—like dot! B-r-r-r-r-r!"

Barry was not prepared for the sudden blow. It filled his eyes with tears, and before he could get rid of the tears a second blow, under the chin, made his teeth rattle. His arms shot out blindly, and he hugged the chef lovingly to his bosom. The chef wriggled like an eel. They staggered to and fro, and fell. Ben, his hands on his hips, and joy in his eyes, watched them as they rolled over and over.

"Bite his ear off, Barry!" he said encouragingly. "Paste him! Souse me, if the little 'un ain't on top! Put your foot on his nose, little 'un! Ha, ha, ha! This is better nor plum-duff, blest if it ain't! He's got holt of his whiskers, souse me! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

In order to obtain a better view of the interesting proceedings, Benjamin leaned on the tub.

"Charge, Chester—charge!" whispered Ching-Lung.

Gan and his Highness were watching the thrilling scene with great interest. Gan-Waga couched a mop as the knights of old couched their lances. Gallantly he charged with a howl. Maddock went down over the tub. The warm water gushed out in a creamy torrent over the combatants, and wails of wrath and agony startled the slumbering air.

"Bill Bailey," grinned Ching-Lung, "it's about time you went home! Dear, dear, what a sinful world! Bill Bailey, go home! You must go home!"

"Me tinks so, Chingy," lisped Gan-Waga. "Not likes bad language. Come 'longs, my Chingy. Ho, ho, hoo! Ain't dey rudes boyses? It musts be washing-days, Chingy. We eats lobsters, hunk? Dey butterfuls, good 'nough. I biff ole Ben a treats wid dat mops. Ho, ho, ho-o-o-oo!"

And, hand in hand, they stole away. It was no place for such innocents as Ching-Lung and his Eskimo friend. They were too young and tender.

A Combat with the Cook—The Famous Salad—Who Threw that Sponge?—Joe Scores Heavily—Another Washing-Day.

Wild and weird was the wrath of Joe, the carpenter, barber, and general utility man, when he opened the locker. Naturally enough, he expected to find live lobsters; but he only found shells. Joe glared at the wreckage of the promised feast speechlessly. In the tense and frigid silence of the first few moments of horror, a poleaxe might have been heard to drop had anyone dropped one. Then three words hissed through Joe's teeth:

"Boned, biled, eaten!"

Joe shed no idle tears. He went to his chest and took out a hatchet. In a black and ominous fashion he tried the edge of the tool with his thumb. The sharpness of the deadly weapon—or the lack of it—did not please him. He selected another, flourished it viciously in the air, as if splitting imaginary skulls, blew his nose, and stumped out.

Mr. Thomas Prout, his hands on the spokes of the wheel, his eyes on the compass, and his bald head gleaming in the light, smoked contentedly. A heavy thump from Joe's hatchet struck the steel plates, and made the steersman jump. There was the carpenter, with dishevelled locks and angry eyes, emerging from the well of the conning-tower from the gloomy regions below.

"Steady wi' the floor, sonny," said Prout. "You needn't knock, and, by hokey, you ain't choppin' wood. Walk right in."

Again Prout's eyes sought the needle of the compass, and a touch put the vessel off half a point.

"Tom," said Joe, in hoarse and muffled accents, "they're boned, biled, and eaten."

"What are?"

"Them lobsters. Boned, biled, and eaten. In other words, Tommy, some sneak-thief 'as pinched the lot."

The dreadful news could not soak into Prout's brain all in a moment. He glanced at his big silver watch, put it back in his pocket, coughed, pulled his flowing beard, sneezed, counted his coppers, and sat down.

"Say it again," he said, fanning himself. "By hokey, say it again, Joseph!"

"Some duckfooted uncle of a spotted dogfish 'as boned our lorbsters," said Joe. "I left 'em safe under lock and key, and when I went to get 'em and bile 'em, I f'un' the shells, and nowt else. I'm lookin' for the bloke wi' this chopper. There'll be enough mincemeat on this 'ere ship to larst till Christmas twelvemonth, if I 'angs for it."

"And his name's Gan-Waga," said Prout, sighing. "It's the Eskimo varmint. Mince him, Joey, as small as pepper. By hokey, there ain't a law made as'll 'ang you for it! I was lookin' for'ard to them lorbsters. If I could only leave this wheel for ten minutes I'd bring you Gan-Waga back all

cut up and on skewers, like you sees 'em sellin' catsmeat in London town. Bash him, slash him, by hokey!"

"I will!" hissed Joe. "I will!"

Barry, Maddock, and Herr Schwartz had made up their disagreement. They had also changed their clothes. It was easy enough to guess that Ching-Lung and Gan-Waga--or probably both—had been responsible for the upsetting of the washing-tub. With the galley door locked to keep out intruders, Barry and Maddock poured terrible tales of Ching-Lung's baseness and Gan's perfidy into the chef's ears. Mollified by large helpings of steak-and-kidney pudding, they swore an everlasting friendship with the cook.

"If life ain't going to be a misery wuss than in gaol, souse me," said Ben, as they prepared to depart. "We've got to stick together like bluebottles on a flypaper. Ain't that the wery—wery—wery crux on it? United we stand, divided we slips down and smashes our front teeth, d'ye see?"

"Choost zo! I gombrehend dot," assented Herr Schwartz. "Ve sdick togedders. Ach, yes! I see mit mine eyes."

"Oi didn't quoite ixpict yez to see wid te back of yer lovely hair, me bhoy," remarked Barry, "but we'll lit that pass, as the bloke said whin he hopped out of the way of the stheam-roller. Oi dhrink to your good health, Misther Chef, and, troth ut's me own hearrt that's afther breakin' to think Oi gave yez wan black oie. Oi meant to give yez two and a thick ear," he added, but under his breath.

Herr Schwartz's injured optic was concealed by half a pound of beefsteak and a bandage. Nor had Barry himself emerged unscathed. His nose was puffy and unusually red, and his chin was sore, for the cook had been performing gymnastics on his beard. The ting-tr-r-r-ring of the electric-bell summoned the chef to the saloon.

