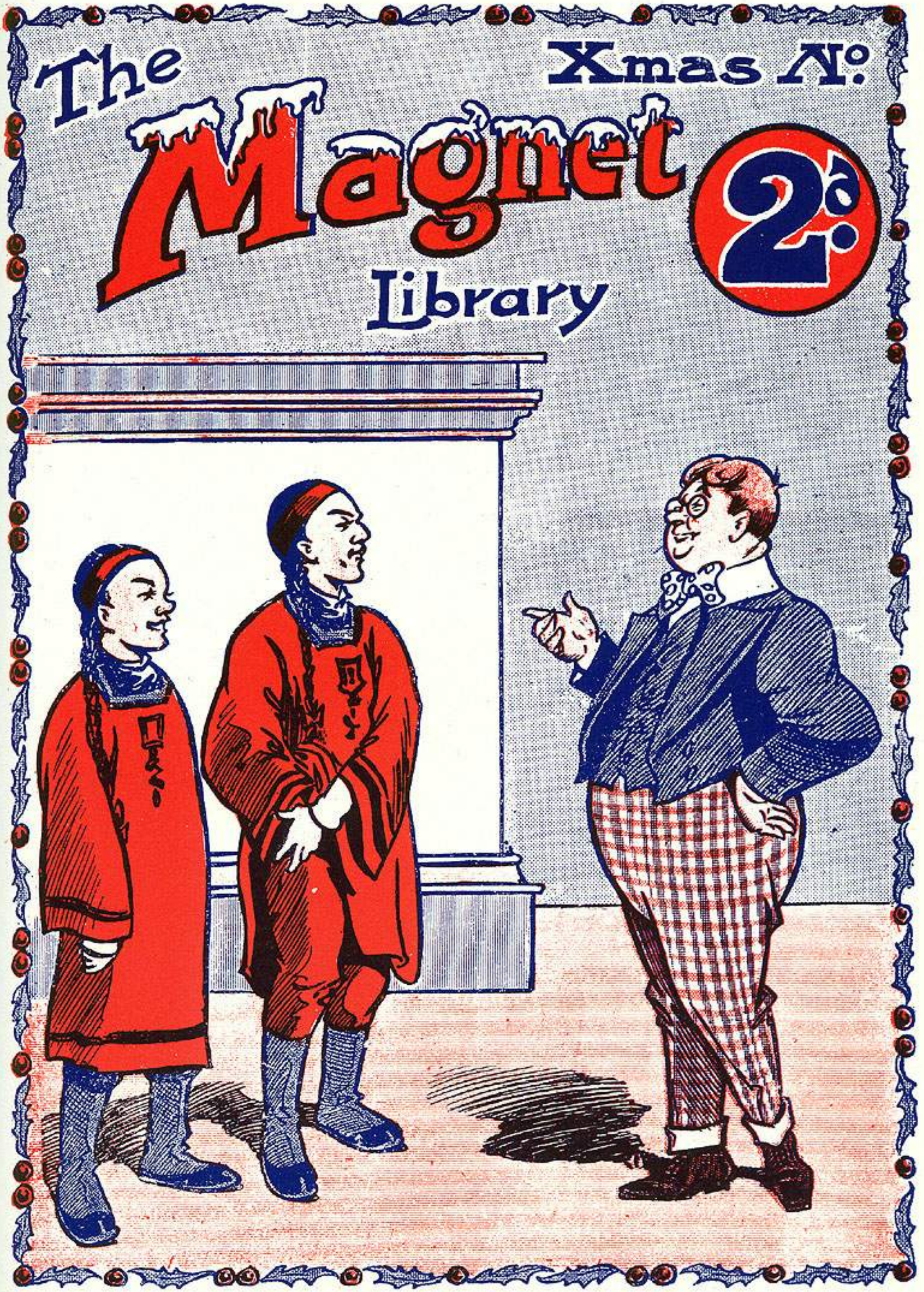
THE GREYFRIARS CHRISTMAS PARTY!



A LOAN FROM CHINA!

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A Magnificent New Double-Length Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE GREYFRIARS CHRISTMAS PARTY!

By Frank Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
All From Overseas!

"CAN'T be did, old scout," said Squiff, shaking his head solemnly.

It was to Harry Wharton that Squiff—otherwise, and at greater length, Sampson Quincy Iffley Field, from New South Wales—spoke.

Harry looked quite worried.

"But it's got to be done," he said. "We can fix it up, I'm sure. I can't take the whole crowd home with me—we don't want Fishy, anyway—but there's plenty of room for you and Browney and Delarey, and we shall all be ever so glad to have you with us, you know."

"Can't be did," repeated the Australian junior, still shaking his head. "It's no end good of you, Wharton, and I don't mind saying for all three of us that there's nothing in the wide, wide world we'd like better if things were different. But things are as things are, and our plans are all cut and dried."

"What's the matter with you two?" asked Herbert Vernon-Smith, whom Greyfriars called the Bounder, coming up to them. "You both look uncommonly cuthus. Not quarrelling, I hope and trust?"

"Not likely, Smithy! But this chap has just let on that quite a little crowd of chaps are spending Christmas here—at Greyfriars! Mind, I'm not running Greyfriars down; but it ain't exactly the place to spend Christmas at, is it?"

"I should say not," replied the Bounder.

"I've suggested that Squiff and Browney and Delarey should come home with me," said Wharton.

"Jolly good way of fixing it up, if you ask me! There's another, though. If they'll trust themselves in my hands—I'm not saying the pater and I are the liveliest of company, but I dare say we can find something to amuse them——"

"Can't be did," said Squiff again. And this time he added, to make himself clearer: "There are the other chaps."

"What other chaps?" inquired the Bounder.

"Wun Lung and his minor, little Sylvester—and Fishy. They're all staying."

"Well, I bar Fishy," said the Bounder frankly. "I don't think the pater could stand Fishy, and I wouldn't like to bring down the old chap's bald head in sorrow to the grave. But you can surely bury Fishy, or send him to the workhouse, or leave him here, with Gossy and Mimble for company."

"And Christmas can't mean much to the Chinese chaps," added Harry.

"And it isn't sense to sacrifice yourself for a kid like Sylvester," the Bounder said. "For that matter! I don't a bit mind him. Not a bad kid, and I sha'n't corrupt his morals now; I've reformed. I'll go further. Wun Lung and Hop-Hi can come, as long as they'll promise not to kill and wolf the dogs."

"You're a brick, Smithy, and Wharton's another!" said Squiff. "But it can't be did."

"Oh, bring Fishy along, then! He's the absolute limit. But I think the pater may survive him. On second thoughts, they'll probably get along together like a house on fire. They'll talk business. Fish's notions of business ought to tickle the old man no end."

"But there are the St. Jim's chaps," Squiff said.

"What the merry dickens has any St. Jim's chap to do with it?"

"Oh, of course, you haven't heard. Dr. Holmes has written to the Head to say that four of their fellows have to put in the holidays at St. Jim's—that is, unless he can arrange to take them in here. Promises to return the compliment some other hols, I gather. Our Head sent for me and Browney and asked us what we thought—quite a compliment, eh? We were on it like birds—the more the merrier, and we'd made up our minds already that we were going to be merry."

"Who are the St. Jim's visitors?" asked Harry.

"Noble—I shall be jolly glad to see more of him! And Dane—another of the right sort. And there's that Indian chap—Koumi Rao. And an American—chap named Finn. I don't know anything about him."

"Sounds all right," the skipper of the Remove remarked. "But isn't there another Colonial there? Oh, I remember now—Clive, of course. Quite a useful half."

