

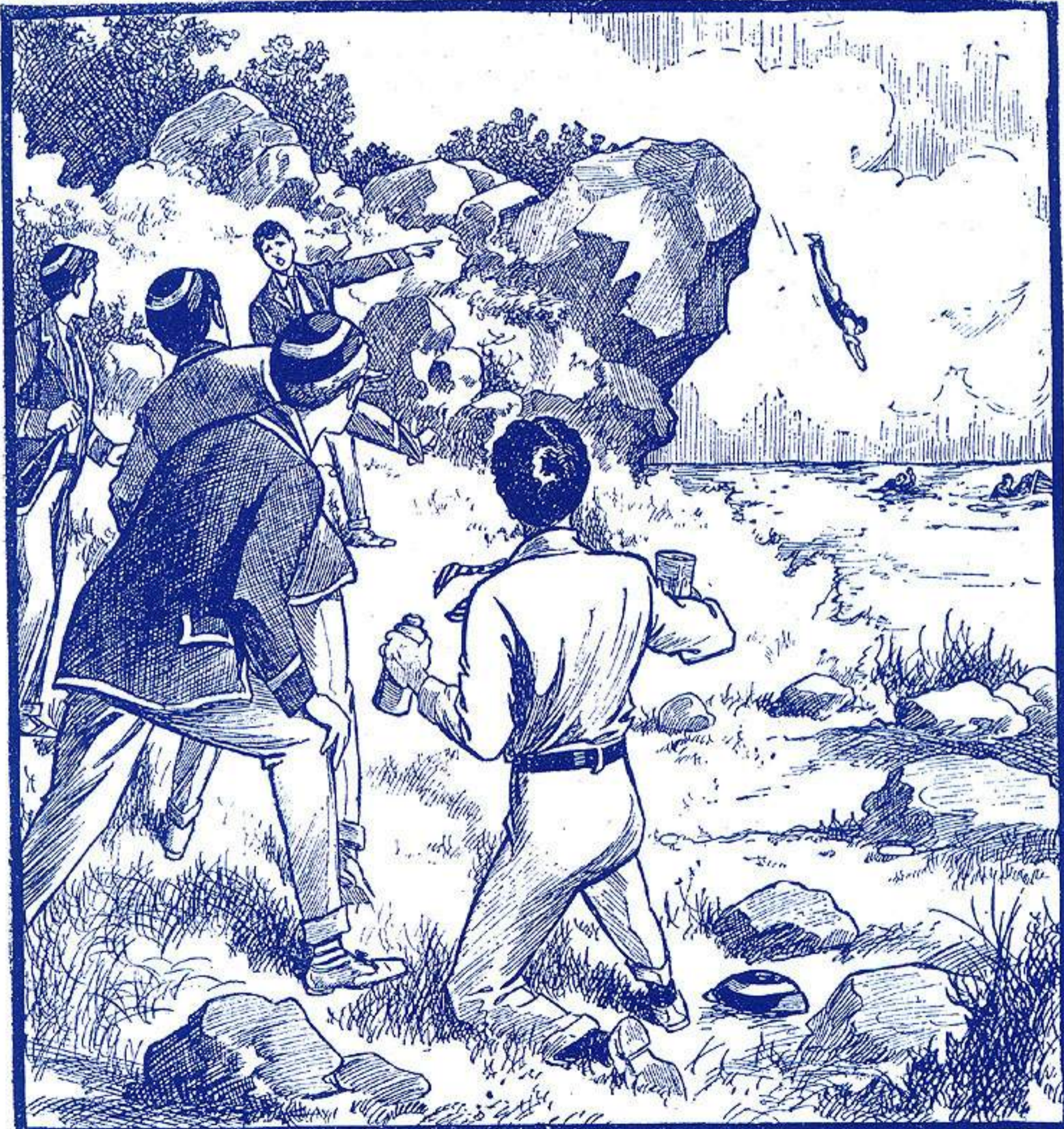
ON THE WRONG TRACK!

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



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A DIVE TO THE RESCUE!

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A Magnificent New
Long Complete Tale
of
Harry Wharton & Co.
at
Greyfriars School.

ON THE WRONG TRACK!

By
Frank
Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Wibley's Peril!

"MY hat! That sounds good!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, fanning his face while Bob Cherry poured out a foaming glass of ginger-beer. "Did I ever hear any silly ass say that the Arctic regions weren't nice?"

"I'd give a trifle to be sitting on a giddy iceberg just now," said Frank Nugent, mopping his perspiring brow. "When you're ready, I'm waiting, Bob!"

The Famous Five of the Remove at Greyfriars—Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Hurree Jaimset Ram Singh, and Johnny Bull—were gathered in No. 1 Study on the Remove passage.

Hot—it was hot! The Close lay under a shimmering veil of heat. The sun poured down relentlessly. Drinks were in great demand.

Harry Wharton set down his quickly emptied glass with a sigh of satisfaction. "Thank goodness this ain't the Sahara Desert!" he said.

"Couldn't be much hotter there," growled Johnny Bull.

"But there wouldn't be any ginger-beer," answered Harry.

"That's so. Hark at the fags yelling on Little Side! Must be trying to convert themselves into grease-spots, I should think," said Frank.

"It's no hotter out there than it is in here," growled Johnny.

"It is, to my respected mind, of a pleasant warmfulness," remarked Inky. "Your ludicrous and venerated English climate is at the presentful moment quite on its best behavfulness."

"My hat! A burning, fiery furnace like this!" gasped Bob.

"I do not find the warmfulness terrific, my esteemed and absurd Bob."

"Oh, you're a salamander!" said Harry.

"Let's get out," growled Johnny Bull. "We've been talking about it ever so long, but we haven't got a move on us yet."

"What are we going to do?" asked Harry lazily.

"A picnic is the wheeze," replied Bob. "A picnic on the giddy cliffs, and a ripping bathe, my sons!"

"Bit of a fag carting the grub up," said Nugent.

"You're a slacker! Come out of it, and show you're alive!"

They departed for the tuckshop, to lay in supplies.

"It's a good thing it's too jolly hot to eat much. And that ginger-beer is still allowed," Nugent said, as they packed their purchases in cricket-bags.

"It may be too hot for you to eat. It ain't for me," said Johnny Bull.

"Nor for Bunter," said Bob, grinning.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Not melted down yet, tubby?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the cricket-bags.

"Say it outside!"

"Gerraway!"

"Oh, really, you might be more polite. I think! I've just borrowed some tin—I mean, I've just received a postal-order. Are you chaps going on a picnic?"

"We are. You're not."

"Oh, really, Wharton, don't be unreasonable! You know jolly well what an acquisition I am to a party——"

"What a which-er?" asked Bob, looking puzzled.

"An acquisition. Don't you know your own language, Bob Cherry?"

"But that ain't my own language."

"It's English, you duffer! You'll find it in the dic."

"Oh! Thought perhaps it was Hebrew for guzzling, gorging porpoise."

"You'll miss me if you go without me."

"And a dashed good miss, too!" growled Johnny Bull.

"And if you're going to Cliff House you simply can't leave me behind," went on Bunter, with a fat smirk. "You know Marjorie wouldn't like it if you did."

"Dry up, you fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"If you want a thick ear, Bunter, just you mention Marjorie's name again!" said Wharton sharply. "As a matter of fact, we're not going to Cliff House. We are going for a bathe."

"I'll come," said Bunter. "I don't know about going in—salt water don't always agree with me on these hot days. But I can sit and mind your clothes—and the bags, you know."

"You won't!" said Johnny Bull decidedly.

"Bob-bub-but I'll stand my whack!"

"My only hat!"

As one man the Five stared at Bunter. This was an announcement calculated to stagger humanity.

"I mean it. I've got the cash!" puffed the Owl.

"Rats!"

"All right; if you don't believe me——"

"We don't! We never do!" said Johnny candidly.

"How much have you got?" snapped Nugent.

"Enough to pay for my share of the feed. I—I'm only a small eater, you know."

"Eh? Some mistake here," said Bob. "We thought you were the original food-bog that all the paper chaps are writing about just now."

"Ten bob—we can let Bunter in for that, I think," said Harry, winking at Frank.

"Oh, that's absurd! You can't expect me to pay for what you chaps wolf, you know."

"We don't. And we haven't any intention of paying for what you gorge, you fat cornucopant!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I'm willing to pay my tanner!"

Johnny Bull forced open Bunter's fat right hand. In it lay a sixpence.

Johnny breathed hard.

"And he was going to pay his whack!" he gasped. "Sixpence—to pay for Bunter's whack! My only sainted aunt!"

"It's no odds, really," said Wharton. "If the Owl were a giddy, bloated millionaire we should have no use for him."

"The nousefulness is terrific, and the absurd and disgusting Bunter should chasefully bunk himself off!"

Bunter blinked at them through his big spectacles as they went, and there was envy and uncharitableness, if not actual hatred, in that blink.

The Famous Five arrived under the grateful shade of the hedge near the top of the cliffs in various degrees of partial collapse.

From here they could look down on the sea, shimmering in the heat of that torrid day; but there was no direct way down. The cliffs were high and sheer. To get down to the beach they would have to descend a sloping path some distance away. This path also led to a boathouse.

"I vote we move on at once, get down, and have a dip right off," said Bob Cherry.

"Better wait till we've cooled down a bit," Wharton replied. "It isn't a good thing to go in perspiring like this."

"No good cooling down here, and getting just as hot again before we're on the beach," said Johnny Bull.

"Can't cool there," objected Nugent.

"The sands are like hot bricks, and there ain't an inch of shade to be had. The cool breeze up here comes straight across the sea."

"The coolfulness of the esteemed breeze is terrific!" purred Hurree Jaimset Ram Singh.

He was far less baked than the others; but even he fanned himself with his hat.

"There ain't any cool breeze at all," growled Johnny Bull.

"Shall we grub before or after our bathe?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, hang the grub! I feel as though grub's dead off," answered Harry. "Let's have a drink, though."

Bottles of ginger-pop were produced and opened. Johnny Bull strolled to the edge of the cliff and looked down.

"Let's have that telescope," he said. "Those chaps in the boat down there seem to be having an interesting little argument."

"Come and fetch it, old scout!" said Bob cheerily.

"Br-rrr-r! Lazy bounders!" growled Johnny. But he came.

"Hanged if it isn't Skinner and Wibley!" he said a moment later.

"Let's have a squint," Wharton said, getting up and going over to Johnny's side.

"Hard at it," said Johnny, without removing the telescope from his eye. "It's a real row, Wharton."

Harry could see that for himself with the naked eye.

On the blue sea down there was a small boat with two occupants. They

had laid down their oars, and were evidently squabbling.

They were some distance out, and the tide was nearly at its full. Here it lapped the base of the cliffs at high tide. Narrow escapes from drowning were frequent, and more than one fatality had occurred.

"They're going strong," said Harry.

"Silly idiots—on a day like this," said Frank Nugent lazily.

"Putting their dukes up now," said Johnny Bull, still clinging to the telescope.

"Let's have a look at the asses, Johnny," said Bob, coming up. And Johnny, with a grunt, resigned the telescope.

Nugent arose slowly, and the Nabob of Bhanipur got up also. Their interest quickened as soon as they were able to see what was going on.

Skinner and Wibley, of the *Remove*, were standing up in the boat, facing one another in pugilistic attitudes.

It was rather a puzzle why Wibley should have been in the company of Skinner. The two were not chums by any means.

"Go it, you cripples!" grinned Bob.

"It will indeed be a goitfulness of the most intenseful when the boat turns turtlefully," remarked Inky.

The voices of the two in the boat floated up to those on the cliff. But it was impossible to distinguish their words.

"If I were in Wib's place I should suspend the little entertainment till I was on dry land," remarked Wharton.

"Perhaps Skinney won't let him," said Nugent.

"Rats! Did you ever know Skinner so keen on a scrap?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Well, he seems keen enough for once," said Bob.

Skinner had lashed out at Wibley.

Wibley retorted by punching hard at Skinner.

"Should have thought Wib would have had more sense," said Harry, in some anxiety. "He isn't what I should call an expert swimmer, and there isn't heaps of room for a scrap in a boat that size. Look how it's rocking! Hanged if they won't be overboard in about two ticks!"

The two had closed. They must have let their tempers get the better of them pretty thoroughly, and have forgotten where they were.

Disaster was almost bound to follow.

And it did!

With a sudden lurch the boat heeled over. In a frantic effort to keep its balance Wibley and Skinner crashed over together on the gunwale, and rolled into the water.

Wibley caught his foot sharply against one of the rowlocks, and uttered a sharp cry of pain as he fell.

"My hat! They might have known what would happen!"

"The mad fools!"

The affair had taken on a distinctly ugly look now.

The boat had turned turtle—it floated hull upwards. Skinner, evidently in a funk, spluttering, floundering, swam desperately towards it, with no thought of Wibley. But that was only what might have been expected of Skinner; and, after all, if Wibley was not a great swimmer, he was not an absolute duffer, and should have been as capable as Skinner of getting into comparative safety.

But he was not doing it. He was being swept further away, apparently without a struggle.

"Why doesn't the silly idiot—"

"He can't, Johnny! He's in difficulties; you can spot that at a glance,"

said Wharton, his flushed face going pale.

"It's a cramp—or he's hurt himself!" gasped Bob. "This is awful! We can't do a thing to help."

The Famous Five looked at one another in consternation. Wibley was in the greatest peril. He had ricked his ankle very badly, and the pain had turned him faint and sick. A strong swimmer might have had a chance in such circumstances; but Wibley was only a moderate swimmer at best, and he had lost his head.

"Help, Skinner!" he spluttered feebly. He went under, came up again, and floundered and spluttered worse than ever.

"I—I can't!" wailed Skinner. "If I let go I shall be drowned myself!"

"You rotten funk!" gasped Wibley.

His senses were coming back to him, but no power to help himself came with them. He was in danger of drowning less because of the impossibility of struggling to the boat than because in his panic he took it to be impossible.

And Skinner's help was lacking, not so much because he could not have helped as because he dared not try.

There was excuse for Wibley's fear—perhaps some for Skinner's, too—but not much.

"Help, help!"

Now Wibley's voice rang out across the blue water, and the cry came plainly to the ears of the five juniors on the cliffs.

"It's awful!"

Wharton was near to breaking down completely. He would have been first to the rescue had rescue seemed possible. But he and all of them were helpless.

"There's not time to rush down!" said Bob. And plucky Bob's teeth were chattering. "He'll be dead before we get near!"

"Skinner, the funk!" gritted Nugent.

"Let's rush!" said Johnny Bull.

"After all, there may be just an off-chance!"

"Great Scott! Who's this chap? Oh, look!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Hero!

FROM somewhere in their rear a man had suddenly made his appearance. When Wharton sighted him he had already taken off his coat, and was quickly removing his boots.

"What's he after?" gasped Nugent.

"My hat! He's going to dive!"

"It's no go, Harry! Too far! A dive from this height—"

"But he's going to, Bob! Look!"

Almost spellbound, the five watched. The stranger had his boots off now. He ran to the cliff-edge, and fairly hurled himself off it.

Down he went—down, down! The juniors held their breath, and their hearts stood still.

A clean, magnificent dive—a dive in a million! He struck the water with hardly a splash.