"Dunder!" he gasped, turning pale. "Vat shall I say apout mine eye—yes?"

"Till them yez sprained ut lookin' for wurruk," suggested Barry, winking at the bo'sun. "Although ut's a moighty big loie as iver was."

Another ring, and an impatient one, sent the chef off at a run without waiting for further advice. Ching-Lung was the ringer. He looked at the bandaged chef in well-feigned astonishment.

"You appear to have been in the wars," he said. "Kindly bring a small bottle of iced chablis and two dinner-plates."

Herr Schwartz bowed low. Barry and Maddock had not failed to impress him with Ching-Lung's wealth, power, and high estate. He executed the order and withdrew. Above the hum of the engines Ching-Lung could hear the notes of the piano. He took the plates and wine, and sauntered into the billiard-room, where Thurston was playing.

"How would a lobster salad go down, Ru?" he asked.

"Like a brick down a well, old man," said Rupert, turning on the stove. "Is there one ready?"

"Behold the magician! Hey, presto! Abracadabra! Allez! There you vas!"

The great dish, piled high with salad, daintily garnished with slices of beetroot and hard-boiled eggs, and crowned with the head of the largest lobster, was balanced high in air on the prince's finger-tips.

"Great Scott! It's no infant," said Thurston, with a laugh. "There's enough for a small army. It looks good."

"Stolen things are sweetest, my boy. Gan stole the lobsters, and Gan made the salad. There are no candle-ends in it, I assure you."

"Under those circumstances, I'll have a little," said Rupert. "But where's the founder of the feast? Where's Gan-Waga?"

"Lying low—very low. Joe wants to comb his hair with a hatchet, and Gan prefers to have it done with a comb and brush. Help yourself while I open the wine. What! No glasses? Ah, I thought so! They're here in my cigarette case."

And so they were, to every possible appearance. Gan certainly knew how to make a salad and how to boil a lobster. The dish was delicious.

"Gan-Waga ought to have a pat on the head for this, Ching," said Thurston, passing his plate.

"He'll get one if Joseph catches him," grinned the prince. Joe is quite of your opinion. M'yes, I've tasted worse talk than this on desert islands. By the way, that reminds me of the great topic. What do you think of Mysteria? Be candid."

"Then I'll be candid. Dear old Lord is the best of the best, I own that. But he can be as mysterious as Mysteria itself. Candidly, Ching — I know nothing about yourself, mind—I think that, for some reason of his own, Lord is playing a terrific bluff on us."

(Another fine, long instalment of this grand new serial next week. In the meantime buy "THE GEM" Library. Out on Wednesday. Price One Penny.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 280.

My Readers' Page

WHOM TO WRITE TO: EDITOR, "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.

OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS "THE GEM" LIBRARY. EVERY WEDNESDAY AND "THE PENNY POPULAR" EVERY FRIDAY.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his Chums, at home or abroad.

FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"QUITS!"

By Frank Richards.

In the splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars which is contained in next week's "Magnet" Library, misfortunes fall thick and fast on the devoted head of Bob Cherry of the Remove. His father becomes hopelessly entangled in the snares of professional moneylenders, chief among whom is Samuel Vernon-Smith, the father of the Greyfriars junior who is universally dubbed the Bounder; and the news is broken to Bob Cherry that he will have to leave Greyfriars.

Mark Linley, Bob's Lancashire chum, however, insists on his working for a scholarship to enable him to stay at Greyfriars, and so the unlearned Bob manfully tackles his distasteful task.

Though the examination for the scholarship has a most surprising and unlooked-for result, fortune favours Bob Cherry in another direction by enabling him to avert the catastrophe which threatens to overwhelm his life. Vernon-Smith of the Remove finds himself in a position of deadly danger from which Bob Cherry is able, at the risk of his life, to rescue him—on terms; thus Bob Cherry and his father are able to cry

"QUITS!"

with Samuel Vernon-Smith and his hopeful son.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Of late I have been the recipient of an unusually large number of letters containing useful suggestions, and I take this opportunity of thanking my many correspondents. Will the following accept my best thanks for their letters? "A True Reader" (Melbourne), M. Casey (Australia), J. P. K. (Sydney), J. Hickey (Ireland), S. O'Connor (Victoria), P. V. James (Norbury), "Cockney" (Yorkshire), P. E. G. (Hampstead), E. Law (Croydon), and B. D. (Lancashire).

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Marjorie R. (Thames).—I must thank you for your letter; it is a splendid idea to give your old copies to hospitals.

J. Thompson (Belfast).—I am sorry to say that I cannot insert your advertisement, as the correspondence column is reserved for Colonial readers only.

J. H. McHallum (Scotland).—By al lmeans start a "Magnet" League among your friends who are readers of our companion papers; the principal object is, as a rule, to introduce the papers to non-readers.

M. Neil (Scotland).—The correspondence column is reserved solely for Colonial advertisements, but any reader can reply to an announcement that appears in it.

E. J. Letts (London).—Both the schools you mention are within easy cycling distance of Greyfriars.

Thomas C., of New Zealand, and "A Constant Reader," of Liverpool.—I am very grateful for your good wishes, and will bear your suggestion in mind.

D. (Perth).—To dispose of your collection of stamps send them to a dealer. You will find many dealers' advertisements in the "Philatelist's Monthly," price one penny.

S. Ward (Leeds).—I advise you to read French books in order to keep in touch with the language.

Edith C. (Liverpool).—I am always glad to hear from any of my readers.

G. Crabb, of East Ham and J. McCreare, of Scotland.—You must write direct to the advertisers.

F. B. and others.—"The Gem" and "Magnet" are published in London, but can be ordered through any newsagent.

"A Finchley Reader."—I should advise you to advertise, under the circumstances, in a New Zealand paper for your friend.