"He's spending half the holidays at Levison's place, and the other half at Cardew's—so Noble says. So we sha'n't have him. But, as you fellows must see now, there's no use in arguing. It's all fixed up, and the Head has already written to Dr. Holmes."

Wharton and the Bounder saw that it was even as Squiff said. And Squiff seemed so cheery about it that there was not really much cause for them to worry. It was extremely unlikely that the eleven thus gathered together would have a dull time. Pretty miserable for any fellow staying alone—not much better for only two or three—but with a number like that a jolly enough time could be spent.

"Well, the Head's a decent old sort," remarked Harry. "I should think he could be quite jolly at Christmas-time. And Mrs. Locke's one of the very best. And there will be the girls, too—Miss Rosy and little Molly; they'll help to make it all right."

"No, they won't," answered Squiff. "They're all going away."

"But you chaps can't be left here on your own," said the Bounder.

"We're not to be," Squiff replied. "Prouty's staying."

"Oh!" was all Wharton found to say to that.

"Might be worse," said the Bounder. "Better Prouty than Hacker or Capper. Better than Quelchy, I should say."

"I don't know about that," Squiff said. "Quelchy's all right. I respect Quelchy like anything. But I don't mind admitting that I don't think him a very holiday sort of old buffer. Perhaps Prouty will be better. He's got more go in him when he is going, and when he ain't he settles down with his cigar and a paper and don't worry you unless you worry him. Yes, I think Prouty will do. Of course, we shall handle him carefully; I shall look after that."

"Well, as it's all cut and dried, we can't upset it," said the Bounder pleasantly.

"I'm glad you didn't bag Inky. If he had known that Koumi Rao was coming it might have made him feel that it was up to him to stop, too. And we should miss Inky no end. It wouldn't be a real Christmas without his dusky old face and his superior brand of English."

The Famous Five were all booked to spend the first fortnight of the holidays at Wharton Lodge.

"Fishy will be the fly in the ointment," the Bounder said. "Can't you swop him for a human boy, Squiff, or give him away?"

"Should have to give a premium with him. Want all the cash we've got. Besides, he promises faithfully to be on his best behaviour and never to attempt as much as one single, solitary deal with the St. Jim's chaps. Oh, I think Fishy will be all serene."

"You're a confirmed optimist, Squiff, old top!"

"Well, I do reckon to keep smiling. I suppose that's about the same thing, translated into English, ain't it?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Bunter's Generous Offer!

"I HEAR you are staying here for Christmas, Squiff," said William George Bunter, rolling into the study which the Australian junior shared with Johnny Bull and Fisher T. Fish.

"You do hear things, Bunter, no mistake!" replied Squiff gravely.

"Yes, I rather pride myself on being better informed than most chaps," said the Owl of the Remove fatuously.

Johnny Bull, who was packing up, grunted.

"Ah, I notice your bootlaces are tied up!" Squiff said.

"Oh, really, Squiff, you do talk rot! What's that got to do with it?"

"Depends upon where you tied 'em," grunted Johnny, who understood perfectly the Cornstalk's meaning.

"I don't see it. But I suppose it's right, Squiff?"

"As Bull says so, I think you may depend upon it, Bunter."

"But I don't mean what Bull says. I don't take any notice of Bull!" said the Owl loftily.

Johnny chanced to be on his knees, and there would be time to flee if he attempted assault.

"What do you mean?" Squiff inquired. "Does this all lead up to a proposal that I shall cash for you a postal-order that has somehow gone wrong in the post, through so many bloaters having soft roes these days, or the rise in the price of matches and tea and things, or——"

"Ahem! As a matter of fact——"

"Can't deal on that basis, Bunty. Call it a matter of fiction, and then we shall be starting fair."

"Oh, don't rot! Is it right that you're staying here for the holidays?"

"It is. Don't invite me to the marble halls of your noble relatives, Bunty, because I can't come, and I should hate to disappoint the Duke de Pawnshop Bunter or the Earl Bath-chairman Bunter!"

"I—I—— Oh, see here, Squiff, we've always been pals——"

"First I've heard of it," murmured Squiff.

"And—and oh, look here!"

"I'm looking. I think I can stand it fifty seconds or so longer. But don't ask Johnny to look, too. It's too much for a chap with his delicate constitution."

Johnny grunted again.

"I'm not talking to Bull. In fact, I may say that I am not in the least interested in Bull. The fact is——"

"Don't strain yourself, Bunty! Fiction's easiest for a fellow with your romantic imagination."

"Won't you ever stop rotting? Oh, really, Squiff, I'm serious! Look here, I'll stay with you, if you like!"

It was out now. Johnny Bull varied his comment. This time he snorted.

"What's the merry little game, Bunter?" asked Squiff.

He knew that Bunter was always trying to push himself into parties for the holidays. But this was not an ordinary holiday-party. No one could have expected even Bunter to be keen on Christmas at school.

"I—I—it ain't nice to think of you here all alone, Squiff!"

"Awf'lly kind of you, old top! But, you see, I sha'n't be alone. Fishy's staying."

"Fishy!" echoed Bunter—if an echo can be contemptuous. "I should think you'd rather have me than Fishy!"

"Dunno," replied Squiff. "Johnny, which would be your choice—smallpox or cholera?"

"Which is Bunter?" growled Johnny. "Tell me that, and I'll choose the other!"

"Then there are Brown and Delarey," went on Squiff, "and Wun Lung and his minor, and little Sylvester. They ain't much, of course—compared with a scion of the house of Bunter de Bunterpup. But they'll be kind of company for me if I get feeling lonely."