"My hat! Wasn't that stunning?"

"Never saw anything like it in all my puff!"

The Famous Five watched the stranger with enthusiasm and admiration as he cut through the water to the rescue of Wibley. Skinner, on the upturned boat, and in no danger, had drifted farther from Wibley. Skinner was anxious, no doubt, but not anxious enough to get over his fear and lend help.

But Wibley was floating now. He was nearly exhausted, and to keep up was difficult—mainly because he thought it difficult, however.

"Ripping!" cried Wharton. "He's got him!"

"That chap's the right sort!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, rather!"

"The rightsortfulness of the esteemed and honourable chap is—"

"Terrific!" chipped in Bob. "I say, you chaps, let's go down and get a boat out. They can't do anything with that thing Skinney's glued himself to. Skinney would never consent to coming off to let it be righted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was easy to laugh now. The tension was over, for Wibley was safe. But if they laughed at Skinner's cowardice it was not because they condoned it.

They rushed off down a cliff-path to the boathouse. The feed was forgotten as completely as though it had never been.

For some minutes they lost sight of Wibley and his rescuer; but just as they were launching the boat they saw the two again.

Harry and Bob pushed out to meet them, rowing with a will.

In a short space they found the rescuer and the rescued alongside.

"Are you all right, Wibley, old scout?" asked Harry anxiously.

"Yes; I'm all serene now! But I was jolly near done! If it hadn't been for—"

"Oh, look here, you stop talking, and let us get you aboard!" said the stranger. "Be careful how you hoist him into the boat, boys. He's hurt his ankle, and I guess he isn't far off his limit!"

"Aren't you coming in, sir?" asked Bob.

"No need. I may just as well swim ashore. Just you take this youngster in, and then go out again to the unfortunate shipwrecked mariner over there!"

He meant Skinner, of course; and it was plain that he thought very much as they did about the cad of the *Remove*.

Harry and Bob pulled at the oars vigorously. The stranger swam alongside. At the boathouse Wibley was lifted out, and given into charge of the other three, and the boat put off again to the rescue of Skinner.

"Oh, crumbs! What a time you've been! Lug me aboard, do!" said Skinner crossly. "I'm shivering like one o'clock!"

"You worm!" answered Wharton, in utter contempt. "If ever there was a rotten coward, Skinner, it's you! Get in, and for goodness' sake don't start making excuses! Whatever you may say, you can't get away from it that it was funk—plain funk—that kept you from giving Wib a hand!"

Bob was silent. It had been funk, beyond all doubt. But once on a time Skinner had shown more pluck when Bob had been in peril; and though Bob had often enough forgotten that since he could not forget it just now.

"I—I—well, a chap can't help it if he loses his head, I suppose?" returned Skinner sullenly. "I didn't feel up to the mark; and I'm not going to pretend I'm as cool as you chaps. There wasn't any use in two of us getting drowned—not that I can see. And Wib would have dragged me under; he'd lost his head, too!"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Harry. "You needn't be a liar as well as a funk!"

The cad of the *Remove* lapsed into angry silence. He was not at all pleased with himself, as a matter of fact. He realised now that he could have given Wibley aid and earned kudos without any very considerable risk. But he had not known that there was anyone about capable of that dive from the cliff.

Skinner thought that, on the whole, the best thing he could do was to clear out as soon as he got ashore. And he

did so, to the annoyance of Johnny Bull, who had a thing or two to say to him.

"How's Wib?" asked Bob, as he disembarked.

"Oh, I'm all right!" said the school-boy actor. "It was the biff I gave my ankle that upset me. It came an awful whack against something, and the pain turned me faint. But I oughtn't to have lost my head. I should have been food for the fishes, though, if it hadn't been for this gentleman. My hat! Wasn't that a dive?"

"Nothing in it!" said the stranger pleasantly. "I don't mean that I take dives from that height every day. But it's only a matter of knowing just how. Let's say no more about it!"

"Well, I'm jolly well going to say that it was no end of a plucky thing to do!" said Bob, his face glowing with admiration.

"Rather!" said Frank Nugent.

"I never saw anything to beat it!" growled Johnny Bull.

The stranger held up his hand before either Inky or Harry Wharton had a chance to say anything.

"Don't!" he said. "On my honour, I'd much rather you said no more."

It was evident that he was not only a hero, but a modest hero.

"We must do something for our friend here," he said. "But, after all, I don't know that there's much to be done. The sun will soon dry his flannels, and it's so hot that he will be in no danger of catching cold meanwhile."

"I'm all right," said Wibley—"only no end thirsty!"

"We've ginger-pop and grub on the cliffs," Harry said. "Do you think you can walk up, Wib?"

"Of course, aas!"

But it was no easy ascent for Wibley. His foot was very painful, and he was glad of all the help Bob and Johnny could give him.

They reached the top at length, and Wibley spread himself in the sun to dry. The matron might not have approved, but to Wibley and the rest it seemed quite a reasonable dodge.

"Mop up that!" said Wharton, handing him a glass of pop.

Wibley mopped it up with dispatch, and felt the better for it. The rest—including the stranger—also went in for mopping-up operations.

"I say, sir, you're a fine swimmer!" said Bob. "I'm not going to praise your pluck again, so you needn't get ready to biff me!"

"I'm pretty good, I believe—had lots of practice, you know. By the way, you may as well know my name—Roland Smale."

He did not add any particulars of his calling, or tell them how he happened to be on the cliffs just at that moment; and, of course, they could not ask.

Wharton introduced himself, and then his chums, one by one. Each shook hands with the plucky swimmer.

They wondered what this man could be. Surely he must be used to danger, that he faced it so coolly and readily?

Perhaps he read their curiosity in their faces. He smiled as he said:

"I don't admit that there was any real risk in what I did, for I knew that the dive was not beyond my powers. But even if there had been—well, I'm used to taking risks. One has to take them in my calling. I am a private detective."

"A giddy detective!" gasped Bob.

"Not at all!" said Mr. Smale, smiling. "On the contrary, I am considered pretty steady, I believe!"

"I knew you must be something out of the ordinary," said Frank Nugent.

"Well, I suppose a private detective

may be said to be that. But he is not generally a much-admired person."

"What about Sexton Blake?" demanded Bob. "And I'm hanged if you don't look rather like him, now that I come to notice it!"

"You flatter me!" replied Mr. Smale. "I am a far more humble individual than the great Blake."

"I suppose you're after some criminal?" said Wibley, with great interest.

"Or a Hun spy, more likely!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Neither, as it happens. I am simply here for the benefit of my health."

"Oh!"

It was evident that Mr. Smale's hearers had a slight sense of disappointment at that answer.

"I have rented the bungalow over there for a short time, and am leading the simple life," Smale said.

"It would have been lots more satisfactory to us if you had been fairly on the track of some scoundrel, sir," said Bob frankly.

"Still, I suppose even a detective is entitled to a holiday now and then, Bob," Harry Wharton laughed.

"And Mr. Smale may tumble upon a first-class case by accident," remarked Wibley.

"Not at all likely, I should say," replied the detective. "And I don't want it, either."

"Have something to eat, sir?" asked Harry hospitably.

"No, thank you! I will go and get into dry clothes, I think. And our friend here should have his ankle seen to before it gets worse. Even if it only needs embrocation, the sooner that's applied the better."

Mr. Smale went, and the six juniors looked after him with genuine admiration.

"He's the right sort!" said Bob.

"The rightsortfulness of the esteemed and honoured sahib is truly terrific!" purred Inky.

And all agreed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Sinister Stranger!

"WELL, yes, I suppose it really was Skinner's fault," said Wibley. "But it's turned out all right, and I don't see any use in making a giddy fuss about it."

"But what the merry dickens did you two silly idiots get fighting in a little boat like that for?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"I thought you had more sense, Wib," Harry said.

"And Skinner more regard for his own safety," Frank added.

It was just before classes next morning, and Wibley was explaining the affair to a select and interested audience on the School House steps.

Wibley was quite himself again by this time. He had made up his mind not to say too much in blame of Skinner. But to tell the story without Skinner would have been too like playing "Hamlet" with the Prince of Denmark left out.

"Oh, hang about sense!" Wibley said. "Don't I tell you Skinny started the whole bizney? I happened to run into him near the boathouse, so we went out for a blow—"

"And got it in the plural—blows," grinned Bob.

"Not to mention running into one another hard—in the boat," said Squiff.

"Well, that was Skinner's fault. After we'd got out into the bay the silly

aas pulled out a packet of cigarettes, and started to light up. I wasn't going to stand that—"

"Quite right, Wib! Standing up in a boat is dangerous," said Tom Brown.

"Though Wib seems to have overlooked the fact a bit later," Peter Todd said.

"Oh, cheese it! You wouldn't have stood it yourselves. I'm not a smoky rotter, and anybody could have spotted us from the cliffs. So I got wild when the bouncer persisted. He called me names, and that made me wilder. In the long run, we stood up and waded in—"

"Looked more like a tumble to me," said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, you chaps are asses! I mean waded in to fight, of course. Then the boat tipped us out—"

"A tip not to fight in a boat again. Hood it, Wib!" said Peter Todd.

"And if it hadn't been for Mr. Smale there would have been but one of us left to tell the tale."

"The metro's a bit groggy," said Squiff, shaking his head. "Verse ain't your strong point, Wib."

"Verse? What are you talking about, chump? I said that only Skinner would have been left to tell the tale."

"And Skinny ain't half a bad hand at telling it, when he puts his mind to the job!" remarked Tom Brown.

Wharton had not spoken. He had been sitting on the steps with a newspaper in his hand. Now he cried:

"I say, you chaps, I've spotted something!"

"What is it? Your waistcoat?" asked Squiff.

"Fathead! A convict has escaped from prison!"

"Don't matter a fat lot to us if fifty of 'em have!" growled Johnny Bull. "I dare say they ain't much worse than plenty of chaps outside—Skinner, for instance."

"But this chap's a desperate beggar," said Harry. "He swore when he was convicted that he would break out and have revenge on the detective who arrested him. Looks as if he'd keep his word now."

"Who was the detective?" asked Tom Brown.

"It doesn't say."

"Then it ain't very interesting," said Bob.

"Perhaps I'm an ass—" began Harry.

"Why this modest doubt?" asked Squiff.

"Oh, dry up! I was thinking about that fellow Smale."

"What of him? The high-diver, you mean?"

"Yes, Browney. Suppose he was the detective the rotter had got his knife into? He might be, you know."

"So might you!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I'm not a detective, aas!"

"No; only a common or garden one!" Bob said.

"Oh, ring off! I can't help thinking it's poss. And Smale wouldn't exactly be on velvet if the rotter found out that he was staying at a seaside bungalow on his own."

"It's a giddy off-chance, Harry," said Frank Nugent. "Not worth worrying about, if you ask me."

"Oh, I'm not worrying, come to that! I should say Smale would be a pretty good hand at taking care of himself, and he'll probably have seen the paper before this."

But the Famous Five thought of that possibility more than once during the day, and the rest of them came to be more inclined to look at it in the same



"A German battleship!" gasped the tramp. (See Chapter 6.)

way as Wharton did. Of course, there were many detectives. But Roland Smale was a detective, and therefore was in the running, anyway.

"Let's take a stroll along the cliffs after tea," Harry suggested. "We might look Smale up if he's at home, and—er—see that he's all right, you know."

"Will you trot along, Wib?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No. But I'll limp along, if you like, and if next Saturday week or thereabouts will suit you for getting back," replied Wibley, with a wry grin.

"It won't," said Johnny Bull decidedly.

"Then I'll stay here."

The Famous Five sallied out after tea. Cricket was given the go-by for once, which of itself showed how much Mr. Smale had managed to arouse the interest of the juniors.

A cool breeze blew off the sea. The heat of the day before had gone.

"There's the giddy bungalow!" said Nugent. "But I don't see Smale."

"We'll call and find out if he's at home, anyway," answered Harry.

They were passing along the cliff-path, some little distance from the detective's place of sojourn.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Who's the merchant lying there?"

"Where?" asked Harry.

"Can't you see him?" returned Bob, with an index finger outstretched. "There he is, and I'm hauged if I don't believe he's watching the bungalow!"

Now all saw the individual who had attracted Bob's attention. A shabby man lay on a little grass hillock, with his face towards the bungalow. He could see it and yet not be seen from it, for the top of the hillock was as cover for him. But it is doubtful whether the spying notion would have occurred to any of them if it had not been for that sensational newspaper story of the escaped convict who was seeking his vengeance.

But Wharton was the first to discount any such idea.

"Oh, it's only some tramp taking a rest, I fancy," he said. "Nothing suspicious about him."

The shabby man seemed to have heard their voices. He looked round sharply, rose, and shambled off.

"There you are!" said Bob. "That's no tramp, Harry! As soon as he saw we were on to his game he hopped it!"

"It does look rather like that," said Johnny Bull.

"Let's hurry after him and get a squint at his chivvy, so that we know him again," Bob suggested.

The shabby stranger was walking quite slowly. But he looked round and saw them approaching on his track. At once he quickened his pace.

"We're going to see his mug, whether he likes it or not!" said Bob determinedly.

"Even if the mere sight of it floors us!" added Frank.

They all moved faster. Now the shabby man had his choice. He could run, and even then might not outpace them—probably would not. But quite certainly he could not keep ahead of them without running.

He appeared to dislike the idea of undue exertion. He slowed down to quite a leisurely walk, and they gained on him rapidly.

"Was yer wantin' ter speak ter me, young gents?" he asked, as they came up.

They looked at him curiously. He was ill-dressed, and of slouching gait. His face was brown, and his straggling beard looked as if he owed it some months' arrears of trimming. But it was his eyes that they noticed most. They were very shifty eyes. Never for an instant did they remain fixed on any one object.

Altogether the Famous Five considered him a decidedly sinister-looking person.

"We—er—thought you might have seen the gentleman who rents that bungalow," said Wharton. "We were looking for him, and as you seemed to be watching the place—"

Johnny Bull's elbow nudged Harry's ribs.

The shifty eyes flashed a queer gleam at the speaker.

"Watchin' the place be jiggored!" said the fellow. "I serpose it ain't agin the lor for a pore cove to 'ave a snooze? But you don't mean no 'arm, I'm sure, an' I don't doubt as you're young gents with kind 'earts. Mobbe you wouldn't mind givin' of a pore bloke a 'elpin' 'and?"

The Famous Five handed over some small change. They did not feel specially sympathetic, but they could hardly refuse, after running the man down in that way.

"You're reel toffs, so you are! Lummy, 'tain't often as I meets the like of you! I shall be able to git a bite o' supper to-night, any'ow!"

He shambled off again. The Famous Five watched him in silence, and in some doubt. No one spoke till he was out of earshot.

"Well," said Frank Nugent, "what do you Herlock Sholmeses make of our friend?"

"I twigged one thing," said Harry. "That beard of his is false."

"Gammon!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I tell you it's right! I'd bet my last tanner on it! The beard was false! So were the eyebrows. The chap's in disguise!"

"Blessed if I don't believe you're right, Harry!"

"I know I am, Bob."

"Yes; but you always do!" growled the candid Johnny.

"The rightfulness of the honoured Wharton is proverbially known," said Inky.