Many thanks to the following readers for interesting and useful letters: J. Dalet (Australia), B. B. (Kent), H. P. Saunders (U.S.A.), A. Webster (Yorkshire), "A Loyal Cork Reader," A. Taylor (Wandsworth), Miss N. Corcoran (Sussex), L. B. Hillbrick (Australia), "Loyal Reader" (Dulwich), "A Hopeful Grumbler" (Woodbridge), H. Jones (Birmingham), W. Sayers (Shepherd's Bush), W. Brown (New Zealand), and V. Travena (Australia).

HOW TO KEEP FIT.—No. 7.

By a Sergeant-Instructor.

By this time I hope most of my chums are getting some benefit from the exercises I have given you. Royalty have taken the same course. If each of my chums were to offer me ten pounds a lesson they could not obtain a better course. The only difference would be that I would be there to see you do the exercises. The same instruction would be given. Now that I have written them for you, I trust you will follow my advice. Here is an exercise that has a splendid result upon all the muscles of the trunk, arms, and, indeed, on every part of the body. It is simplicity itself.

Take a position on the floor with the body stretched out to its full length. The back is kept straight, and the legs must be quite stiff, with the toes resting on the floor. The arms support the weight of the body. The face is looking down just between the hands, which are straight down from the shoulders. Keeping the body and legs stiff, bend the arms until the body almost touches the ground or floor. Keep the arms close to the sides, and then press on the hands, using the arms to push the body back to its first position. In this position no part of the body should touch the floor—only the hands in front, and the toes in rear. A man who can press and bend thirty times without ever allowing his body to touch the floor is a very strong man indeed. A boy who can do it three times for a start is a strong fellow. After a week he should be able to do it six times easily. There may happen a time when you find it necessary to drop from a height in order to save your life, or prevent the farmer's dog from laying hold of you. Let us suppose you are on the top of a ten-foot wall. If you follow my instructions you can drop from a greater height than ten feet and not sustain any injury.

How to Drop.—Always face in the direction you are going to drop. Let go, and as you reach the ground let your toes be the only part of your feet to touch the ground. Bend your knees outward. Your body will bend forward with a sharp dip. If your knees are together, your chin will be sure to strike right upon them. The result will be that you may break your jaws, and knock out more teeth in two seconds than you can grow in a lifetime. Just try to jump over some object, and see if your chin does not come into violent contact with your knees. But, if you follow my instructions, you will land easily and gracefully on the fore-part of your feet, break the shock so that it spreads over the springy part of the feet and legs, and save you from certain hurt.

What I am going to tell you now may appear to be a bit stretched. But, believe me, lads, it is perfectly true.

You can break your neck by falling violently upon your heels! The whole system is jarred, and the brunt, or weight of the shock, is borne by the backbone. A violent jerk may cause the spine to break, just where the head and upper part of the neck are joined.

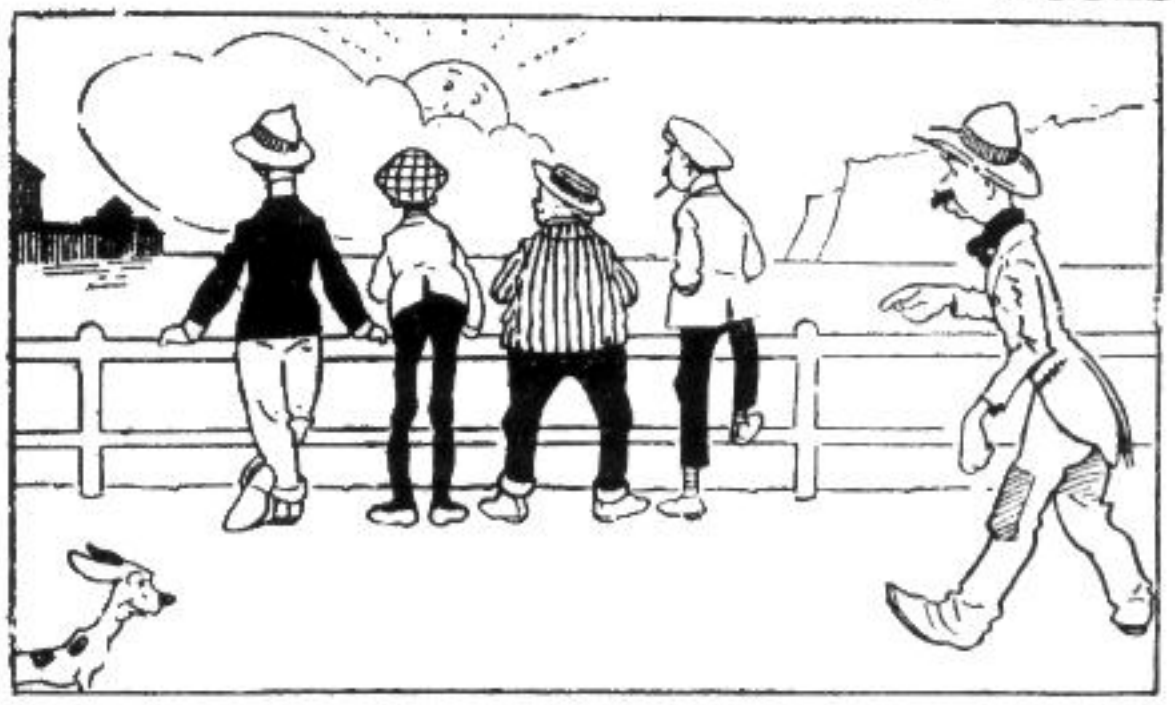
(The concluding article of this splendid series will appear on next Monday's Chat page.)

THE EDITOR.