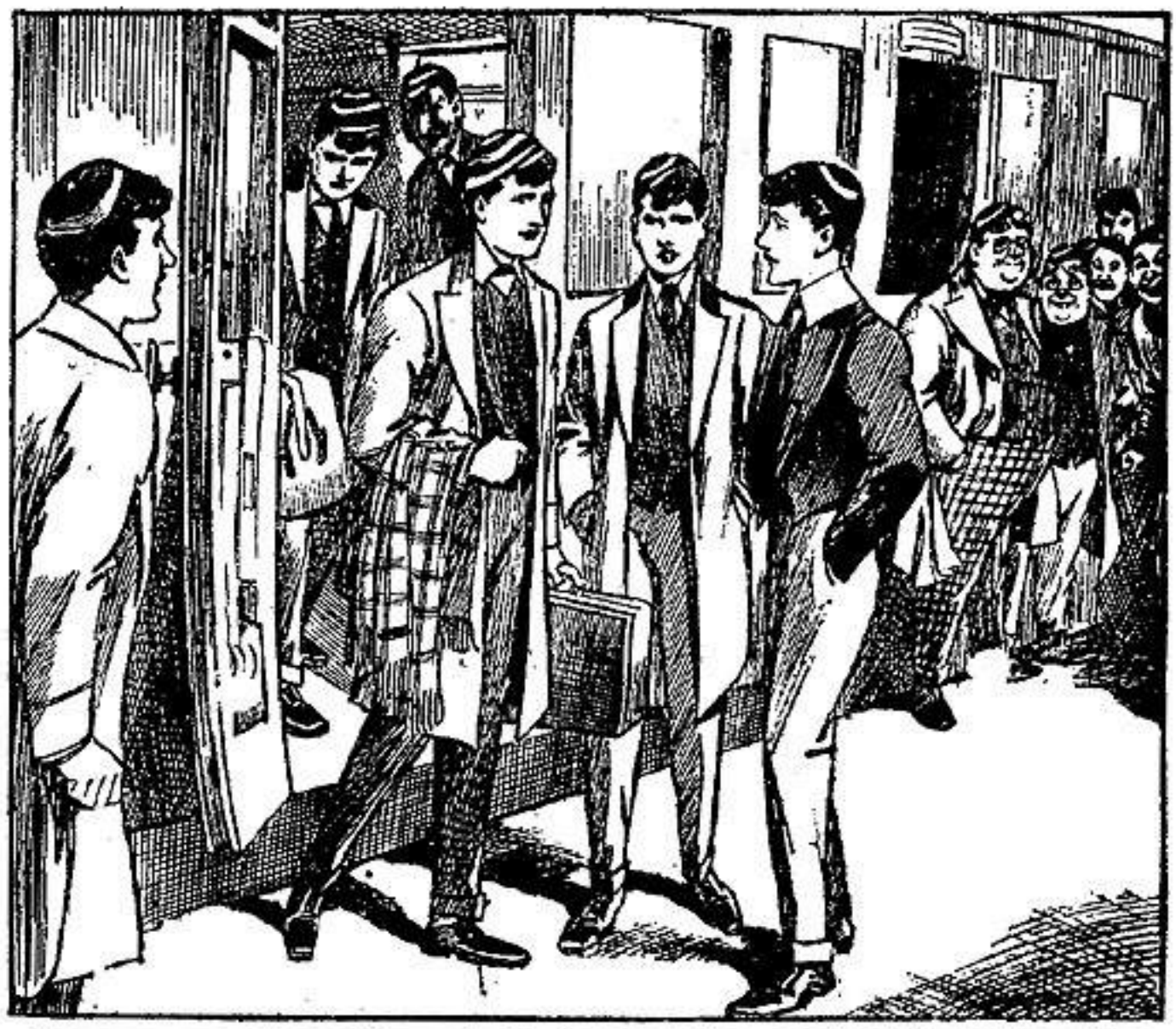
"Well, I don't mind any of them except Fishy," said Bunter generously. "I dare say it can be arranged, as you're so keen on it, Squiff."

"Oh, ain't I keen on it—just!" murmured Squiff rapturously. "I could jump for joy!"

"I don't know that anything need be said to the Head. I've heard that he's going away," continued the fatuous Owl. "Prouty, or whoever is in charge, won't know that I'm staying—er—out of charity, as one might say, and not because I have to. And the little I eat won't be noticed."

"Not likely!" said Squiff, with a shake of his head. "You won't get anything to eat, you see—not what you would call anything."

"Eh? Oh, rot, Squiff! I'll bet they do you jolly well! The Head's sure to give orders for that. And you don't catch old Prouty going short, either."



The visitors for St. Jim's! (*See Chapter 9.*)

"You can't have heard of the experiment, Bunter."

"What experiment?" asked Bunter, with eyes almost goggling out of his head behind his big glasses.

"You know that Prouty's a patriot?"

"I know he makes out he is," answered the Owl cautiously.

"Well, then, have you heard about the new condensed rations?"

"Oh, what rot! Nobody wants to be rationed—especially at Christmas. And as for condensed rations, I like to feel what I've eaten inside me."

"And to swell wisibly after it," said Squiff. "I know, old thing! Well, it can't be done with these rations. One of their chief features is that they are so nasty that the biggest pig going——"

"Bunter, f'rinstance!" put in Johnny Bull.

"That even you, Bunty, couldn't eat more than a few mouthfuls. But, having got it down, and kept it down—I may add that that has been found difficult by some of the experimenters—having gorged it and not been ill, I say——"

"Ugh! It sounds beastly!" said Bunter, shuddering.

"It nourishes a chap no end—simply no end," Squiff said solemnly. "There you are! Of course, a fellow would not choose to have his turkey condensed and tasting like a mixture of senna-tea and eucalyptus; but a chap's patriotic or he isn't patriotic, and there you are! When Prouty leads the way, who can refuse to follow?"

"But you don't mean to say——"

"I don't mean to say another word. Strickly speaking, I ought not to have told you anything about it. We're not talking. Just to go through with it like patriots, and not brag—that's the game! I do think you ought to be in it. You're a particularly eligible sort to experiment upon. It isn't to be expected that you can keep all your fat; but it won't hurt you to lose a few stones. And while we skinny chaps may starve—only through difficulty in keeping the stuff down, you know—there ain't any doubt about its nourishing properties if you once get it fairly stowed in the hold. You'd be all right, anyway. You could live on your reserve stock—like the giddy camel, you know, Bunty!"

"You'll all be like camels," said Johnny Bull; "for you'll all jolly well have the hump, that's a dead cert!"

Johnny spoke as if he knew all about it, and any lingering doubts Bunter may have had were dispelled. Bunter should have had doubts, for all Greyfriars knew what an inveterate spoofer Squiff was. But the Owl had at times a capacity for belief even more wonderful than his capacity for food.

"I—I don't think I could stand that, Squiff," he said dolorously.

"Oh, don't say that, Bunter! It would be easier for you than for the rest of us."

"Look here, I'll bet Fishy ain't going in for any blessed experiment like that!"

"I'll admit that Fish doesn't know that he is," Squiff said calmly. "But that's no odds. Since the United States came into the war, running on the high speed, with their tails up and the flags flying, Fishy's position has changed some, I rather guess an' calculate. He's no longer a 'nootral.' When the War Office and Mr. Prout give orders, Fishy's just got to buck up and look slippy. I ain't saying he must look pleasant, because we don't ask impossibilities of any chap. Would you like to sample the stuff now, Bunty?"

"Yes—no—yes, I mean!"

Bunter had special reasons of his own for preferring Greyfriars to home. The stuff might not be so bad, after all. He might even like it. And if the rest didn't—why, so much the more for William George Bunter!

To Johnny Bull's surprise Squiff produced from his pocket a slab of something which bore a resemblance in look to toffee.

Bunter looked at it doubtfully. Certainly it might be nasty—on the other hand, it might not. It had a slight smell in no way like toffee, and not in the least appetising.

"Don't take a big bite, Bunty. There's two days' rations here," said Squiff.

"I—I—— Look here, Johnny old chap, will you try it?"

"No, thanks! I'm going home with Wharton. Don't want to be measured for a wooden suit directly I get there!"

"It's not poison," said Squiff. "You shouldn't exaggerate, old scout. I don't say the flavour's nice, but it's not poisonous. In fact, I don't know that you can keep it down long enough to hurt you even if I it was."

"It doesn't sound nice," remarked Johnny. "Good enough for Bunter, though, I dare say."

"Take a nibble, Bunty!" said Squiff, holding out the stuff in an encouraging way.

"I—I—— Let me have a look at it, Squiff! Let me take it in my hand."

"That's where your reputation's against you, old chap. You——"

"Well, I suppose I'm not pig enough to——"

"You may know the limits of your own piggishness. We don't. We have never yet found them."

"They don't exist!" said Johnny Bull very positively.

But it appeared that Johnny was wrong. There were bounds to the greed of Bunter.

He did not want two mouthfuls of the stuff proffered him.

He did not swallow even the one he had taken. He got rid of it with greater despatch than politeness.

"Ow-yow! Yarooch! You beast, Squiff! Ow! It's the-nastiest——"

"You really don't think you'd like it at three meals a day, then, Bunter?"

"Yah! I don't believe it! It's all a pack of lies! You aren't going to grub on that! But I don't care! I wouldn't stay with you now, not if you asked me to on your bended eyes, with tears in your knees!"

And Bunter bolted.