"Also terrific!" chimed in Bob.

"It did strike me," remarked Frank, "that although the chap didn't let out at us, and though he cadged, he was furious with us for disturbing his little game."

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," growled Johnny, "that he's the escaped convict, and that he's watching the bungalow for a chance of doing Smale in!"

Johnny Bull intended sarcasm, but it fell quite flat.

"You've hit it, old scout!" said Bob.

"Yes, I believe that's the game," Harry said.

"The esteemed and abominable convict is watchfully regarding the habitation of the honourable Smale in order that he may in the darkness and behindfulness whackfully crump the honourable detective on his ludicrous napper!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh gravely.

Johnny Bull snorted.

"As you're all so jolly sure," he growled, "I give in, of course. I'm not a detective. I've got nothing but common sense!"

"And not too much of that!" said Bob.

"There's no proof—as yet—Johnny," said Harry Wharton slowly. "But there's lots of suspicious facts. That convict chap had sworn revenge on the detective that nabbed him. And here, the day after he gets away, a chap in disguise is hanging around Smale's bungalow. And we know that Smale's a detective!"

"Well, he told us so, and I believe that all serene. But it doesn't prove he's the same 'tec, or that this is the convict. You chaps go too fast for me."

"Poor old Johnny! Give him a year or two to think it over in," grinned Bob.

"Make it three years, or the duration of the war," suggested Frank.

"Oh, don't try to be funny! It's too painful. What do you mean to do about it, Wharton?"

"I don't know. Difficult to see what

we can do. Hallo, there's Smale himself!"

The Famous Five hurried to meet the detective.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Warning!

"GOOD-EVENING, my friends!" Mr. Roland Smale greeted them cheerfully as he came up.

"Good-evening, sir!" answered the Famous Five in chorus.

The detective looked very fit and cheery. He took his pipe from his lips, and puffed a cloud of blue smoke into the clear air.

"And how is the victim?" he asked.

"Wibley, you mean? Oh, his ankle's pretty painful to-day, but it will be all right in a day or two, I guess. I say, sir, we wanted to speak to you!"

"Well, aren't you?"

They were, of course. But now they all looked at one another in some doubt as to how to start. Johnny Bull snorted, as who would say: "You can leave me out of this, anyhow!"

"By Jove, you all look very serious! Anything the matter?"

"Well, it isn't anything that has happened," said Bob, taking the bull by the horns. "It's what may happen, you know. There seems quite a lively chance that you'll get it in the neck!"

Johnny snorted again; and the other three seemed to think Bob might have put it better.

"Dear me! That would be painful," said Mr. Smale, with a queer smile.

"I—I mean, we want to give you a word of warning, sir," said Bob.

The detective looked sharply at the five juniors.

"A word of warning?" he echoed.

"Haven't you seen to-day's papers, sir?" said Frank.

"Not yet. Papers don't concern me much just now. Is there anything particular in them?"

"There's a convict escaped," said Wharton. "An awful scoundrel, it seems. He threatened to have revenge on the detective who arrested him. We thought, perhaps—"

Mr. Smale laughed—in a relieved kind of way, Johnny Bull thought.

"You fancied I might be the detective against whom he had sworn his vendetta?" he said. "Set your minds at rest. As far as I am aware, none of my victims—shall we say—has sworn to have my blood. So I am not the unfortunate minion of law and order over whom the danger hangs."

The Famous Five seemed almost disappointed.

"You're quite sure, sir?" said Wharton.

"Quite, my friend!"

"Then it's jolly queer, for I can't help thinking the chap we saw must be some enemy of yours. Detectives can hardly help having lots of enemies, I should think. Some awful rotter seems to have found out where you are, and started in to spy on you."

Now Mr. Smale smiled no longer. He frowned.

"I really don't follow you!" he said almost crossly.

"When we came along here ten minutes ago there was a man watching the bungalow," Johnny Bull told him.

"Great Scott!" said the detective. "Is that correct?"

"The correctfulness is terrific, honoured sahib!"

Mr. Smale's face went pale. The juniors were surprised. There could be

no doubt about this man's courage. Yet he seemed alarmed at this news.

"You must be mistaken, I think," he muttered. "What sort of man was he?"

"Oh, an awful-looking scoundrel, sir," replied Bob. "He looked like a tramp all over, and had whiskers like a giddy rook's nest."

"And his eyes, too!" said Harry. "They were the shiftiest I ever saw."

Smale's easy manner had returned to him now.

"I really think you have been worrying yourselves unnecessarily," he said.

"There are hundreds of tramps about at this time of the year—not so many since war broke out, it is true, but more than anybody needs. The fact that I am a detective is not sufficient ground for assuming that every shabby stranger you see is an enemy of mine."

The Famous Five were a trifle nettled. It seemed to them that Mr. Smale was treating them like mere kids.

"We don't," said Bob. "We suspect this one, that's all."

"And we consider that we have good reason for suspecting him," said Harry quietly.

"Indeed! And what is your reason?"

"I think you will admit there is something in it!" Harry replied. "The fellow was disguised."

Again Mr. Smale looked uneasy; and Johnny Bull noted it, if no one else did.

"He wore a false beard, and his chivvy was made up," Bob said.

Mr. Smale started. Then he laughed huskily.

"Oh, nonsense! You're imagining things," he said.

"Dash it all!" growled Johnny Bull.

"There don't seem any reason to me why you should set us down as donkeys. After all, we are only warning you for your own good!"

"Perhaps Mr. Smale thinks we are trying to spoof him," Frank Nugent said.

"Not at all! My dear boys, I am sorry if I appear unduly incredulous. But danger and I are old playfellows. I have learned not to go meeting perils in advance. Yet I freely admit that it would take some of the pleasure out of my holiday if I had to spend it in dodging some old and spiteful enemy. I am still inclined to think you must be in error."

"Well, we may be," said Harry curtly.

"I didn't twig the false face-fungus," remarked Johnny Bull. "But Wharton did, and he doesn't often go about imagining things."

"Thanks, Johnny!" said Harry, smiling.

"I promise to keep my eyes open," the detective assured them. "And I thank you sincerely for your evident interest in my fortunes. But let's drop the subject now, and talk about cricket. You will understand that a man on leave for the benefit of his health prefers to put behind him such matters as this."

He walked with them till they reached Friardale Lane, and talked cricket with evident knowledge of the game.

As they entered the lane Bob was ahead. He started back.

"He's coming this way!" he said, in excitement.

"Eh? Who?" asked the detective abruptly.

"Shifty Eyes—the tramp!"

"Good chance for you to get a squint at the rotter, sir. You might be able to recognise him," said Johnny Bull.

Again there was an expression on Mr. Smale's face that puzzled Johnny. It was so like fear. And yet the man was indisputably a hero!

"I think I will turn back," he muttered.

"Oh, but we know you're not afraid, sir—and you may not get another chance as good as this!" exclaimed Harry.

"Of course I'm not afraid! You boys must know I am at least no coward. But I believe in due discretion. Let us get behind the hedge, and let the fellow pass without seeing us."

There did not seem much in this dodge to the Famous Five. Assuming that the disguised tramp was an enemy of Smale's, he had obviously already located the detective, and evasion of this kind was rather futile. And if he were not an enemy, there was no particular reason that they could see for avoiding him.

On the other hand, Mr. Smale, with all his experience, ought to know best.

The five juniors and the man crouched behind the hedge and waited. The foliage was thick, and served as quite an efficient screen.

The shifty-eyed tramp shambled close past them, to all appearance unconscious of their nearness. He was smoking a black clay pipe, and looked the wastrel of the dusty road and the haystack and the doss-house all over.

Mr. Smale gazed at him intently, holding the branches ever so little apart. He gave a low sigh of relief.

"Well, sir?" said Harry, when Shifty Eyes was out of earshot.

"You were mistaken," said Mr. Smale. "That man is not in any way disguised."

His whiskers are a natural, though highly unbecoming, growth. You expected a scheming scoundrel, and your expectations influenced your judgment, I fancy."

"Then you've never seen him before?" asked Bob.

"Not to my knowledge."

"You don't think he's the man you got sent to prison, sir?" said Frank.

"I am quite sure I never had a hand in sending that man to prison—though no doubt he has deserved to go there, and very possibly has been there," answered the detective, with a laugh that rang more truly than before.

Somehow, they were not quite satisfied. Wharton had not lost faith in his own eyesight, and not one of them was willing to admit himself so fanciful as Mr. Smale seemed to imagine them all to be.

His next words did not please them.

"I should advise you to dismiss the man and the whole matter from your minds. Such sensational notions are apt to do harm to boys."

But after that he did his best to charm away the clouds that had come over their faces. Bob Cherry was the first to resume his old sunny smile.

He ran his fingers through his curly hair, and said:

"I suppose we've made asses of ourselves, more or less. The thing may happen to anyone. Good-night, sir, if you're leaving us!"

For Mr. Smale had stopped.

"I've got an idea," said Harry. "What do you chaps say to asking Mr. Smale to tea—a war tea—in No. 1 tomorrow night? The grub will be limited, sir, but the welcome won't."

"Ripping!" said Bob. And the rest murmured assent.

"Thanks very much. I accept with real pleasure," said the detective.

"Right-ho, sir! Five o'clock suit you?"

"Certainly. You may depend upon me, and it's uncommonly good of you to extend an invitation to such a dry and matter-of-fact fog!"

With that—it might have been a hit at their supposed over-imaginativeness, or it might not, but it was spoken pleasantly, anyway—Mr. Smale went.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tea With a "Tee!"

"A GIDDY detective!"
"My hat! You chaps are going it some!"

"I don't mind coming. Bring my own sugar, of course."

"Quite impossible to leave me out, Wharton. You see that for yourself, I'm sure, being such a reasonable fellow."

"Nice compliment, Squiff, old scout, and I hate saying 'No.' But this is to be a very select party indeed—even Marky isn't getting an invite. Just ourselves and Wib, that's all."

"Good!" said Wibley heartily. "Depend on me."

"This detective chap ought to take away a good impression of Greyfriars, Wharton—"

"So he ought, Toddy. So he will, seeing only us. That's why we mean to keep you and the other giddy freaks in the background."

"Seven's a crowd in No. 1!" growled Johnny. "We have got more in, I know. But—Well, just look at your nose, Toddy! 'Tain't reasonable, you know."

"Oh, Toddy knows Toddy's nose all serene! It's like the poor—always—"

"Oh, dry up!" yelled Peter. "If you want to talk about prominent features of the landscape, why not get on to Bob Cherry's feet?"

"I shall biff anyone who gets on to my feet—good and hard!" said Bob, looking warlike.

"Rough on the 'tee," grinned Tom Brown. "But perhaps he's used to obstacle races!"

"Shall you stick them out of the window, or leave the door open for them, Bob?" inquired Piet Delarey.

"He'd better sit on them!" Bolsover major growled.

"I'll sit on the next chap who says anything about them!" howled Bob.

"Got any corns, Bob?" inquired Dick Russell sweetly.

"Or Bunyans?" asked Dick Rake. "Pilgrim's Progress sort, you know."

"Well I know one thing—I wouldn't come to their rotten party if they asked me!" sniffed Stott.

"Nor yet me!" said Snoop, sniffing still more.

Snoop was a naturally sniffy sort. "I bar detectives," Skinner said.

"Your sort generally does!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha! Of course. Jolly awkward for Skinney running against a detective," remarked Ogilvy.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Nothing doing, porpoise!"

"Oh, but really, it ain't fair! You know I'm quite different from the other fellows."

"We do—we does!" replied Bob cheerily. "Most of the other fellows are decent human beings. Of course, there are Snoop and Stott and Skinner; but it needs an exception or two to prove a rule."

"And most of them have decent human appetites," said Frank Nugent. "Yours is an elephantine one, with a touch of boa constrictor!"

"And, not to waste time in argument, you are not coming, Bunter!" Wharton added, with immense decision.

"But—but it's necessary I should, you know. Really, it is."

"Oh, it's necessary, is it?" asked Frank.

"Bunty means he'll die of starvation, or chagrin, or something if he doesn't come."

"But that doesn't make it necessary," Bob said, looking puzzled. "Who minds Bunter's pegging out of anything that ain't infectious?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't mean anything of the sort, Peter Todd! Only an ignorant person—"

"Eh?"

"I mean— Of course, I have the highest possible respect for your intelligence, Toddy. But you do talk like a silly fool, you know!"

"Why is it necessary, butter-tub?" asked Johnny.

"My ventriloquism!" replied Bunter loftily. "Your guest will want to be amused, I suppose? It ain't to be expected he can stand much of your conversation. Besides, it would be a ripping dodge to make him make a giddy ass of himself. He, he, he!"

Gently but firmly Wharton took Bunter by the ear, while Bob turned up his sleeves.

"Want a little exercise, Bunty?" asked Bob blandly.

"I—I— Oh, don't be silly, Bob, old man! I am coming, ain't I, Harry, old pal?"

"Not on your life you're not! And if you call me 'Harry, old pal' again—"

"Or me 'Bob, old chap'—"

"Ow-yow! Stop them, Toddy! You can fight the beasts! I'll hold your coat!"

But Peter Todd merely grinned.

"It ain't as if you fellows were really the sort to do credit to Greyfriars," went on Bunter, believing vainly in the obtuse depths of his fat mind that the invitation was only hanging fire. "You want an aristocrat like me—a chap with titled relations. Tell you what—better ask me and my pal Mauly, if no one else—"

"Oh, begad! Did I hear you mention me, Bunter?"

"Yes, old chap. I was just saying—"

"Please don't, then! You're not a pal of mine, y'know. Speakin' calmly an' politely, an' all that, y'know, I wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole!"

"Don't go back on a chum like that, Mauly, just as he was trying to squeeze out an invite for you!" growled Bunter indignantly. "I— Yarooogh! Wharrer at, Cherry? Yow! Stoppit, you silly ass! Leggo my ear, Wharton, you cad! Ow-yow!"

Bunter was convinced at last that he was not to take tea in Study No. 1. Conviction had been slow in coming to him, but it had come.

"Well, I think there will be enough to go round—as long as Smale isn't too big a whale on sugar," said Bob, his eyes roaming over the table in that famous apartment, a few minutes later.

"Is the august feedfulness all readyful?" asked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"The readyfulness is augustly terrific, Inky," replied Bob cheerily. "The boilfulness of the honourable kettle will also be terrific—when she boils, of course. Disgusting Sister Ann, do you see the ludicrous and venerated guest on the august wayfulness?"

"Oh, chuck it, Bob!" groaned Johnny Bull. "The chap will think we are mad. He's just coming."

And a minute or so later Mr. Smale presented himself at the door of the study.

"Am I too soon?" he inquired.

"Not a bit, sir! Come in!" said Frank.

"By jove, this is a spread—for wartime!" said the detective.

A sudden doubt crossed the mind of Johnny Bull.

Their visitor was quite obviously under forty-one.

How was it that he was not in the Army? It was hardly likely that private detectives were getting exemption, Johnny thought. They were in a very different position from Scotland Yard men, of course.

But perhaps he had been rejected on

grounds of ill-health, though that scarcely seemed consistent with such high-diving ability as he had displayed.