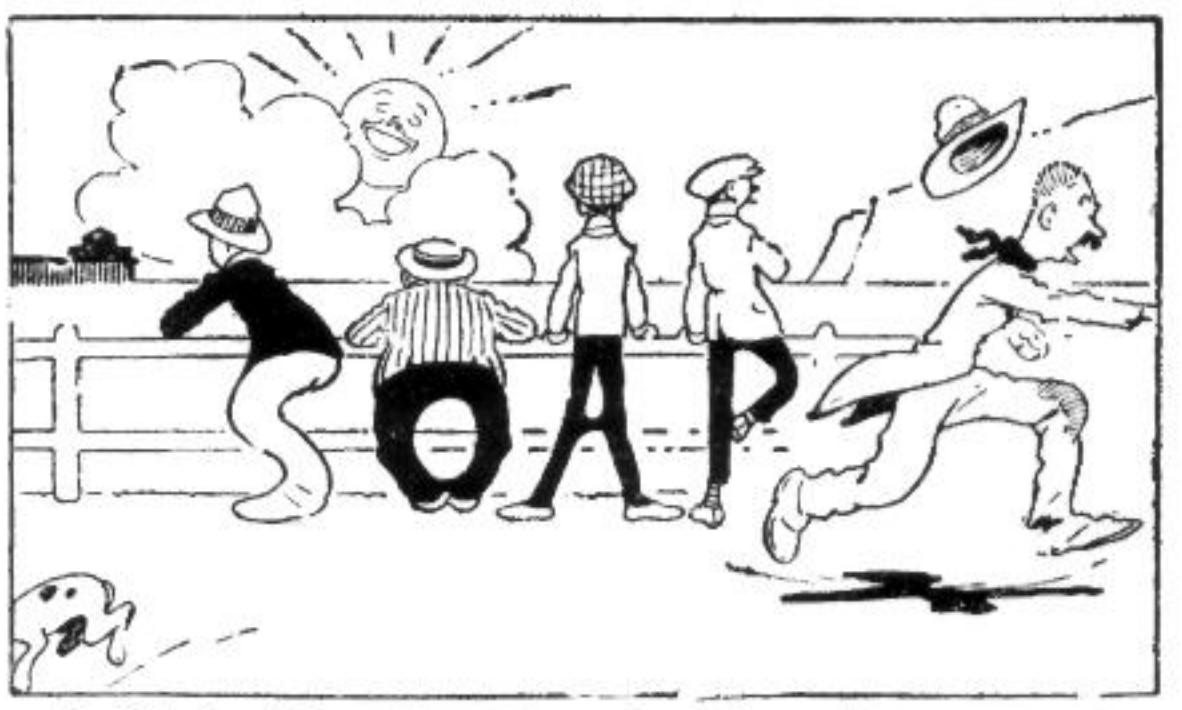
THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY

SPECIAL COMIC SUPPLEMENT.

IT WOULDN'T WASH!



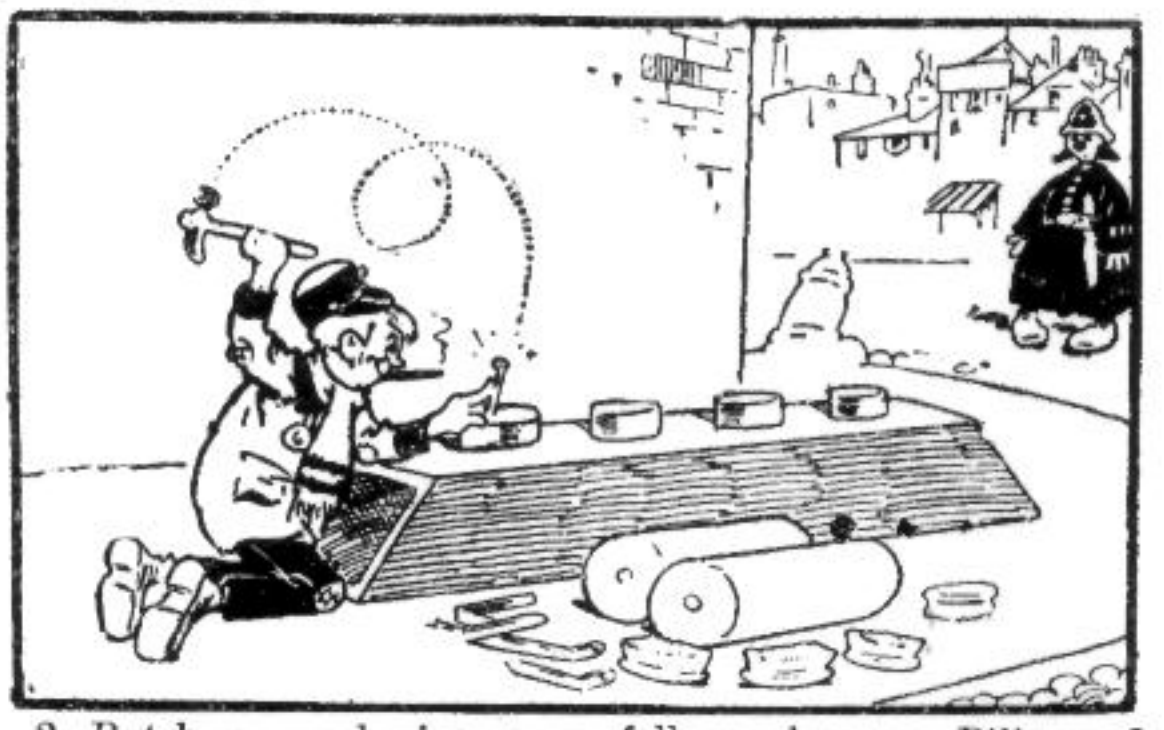
1. "Ah," said Weary Walker, "these look likely gents as'll give a poor cove a few coppers!"