"Unsay them words, cruel fair one, or see me fall lifeless at your feet!" called Squiff after him.

"What was the stuff, Squiff?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Only resin. I don't believe it's so bad as all that, either."

"But you hadn't got it to eat?"

"Well, hardly. Only for the strings of my fiddle."

"I didn't know you could play the fiddle," Johnny said.

"I don't know whether I can or not. You see, I've never tried yet," replied Squiff.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Sammy Bunter is Hurt!

"THE coldfulness of the esteemed weather is disgusting!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, in his weird and wonderful English.

No one else seemed to be finding fault with the weather. At worst it was seasonable. The frost had begun some days earlier; but it had partially given, and there had been a heavy fall of snow. Now it was freezing hard again, while the snow was still piled in great drifts, and all the trees wore a raiment of white.

The frost had not been intense enough to allow of skating till that day. And on that day most of the fellows at Greyfriars had no thought of skating, for they were off home for the holidays.

Home for the holidays!

The four simple words speak volumes to the schoolboy.

And what better holidays than those at Christmas? The long summer break has its charms—the seaside or the river, the camp or the caravan tour, cricket, tennis, long, hot days. But think of all that Christmas means—the family reunion, the festive board, parties, charades, or even amateur theatricals, skating, footer, hockey, a day or two with the rabbits, presents. On the whole, one fancies the votes of the majority go for Christmas!

Aready some of the home-goers had departed. But these were only the fellows who had such long distances to go that they must tumble out of bed while yet the day had not even begun to dawn, and get down to the special early breakfast prepared for the first train boys. For the rest there was no rising-bell, and breakfast was at nine; but, of course, most of them, since they were allowed to stay in bed longer, didn't want to. Even Billy Bunter had arisen with the lark—if the lark arises about 7.30 in December—and had gone in to breakfast with the first-train boys. It is true that he was not travelling by the first train, and that he was to be seen in his seat again at nine o'clock; but these are mere details.

Neither Bunter nor his minor Sammy, of the Second, looked very joyful. Something had happened to cast a damper over their home-going. But no one knew what that something was, and no one asked. No one, in fact, was taking much notice of Billy and Sammy.

A long slide—a slide such as is seldom seen—had been made in the playground, and down this a long row of fellows went whizzing, to run back again to the starting-point when they reached the end.

"Come along, Wingate, old sport!" cried Bob Cherry.

Sliding would have been beneath the dignity of George Wingate, captain of Greyfriars, at an ordinary time. Not that Wingate stood excessively on his dignity. But there are some things a Sixth-Former, and, above all, the captain, does not do.

But to-day was a day like no other day, and Wingate joined in, and went careering down the slide with all the joyous abandon of a junior.

Courtney and Gwynne followed him, and even Walker and Valence, after a moment's hesitation, joined up. But Loder and Carne stood by with sneering faces.

Hurree Singh also stood by, though not sneering. Frosty weather did not suit Inky. He could be happy in the dog-days; but his spirits had rather a tendency to fall with the thermometer.

Sammy Bunter stood by, too, blue-nosed and shivering. The other fags called to him in vain.

"Come along, Sammy, you shivering tadpole!" yelled Dicky Nugent.

"He's afraid!" scoffed Gatty.

"Leave the mugwump alone!" said Tubb of the Third authoritatively. "He'd only mess things up if he tried to join in!"

"Do you think we're taking orders from you, Tubby?" retorted Dicky. "If you don't come, Samivel, I'm coming to fetch you!"

"Yow! Lemme alone! I don't want to slide!" burbled the fat fag.

But, of course, Dicky did not let him alone. He came behind, and caught Sammy by the collar; he rushed him on to the slide, regardless of the convenience of those behind, and gave him a lusty shove.

Sammy started with his face in the right direction, of course. But it would not stay so. Sammy did what the nervous and hesitating slider so often does. He began to slew round.

And as he slewed round he howled. The rest were pressing behind him—too fast for poor Sammy. Dicky Nugent, Gatty, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, Rake, Wingate, Courtney, Vernon-Smith, Harry Wharton, all came on, and behind them were more and ever more.

"Yow-ow! Don't! I shall be over!" wailed Sammy, faced right round now.

"Easy behind, there!" yelled Johnny Bull. "We don't want——"

"Get on, you fathead!" shrilled Dicky Nugent.

Sammy would have got on if he could, though he would have preferred to get off. But he was helpless.

And now came the crash!

"Yooop!" howled Dicky.

"Wow!" sang out Gatty.

"Oh, my hat!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, ha——"

Bob did not finish. He was down, on top of Johnny, who, in turn, was pressing down Gatty, whose face had smitten the back of Dicky Nugent's head with a mighty smite, and Sammy was under Dicky!

And now those behind were piling themselves on the top of the heap. Rake came, and Wingate and Courtney. But the Bounder was warned in time, and threw himself aside, and those behind him did likewise, though not all of them kept their feet as he and Harry did.

Dicky Nugent was a light-weight. Even the addition of Gatty was no more than Sammy could have borne. He had been buried under more in many a Form-room rough-and-tumble.

But Johnny Bull was solid, and Bob was not exactly a feather-weight. Rake helped to add some few stones, and Wingate—a man in size—and Courtney contributed liberally, though not willingly. It really looked as though Sammy was in grave peril.

He was not yet dead, however. That much was evident by the cries that proceeded from the bottom of the heap.

"Yaroooh! You're squ-squ-squashing me! Gerroff! I'll bite you if you don't gerroff, Nugent minor, you beastly kid!"

"Better for you you don't, you fat worm! Yoo-oooop! Gatty, you silly chump——"

"Chump yourself! Ow-yow! They're all on top of me! Bull, you beast——"

"What the merry dickens are you doing, Bob, you idiot?"

"Look here, Rake——"

"Yow! I say, Wingate, you're heavy!"

Courtney struggled up, laughing. Wingate rose to his feet, and Rake and Bob and Johnny and Gatty and Nugent minor lost no time in doing likewise. But Sammy did not arise. He lay there, gasping and gurgling, and making a determined attempt to go black in the face.

"Oh, dear! I'm injured inside—I'm dying!" he wailed.

"Hurrah!" shouted the unsympathetic Dicky.

"I say, though, the kid may be hurt," said Wingate, with grave concern. "Clear out of the way, Nugent minor! Now, then, young Bunter, where are you hurt?"

"Here—it's horrible!" gasped Sammy, putting his right hand on an exceedingly tight waistcoat.

"Everybody knows that!" said Gatty. "Bunter minor's tummy is a disgrace to the Form!"

"Shut up!" snapped Wingate, down on his knees now, and sorry that he had yielded to the temptation to slide. "Can you get up, kid?"

"Nun-no!" Sammy gasped pathetically. "I can't stir—I think I'm all broken, Wingate!"

"Rubbish! Just you try! It's only the wind knocked out of you!"

"I—I think I ought to have something to get my strength up first, Wingate!"

"Brandy, do you mean? I don't suppose anyone here has got brandy."

But Wingate directed an inquiring glance at Loder. It was at least possible that Loder's pocket held a flask, and that the flask held spirits of some kind.

"Nun-no! I don't like brandy—except on plum-pudding. I think I could eat a ham-sandwich, Wingate—a big one!"

"You gorging little toad!" roared Wingate, as he yanked the fat fag to his feet.

Sammy went off snivelling. Possibly he was hurt; but his internal injuries could scarcely have been serious if the medicine they called for was a ham sandwich!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Bunter's Secret!

AS Bunter minor took his wailful way into the School House, his major and Frank Nugent came out together.