Anyway, it was not Johnny's business. He liked Smale well enough; but, without being suspicious, Johnny Bull was less ready to take anyone on trust, and far less inclined to sudden enthusiasms, than any of his chums.

"I feel like a boy again, by jingo!" said Mr. Smale, as he started in on the good things provided.

"When do you go back to town, sir?" asked Harry Wharton, a little later.

"I cannot say with anything like certainty. I may go to-morrow—"

"Oh!"

"Or I may be here for a fortnight yet. You see, if I get a wire from headquarters, I must give up my holiday. After all, work is more important than play."

"You're not working on any case now, are you, sir?" Wharton said. "I don't mean to be rude, of course; and we sha'n't be offended if you tell us we are too inquisitive."

"Oh, I don't mind! I recognise the friendly feeling that prompts your interest. No, I have nothing at all in hand at the moment."

"I read something rather interesting in the paper this morning," Wharton remarked thoughtfully. "A rotten forger—"

"A forger?" ejaculated Mr. Smale, and the warranted no-excess-of-sugar scone, to which his attention was being given, fell to his plate with a dull thud that seemed to suggest its being none too light.

"It seemed to startle you, sir," said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, no; it simply reminded me of a particularly interesting case in which I was engaged not long ago!"

And Mr. Smale took a long drink of tea.

Harry Wharton went on with his newspaper story.

"This was a chap named Douglas Marsh," he said. "Got off with the proceeds of a forged cheque for ten thousand pounds."

"Didn't they catch him?" Bob asked.

"Whew! He was going some, as Fishy would say," put in Frank Nugent. "Ten thousand is a trifle steep."

"He's never been seen since, as far as anyone knows," Wharton continued. "The notes he got from the bank he changed for others, and the numbers of the second lot hadn't been taken, it seems. So he's pretty safe unless the police can track him."

"Got out of the country some way, I guess," Frank said.

"That's not so easy nowadays," Johnny Bull replied. "More likely he's lying low in town, or in some quiet country place, till the storm has blown over. What do you think, Mr. Smale?"

"The case is not so interesting to me as it appears to be to you," answered the detective, in a bored tone. "Forgery is one of the commonplaces of crime. The amount in this case makes it more enthralling to the general public, but not to a detective. As for eluding capture, there are a hundred ways of doing that. One hears of the triumphs of the detective system; but when a criminal gets away little is said, and the public has a short memory."

"A man of that kind must be a fearful scoundrel," said Harry. "His employers trusted him no end—that makes it blacker. He can't have a single redeeming point, I should say."

"A hard case, no doubt," said Mr. Smale indifferently.

"Yet he appears to have been a well-educated man—the sort most people

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would call a gentleman," Harry went on, too much interested to perceive that the subject was rather an uncongenial one to their guest. "Now, I shouldn't have thought it possible that a sneaking forger could make anyone think of him as a gentleman."

"He must be rotten to the backbone!" growled Johnny.

Mr. Smale was crumbling his scone, in reckless disregard of all the counsels against waste.

"Yes, I suppose that would be so," he said slowly. "Rotten to the backbone, beyond doubt!"

His face had changed. It was not only Johnny who noted that. They all saw it. The look of a man enjoying himself on a holiday well earned had gone; the face was very serious now.

"Perhaps you don't care about talking shop, as one might call it, just now, sir?" said Frank.

"It isn't that," the detective answered. "Your words happened to touch a raw spot, that's all. I would rather not talk about Douglas Marsh. I have a reason—a sentimental one, perhaps; but the fact is that I was up against him once, and he beat me all along the line. Perhaps it is too thin-skinned to feel gloomy at being reminded of one's failures, however."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir!" said Harry. "Of course, I did not know—"

"How could you have known? Don't apologise, Wharton, I beg. But you will understand my feelings."

"Rather, sir!"

But Johnny Bull thought the detective really was too thin-skinned. It was scarcely one of Johnny's failings. He saw that Wharton was upset because he had upset the guest, and he considered Harry rather silly; for, to his mind, there was no possible harm in Wharton's remarks, and nothing for a detective to worry about in being accidentally reminded that he could not come out top dog every time.

"I must be going," said Mr. Smale rather suddenly.

"Oh, not yet, surely, sir?" said Wharton.

"Come and have a squint at the cricket-ground and the gym first, anyway," Bob added.

"Sorry, but I really can't."

"I was going to show you the giddy mysteries of the Remove Dramatic Club," said Wibley, in disappointed tones. That was what Wibley had been thinking about all the time the others were discussing the affair of Douglas Marsh.

"Some other time," said Mr. Smale, with a forced smile.

"You'd like to see me made up as Fagin, in 'Oliver Twist,'" Wibley said.

"That treat must wait. I have just remembered that I have some really important letters to write. Please don't think me discourteous."

"But you'll come again, sir?"

"Certainly; if you'll have me!"

"Of course!" said Wharton heartily. "I feel like kicking myself for—"

"Oh, don't mention that! I assure you that I recognised fully the fact that you had no intention of ruffling my vanity!"

"We'll walk back to the bungalow with you, sir, if you like," said Bob.

"I shall be delighted to have your company," replied Mr. Smale.

They were glad to go with him; but it did not appear that he had any mind to chat in the way they liked so much. His brow was still gloomy.

They left the Close, and passed into Priardale Lane, and still silence pre-

vailed, till Bob whispered in Harry's ear:

"You really are a bit of a prize ass, old scout! It's all your giddy fault, you know!"

"How do you make that out, you chump?"

"Didn't you start all that piffle about Douglas Marsh, or whatever the rotter's silly name is? That's what's upset him, though I'm blessed if I can see why!"

"I couldn't tell it was going to upset him, could I, idiot?"

"If you boys are going to quarrel about anything which concerns me—"

"Oh, not at all, sir! We always talk like that to one another, don't we, Harry?"

The detective's tone had been quite sharp, and Bob sought to get out of it the best way he could. And, of course, it was true that such slight compliments as he and Wharton had been exchanging did not count for a great deal in the Greyfriars Remove.

But a cloud hung over the party, and they were not altogether sorry when the bungalow was reached.

There was a stiffish breeze from the sea now, with an edge to it.

"It is not of the terrific warmfulness here!" Ipky said, shivering in his flannels.

"Good-night, all of you!" said Mr. Smale.

He waved his hand, and passed up the short path to the front door of the bungalow. The door slammed behind him before they had fairly had time to answer his abrupt leave-taking.

And somehow they were not exactly pleased. They might not have been willing to own it; but the impression made upon them by Roland Smale that day had scarcely been so favourable as that produced on their first meeting with him.

"Do you know," said Harry, "I believe he saw something that we didn't?"

"I twigged the way he kept looking along the cliffs!" growled Johnny Bull. "But I didn't see anything there to frighten him."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "He did see something. You're right, Harry, if you never were before! Look! There's a chap dodging behind that hedge!"

"The dodgefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh. "And I shrewdly suspect that the esteemed chap is the disgusting and ludicrous merchant with the shiftful eyelids."

"Rats!" said Nugent. "Mr. Smale was dead certain he was only a tramp. Why should any tramp hang about like that?"

"What Mr. Smale said ain't likely to cut any ice with Shifty Eyes," remarked Johnny Bull. "He may be a tramp all serene; but saying so don't make him one."

"Let's get a bit closer and investigate," suggested Harry.

"I'm game!" said Bob.

"The gamefulness is terrific, my esteemed and absurd chum!" purred Hurree Singh.

"May as well!" growled Johnny.

"Not much use. But I'm not going to back," Frank said.

"If he ain't a tramp, he's jolly well made up. I'll say that of him!" said Wibley.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Crafty Customer!

"THERE he is!"

"That's Shifty Eyes, right enough!"

The six had drawn nearer now, and all but Wibley recognised the man Mr. Smale was so sure was a mere

tramp. But if he were only a tramp, why should he again be watching the bungalow?

It seemed to the juniors that Mr. Smale must be mistaken. This man was plainly an enemy of the detective, waiting his opportunity to do him some damage.

"Better collar him!" growled Johnny Bull, always in favour of going straight at anything. "Seems to me it's up to us to find out who he is."

"What's it all about?" asked Wibley.

"Why, if we don't do something, the rotter practically has Mr. Smale at his mercy," said Frank. "He could murder him up there, and chuck the corpse into the sea!"

"Sounds a bit like 'Maria Martin in the Red Barn,'" said Wibley. "But as an explanation, it really ain't—"

"I wasn't explaining, you chump!"

"He will be easy enough to collar," said Wharton. "He's watching us now, and doesn't appear to have any notion of sheering off."

"But what's the idea of collar—"

"Oh, dry up, Wib! Take a thinking part for once!" Harry said impatiently.

"And enough to think about, too!" murmured Wibley, to whom mere thinking parts made no appeal at all.

They walked on. Shifty Eyes leaned against a grassy bank filling his pipe. His eyes were no longer upon them. But as they came up he looked at them in his peculiar way, and touched his cap with a great show of respect.

"Evenin', young gents!" he said affably.

"Cheek!" muttered Nugent. "But it won't wash. Don't let him bluff us, you chaps!"

"Better collar him without any blessed chinwagging!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Rather!" agreed Bob.

Harry Wharton hesitated a moment. Then he said:

"Right-ho! Best grab his arms. You never know whether rotters like this mayn't have concealed weapons."

Without giving Shifty Eyes the slightest inkling of their intentions they piled in on him as one man.

Their vigour was, indeed, almost excessive. Shifty Eyes went sprawling, his pipe flying one way, his stick another. On the face of it, it was a most wanton, unprovoked attack, and Shifty Eyes was so utterly taken by surprise that for a moment he could only gasp.

"Got him!" cried Nugent exultingly.

"You— What's the meaning of this?" roared the man furiously.

"Lemme go, you young hooligans!"

"Not likely!" answered Johnny Bull. "You're our prisoner, old cock!"

Mr. Shifty Eyes, who had been struggling hard, suddenly ceased to wriggle, and chuckled.

"Wot's the game?" he asked coolly. "I ain't above takin' a joke, young shavers; but there's a limit, you know. Wot is your bloomin' game?"

"That's the question we are going to ask you," Harry said.

"As 'ow?"

"What are you hanging about Mr. Smale's bungalow for?"

"Can't a feller walk about on these 'ere cliffs without bein' asked silly questions like that?" demanded the shabby man, his queer eyes wandering from one face to another restlessly. "Is there any bloomin' law against it? Fust I've heard of it, if there is. I've got jest as much right here as you have, nah then!"

"That's not what we're talking about. We know jolly well that you are watching the detective's bungalow," said Harry. "And we want to know why."

"A 'tee, is he?" muttered Shifty Eyes, as if surprised.

"You know he is! You can't do us

down-like that!" said Bob. "You're here for no good purpose!"

"That's where you're clean orf it, young shaver, 'for I'm 'ere for a very good purpose," replied Shifty Eyes, picking up his pipe.

"What is your purpose?" asked Frank.

"That's tellin'. Trot off to your school-room, kids, an' leave such things to them as is older than you, an' has more experience."

"We aren't going to let you loose till we know all about it!" said Harry firmly.

"Then I'm afraid you'll be gettin' into a bit of a row with your kind teachers," Shifty Eyes said, with a certain grim humour. "They won't like you bein' out so late, I should think!"

It was indeed getting late, and call-over had to be remembered. But Shifty Eyes meant more than that. What he implied was that they might have to wait all night, and then some, as Fishy might have said.

"Are you going to tell us?" snapped Wharton.

They were all round him, and Bob and Johnny still had a grip on his arms.

"I'm goin' to tell you jest this, an' you can take your change out of it. I'm a pore, unlucky tramp, 'angin' round this 'ere locality 'cause I ain't got nothink better to do. An' you're a set of inquisitive puppies, wot wants the whip good an' hard!"

"It's all lies about your being a tramp!" said Bob Cherry hotly.

"Haven't we seen you spying on Mr. Smale?"

"I ain't never seen nobody of that name in my life; nearest I ever got to it was Smale. But that ain't the same."

"Why, you saw Mr. Smale ten minutes ago!"

"That's wot you say. But if you mean 'im in the bungerlow, I've got another name for 'im."

"What?"

"Ah, that makes you think a bit, do it? Well, get on with yer thinkin'! I ain't goin' to tell you any more. I'm a free citizen of a free country, and I ain't called upon to arnser the imperent question of a pack of young jackanapes!"

"The itchfulness of my esteemed hands to grabfully grasp the honourable rotter and give him the revered bumpfulness is terrific!" said Inky wrathfully.

"Same here, old sport!" said Bob.

"But what can we do?"

"Wot, indeed?" grinned Shifty Eyes. "You'd like to be usin' the rack, or one of them pleasant little rememberers an' cough-it-uppers, I dare say. But that's got unfashionable these days!"

"We can inform the police," said Wharton quietly.

"Split to the cops—eh? Well, after all, the cops can but say, 'Move hon? And I've heerd that before!"

"Perhaps they'll know your ugly dial when they take that false beard of yours off, though!" said Bob.

Now, for the first time, Shifty Eyes showed real signs of perturbation.

"You're a young ijjut!" he growled.

"Oo's gotter false beard?"

"Let's rip his disguise off, you chaps!" cried Bob. "It's not a scrap of use arguing with the bounder!"

"Good heavens!" yelled the man, as if suddenly taken with great alarm.

He wrenched his arm free, and pointed out to sea.

It was not in human nature to refrain from looking where he pointed.

"What is it?" asked Frank Nugent, scanning the wide waters and seeing nothing.

"A battleship—a German battleship!" gasped Shifty Eyes.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Where?"

Every face was turned towards the sea for a moment; but next moment one face of the seven turned inland.

Shifty Eyes had shaken off the only hands still upon him. He dodged away.

Not a single ship of any kind was in sight. The sea was void of craft to the very horizon.

But now they understood that Shifty Eyes had craft, if the sea had not.

He had taken them in completely.

"Good-night, young gents!" he sang out, running off at a speed that amazed them. "Done brown this time! 'Ave a few more questions ready for our nex' merry meetin'!"

He was lost to sight behind a thick clump of gorse before the juniors could find their voices.

Then Wibley said:

"I dunno what you chaps were after. But you haven't got it; even old Coker is enough of a Herlock Sholmes to twig that!"

Which remark did not tend to make Wibley popular. But they explained to

"Hope it won't come yet awhile," replied Frank Nugent.

"Why not?"

"Some of us are going down to the sea for a bathe. Say it wasn't thunder, Toddy, there's a good chap! Say it was only the rumble of far-away guns—a naval engagement out in the Channel, or some such trifle!"

"But it was thunder!"

"How do you know?"

"How does a chap with brains and eyes and ears know things? How do I know the earth's round?"

"Blessed if I know, Toddy! Do you?"

"How do I know that you are a silly ass? How do I know anything?"

"Do you know anything, Toddy?"