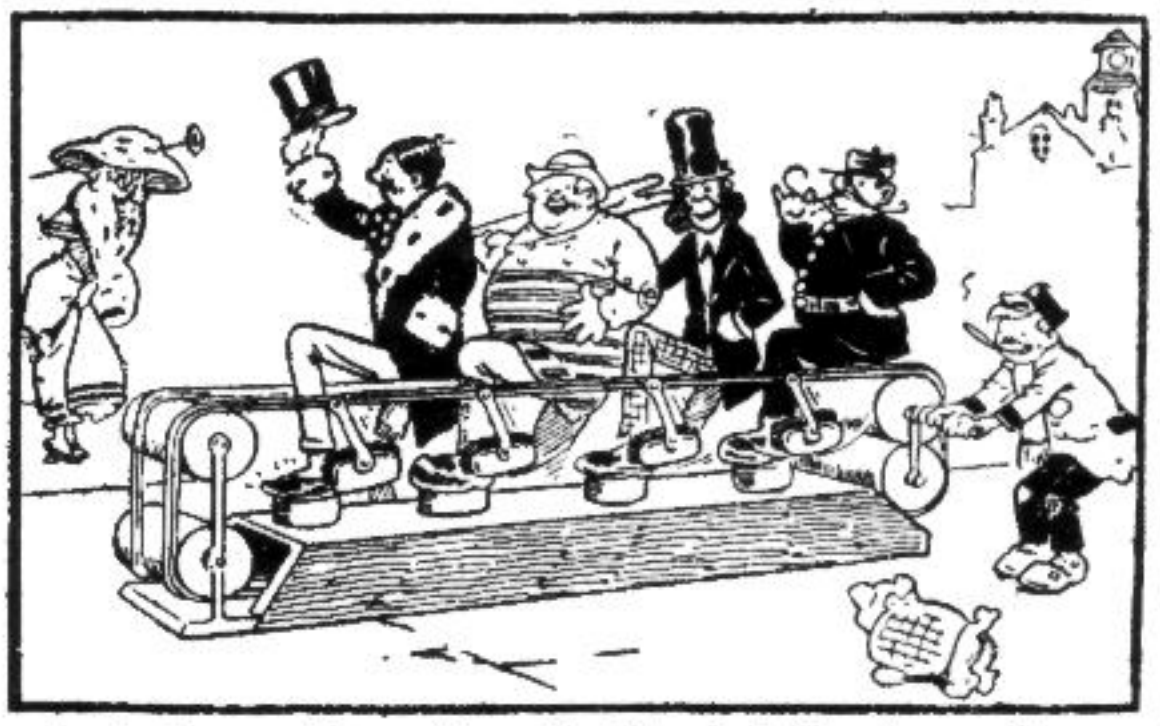
2. But just then they changed their positions somewhat, with the above result. The weary one didn't wait.

HE OUGHT TO "SHINE!"

1. "My word," gurgled Bill the bootblack, as he polished up the dainty tootsies of Sir Jolly MacStickfast, the multi-millionaire, "if this goes on long I shall be making a small fortune soon!"



2. But he was a brainy young fellermechap was Billy, and soon a gigantic scheme struck him wallop! What's it all about you wonder, reader. Kindly step into the next department—



3. And you will see his nutty idea in full swing, as it were. Isn't it a clinking notion, lads? Billy will be Prime Minister before he's reached the age of ninety, 'pon me word he will!

A THING OF THE PAST!

P.c. X Y Z: "What's your number?"
Motorist: "B C 250."
P.c. X Y Z: "I asked your number, not the date it was made!"

(More comic pictures on pages iii. and iv. of cover.)

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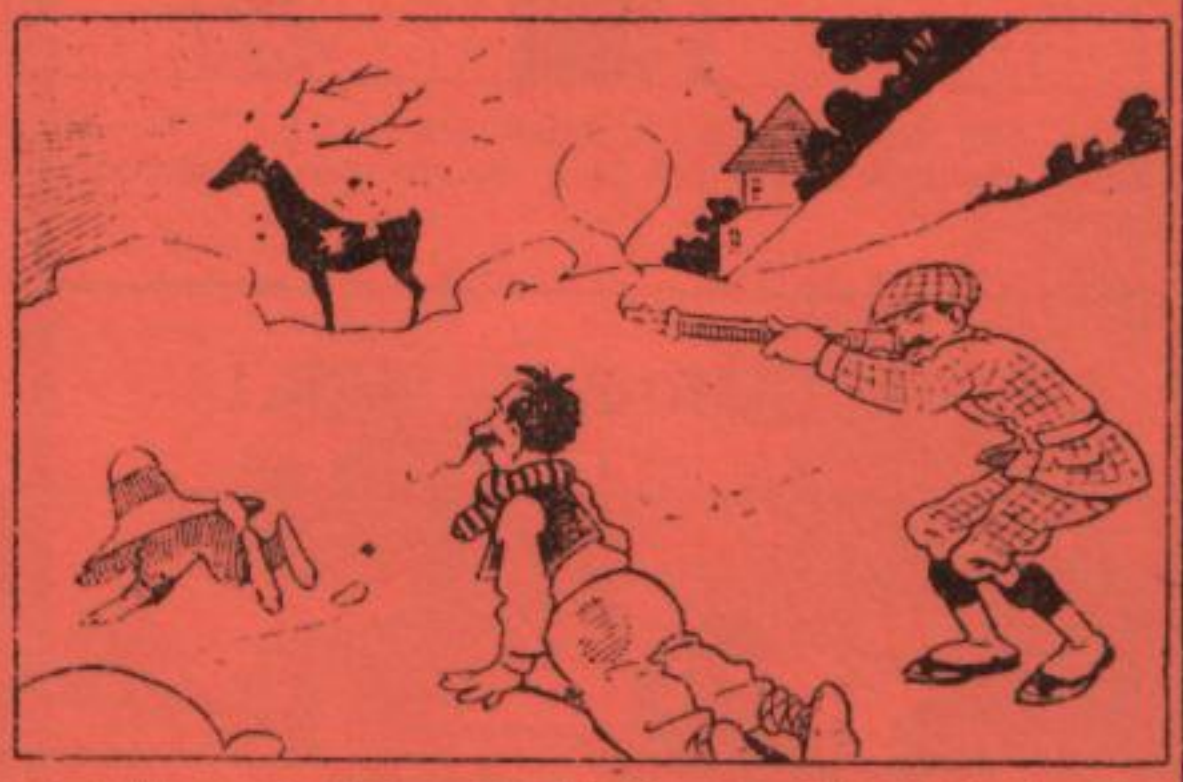
THE BILL STAGGERED THEM!