They came out together in a manner that looked, at first sight, quite affectionate. Billy Bunter was clinging to Frank's arm as if he loved him. Perhaps for the moment he believed that he did. Bunter could feel affectionate when he entertained hopes of getting something out of somebody.

But the affection, if there, was very one-sided. Frank did not in the least love Bunter, and a second glance might have revealed the fact that he was trying to withdraw his arm from the grip of the Owl.

He succeeded at the moment when they met Sammy.

"What's the matter, Sammy?" asked Frank. He was by no means hard-hearted, and he barred Sammy Bunter rather less than he did Billy, probably because he saw less of him. There was less to see, for the matter of that, but only because William George had had the start, and now, when Sammy was doing his level best to catch up, the war had come along to spoil his chances.

"I—I'm all squashed inside, Nugent—horrible!" replied Sammy dolorously.

"That sounds bad. How did it happen?"

"Oh, really, Nugent! I can't think why you go troubling about that silly kid when I'm talking to you! As I was saying——"

"Silly kid yourself!" barked Sammy. "If you'd had what I have you'd have shammed death till you'd wangled something out of somebody, I know!"

It was likely. Promising as Sammy was, he had not yet achieved the heights of wangling upon which William George sat enthroned. When he had tried to persuade Greyfriars that he had lost his memory, the Second had seen through it on the instant. Billy had spoofed the whole school.

And Sammy had not even managed so little as a ham-sandwich out of the much more real catastrophe which had befallen him.

"Well, what have you had?" inquired Nugent. "You do look a trifle squashy, but you're all there still."

"I've been over on a slide with half the school on top of me!" said Sammy, with a gulp of self-pity. "It was your minor's fault, and—— Oh, dry up, Billy, you fat beast! I'm talking to Nugent!"

"Go and eat coke, you cheeky little prize porker!" snapped the Owl. "As I was saying, Nugent——"

"Your brother Dicky did it, Nugent, and——"

"Wharton thinks no end of you, and quite right, too! You and I are really his best chums. Do you remember what ripping times we used to have when we were all in No. 1 together? If you were to tell him that you particularly want me to be included in his party——"

"But that would be a lie!" said Frank. "I don't like telling lies!"

"Oh, really, what does a lie or two—I mean, it wouldn't really be anything of the sort, because at heart—at heart, I say—you're really quite pally with me!"

"Yah! Trying to get out of Aunt Becky!" sneered that unpleasant young person, Bunter minor. "I'll tell her!"

It was a Parthian shot. Sammy had given up hope of inducing Frank to stand anything as a consolation for the ill-doing of his minor; and now he went in haste, thinking it best to get speedily out of reach of his brother.

"All right! Just you wait till I get hold of you, Sammy!"

"Yah! You're too fat to run!" came the answer.

"What's it all abount, Bunty?" asked Nugent, his curiosity aroused.

"I'll tell you, Frank, as you're my best pal—next to Wharton, of course. I haven't told anyone, though Todd was very inquisitive about it. But I don't like inquisitiveness—I think it's bad form, don't you?"

"Perhaps, Bunter! But I shouldn't have thought you'd have seen that!"

"I'm misunderstood. There never was a chap more misunderstood than I am!" said Bunter pathetically. "There's Aunt Rebecca, now—she's father's sister. She don't like me a bit. Sneers at me because she says I'm fat—being as skinny as a Maypole herself, she don't like people who are—er—well made and plump. But she makes quite a favourite of Sammy, and he's fatter than I am, the young beast!"

"And she's coming to stay with you for Christmas, I suppose?" said Nugent.

"No, she ain't. She's there already, and the mater says she don't know when she'll clear out. You see, she lent the pater money——"

"Your mater did?"

"No, fathead! Aunt Becky, of course! So she's planted herself on us to take it out in board and lodging."

"Well, that ain't unreasonable, if she can't get it any other way.

"Oh, really, Nugent! What price me?"

"It doesn't make much difference to you, I suppose. You don't have to pay for her grub."

"But anybody might think she had to pay for mine!" groaned Bunter.

"Perhaps she reckons she has."

"She grudges me every mouthful I eat. It's awful! I don't know what sort of a Christmas dinner we shall have, but I jolly well know one thing—I sha'n't get half as much as I want—no, not a quarter! She's worse than fifty Food Controllers!"

The tragedy of Bunter! Knowing Bunter as he did, Frank Nugent felt some slight sympathy. But it was too slight to have any effect upon his actions. Bunter was not wanted at Wharton Lodge, and if Harry Wharton were weak enough to let him come—and Harry had been weak in this way more than once out of sheer kindness of heart—he would only repent it later.

"I'll give you——"

"Oh, thanks awfully, Nugent! I know what a generous chap you are!"

"Some good advice!" finished Frank.

"Oh!" said Bunter dismally.

"Make up to your aunt. Be polite to her. Let her feel that she's an honoured and welcome guest. After all, she's partly human, I suppose, even though she was born a Bunter!"

"You don't know Aunt Rebecca!" interjected the woeful Owl.

"Restrain that greed of yours. After all, I suppose you can enjoy yourself without being an absolute pig!"

"Then you suppose wrong, because I can't! I mean, that's all very well, but——"

"'Nuff said! You may as well make up your mind that you're going home, because you certainly ain't coming with us. There are five objectors to that, and there ain't one of them that objects more strongly than I do. If I could get Wharton to take you by a nod of the head I'd sit in a draught till I got a giddy stiff neck, for fear I might give the signal by accident!"

"Yah! You're a beastly rotter, Nugent!"

"And you really don't love me any more, Bunty? Thanks! Give my compliments to your Aunt Rebecca, and tell her you need dieting—I say so!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Inky Is Really Hurt!

OUT in the quad sliding was still going on merrily. The fags had set to work to construct a new slide by the side of the first one, and now that they had got it into something like going order they found the rest using it—up one slide and down the other being much livelier than running one way.

The Sixth-Formers had cleared out, but the ranks of the sliders had been reinforced by a contingent of Fifth, Shell, and Upper Fourth fellows, including the magnificent Coker, the burly Hobson, the musical Hoskins, and the lordly Temple, accompanied, of course, by Dabney and Fry.

Temple went up and down the slides like one who is condescending; but Coker was as keen as any fag, and as loud in his keenness.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Come on, Franky!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Where have you been?" asked Harry.

"Giving Bunter consolation and good advice," replied Frank, with a grin.

"What Bunter needs is exercise," pronounced Coker. "Come along, you fat criminal!"

"Oh, I'll come fast enough!" said the Owl. "I bet I can beat you at sliding, Coker! You're clumsy!"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped the great man of the Fifth.

"Clumsy, I said! Oh, gerrout of the way, Inky! He's after me!"

Hurree Singh had joined the sliders now, and was no longer quite so chilly as he had been. He allowed Bunter to dodge round him, and refrained from employing his agility in getting out of Coker's way. Bunter was Bunter, and Inky did not love him; but Bunter was of the Remove, and, therefore, to be backed up more or less as against Coker.

Others saw the matter in the same light, and Coker had to twist and twirl frantically among apparently immovable objects which had a few moments before been active juniors. But Coker was dogged, and he stuck to the pursuit.

Bunter reached the end of the slide, and ran on towards the gates. Coker followed.

It really looked as though Coker was a little bit clumsy. Bunter dodged back, and eluded his outstretched arm. Bunter could not thus have dodged a Removite.

But Coker had the legs of Bunter. He swung round, and gained fast on the Owl.

"Yoop! Help, you chaps!" howled Bunter.

But the rest were all speeding down the slide.