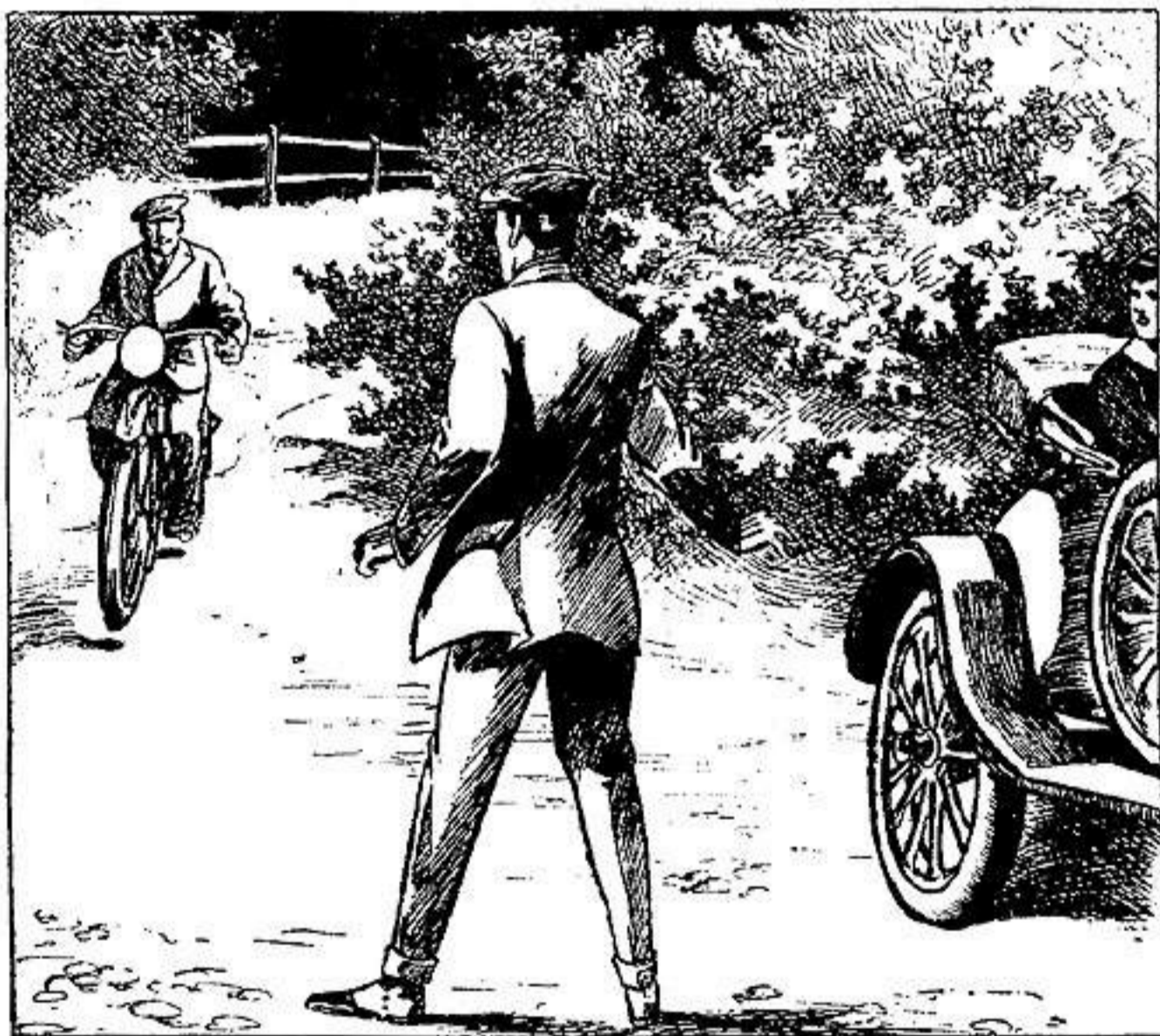
"Don't get fresh, young Nugent! Of course, this storm may not hit up Greyfriars!"

"What's that new language you're talking?"

"American. The real brand, not the Fishy sort. Ever read Henry?"

"Henry who?" asked Nugent.

"O. Henry."



Ferrers Locke bars the road! (See Chapter 12.)

him as they trudged back to Greyfriars. And Wibley agreed that it was a pity they did not get more out of Mr. Shifty Eyes, for there was very evidently more in him than they had dreamed!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Amazing Discovery!

"THUNDER!" said Peter Todd.

"Didn't you hear it?"

It was the evening of the day after Mr. Smale's visit to Greyfriars. Several juniors were grouped on the School House steps, seeking the fresh air, which seemed nowhere to be had that day.

All through class hours the heat had been terribly oppressive, and it was now worse than ever.

The old elms were like trees cut out of something solid. Not a leaf stirred. Away to the south-west heavy, blue-black clouds loomed up.

"There'll be a storm," Peter Todd said.

"Oh, rats! Hallo, here are the other chaps! Got my towel and things, Bob?"

"Fair youth, I have. Let's look slippy! Coming, Toddy?"

Peter Todd shook his head.

"Coming, Mauly?"

"Oh, begad, it's awfully kind of you, Cherry, but it would be such an awful fag—walkin' all that way, y'know!"

"Coming, you three?"

But the Three Colonials could not come, they said.

The Famous Five went off with their towels and bathing-costumes, leaving Mauly in amazement at their energy.

"Toddy's right, I think," Nugent said.

"There's a storm brewing. Still, we may have time for our bathe first!"

"Let's go round by the bungalow, and ask Smale to come along and have a dip with us," suggested Harry Wharton.

"It will only take us a few minutes longer!"

"No sign of Shifty Eyes," said Bob Cherry, looking round him as they drew

near the bungalow. "Perhaps the bounder was only a tramp, after all!"

"Jolly cheeky one!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The signfulness of the honoured Smale Sahib is also not of the evidentfulness," remarked Inky. "Shall we make the bashfulness at the door of our absurd and revered friend?"

"Too modest to knock?" asked Bob, grinning.

"It was the knockfulness that I intended by my suggestive remark," replied Inky.

"Oh, I see! Thought the modesty was too terrific, that's all!"

"What's that?" snapped Johnny.

"What's what?" asked Harry.

"Didn't you hear it? A cry! There it is again!"

Now they all heard.

"I think the sound came from—"

"Shush, Franky! Don't jaw!"

Everybody "shushed." And again a strange sound fell upon their ears.

It was a cry of rage and alarm, as it seemed, and it came from the direction of the bungalow.

And now they knew it for the voice of Mr. Smale. It sounded as though some fierce argument was going on, and their detective friend had been pushed almost to the verge of hysterics.

"Great Scott! Did you chaps hear?" gasped Bob. "Smale said he wasn't going to be taken!"

The Famous Five hurried forward in great excitement. It might be butting in where they were not wanted, but they did not stop to think of that.

Headlong they dashed in through the open door of the bungalow. In the little hall they came to an abrupt halt. They looked at one another, breathing hard, and feeling rather doubtful now.

From an open doorway along the passage came sounds of scuffling.

"You scoundrel! It's all up! I've got you at last! No good resisting!"

The voice was strange to them all.

"I won't be taken!" answered Roland Smale hoarsely.

What could it mean? These were queer words for a hunter of criminals to be speaking!

"My hat! Smale seems to be getting it in the neck!" gasped Harry. "To the rescue, you chaps!"

"Here, hold on!"

That was Johnny Bull, vaguely doubtful whether a rescue was just the right thing in the circumstances. But the rest paid no heed. They rushed in with such haste that there was a jam in the doorway. Johnny followed.

Smale, crimson with exertion, and streaming with perspiration, was down on his back in the middle of the floor, and, kneeling upon his chest, shabby and unkempt as ever, was Shifty Eyes!

The sight of the tramp overpowered Johnny Bull's scruples and doubts. They had all made up their minds so thoroughly that Shifty Eyes was a wrong 'un, and they all regarded Smale as a friend and a hero.

"Help, boys!" he panted.

They could not be deaf to that appeal.

"Collar the rotter, you chaps!" sang out Harry.

And he hurled himself at Shifty Eyes as a start.

The situation seemed clear to them, in spite of the doubtful words spoken by Smale—words which sounded as if he were resisting arrest. But how could that be, when his assailant was the man they all believed to be the escaped convict?

They dragged Shifty Eyes off. He uttered a roar of wrath.

"You young fools! If you knew who I am!"

"You're a rotten gaol-bird!" shouted Bob.

"And you thought you had Mr. Smale at your mercy!" added Frank.

"Let me explain. Don't be so idiotic!"

It was not with the accent of Shifty Eyes that the victor in the struggle spoke, but they were too excited to notice that.

They sat on their prisoner. Mr. Smale jumped to his feet, gave one glance round, and dashed for the open window. Out of the window he leaped, and rushed away as if pursued by avenging furies.

"Let me go, you hopeless young idiots!" roared his enemy. "Can't you see the fellow's escaping?"

Perhaps they ought to have tumbled then. But they were all—even Johnny—so sure that Shifty Eyes was a wrong 'un, that the bare possibility of the truth never entered their heads.

"Let you go be hanged!" snapped Bob. "We'll have that disguise off now, and look at your chivvy!"

"I'm Locke!" gasped the captive, writhing under them.

"You'll be locked up very soon, if that's—"

Harry Wharton gave the beard a hard tug, and it came away in his hand with a jerk, cutting short Frank's speech; and then all five gasped in utter amazement.

For the face revealed was the face of Ferrers Locke, the detective!

Shifty Eyes, the tramp, the supposed escaped convict, was Ferrers Locke!

They loosened their grip in as much haste as if their captive had suddenly become red-hot.

"Ferrers Locke!" gasped Harry faintly.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Bob.

But Bob did not mean to claim the famous detective as a female relative, of course!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

On the Wrong Track!

"IT—it ain't possible!" said Frank Nugent.

The weakness of that assertion seemed to have an electric effect upon the man whose plans they had thwarted so innocently.

"It's not only possible, but it's true!" he snapped, jumping to his feet. "Do you young idiots know what you have done by your infernal muddlesomeness? You've ruined everything!"

They stood open-mouthed, flabbergasted, but dimly thankful that the secret was in the family—that all Greyfriars was not there to see. Peter Todd would have had fair excuse for sarcasm. The Three Colonials would have been justified in grins. Skinner and Stott and Snoop and Fishy would have sneered.

"I—I—you—you—we thought you were a horrible criminal, Mr. Locke!" stuttered Harry Wharton, in deep confusion.

"You should give up thinking—it isn't your line, evidently!" the detective replied angrily.

He went to the window.

"It is hopeless to follow, for I have no idea in which direction he went," he said. "A ghastly failure, and just when success seemed certain! You boys have something to answer for!"

The minds of the juniors were in a chaos. They had never seen Ferrers Locke so upset before. Plainly there was reason for his displeasure; but even now they had not got the hang of things.

Ferrers Locke was the Head's relative, and more than once he had been called in when some mystery puzzled Greyfriars. But what was he doing down

here in the disguise of a tramp? And why should one detective seek to arrest another? It was like dog eating dog!

"We can't make out what it all means," said Frank Nugent blankly.

"It means that you have ruined all my plans—that you have helped in the escape of a desperate criminal!" answered Ferrers Locke, with unmistakable grimness. "I suppose I must not blame you too harshly, for it is evident that you were completely taken in by the rascal. But it is very regrettable; and if you are not too proud to take a hint, a very homely one might be fitting. That is—mind your own business!"

"But—but we were helping Mr. Smale, sir," said Bob, in bewilderment. "Who is the rascal you speak of?"

"It can't be Mr. Smale," said Harry.

"Bet you it is!" growled Johnny Bull. Ferrers Locke smiled wryly.

"You have helped him to some effect," he said. "He has escaped me."

"You—you speak as though Mr. Smale is a criminal, sir," said Harry.

"Smale be hanged! That name no more belongs to the fellow than it does to you. He is a criminal, and a desperate one!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob.

"The police of Great Britain were searching for him. I had collared him. You butted in, and— Oh, confound it, the situation is maddening!"

"But Mr. Smale's a detective, sir, as you are!"

"Rubbish, Wharton! But he told you that yarn, I suppose?"

"I—I can't understand even now," said Bob. "Who is he if he's not a detective?"

"A forger!" snapped Ferrers Locke.

The five stood dumbfounded.

"His real name is Douglas Marsh."

"My hat!"

"Great pip!"

"This is a knock-out!"

"The knock-outfulness is—"

"Even if he's a forger he's a hero," said Frank Nugent. "He dived from the cliff to rescue old Wib. You can't wipe that out."

They almost wished they could. Essentially, their strong liking for Roland Smale—who, it seemed, had no right to that name—was based on that one brave deed. They had found him very pleasant, and had been willing to give credence to what he told them. But that one plucky act was what made all the difference.

And now they were told that the man who had done it was the forger Marsh—the very person of whom they had talked over the tea-table. They had told Marsh that Marsh must be a fellow with no decency in him. And Marsh had agreed with their judgment, too.

And Marsh was Smale—and Smale was Marsh—and Shifty Eyes, the tramp they had suspected of being a criminal, was neither tramp nor criminal, but Ferrers Locke, the detective! And they hardly knew whether they stood on their heads or their heels!

But every moment made it plainer to them.

Marsh was staying at the bungalow under an assumed name to hide from justice. Ferrers Locke had tracked him down. And they had butted in, and brought to nought the detective's work.

"Even now I feel that I can't believe it, sir," said Bob slowly.

"I can!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Ferrers Locke was growing more amiable. He was not by any means a bad-tempered man in the ordinary way.

"It's the truth, whether you believe it or not, my friends," he said. "I had great difficulty in tracking down the fellow. Once or twice I fancied I was on the wrong scent; but I made sure of

being right before I even applied for a warrant. Then, as I was in the very act of arresting Marsh, you threw yourselves, with youthful enthusiasm and wrong-headedness, into the fray—and Marsh has gone!"

"We're awfully sorry, sir!" said Harry contritely.

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, oh, honoured sahib!" Hurree Singh murmured.

And the rest chimed in with other expressions of regret.

"Why didn't you tell us last night, sir?" asked Bob reproachfully. "Surely you knew we could be trusted?"

"Perhaps it would have been wiser," the detective agreed. "But I had reasons for keeping my identity a dead secret. Yes, I could have trusted you all in so far as that I know none of you would wilfully have given me away. But accidents happen; and at fifteen one has not attained the absolute maximum of discretion—as you have given me proof."

"It is such a pity," Harry said. "To think that a brave chap like that should be—"

"That's what gets me," Bob chimed in. "It doesn't seem possible."

"You are apparently arguing on the mistaken hypothesis that pluck and criminal instincts are never found together," said the detective. "That is as far wrong as anything can be. A great many criminals—most criminals—have courage. Some of them are even capable of self-sacrifice—or of taking a risk such as this man took. A heavy one, I grant you."

"He didn't make it out so," said Johnny Bull. "I felt a bit doubtful about the chap now and then. But I must say he never swanked."

"And he seemed such a decent chap—a real gentleman. That may sound queer to you, Mr. Locke; but I can't think of any other way to put it," said Bob.

"Rubbish! That, at least, was merely on the surface. A thief may have courage; but no gentleman is a thief. This fellow was trusted implicitly by his employers, and robbed them of ten thousand pounds. I don't suppose you will ever see him again. But I shall—I mean to have him!"

Ferrers Locke was grimly determined. They could not help feeling sorry for the man they had known as Roland Smale, criminal though he was. A forger—but a man brave beyond most men! For nothing but courage could have prompted him to that dive from the cliff. It could not advantage him anything.