1. "Look! A stag on the horizon-scape!" cried the sportsman, who was out potting anything that came in the way of his pills.



2. "There, that's done it a bit of no good," said the shootist, as he let fly with his shooter. "That pill will improve his digestion."

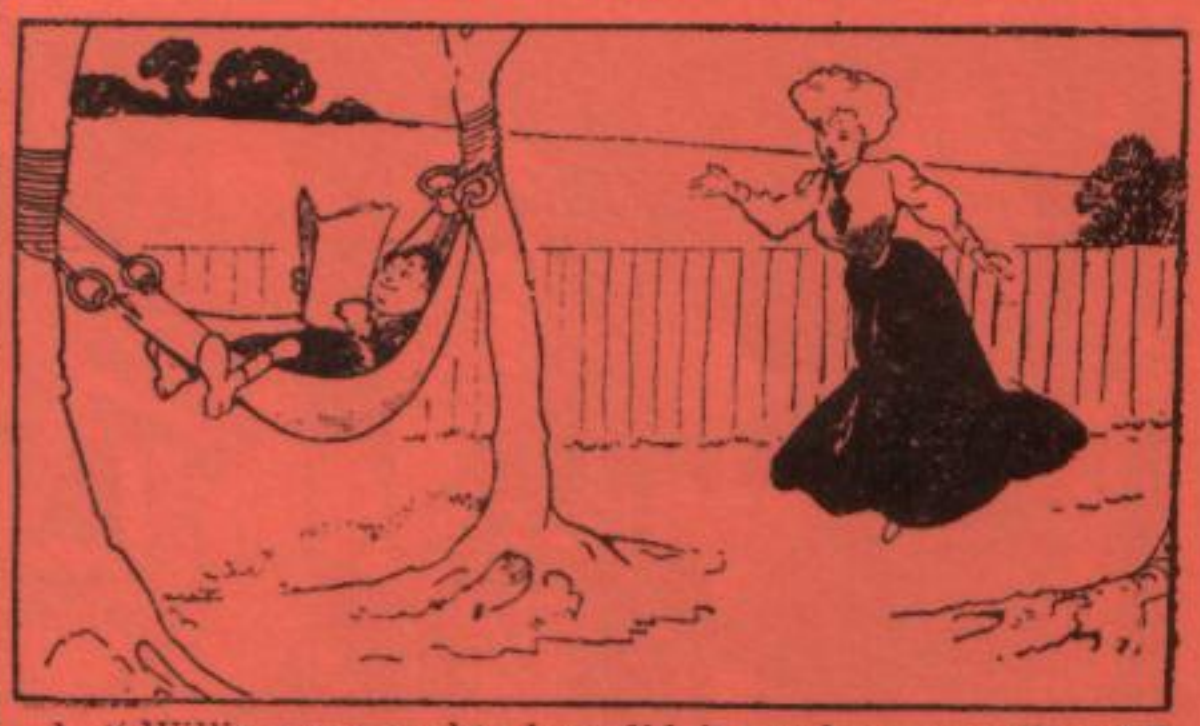
3. But wasn't he surprised when the hotel-keeper strolled up with the bill for damaging h.s sign! Well, we should smile!

ONCE BITTEN!

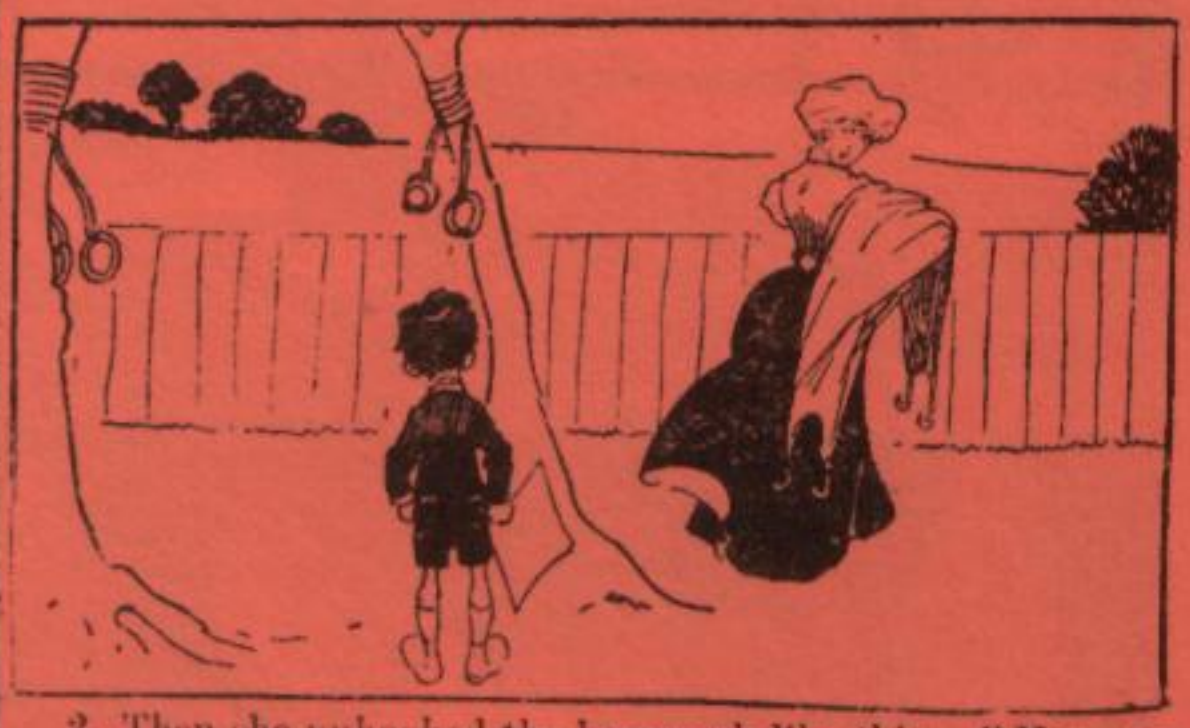
"I asked your husband last night if he had to live his life over again if he would marry you, and he said he certainly would."