There seemed nothing else for it, though perhaps only Bunter would have done so silly a thing.

He burst right through the ranks of the sliders, and Coker came after him.

Bunter got through, bringing Inky with a crash to the ground.

Coker did not. He fell on top of Inky.

"Yah! Serve you right!" yelled Bunter, as the rest proceeded to pile themselves to the number of ten or so upon the prostrate two.

They could not help it. They had been going down the slide with a rare swing and rush, and were sprawling before they realised what had happened.

Then down went the lordly Temple, and down went Harry Wharton. On Harry's back fell Hobson, and his legs lunged wildly, and one of his feet took Tom Brown in the neck as Tom went down, too—but not immediately on top of Hobson, for Hoskins, groaning, was sandwiched between them. Dabney was down, and Bob Cherry and Potter and Kipps.

They got up in haste, some of them grumbling, some laughing. Kipps, who had been at the top of the heap, laughed most. Bob Cherry was quite cheerful, and Hobson considered it a joke. But Potter was unmistakably waxy, and Hoskins did not look or sound cheery; Temple was furious, and Coker was saying things.

Harry Wharton alone had an inkling of the thing that had chanced. He had caught Inky's low moan of pain, and he knew that it was not for any slight hurt Inky moaned.

"Get up, Coker, you ass!" he snapped. "You've——"

"Look here, you cheeky fag, I may consent to mix with your childish games at a season like this, but I'm not going to——"

"Oh, you mad idiot! Can't you see you've smashed up poor old Inky? Get off, do!" cried Harry, tugging at the Fifth-Former's arm.

"My hat! I say, though, not really?" gasped Coker.

"You've done it now, Coker!" said Bob Cherry bitterly.

For there was no doubt at all that Hurree Singh was really hurt. His face had gone a ghastly hue, and he had fainted.

They were down on their knees beside him—his own chums and Coker, Coker as honestly concerned as any of them. The rest crowded round, and Bunter came rolling back.

"Stand back a bit!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "It's no good stifling him. We'd better get him indoors and send for the doctor, Wharton."

"You're right, Smithy! We must get a form or something to carry him on, I suppose."

"No, you won't. No use to waste time," said Coker. "I'll carry him in."

And, before anyone had time to remonstrate, the light body was picked up in Coker's strong arms.

It was not a judicious thing to do. Bones might be broken, or there might be internal injuries which the being carried thus would not improve.

But, so much granted, nothing more could be said against the doing of it. The manner was beyond reproach. No one could have lifted Inky more gently or have carried him more carefully than the usually rough and clumsy Coker.

The great Horace was full of remorse. At such a time the first thought of a mean, selfish fellow is of himself—of the blame that may fall upon him for what he has done. Bunter, as directly responsible as Coker—though it is to be admitted that Coker was not obliged to follow him in his wild rush across the slide—trembled like a blancmange, and could scarcely stand up for fear. Bunter was sorry for Inky—a little. But Bunter was much more sorry for William George Bunter, who was certain to be blamed for the accident.

Coker, on the other hand, never thought of Coker. All his fear was for his victim.

And the rest saw it, and ceased to accuse Coker of his fault. Even Cecil Reginald Temple cut short something he had started to say; and impulsive Bob Cherry choked down angry words; and Johnny Bull contented himself with a growl without words to it.

"Poor old Inky! Poor little chap!" murmured Coker. And Harry saw tears in the bold eyes of Horace Coker.

A long procession tailed after them. Bunter came at the rear of it.

Mr. Prout, in Norfolk jacket and knickers, with a gun across his shoulder, met them at the door.

The Fifth Form master was going to shoot rabbits—or at rabbits, the coney being notoriously a smaller mark than the buffalo. Besides, the days when Mr. Prout had shot buffaloes were a long way back in the past. When Mr. Prout pulled trigger now, there was consternation among those within range. Possibly the rabbits might be frightened to death by the sight of him.

But hardly on that day. For Mr. Prout, the soul of good nature and kindliness for all his pomposity, turned back at once.

"Goodness gracious!" he puffed. "Dear me! This is really too unfortunate, and especially at such a time. Who is responsible for the condition in which I see this poor lad?"

"I'm afraid I am, sir!" answered Coker, with unwonted humility. "But it was entirely an accident."

"Wasn't half as much your fault as Bunter's," said the Bounder bluntly. "That fat ass knocked him down. You only fell on him—and you weren't the only one, either!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I hardly touched him!" expostulated the Owl.

The Remove generally had had rather a notion that Mr. Prout barred Coker. The two had often come into collision, and the master had more than once expressed his opinion that Coker was the stupidest boy in all Greyfriars.

But the hand that Mr. Prout laid on Coker's shoulder then was a very friendly one, and Mr. Prout could not have spoken more kindly.

"There, there, Coker!" he said. "You must not take too much blame upon yourself for an accident. I am quite sure that you would not wilfully damage a boy so much smaller than yourself. Bring him along this way. Better not to take him upstairs."

"I—I—oh, I say, sir, would you mind putting that gun down?" asked Coker, in alarm. "If you shot him it might put the lid on the whole affair, you know, sir!"

"Much better shoot Bunter, if there's to be any shooting at all," spoke a voice that sounded like Delarey's.

"There is no danger whatever," said Mr. Prout stiffly. But Coker had not been the only one who had fancied there might be. Mr. Prout had a fashion of carrying a gun which was, to say the least of it, singular in a perfect Nimrod.

He put the gun down now, and ordered most of the crowd back. Only Coker, Harry Wharton, and Johnny Bull were allowed to pass along to the Head's study, which had been placed at Mr. Prout's disposal during the holidays. Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent grumbled, Bob loudly; but Mr. Prout would not relent.

A telephone call fortunately found Dr. Short at home, and he was at Greyfriars in a very brief space.

Johnny Bull came forth with a very long face. It was not easy for Johnny to draw a long face, his countenance having a natural tendency to squareness; but he drew one then.

He and his chums had missed the train by which they had meant to travel. So had forty or fifty others, who would not go until they had heard how serious the matter was.

Most of the Remove left thus far had stayed. Skinner, Stott, and Snoop had slunk off, though Skinner had the shortest journey of all to cover, as he was going to stay with friends a mile or two beyond Courtfield. Those three cared nothing for Inky.

But Bob and Frank, Rake and Bulstrode, Wibley and Kipps, Mauly and Sir Jimmy, Peter Todd and the Bounder, Tom Dutton and Russell, were all there. Ogilvy and Mark Linley had been among those who had departed by the first train—the Scot for his Highland home, and Mark for Lancashire.

And Temple & Co. were there, and Hobson and Hoskins, and Potter and Greene—good fellows all at heart, they could not have gone off lightly in ignorance of the best or the worst. And Billy Bunter had stayed. Sammy had tried to get him away; but it was all no go, so Sammy, looking very discontented, had stayed, too.

"Don't look like that, Bull! Anyone would think there was no hope for him!" snapped Temple, whose nerves had not stood the strain too well.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

More Nobility From Bunter!

"IT ain't so bad as all that," said Johnny; "but it's pretty rotten. His right ankle has had a nasty wrench that sprained it pretty badly, and something seems to be hurt inside him. The old sawbones isn't sure what, but he says nothing vital. He's forbidden him to travel for at least ten days, though. That spoils things for us. Not that it matters about us—I don't mean I'm such a pig as to think of that—but it's beastly all round!"

It was not often Johnny Bull spoke like that. All could see that he was strongly moved. Inky and Johnny had drawn very closely together since the day when the Bounder had healed their feud in his own strange way.