"I must get away at once," said the detective. "I have stood here talking too long already. I hope to arrest this man within twenty-four hours, though he has eluded me now."

Ferrers Locke hastily removed all traces of his now useless disguise, and hurried off.

The Famous Five went back to Greyfriars with their brains in a whirl. They had had a shock that was not easy to recover from.

"We've been on the wrong track all the time," said Harry Wharton quietly. "The chap we believed a detective was a giddy criminal—the chap we thought a criminal was the detective!"

"It all seems upside-down," said Bob, rubbing his curly head.

"It licks me that he should turn out to be a rotten forger," Frank Nugent remarked. "That's the worst. Forgery's such a mean trick!"

"Shows you what rotters there are walking about looking like men," said Johnny Bull gloomily. "What with conscientious objectors and pacifists and profiteers and forgers, this old country

will soon be getting down to the Hun level!"

"I believe yet that there's good in him," said loyal Bob.

"He might be shielding someone else, or—"

"Rats, Harry!" snapped Johnny. "He did us down; don't let's do ourselves down. Hallo! There's the rain!"

They bolted, and arrived at Greyfriars just as the rain began to fall in torrents.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Friends in Need!

THE storm raged. The lightning flashed in blinding fashion.

Boom! Crash! Boom!

The thunder rolled right overhead, and seemed to shake the whole school to its very foundations.

The rain came down with tropical violence. It hissed upon the window-panes like the stream from a powerful hose. As the Famous Five stood looking out they could see the Close illuminated by the flashes till it looked as bright as day, though night had now fallen.

"It's too hot to last," said Wharton. "The Head won't think much of it. This kind of thing is rough on gardens. But it's making the air a lot cooler, and that's something to be thankful for."

"It is not in my mind of the great thankfulness," said Hurree Singh. "My own honourable thankfulness is by no means terrific, for the warmfulness even in toomuchfulness is to me better than the chilfulness."

The lightning-flashes came again and again, and the roll of the thunder was like unto great guns booming right overhead.

"Talk about searchlights!" said Johnny Bull. "They simply ain't in it with this lightning. By Jove! Was that someone scooting across the Close?"

He peered out into the darkness, which seemed very black in the intervals between the flashes.

"You fancied it, old ass," said Bob Cherry. "Catch anyone being out in a storm like this unless he had to be!"

"Unless he wanted a free bathe, without taking his clobber off," said Frank Nugent.

The rain hissed against the window as furiously as ever, but the storm seemed moving away, for the last thunder-roll had been less directly overhead.

Tap, tap!

"What's that?" asked Wharton sharply.

"A tap on the window, I thought," said Johnny Bull.

"Must be a strand of ivy broken loose," Frank said.

"My hat! There is is again! And I can't see any ivy," said Harry, who was peering out. "It's a hand—a hand tapping at the window, you chaps!"

"A hand?" gasped Frank.

"It can't be, Harry!"

"But it is, Johnny! Look!"

The hearts of all five beat a trifle faster. There was something uncanny about this hand which tapped upon their window in the midst of a thunderstorm.

It had gone now. But they waited and watched, all a bit nervous.

Then from the darkness below the sill a hand came up, and there followed the sound of tapping upon the glass.

"Mum-my aunt!" gasped Nugent.

"Who can it be?"

"Some silly ass must have scrambled up the ivy," said Harry. "A beastly dangerous trick in a storm, I must say!"

"Wouldn't be a bad dodge to open the window, I think," said practical Johnny Bull.

He slipped back the catch, and flung up the lower sash.

A great gust of wind blew in, and a rush of rain came with it. Harry leaned out, and looked down.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Help me! I'm slipping down!" came a voice he did not recognise.

But the hand shot up again, and both Harry and Johnny gripped firmly, the latter catching the wrist.

Then another hand emerged from the gloom, and Bob Cherry's strong clutch closed upon it.

"That's better!" gasped the voice. "Do you think you can pull me up?"

It was no easy task, and it strained backs and arm-sockets in the doing. But as well as they could all five helped, and the person below was yanked up over the ledge into the study.

"Mr. Smale!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Shut the window! Pull down the blind!" said the fugitive hoarsely.

Bob turned the key in the lock at once. Wharton closed the window, and Hurree Singh pulled down the blind.

Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull stood gazing at the soaked and dripping figure of Roland Smale. The man was panting hard and heavily.

"They're after me!" he said breathlessly. "Locke and the police! I don't think they saw me enter; but they know I'm somewhere in the grounds. I haven't a moment to lose. Help me, boys, for pity's sake!"

"But—but—"

"Oh, dash it all!"

"We don't know—"

They were in the gravest doubt. In the hearts of all there was some sympathy for this hunted man.

But they could not disbelieve the story Ferrers Locke had told them. And to help Smale seemed taking too big a responsibility. They had meddled once, with no good effect.

"I'm done!" gasped Smale. His teeth were clenched, and his face was drawn up in an agonised way that was not pleasant to see. "I'm done, unless you help me! I had a wild, foolish hope that you would, in spite of anything you may have heard. But I ought not to have come here; and I suppose the only thing for you to do is to give me away. Shout for help, and get it over! Not that you need help, really. I sha'n't show fight against you."

They were all touched. Even Johnny Bull did not feel that to decide what to do was quite easy.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Smale," said Harry Wharton quietly. "This isn't just easy for us, you know. For we're aware now that you told us—well, that you aren't really a detective. We know that you are—"

"A forger! A hunted criminal!" said Smale huskily. "Speak out! I'm not worth consideration. But, Heaven knows, I've repented of my crime!"

"I don't see how we can possibly help you," said Johnny Bull.

"I see that," answered the fugitive wearily. "I realise now what an utter fool I was to come here. But I didn't know which way to turn. Then I thought of you fellows—as friends. That was absurd, of course, now that you know! I remembered stories you told of boys climbing up the ivy. I took my chance. It was never much of a chance, really. And now I must go to prison, I suppose!"

He buried his face in his hands, and his shoulders shook with the dry sobs of a man tried beyond the limit of his fortitude.

The Famous Five looked at him uncertainly.

"What can we do?" asked Harry Wharton at last.

Smale looked up, with a new light of hope in his eyes.

"If you'll only help me to get away!" he gasped. "Don't think the worst of me! I'm a rotter—a criminal; but I swear to you that I have repented! I want to get away—to start afresh, to wipe out the past!"

He looked at the juniors, with tears in his eyes.

"You think I'm lying, no doubt!" he continued. "But you don't understand how your influence has helped my own conscience. I know now that I have been on the wrong track. There's no joy, no peace, for a man on the downward path unless he can get rid of his conscience once for all. But mine is alive still. I could pull myself up again, if only I had a chance. Once convicted, I'm branded for life. You know that, young as you are! Will you give me a chance?"

The pleading went home to them all. Johnny Bull turned his head away, and the dusky face of Hurree Singh was unreadable. But Bob and Frank were looking at Harry Wharton with something very like an appeal in their eyes.

It was for Harry to speak, and he spoke.

"You stole a big sum from men who trusted you," he said slowly.

"Heaven help me, I did! But I must have been mad! I dreamed that the money would bring me all I wanted; but in a moment, when my schemes met with success, I became a broken man. I haven't touched the money—I never will! I hate it! Your words got home on me, boys, as nothing else in my life ever did. I was remorseful before I heard them, but they made me realise what an utter cur I was. You spoke out frankly, not knowing that the man of whom you talked was with you, and that made what you said even more telling. I've heard plenty of sermons, and they left me cold. But I can't explain. You fellows, so straight and honest, and I beyond the pale—a rotter through and through, as you told me! I want to atone. But I know how hard it is for you to decide!"

He broke down, and buried his face in his hands.

"But—I don't like saying it—but how do we know you are telling us the truth even now?" asked Bob.

"That's it, Bob; we can't tell!" growled Johnny.

If they could only have believed, then the way would have been less hard.

"I'm a poor, weak fool!" said Smale huskily. "I'm in your hands, to make or break. I don't think any of you can ever come to such a pass as mine; but if ever you have to ask for mercy—if ever—No! I won't say more! It isn't fair to you."

"If we could believe—if there was any proof!" said Wharton, wavering.

"We can't let you clear out, and your boss lose the money you stole!" growled Johnny Bull. "That's how we stand. It would be making ourselves accessories."

Smale jumped to his feet.

"I can make you believe in me yet!" he cried. "Why didn't I think of it sooner? I can prove to you—"

"There's only one thing can do it!" growled Johnny.

"And that one thing can be done! I know what you mean. If I have spent the money, if I cannot produce it, then my whole story is a lie! But my story is true, as I will give you proof. I have not spent a penny of it!"

"Then where is it?" Johnny asked bluntly.

"Here, in my pocket!"

"You've got it here?" gasped Harry.

almost thunderstricken by this sudden turn given to the situation.

"Yes, every pound of it—in bank-notes!"

He drew a bulky wallet from his breast-pocket.

"I want to escape," he said, much more calm in manner now. "But not with the plunder. I don't want that; I hate the very sight of it! I will leave it here with you. You can hand it over to Mr. Locke. He will still do all he knows to hound me down, no doubt; but at least I shall have made restitution, and if I escape it will be something to be able to remember that!"

He opened the wallet, and the Famous Five saw therein a number of Bank of England notes of high denominations.

"I'm glad!" said Bob, with a lump in his throat.

The simple words expressed the feeling they all had. Even when they had come to know of his crime, they had found it impossible to dislike this man, who was so pleasant and friendly, who seemed so sincere, who, whatever his sins, had proven himself, as they held it, a hero!

At heart he was honest—no, perhaps that was too much to say! But, at worst, there was a wide gulf between him and the callous thief. He had fallen a victim to a mad impulse, and he had repented it bitterly. In the eyes of the law he was unquestionably a criminal. But in the eyes of these boys he was hardly that. Somehow, they were sure that Douglas Marsh would never fall again.

If he could but escape the past would be dead to him.

But if he was captured it would be the end of all hope. He would bear through life the stigma of the prison.

The Famous Five looked at the wallet, keeping their eyes off his face. They had never been determined to give him up. Now their impulse was to help him, if it was in any way possible.

But what could they do? There were very obvious difficulties in the way of smuggling him out of Greyfriars, and difficulties scarcely less great in the way of keeping him hidden there.

The police knew that he had entered the school grounds. That fact did not make the problem easier.

"We'll do what we can," said Harry Wharton. And he knew that in so speaking he spoke the mind of all. "But—"

Tap!

"Someone at the door!" said Frank Nugent in alarm.

"The police! I'm trapped!" gasped the fugitive.

His face wore a desperate, hunted look as he glanced round in search of some place of concealment.

But there was no such place. He pulled himself together by a great effort, and looked more the man than at any moment since they had hauled him in at the window.

Somebody tapped again. Then somebody kicked.

"Open the door, boys," said Smale quietly. "It's all up! But, believe me, that I shall not forget your willingness to help. It will be something to think that you had faith, little as I deserved it!"

"It doesn't sound like the police," said Bob. "The police wouldn't kick, I fancy. Keep your pecker up, Mr. Smale!"

"Who's that bashing the door? We're busy!" called Harry Wharton.

The handle of the door rattled.

"No admittance here! Bunk!" shouted Nugent.

"Rats! Open the giddy door, you merry idiots! I'm not going to be locked out!" sounded a cheerful voice.

"It's Wib!" said Johnny Bull

"Of course it is, you chumps! What's up? A giddy secret meeting—eh?"

"Let him in," said the fugitive quietly.

"I am sure Wibley would not betray me!"

"My only aunt—no!" answered Bob. "Didn't you save the bounder's life?"

Harry turned the key in the lock, and Wibley pushed open the door and marched in.

"What's the game, you chaps? Why, great Scott! What—"

It was the sight of Mr. Smale that had taken Wibley aback.

Bob quickly locked the door again.

"Shush!" said Johnny Bull warningly. "Don't yell out like that, fat-head!"

Open-mouthed, puzzled utterly, Wibley stared.

"I'm trying to hide from the police, Wibley," said Mr. Smale, with a wan smile.

"My hat!" gasped Wibley. But he came forward. There was no doubt in Wib's mind about where his sympathies lay. "You saved my life, you know, sir. If you were going to prison it would be all the same. I don't believe you're a wrong 'un, whoever does!"

And Wibley spoke quite simply and very earnestly. One might have expected melodrama from a born actor like Wibley at such a moment. But there was nothing of the sort.

The man who had rescued him held out his hand, and Wibley gripped it hard.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Wibley Finds a Way!

HARRY WHARTON explained in as few words as possible. But not many words were needed for an intelligence as keen as Wibley's.

Then Wibley spoke out.

"I'm not going to say anything about what you've done, sir," he said. "But I just want to say this. It doesn't make a scrap of difference to my feelings about you. And I'm dead sure that you're going straight in future, as you say!"

"But in the eyes of the law—"

Wibley cut him short.

"Blow the law! Who cares about that? It's justice we care about, not the law. You saved my life at a big risk. No rotter would have done that!"

A step sounded in the passage. Smale looked at the door in alarm.

"It's all right!" said Bob. "Only Squiff—I know his step."

"There's no time to lose, though," said Wibley. "The question is how to get you away, sir."

"The window's no good—too risky, and they might be watching outside," said Wharton.

Wibley's face suddenly brightened. Wibley's was not a very handsome face, but it was a wonderfully expressive one, and they all felt sure that he had thought out a dodge.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! A wheeze, Wib?" said Bob.

"A stunning wheeze, my infants!" said Wibley gravely. "We'll get Mr. Smale out, and then hang up the police till he's had a chance to clear."

"I do not see—"

"That doesn't matter, Mr. Smale. I do! It will take a quarter of an hour or so to do, though, and every blessed minute you chaps keep me arguing is time wasted! Don't you know well enough that what I say I do?"

"Yes; but what's the merry wheeze?"

"The wheezefulness is doubtless great, but—"

"Can't be done, Inky! You can speak your piece when the thing's through!" Bob said.

"Now then, Wib!" growled Johnny Bull.

"What's the matter with shoving him into a master's gown?" demanded Wibley, with the air of one who sets criticism at defiance. "That will be a jolly complete disguise, and he can walk right past the giddy sleuths without their smelling even a mouse! They'll never dream of the man they're after being in a master's gown."

"Top hole, Wib!" said Harry.

"The topholefulness of the respected

"Terrific! Dry up, Inky!" snapped Bob.

"It's a ticklish business. Do you think you can manage it?" said the fugitive doubtfully.

"I don't think—I know! And there's more in it than that," said Wibley cheerfully. "I'll make up as you, Mr. Smale, and you bet I'll lead Locke and his merry men a rare old dance! And meanwhile, you can skip off—see?"

"I could hug you, Wib!" said Bob fervently.

"No, thanks! Too much of the grizzly about you, old scout!"

"But I can see no hope in such a scheme as this," said Mr. Smale anxiously. "Actors might carry it through; but you are not actors. You have not the necessary—"

"Off the wicket, sir!" said Bob.

"Wib's simply a wonderful actor. There's nothing he can't do in that line," Harry added.

"Thanks for that testimonial, Wharton! I'll remember it!" Wibley said.