"He certainly wouldn't!"

THE WILL(IE) AND THE WAY!



1. "Willie, you naughty boy, didn't you hear me calling?" said mamma. "Come out of that hammock at once!"



2. Then she unhooked the hammock like this. "Now you can't stay there wasting your time!" she cried.

3. "Can't I?" smole Willie, as he fixed himself up thus wise. But didn't he catch it when father came home!

BROTHERS IN MISFORTUNE.

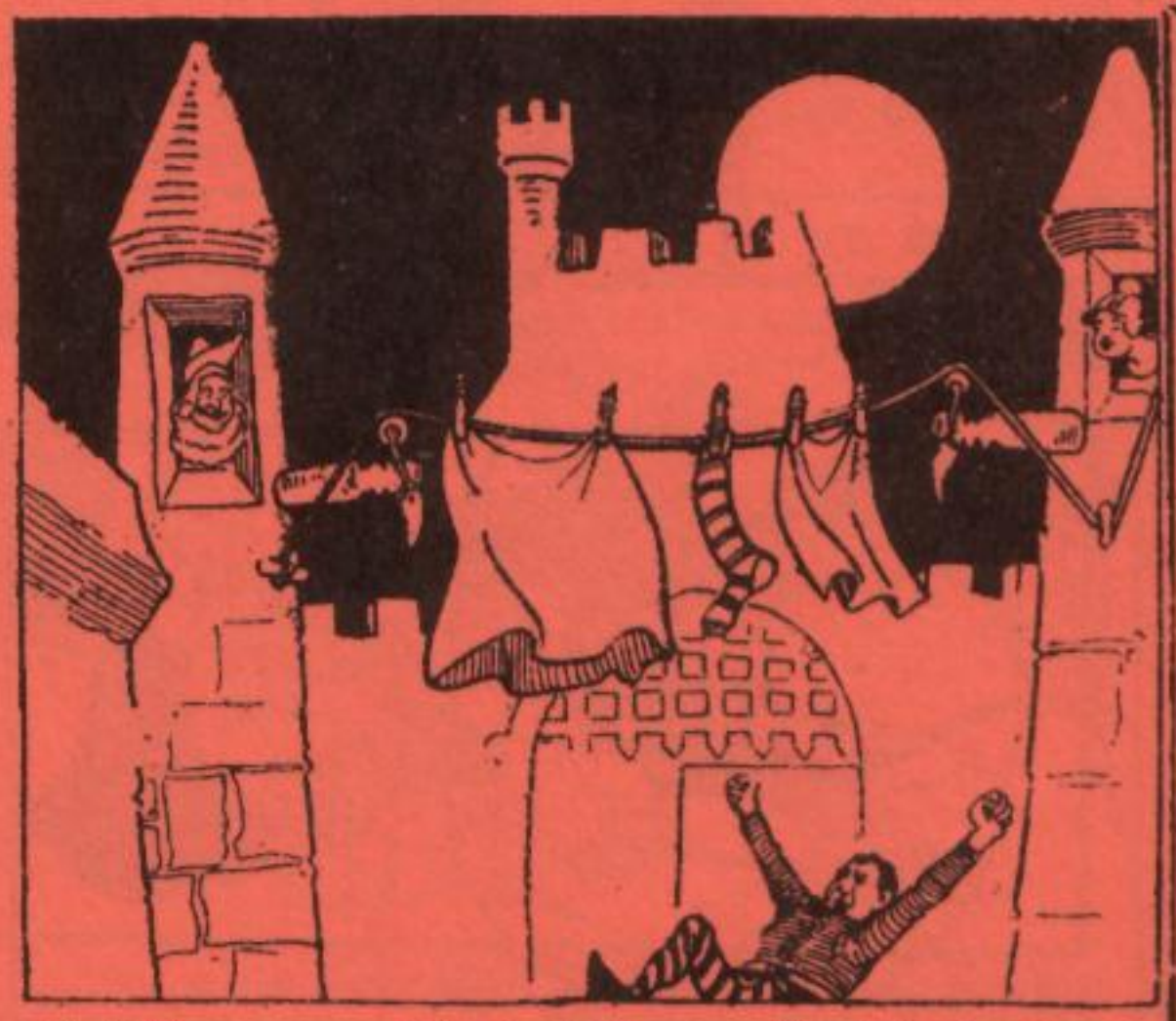
Tramp: "Excuse me, sir; but I don't know where my next meal is coming from."

Gent: "Neither do I. I'm in a similar predicament. My cook left this morning, too!"

DRY UP!

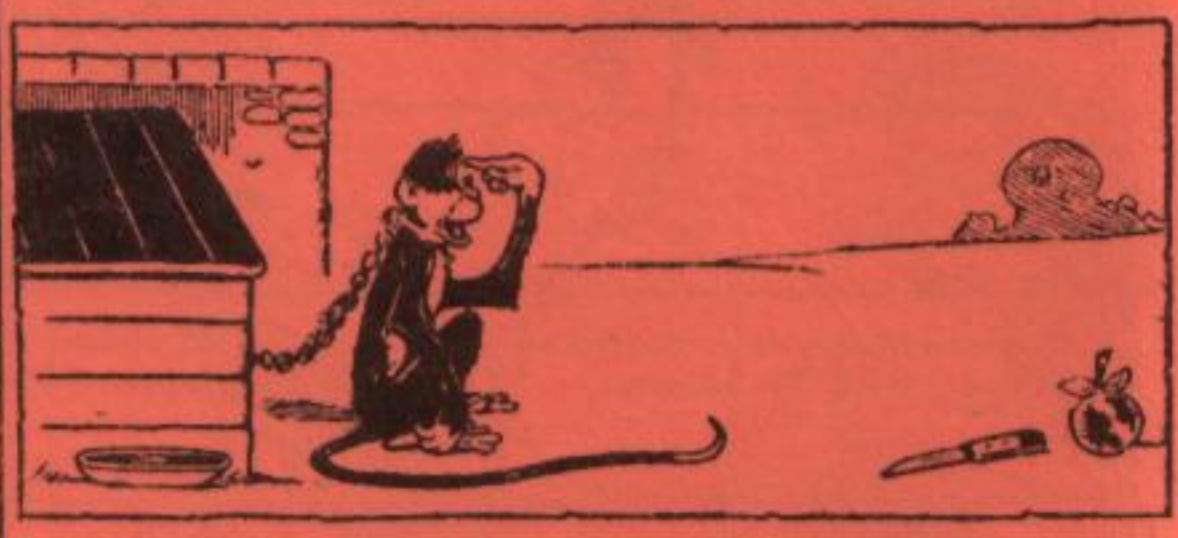
1. "How now?" said the valet. "What's amiss, pretty one? Tell me, I prithee!" Then Marjorie, the maid, said she'd no line to hang the washing on.