The Bounder spoke now.

"Cheer up, old sport!" he said. "After all, it might be worse!"

"All very well for you, Smithy; but we shall miss old Inky no end," said Bob, his sunny face unusually clouded. "And the poor old chap having to stay here, too! That's rotten!"

"Even that ain't so bad as it might be, Bob," said Squiff cheerily. "We'll look after him all serene—soothe his hours of melancholy, and promote giddy mirth as soon as his Highness is fit for it—eh, you fellows?"

"Rather!" said Tom Brown and Piet Delarey together.

"Jerusalem crickets, yes!" chimed in Fisher T. Fish, moved out of his selfishness for once.

"I'll fag for him," said little Sylvester. "Don't you worry, Cherry! Inky's a good sort, and I don't mind staying in with him when the other chaps want to go out."

"Me lookee aftel Hullee Singhee," announced Wun Lung, the Chinese member of the Remove. "Nobodee else wolly about him at allee. Me and Hop Hi, we lookee aftel him."

"Oh, lathel!" said Hop Hi, Wun Lung's minor. Hop Hi meant "Oh, rather!" but he had the same difficulty with his "r's" as his brother had.

Bob and Johnny and Frank were distinctly bucked up. After all, Inky would not be so badly off at Greyfriars. But they would miss him sorely at Wharton Lodge.

"Well, I don't suppose we shall be allowed to see him if we stay longer," said Temple. "Will any of you fellows that see him tell him how sorry we all are, and wish him as merry a Christmas as can be expected under the circumstances?"

There was quite a hum of assent. For once Cecil Reginald had said the right thing, and everybody there was in agreement with him. It did not often happen to Temple.

He and Dabney and Fry cleared out for the station. Potter and Greene waited for Coker, who came before long in rather a depressed state, and obviously not likely to stand slanging. But his chums did not try to slang him. He was feeling it enough without that.

The rest dribbled away by degrees. But Bob and Frank and Johnny waited for Harry Wharton to come and tell them they were allowed to go along and say good-bye to Inky; and the Bounder and Bunter waited, too, and a very disgruntled Sammy, caring little about Inky, but much about missing his train, waited with them.

Harry came at last.

"He's all comfortable now," he said, and quite chirpy. You can come for a minute or two, Prouty says. I say, though, I hope old Coker wasn't chipped? He's feeling it no end."

Bob shook his head.

"No one had spirit enough to chip Coker," he said mournfully. "We're feeling it a bit, too, Harry, you know."

They filed through the corridors after Harry.

"Here, I say, it ain't any use you going, Billy!" said Sammy.

"I'm going. Don't be such a young idiot! Of course I'm going!"

"Well, I sha'n't. They may call you a murderer for what you did, and I don't want to be called a murderer's brother—so there! Besides, we shall miss another train."

"I don't care a scrap if we miss them all!" replied Billy Bunter peevishly. "And if they didn't blame that ass Coker, they can't blame me. It was much more his fault than mine."

"All right, then! Go and look at what you've done, and be proud of it! I'm going to the station, and I hope Hurree Singh will give it to you hot. If I was him I'd jolly well bite you—there!"

Sammy rolled off in one direction and his major in the other.

The rest had gone some distance ahead. But Bunter knew his way.

He blinked into the Head's study.

Mr. Prout was not there. He had realised that his presence wasn't required.

Inky lay on the couch, and Bunter was relieved to see that he was smiling. Bob Cherry knelt by him, and Harry and Johnny and Frank stood on the other side. A little apart stood the Bounder, with a very grave face. Perhaps he felt in that moment of highly-strung feeling that he was not quite one of them, though he owed them all much, and would have done much for any of them.

It was his own fault if he stood a little outside the brotherhood; and he knew it—none knew it better. What perhaps he did not know was how warm a place he had in the hearts of all five. The Bounder's own heart was rather a cold one, and he liked to say that his pater was the only person in the world for whom he cared a rap. But it was not quite true; and he knew that now—never better than now!

Bunter bustled in. Inky's smile had quite reassured Bunter, and, since any strain he had felt was the result of fears for himself, it passed at once. A fellow who smiled like that wasn't going to peg out, and, anyway, it was an accident. Moreover, it might be made to fit in with Bunter's schemes.

"Gerrout!" growled Johnny Bull, perceiving him. "Inky doesn't want to see you. If it hadn't been for you he wouldn't have been lying here. We should all have been in the train before now if it hadn't been for you!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Let him come in, Johnny," said Harry Wharton.

Inky had not spoken, but Harry understood.

"But I want to see Inky alone," said Bunter.

"Like your blessed cheek, too!" snapped Bob. "I suppose you want to finish off the job you've begun—eh?"

"I don't understand you, Cherry!"

"You haven't quite managed to kill him by your idiotic clumsiness, so——"

"Oh, dry up, Bob! Anything you've got to say, Bunter, you say before us, understand that!" Harry said firmly. "He mustn't be talked to much, and, of course, he knows you're sorry."

"I think it's Coker who ought to be sorry, not me!" said Bunter protestingly.

"Well, he is. If you were half as sorry as old Coker it would be easier to forgive you," replied Frank.

"I am. But my nature is a modest one, and I do not show my feelings," said the Owl, blinking. "It was my modesty that led me to ask to see Inky alone. But what I am going to propose will prove to you all that I am not only sorry, but also ready to make a sacrifice which Coker wouldn't make. I'm going to stay here and nurse Inky!"

He looked round to see the effect of his noble speech. Strange to say, Frank Nugent was giggling. Vernon-Smith looked grim, Bob and Harry puzzled, and Johnny angry.

Inky smiled wanly, and shook his head.

"Your Aunt Rebecca is a holy terror, isn't she, Bunter?" said Frank.

The rest started. Perhaps in all Greyfriars only Squiff would have tumbled on the instant, and he had something to go upon. Johnny Bull, who had heard Bunter's earlier noble offer, was not so quick as Squiff.

But now he saw. It was as though a flood of light had broken in upon him.

"I've got it!" he cried. "Bunter doesn't want to go home at any price. So it's an aunt, is it? Serve you right, porpoise! I wish there were fifty of them!"

Mr. Prout looked in, and they had to go. Inky had Temple's message, which was also the message for some forty others, all right, and it pleased him. He escaped Bunter's appeals to be allowed the post of sick-nurse, and perhaps that escape pleased him too.

But of six fellows who departed in rather downcast mood the saddest of all was William George Bunter, across whose path there was thrown the dread shadow of an extremely unpleasant Aunt Rebecca!

Chucked out and left behind! (*See Chapter 16.*)

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Going to Meet the Visitors!

"IT'S a great responsibility, of course," said Squiff. "But the Head says I'm to take it on, and what the Head says goes. Under Prouty I'm in command, and Prouty we shall not have always with us—at least, I should jolly well hope not!"

"I calculate it doesn't cut any ice with me, Squiff," observed Fisher T. Fish coolly. "You may let on that the Head put you in as boss, but he didn't tell me so. Nope, siree!"

"And you don't think I am boss, Fishy?"

"Nope!"

"And you're going to do just as you darn please—eh?"

"Yep!"

"Bump him!" ordered Squiff.

They were all there—the Greyfriars

juniors who were staying for Christmas, save for the latest and most unexpected addition, Hurree Singh. Tom Brown and Delarey, Wun Lung and Hop Hi, and little Sylvester of the Third, had all come along with Squiff to welcome the visitors from St. Jim's at the station.