"Though he's no sort of use at anything else. Perhaps he'd better remember that, too, so that he won't be wanting a bigger size in hats," said Frank Nugent.

"Wib can spoof the whole blessed school with his wigs and his grease-paints," Bob said.

"And if I can't spoof Mr. Locke and his little lot on a dark night like this, I'll retire from the profesh!" snorted Wibley.

Mr. Smale began to look much more hopeful.

"I'll soon show you, sir!" said Wibley. "I sha'n't be half a tick fetching the props. Let me out, Bob, and lock the door after me."

He was back in a very brief space with his make-up box and a bundle of clothing, and he began operations almost before the door was shut.

For a minute or so he sat at the table, gazing upon Mr. Smale's face. The onlookers knew that this was all part of Wibley's way. Then his own face seemed to change. It was a very mobile face, and the manner in which he could take on the appearance of another person quite unlike him was a standing wonder to Greyfriars.

Even before he had begun to apply the grease-paint he had begun to look like the man he meant to represent. A few touches, and the resemblance grew stronger. He put on a collar and tie nearly enough like Smale's, and stood up.

"It's really marvellous!" said the fugitive.

"Ripping!" said Bob.

"You'll do, Wib!" added Wharton.

"Quite an easy one," said Wibley casually. "Ferrers Locke wouldn't know me from Mr. Smale at five yards, and I don't mean to let him get as near as that if it can be helped. Now let's start on you, sir."

A pair of side-whiskers, a wig, and false eyebrows made a lot of difference to the face of Mr. Smale. A mere touch of grease-paint was necessary. When

he looked in the glass he did not know himself.

"Upon my word! I hardly know what to say!"

"Don't say it, then, sir. Slip this gown on, and then scoot. The moment you're clear I'll show myself, and lead Locke a pretty dance, I promise you!"

Bob Cherry glanced at his watch.

"My hat, you'll have to be at Friar-dale Station in less than twenty minutes if you're to catch the London express, sir, and I suppose that's the quickest way to get clear."

"Yes; I must try to catch the express."

"Then I'll go out with you, to see you safe," Bob volunteered.

Smale turned to the rest. His eyes were moist, and his voice was husky as he said:

"I don't know how to thank you all! You have treated me far better than I deserve. But I will repay if ever the chance offers, and you may believe that I have learned my lesson."

They would not interrupt him; but there was no time to spare for talk. They gripped hands with him warmly.

Then, with Bob Cherry by his side, he walked out into the passage. Bob's heart beat fast, but it was not of his own risk he thought.

They emerged into the open air without seeing or being seen by anyone. It was a rare bit of luck, but it was too much to expect it to last.

The rain had ceased now. The stars were shining brightly. After the thunderstorm the air was fresh and cool. Smale's heart was full of hope.

Two men stood near the gates—Ferrers Locke and the police-inspector from Courtfield.

Bob's heart did not fail him. He pressed Smale's arm warningly.

"It's jolly after the storm, isn't it, sir?" he said. His voice sounded queer and forced to himself; but that must have been imagination, for neither of the waiting men noticed anything wrong with it.

"Yes," the fugitive replied. "There is a wonderful feeling of relief after the passage of such a storm as this."

His voice did not shake. He was playing up well, knowing how much hung upon his coolness and that of the plucky junior by his side.

They passed. What did Ferrers Locke and the inspector see? Simply a boy going out of gates with a master. There was nothing in that to cause suspicion.

"Our man must be hiding somewhere on the school premises, inspector," said Ferrers Locke. "A thorough search must be made."

The two who had just passed out heard that.

"Just in time, sir!" whispered Bob. "This is where old Wib comes in."

"He will do his best, I know," answered Mr. Smale. "And that it will be a good best I am very sure. Cherry, you have been more than plucky, and more than good to me! I don't know how—"

"Oh, rats! You'll lose the train if we jaw, sir!"

They hurried to Friar-dale, and were just in time. The train steamed out, bearing Mr. Smale with it.

Bob lost no time in getting back to Greyfriars. He felt quite happy, and had no doubts concerning what he had done.

That the fugitive's repentance was sincere he had no doubt whatever. And he was making amends. Not a penny of the stolen money was being carried off by him. His crime had brought him no profit—nothing but misery.

The Famous Five and Wibley were defying the law. But Bob could not feel

this; they were acting against the interests of justice.

They were risking a good deal. It was not likely that either Mr. Quelch or the Head would see matters from their point of view, and it was quite certain the police would not.

But Bob took the risk lightly, and he knew that his chums feared it no more than he did.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Chase!

HORACE COKER wheeled his famous motor-cycle into the Close, and pushed it across to the bicycle-shed.

Coker was growling. He had got caught in the storm, and was very wet indeed. Coker had no relish for getting wet. Besides, it was exasperating in the extreme to save up one's small supply of petrol so long, and then run into a thunderstorm the first time one used it.

"Rotten! I'm bally well soaked!" he snorted.

Even Coker knew enough to be aware that thunderstorms are no respecters of persons. But he had a vague feeling that this particular thunderstorm had gone out of its way to be rude to him.

So disgruntled was Coker that he would not wait to put his bike into the shed. He leaned it up against the wall, and stamped his muddy way into the School House.

Nugent was in the entrance-hall. He was more or less on scout duty. The fellows Bob had left behind were naturally very anxious. They could not all go down and wait; but Frank was the most nervous and excitable of the four, and the others were glad that he should go.

Nugent had seen Ferrers Locke, and that had not served to make him less nervous. But the sight of Coker somehow did him good. People had a queer way of taking the mighty Coker of the Fifth as a humorous proposition. Coker had never quite realised that, and would not have understood it if he had.

"Hallo! Had a spill, Coker?" asked Frank.

"No. Got caught in that rotten storm," growled Coker.

He passed on. Frank looked out into the Close, and saw Coker's bike still there, with its lamps burning.

It was very careless of Coker to leave it like that. But it was not of Coker's carelessness Frank thought.

The sight of the bike gave him a great idea.

He scooted at top speed for No. 1 Study.

There he burst in like a small whirlwind.

"Great Scott! What's the matter? Has he been caught?" asked Wharton, clutching him by the arm.

"He's clear off, I think," Frank replied. "We've done them all right. Locke and the inspector were in the Close; but if they'd dropped on them we should have known before now."

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull.

"I've got a great wheeze—a great wheeze!" Frank cried. "Coker's left his motor-bike down in the Close—lamps burning, too. There's your chance, Wib!"

"My hat, that's a dodge!" said Johnny Bull.

"I'm on!" cried Wibley. "In the Close, did you say, Nugent? Here goes!"

He took a final look at himself in the glass.

"It's all right," said Wharton. "Blessed if I shouldn't take you for Smale if I didn't know who you were!"

"I guess it will do," Wibley replied.

"You chaps cut along, and clear the way. Then I'll steal out in a villainous and suspicious manner that will be sure to make Locke think me a desperate criminal. You're sure the jigger's in going order, Nugent?"

"Oh, quite positive!"

Harry and the rest went ahead. Wibley followed, and reached the entrance-hall without being seen by anyone but Bunter, who blinked at him, but said nothing.

Harry dodged back.

"Look sharp, Wib!" he said. "Locke's standing right out in the middle of the Close, with Quelch, and they're talking over the matter of having the school searched, I'm sure. It's a fine chance. And if there's any danger of your getting copped, you can rely upon us to make a gorgeous mix-up that will let you clear out."

"Look out! Old Coker's coming downstairs!" Frank Nugent warned them.

Wibley bolted. He stepped out into the Close, and moved stealthily along by the wall in the direction of the motor-bike. The stealth was meant to attract attention. But it didn't attract any. Ferrers Locke and Mr. Quelch went on talking, and neither noticed Wibley.

So the schoolboy actor purposely stumbled, and the detective looked round then.

And as he reached the bike Wibley took care to let his face be visible in the rays of the head-light.

"There he is!" cried Locke. "Quick, inspector, or he'll be off!"

Wibley gave the machine a brisk push, and the engine began to fire at once. It did not always behave like that with Coker.

Pop, pop, pop!

"Well, of all the cheek!" hooted Coker. "Stop him! That's my bike!"

Wibley was now sailing at a good pace towards the gates.

"Stop him, Gosling!" shouted Ferrers Locke. "By Jove, he'll be escaping from under our very noses!"

Gosling, standing at the gates, looked uncertainly at the motor-bike sweeping down upon him. Gosling could not quite see himself plunging into the breach in the fashion demanded of him.

"What I says is there 'ere—"

"Stop him, you utter fool!" roared Locke.

"Which I ain't fool enough for that job! An', moreover, I ain't a policeman, an' never wasn't. My heye!"

Gosling had had a narrow escape of stopping the motor-bike, in spite of his determination to do nothing of the sort. At least, so it seemed to Gosling. But Wibley knew better. He had purposely steered within an inch or two of the porter. It was the surest way to make him too frightened to do anything.

Into the gloom vanished Wibley, leaving Gosling staring.

"You barmy old idiot!" howled Coker.

"That's my bike he's bolted with!"

"The ownership of the machine is a small matter!" snapped Ferrers Locke. "That man is a desperate criminal. Which way did he go, Gosling? Quick, man!"

"My heye! If that weren't both ends an' the middle of a narrow squeak for me! An' me expected to stop a raving, tearing thing like that there! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Stop your maundering! Which way, man?"

"Down towards the willage. But wot I says is—"

"That's enough! The only chance is to pursue in my car. It's a lucky chance I have it here."

"Shall I come with you?" asked the inspector.

"Better remain here, I think, Mr. Grimes. This may be only a ruse. The fellow may return on his tracks."

Locke ran to his car, and started the engine.

"Can we come with you, sir?" asked Harry Wharton eagerly. "We might be of some use, you know, if he shows fight."

It was a bold stroke. They wanted to be in at the death; but the rest had not thought of this. It was very much like running with the hare and hunting with the hounds!

They hung upon Ferrers Locke's answer.

"Jump in if you like!" snapped the detective. "But don't meddle unless you're asked to. You've done enough of that already!"

They jumped in at once, grinning in the darkness. In spite of their anxiety, the whole affair was very much of a joke to them now. But it was no joke to Ferrers Locke.

Whir!

The engine raced for a second. Locke threw in the clutch. The car glided off. They were hot on the track of Douglas Marsh, the forger—or, to be more accurate, on the track of William Wibley, of the Remove, his impersonator!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Locke!

WIBLEY was quite enjoying himself. His escape had been made with success, and in dramatic style. Locke was sure to chase him, he knew. He had seen the detective's car outside the gates.

"I'd better ease down a bit," Wibley said to himself. "It won't do to run right away from him, or to let him lose me. But if he keeps on the track the end of the chase ought to be as exciting as anything on the pictures!"

About the fact that he was helping a criminal to escape justice Wibley thought little, if at all. Least of them all did he look upon Douglas Marsh as really a criminal—and that was natural enough, seeing what the man had done for him.

As for any fear of the wrath of Ferrers Locke, that was wholly swallowed up in satisfaction with the dramatic part he was playing. The detective would be very angry, of course; but Wibley simply did not think about his anger as a thing of any importance.

He popped along at a steady pace on the Courtfield road. The storm was over now, and the sky was clear and bright.

Every now and then Wibley took a glance round. But for some time he saw no sign of pursuit.

"Silly asses! Why the merry dickens don't they come? Strikes me Ferrers Locke is a bit overrated as a detective!"

Once more he he looked round.

"Oh, good egg! There they are!"

Two points of light had swept round a bend. Wibley felt sure they were the head-lights of Locke's car.

"This is where the band begins to play!" said Wibley.

The motor-car was travelling at a great pace. Wibley was not. It drew up on him swiftly. When it was fairly close, Ferrers Locke switched on the full head-light. In the great beam of the illumination the motor-bike showed up plainly. Wibley turned round so that his face might be seen.

"In the King's name! Stop!" shouted Locke.

But Wibley did not intend that the chase should end so soon, or so tamely.

The motor-bike leapt forward again on the full speed.

Ferrers Locke set his teeth. The odds were with him, and he had no intention of letting his man escape. His eyes glinted with the light of the chase, and there was a look of grim satisfaction on his face.

The road was straight and empty. Coker's bike flew as it had never flown before. The engine chug-chugged away merrily. Wibley felt that he could conscientiously praise the bike to its owner—though whether that would please the lordly Coker was quite another matter.

And the car flew, too. The juniors felt the wind of its going sweep their faces, and come near to blowing off their hair.

Again Locke shouted to the cyclist to stop.

"Catch me if you can, my tulip!" yelled Wibley, almost too excited now to remember even such important things as the dramatic proprieties. Smale would scarcely have called Ferrers Locke his tulip.

"My hat! This is worth giddy quids!" yelled Johnny Bull in Harry's ear. And so thought they all.

"The game's up! Stop, in the King's name!" Locke shouted again.

But the game was not yet up—unless Locke was prepared to do a thing he very naturally shrank from. While Wibley kept dead ahead the speed of the car was limited by his speed. Locke could not open up his engine further without running the fugitive down.

At last the detective's chance came. A broad stretch of grass by the roadside gave him it. He sent the car forward on the full speed, swerved deftly on to the grass, and shot past Wibley.

"Mum—mum—my hat! What's he doing?" grasped Frank Nugent, holding on with both hands. Hurree Singh only just missed being jolted out.

The car swerved back on to the road in front of the motor-cycle. With a grinding whir the brakes were clapped on. It was no time to be thinking about damage to tyres.

The car stopped dead. Locke jumped out, and barred the road behind it. He stood with legs straddled, coolly inviting the fugitive to run him down—if he dared! It needed nerve, as the watchers realised. But it would have needed a good deal of nerve—and callousness—to accept the invitation, as Locke no doubt reckoned. And it would not necessarily have meant getting past, either!

Douglas Marsh would hardly have attempted it. Wibley, of course, never even thought of doing so.

He slowed his machine down, and jumped from it.

"You've got me, Mr. Locke!" he said.

"That's so. And I should advise you to make no resistance," answered the detective.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the supposed desperate criminal.

The laugh was echoed by those in the car.

Ferrers Locke was amazed and angry.

"Have you gone mad?" he snapped.

"This—"

Wibley whipped off his disguise.

"You've got the wrong chap, sir, that's all," he said coolly. "I'm not Mr. Smale. I'm Wibley of the Remove!"

"By Jove, this passes all bounds! Have I been deceived by a deliberate imposture? And are all of you in this? You surely cannot appreciate the seriousness of your position! Unless you can give me some satisfactory explanation—and that seems scarcely possible—I—"

"Look here, sir! We knew you'd be
(Continued on page 15.)

angry," said Harry Wharton, stepping forward. "But Mr. Smale came to us for help. He counted on us as friends, and we could not refuse him. I suppose you would call him a criminal. But we don't. Anyway, we helped him, and he's clear away by now, and if there's going to be trouble about it, we've got to face the music, that's all!"

"Do you imagine that an imposition or a birching will set you clear?" snapped Locke. "This is a matter for the law to deal with. I am sorry, for I recognise that you have been betrayed by your own generous feelings. But the man must have deceived you completely, and it does not say much for your common-sense that he should have been able to do so. You have aided him to get off with his plunder. He had ten thousand pounds of stolen money!"