2. "Oh, beshrew me!" cried the valet. "'Tis easily done. See here! I'll e'en hang the old man's boots out like so, and—

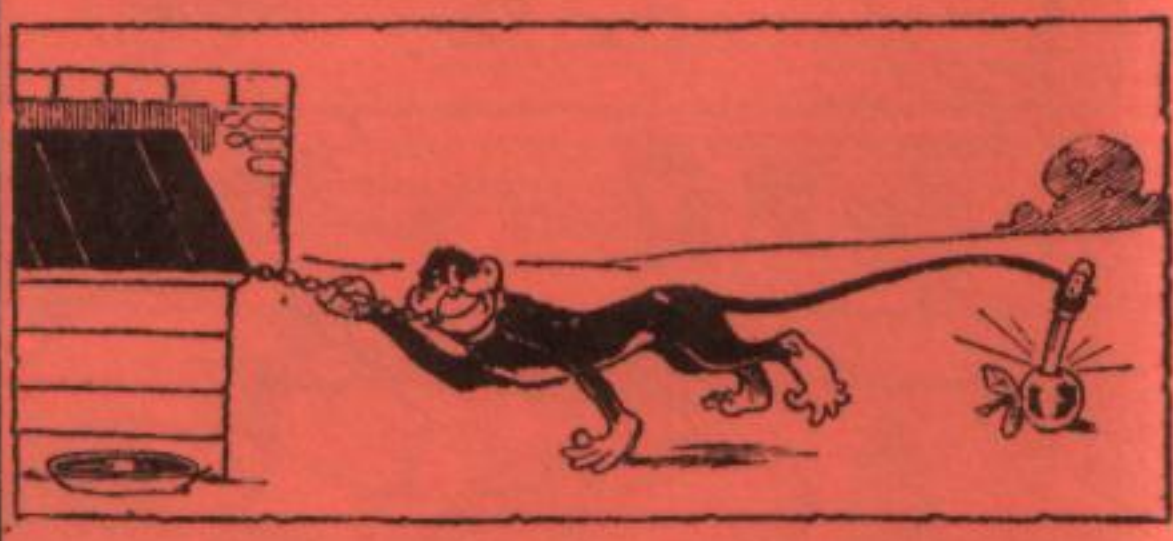


3. "There you are!" And all was well till the baron saw it, then the valet got the push straight away.

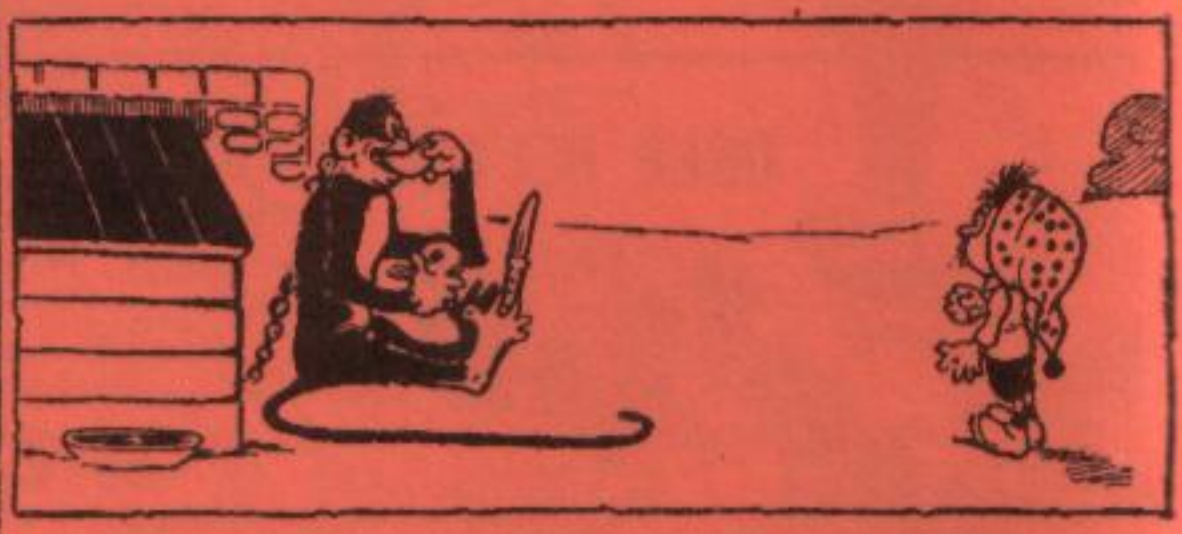
A CURIOUS TAIL!



1. Thought Micky the monk: "That apple I'd like;
A method of reaching it p'r'aps I can strike.



2. "Ah, happy idea! My tail I'll employ;
That pippin before very long I'll enjoy.



3. "Thanks awfully, Tommy, for leaving it there;
It is simply delicious—rich, ripe, and rare!"

VERY PLAIN!

Inspector: "I seem to know your face. What is your name?"

"I'm Constable 090 in plain clothes!"