"He had, sir," replied Wharton quietly. "But he has not now!"

"What do you mean, Wharton?"

"I have it."

"What! Do you understand what you are saying?"

"I think so, sir. Anyway, here it is. See for yourself!"

And Harry handed over the bulky wallet.

Ferrers Locke looked almost dazed. His experiences had been many and various; but nothing at all like this had ever happened to him before.

"What trickery is this?" he asked slowly. And he turned the wallet about in his hands, as if unwilling to open it and put the matter to the test of sight.

"There's no trickery, sir!" Johnny Bull replied sturdily. "That ain't our line. We shouldn't have helped him if he hadn't made it plain to us that he was sorry for what he had done, and wanted to give the money back."

"That's it!" said Frank eagerly. "You'd have believed him yourself, Mr. Locke. You couldn't have helped believing!"

"The repentfulness was great, honoured sahib," said Hurree Singh softly.

"I should have helped him, anyway, if I'd had the chance," said Wibley boldly. "He saved my life. I'm not such a cur as to go back on the man who did that, I should hope!"

Ferrers Locke looked from one to the other. Each met his angry gaze fearlessly. What they had done they had done; nothing would persuade them that it was wrong, morally, whatever the law might say about it.

Gradually the anger faded out of the detective's face. They were not strangers to him. He knew and liked them all.

"Tell me the story, Wharton," he said. "But wait! Cherry is not with you. I suppose he— Oh, what a fool I have been! It was he whom I allowed to pass, suspecting nothing; and, of course, the man with him was Marsh himself!"

"That's right, sir," said Harry gravely. "Bob and Wibley took the biggest risks; but, mind you, we're all in it, as much as they are!"

"Never mind that now. Explain how this money came into your hands."

Harry told the whole story. His account of it was so clear and concise that the detective did not stop him to ask a single question, and his chums felt that there was nothing to add, and so kept silence, though it was not easy to do that.

"You have acted foolishly," said Ferrers Locke, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, and still frowning. "Very foolishly! And yet, I agree with you that the man must have repented. He has given proof of repentance. But the law

"We're not the law, sir!" said sturdy Johnny Bull.

"And he was our friend," added Frank.

"He saved my life," Wibley said.

"And he would have been ruined for life if he'd had to go to prison," Harry chimed in.

"The sorrowfulness to have deceived you takeinfully is great, oh, Locke sahib! Our respectfulness for you is of the first waterfulness. But—"

"Enough! I don't quite know how I shall set matters straight with the police, but I will do my best for you, and— Oh, confound it, do you want me to admit that I am glad the fellow has escaped?"

"He'll go straight from now, I'm sure, sir," Harry said.

"Let us hope so. He has my good wishes," Ferrers Locke said, as he transferred the wallet to his pocket.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Soldier of the King!

"REDCLYFFE to-day," said Harry Wharton cheerfully.

"And it's up to Inky to do half a dozen hat-tricks," added Bob Cherry.

"If I were the esteemed and ludicrous Kipps, and hat-tricks were five-pounderful notes, undoubtedly—"

Fisher T. Fish came up.

"You galoots seen him?" he asked. The Famous Five looked round the quad.

"If it's Bunter, we've seen part of him," replied the humorous Bob. "You can't expect a chap to walk all round that before dinner."

"Be a trifle more explicit, Fishy," said Wharton.

"I guess there's a visitor here that you've seen before," answered Fish.

"I kinder calculate," Frank Nugent said, "that a thick ear might help you."

"Here goes!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yoop! Lemme alone, Bull, you varmint! It's Ferrers Locke!"

A fortnight had passed since Douglas Marsh had made his escape by the aid of the Famous Five and Wibley. The detective had left Greyfriars the next day, and not a word had come from him since.

Nor had anything been heard of "Roland Smale."

Now Fishy had come to them under the chins to tell them that the detective had reappeared.

"Where is he?" asked Bob.

"I guess I ain't the mugwump's keeper," replied Fish sullenly. "You chaps don't behave nice. You're like Bowery specimens. Reg'lar toughs!"

And Fisher T. Fish vamoosed the ranch, not wishful of closer contact being established between his ear and the fist of Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five ran against Ferrers Locke in the entrance-hall, and he held out his hand to them with a very friendly smile upon his face.

"It's pax, then, Mr. Locke?" said Wharton.

"Oh, I thought you quite understood that before I left!"

"Well, sir, you must have felt pretty mad," Frank said. "We were sorry for that, because we've always thought a heap of you, you know."

"Hear, hear!" murmured the rest.

"Well, I'm glad of that. I just want to tell you now that you can feel quite easy about your friend the forger."

"Don't call him that, sir!" said Wharton. "He's our friend right enough; but we don't think of him as a forger."

"We will say Marsh, then."

"Have you heard anything about him, sir?" asked Bob.

"No. He has completely disappeared. But what I mean is that the case has been dropped. His former employers acted in the most generous manner. Curiously enough, they appear to take much the same view of his conduct as you do."

"Can't see that it's curious, either!" growled Johnny Bull.

"They know him," Frank added.

"So do we. You don't, sir."

"But I have known many criminals, and I have little belief in the real repentance of the hunted man, as a rule. This is an exception. The man's employers made the most urgent representations to the authorities to drop the case, and it has been dropped. I am not sure that they would not take him back. The fellow must have had a good deal in him to cause liking and trust."

"They'd do right, too," said Johnny Bull. "Look here, sir. I was the only one of us who wasn't satisfied about him. But now I'd trust him with every penny I had in the world!"

"I wouldn't advise that, even now," Ferrers Locke replied, shaking his head. "But the risk is remote. You are never likely to see Marsh again."

There, however, Ferrers Locke was wrong!

He was taking a brief spell off duty, and the Remove team were delighted when he consented to come with them to Redclyffe.

A merry party started out from Greyfriars after an early dinner.

As they left the station at Redclyffe they found a crowd gathered. Inquiries elicited the fact that a battalion quartered in the town was about to proceed by rail to "Somewhere in England" for further training.

They waited to see the march past.

The strains of a band playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and the sound of many feet tramping in unison were heard, and the 3rd Clayshires marched past.

Bob Cherry caught Harry Wharton by the arm.

"Look!" he cried.

"Where? Oh, I see!"

"Who is it?" asked Frank.

"Or what?" inquired Johnny Bull, gazing around.

"The lookfulness is terrific, but the see-

fulness is—"

"That chap on this side, third file from

the big sergeant with the raspberry-

coloured face!"

"By jingo, it's Smale!"

"My hat!"

"Oh, good egg! This is ripping!"

"Mr. Locke—"

"I see, Wharton! And I am glad,

too! This is his best way, and he has

taken it like a man!"

And now he saw them. His face broke

into a smile of real pleasure. He waved

his hand, and they gave a sudden shout.

Ferrers Locke, carried away, joined in

it. His eyes met those of Douglas

Marsh, and between them there passed a

look full of meaning on both sides.

The past was wiped out. No rancour

was left in either. Each was a man

doing his duty to his country after his

own fashion. And if there was regret in

either it was not in Marsh, but in Ferrers

Locke, who would gladly also have been

a soldier of the King!

"Hurrah!" came Bob Cherry's solus

yell, after the rest of the cheering had

died down.

"Pity old Wib couldn't have been

here!" said Harry Wharton.

(Don't miss "HURREE SINGH'S

SECRET!"—next Monday's grand

story of Harry Wharton & Co., by

FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 31.—SAMMY BUNTER.

THE most charitable thing one can find to say about Sammy Bunter is that he is not old enough to know better. Unfortunately, this excuse has the drawback of being doubtfully true.

One is not at all sure that Sammy does not know better. If there is any difference worth mentioning between him and Billy, one is inclined to fancy that it lies in the fact that Sammy is slightly the less obtuse of the two.

They are alike in their greed and their lack of scruples, in their grubbiness and their ignorance. They are quite wonderfully alike in person. Sammy is simply a smaller edition of the egregious William George.

When Billy Bunter heard that his minor was to come to Greyfriars, he announced the fact as if it were really important.

"Sammy's coming!" he told the Remove, and promptly rolled away to blue the remittances which Aunt Peggy had forwarded to him to make smooth the way of Sammy.

Dicky Nugent and Gatty and Hop Hi met Sammy at the station, and were not pleased with him. Frankly, one must say that from the outset Sammy revealed himself as the perfect little beast he is.

His fat, discontented face impressed the fags unfavourably. His reply to the Form-master when told that his hands were not clean had the same effect upon Mr. Kelly, then in charge of the Second.

"I washed them this morning!" grunted Sammy, which was at one and the same time a rude answer and a revelation of his low standard of cleanliness.

Nugent minor had promised Wingate to look after Bunter minor during his first day. It was no easy task, especially as the other fags were eager to give Sammy the licking which he asked for—though not in words—at least every five minutes.

Lonzy was in his bath when Skinner put Sammy in the bath-room. Sammy was very rude and rough to the gentle Alonzo, who wished nothing but his good, and directed his conversation to that end. Sammy ducked Lonzy's head under water, and held it down. But the Famous Five came in and rescued Lonzy from the ferocious fag. And Sammy was rude to them, but repented when he knew who they were. For it was firmly fixed in the mind of Sammy that Harry Wharton was brother Billy's best chum, and that Frank Nugent was horribly jealous because Wharton held that august position!

Perhaps disillusionment on that score tended to make Sammy morose. Anyway, the Second found him quite insufferable, and Dicky Nugent had his work cut out to protect him—hating the job with all his heart meanwhile.

Sammy perambulated trying to collect cash from fellows who, so he had been told, owed it to Billy. He was ready to believe things of this sort, though he had no faith whatever in his major's word when the matter concerned himself. He had discovered that Billy had embezzled Aunt Peggy's remit-



tance, and made his senior uneasy by threats of informing. But Billy got his promise—for what it was worth—not to tell by refusing to cut him down when hanged until he gave that promise.

Coker had hanged Sammy—but not by the neck; only by means of a rope under his armpits.

Wingate interrupted a dormitory ragging due to Sammy's obstinate determination to go to the Head and sneak about what had been done to him; and the skipper aroused the resentment of Sammy by not punishing anyone for the ragging. Furious, Sammy knocked Dicky Nugent down by an unexpected blow; and it was hard for Dicky to keep his promise then. But he kept it like a man!

The obnoxious new junior escaped, and on his way to the Head ran into Mr. Kelly and Wingate. An appeal to the Head could not be refused by any master, and Mr. Kelly took him along. Sammy got no change out of it; the Head caned him.

Back in the dormitory, Sammy threw his boot at Dicky's head. Nugent minor waited till next day, and then gave him what he had been asking for.

Between Billy and Sammy the relations are scarcely brotherly at the best of times—more like armed neutrality, as a rule. It is true that when Bunter got up a team to play for the Coker Cup he included Sammy, and put him in goal. Sammy was a frost in goal, but he was one of the only two left on the field—Alonzo the other—with their noble skipper soon after it had become plain that Dick Nugent and his men of the Second would be all over them. Probably Sammy had not noticed the others sneaking off.

He will back up Billy in any lie if only a

share of the plunder be secured to him. He did not believe that Billy had lost his memory when the Owl succeeded in spoofing everyone else; and the Cliff House girls thought the affection between the two, when they were regaled with good things by Margerie & Co., quite pathetic—though they would hardly have continued to do so if they had heard the asides between them!

Sammy, after being cuffed by Loder, had a shot at the lost memory dodge himself. But Hop Hi tripped him up. The little Chinese talked of a registered letter for Bunter minor, and Sammy forgot to remember that he had forgotten his name. So he did not profit as Billy had profited.

He played up to his scheming major when "Captain Bunter" appeared in the casualty list, and Billy claimed him as an uncle. Sammy boo-hooed in the most lifelike manner when the list was shown him, and made some of the fellows feel quite repentant—so much so that they were ready to comfort Sammy with such grub as his soul yearned after. But Sammy had seen the paper earlier without a breakdown, and "Bunter" turned out to be only a misprint for "Hunter" after all!

He is a blackmailer, in an infantile way, maybe, but up to the limits of his ability. He blackmailed Billy over the loss of memory trick, and added insult to injury by telling the girls that Billy and he might be taken for twins if only Billy were a bit better-looking!

He is meanly greedy. When Dicky Nugent was captured by Mr. Quelch and haled off, Dicky shed biscuits from a paper bag as he went, and Sammy walked behind him picking them up and popping them in his mouth. The other fags were worried about Dicky's fate; but not so Sammy. To him only the biscuits mattered.

"There's another bisker, Sammy," said Gatty.

Sammy stooped, and Gatty took a running kick. Served Sammy right!

When Cousin Wally took Billy's place at Greyfriars for a week or so, and the school was astounded by Bunter's supposed bucking-up, Sammy twiggged, and Wally had to pay blackmail. But Billy refused to continue the subsidy, and Sammy let the cat out of the bag.

Sammy shared his major's captivity in the vaults of the ruined Priory, when the supposed archaeologists were so liberal with their banknotes—made on the premises—to Billy, and Sammy wanted a share of the plunder. They were too pressing, and they had seen too much, so they were tied up and left there while the rascals made themselves scarce.

Once Sammy showed human feeling. Wun Lung was supposed to have been drowned. Hop Hi seemed inconsolable. Sammy tried to console him with a chunk of toffee—Sammy's own, too!

Let it count to his credit, small thing though it be.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"HURREE SINGH'S SECRET!"

By Frank Richards.

It is a long time since we have had the genial Inky as chief character in a story, and his appearance in that guise is sure to give pleasure.

What his secret was I am not going to tell here, of course. It leads to some feeling for a time between him and his chums, and to a definite quarrel with Johnny Bull. It also leads to Inky, who is usually well off, playing the unusual role of the borrower, which is considered by the Form a very suspicious circumstance.

At the end of the story Inky and Johnny

are still quite at loggerheads. But the breach, though it may seem past healing, is not really so, as the next yarn will show.

CORRESPONDENCE WANTED BY :

S. Shilkin, care of Messrs. J. B. Tickle & Son, 34, King Street, Perth, West Australia, with readers aged 17-18 in any part of the world.

R. R. Sawyer, 70, Park Road, Merton, Surrey, with readers interested in photography or electrical engineering.

Miss Ethel Sargent, 51, Waterloo Promenade, Forest Road, Nottingham, with girl readers, not under 22, at home or abroad.

Reg. Roberts, 15, Hall Street, Moonee Ponds, Melbourne, Australia, with boy readers.

Miss Kathleen Megson, 26, Pietersen St., Hospital Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa, with girl readers.

George Ireland, Esplanade North, The Grange, South Australia, with readers who will let him have back numbers. Especially

wants "The Boy Without a Name," "Surprising the School," and "The Rival Ventriloquists."

Sea Scout C. Nicholson, Sea Scout Hut, Portmahomack, Ross-shire, with any Perth boy.

H. Poole, 56, Montague Road, Sheerness, wishes to hear again from his correspondent, James Cooper.

R. S. Stonnill, 55, High Road, South Tottenham, London, N., with readers interested in foreign stamp collecting.

David Warner, 148, Newtown Road, Bestworth, Nuneaton, with boy reader, about 17, interested in views and old numbers of companion papers.

Your Editor