Fishy had come, too, but in no very pleasant mood. Twenty-four hours earlier he had been quite amiable, and had promised Squiff afresh that the morrow would find him on his best behaviour. Not that Fishy saw anything the matter with his ordinary standard of behaviour; but it appeared that Squiff had the bad taste to object to certain features of it. Squiff had insisted that no attempt was to be made to do down the visitors, and this, of course, would cut Fishy out of his beloved deals entirely—it was impossible to imagine Fishy in a deal which was in the least likely to advantage the other party.

Squiff had hinted, too, that bragging would not be welcome. There was an American in the St. Jim's contingent, and if Fishy started bragging it would probably set him off on the same game. Two of them would be more than the gathering could stand, Squiff thought.

Fishy was not quite such a braggart now as he had been when he first sighted Greyfriars. He had "got left"—in his own choice idiom—so many times that some of the steam had been taken out of him. But he was still apt to break out.

Squiff's injunction seemed to him to be designed to give Buck Finn unlimited—and unfair—opportunities of talking big talk without a rival. And Finn came from the West—from Arizona—and no New Yorker likes the idea of being outdone or out-talked by a man from those wild and woolly regions.

So Fisher T. Fish had soured on his promise, as he himself might have put it; and Squiff's announcement that Dr. Locke had made him Mr. Prout's first lieutenant roused him to revolt.

Tom Brown might have objected. He had been at Greyfriars before Squiff, and stood at least equal with him in the estimation of the Form. But Tom and Squiff were the best of chums, and there was no objection from the New Zealander. On the whole, he preferred to have Squiff as leader.

Delarey felt the same. The two Chinese boys and the Third-Former did not love Fish at all.

Therefore it was fairly certain that Squiff's order to bump Fishy would be obeyed at once.

And it was. Ten hands seized the American junior in firm grip.

Fishy was quite surprised. He had counted on most of the others backing him up. Fishy's idea of a really good government was one which allowed a fellow to do what—and, incidentally, whom—he liked. The rest must be jays and mugwumps if they failed to agree.

"Hyer, drop it!" he yelled. "I reckon——"

"Yes, drop it!" said Squiff, grinning.

He put an emphasis on the two-lettered word which the five understood. Fishy, though not IT, was for the time being "it."

They dropped Fishy to the snowy road, picked him up again, dropped him again, picked him up once more, and then let him drop and stay there.

"Oh, you mugwumps!" hooted Fisher T. Fish. "Hyer, stop! I'm coming!"

But the six did not stop. They held on their way. Fishy trotted after them, moaning and groaning. He wanted to be there to greet Buck Finn, though there was no special friendliness in his desire.

Temple & Co., and the rest who had left Greyfriars at the same time as they, had just caught a train which they supposed to have gone long before.

The heavy snowfall and military requirements had combined to hamper traffic, and no one could say when a train might be expected.

Sammy Bunter had been a few minutes too late. The party found Sammy on the platform, blue-nosed and miserable, trying to extract chocolate which was not there out of an automatic machine, without pennies.

"You don't look over and above cheery, young porpoise!" said Squiff.

"I ain't," confessed Sammy. "Look here, Squiff, 'tain't fair! This beastly machine won't work!"

"What are you trying to get out of it?" inquired the Australian. "Matches?"

"Matches! Who wants matches? You can't eat matches!" grunted Sammy.

"Well, the other compartments are all empty, and it's pretty nearly a miracle that there are any matches there, considering how scarce they are just now. How many times have you tried?"

"Five or six," said Sammy ruefully.

He did not add that the attempts had been made with discs of cardboard cut to the shape and size of a penny; but as he spoke one of them fell from his numbed fingers to the ground, and the keen eyes of Piet Delarey caught sight of it.

Squiff failed to see.

"Rough luck, kid!" he said. "Come along with me, and we'll see if Uncle Clegg has any chocolate!"

"Square does?" asked Sammy, blinking suspiciously up at the Removite.

"What a chiselling little beast it is!" said Squiff good-temperedly. "Yes, square does, though you don't deserve it."

Sammy trotted off with Squiff to Uncle Clegg's shop, not far from the little station. Delarey picked up the disc. He grinned, but said nothing. It would be a bit of a score against Squiff when told; and though Sammy was undoubtedly a little rat, he was a miserable little rat just then, and Piet felt some pity for him.

"Try it in the match contraption," spoke a voice behind him. And he turned, to see Fishy.

"Try what?" asked Delarey.

"That hyer sheezick you just picked up. Oh, I was on to Master Sammy's game, you bet!"

"You would be!" said Piet, contemplating the lean, hatchet face of Fishy without enthusiasm. "There's one objection to my trying young Bunter's game, though. I happen to be honest!"

"Gee-whiz! You can't swindle an automatic machine, I guess!"

"I'm not going to try!"

"Waal, you are a galoot! Let me have a go. Matches are dear just now, I calculate!"

"They always are if you get them from these machines."

"Then I calculate that's one good reason for getting them for nix when you can. Hand over, Rebel!"

"I'll hand over a thick ear if you don't clear out!" answered Delarey. He put the disc in his pocket, and followed Squiff and Sammy to Uncle Clegg's. As far as they could make out, no train on either line was likely to be along for the next half-hour. But the stationmaster, in telling them this, made it clear that he rather expected the unexpected to happen, since that was the way things were going just now.

Some of the misery had faded from the face of Sammy. He was putting down some hot drink, and there were crumbs round his peevish young mouth.

"I'll have the chocolate now, Squiff," he said, setting down his glass.

"Oh, will you, Samivel? Wasn't it understood that you had that little lot instead of the chocolate?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But I think now the choc would have done me more good," answered Sammy, making eyes at a glass case on the counter.

"Try Uncle Clegg with some of these, Sammy!" said the Rebel.

Uncle Clegg snorted. Squiff look curiously at the disc. So did Sammy. And, having looked, Sammy, whose love of truth was about as great as his major's, said:

"I don't know what the thing is. What is it, Delarey?"

"It's what young rotters try to get chocolate out of an automatic machine with!" said Piet pointedly.

"Oh! Did you get any, Delarey?" asked the innocent Sammy.

"You'll live to be hanged, you young swindler!" said Squiff. "You ought to be pommelled for imposing on my sympathy! But I'll let you off this time!"

"And am I having the choc?" whined Sammy.

"You—are—not!" said Squiff, very distinctly. "Have anything, Rebel? Not that there's much to have!"

"No, thanks, old fellow," said Delarey.

"Then I might as well have it," put in Sammy, visibly brightening.

"Have what?" asked Squiff.

"What Delarey don't want."

"Well, he doesn't seem to want anything here."

"That's all right! I can mop it all up!" said Bunter minor kindly.

At that moment his affectionate major rolled in. William George had realised at last that he was not going to stay at Greyfriars, and had made tracks for the station.

"Oh, I say! Standing treat, Squiff?" he asked, with much interest.

"I have been! I am not open to further proposals. Your minor has done me down," said Squiff.

"I don't see——"

"Shut up, Sammy! You're a disgrace to the family! I say, you fellows, you aren't going, are you?"

"We are," replied Delarey.

"Oh, really, come back! I—I could do with some of those——"

"Do with them, then! We're not filling any more Bunters!" said Squiff.

Sammy and Billy were left alone with Uncle Clegg. The elder bent forward and whispered in the younger's ear:

"Have you got your journey money, Sammy?"

"Yes; and I'm jolly well going to stick to it!"

"Don't be a young idiot! Let's have a tuck-in with it. You can travel under the seat!"

"I jolly well sha'n't! But if you like to use yours, and travel under the seat——"

"You silly young fool! I might get caught!" bellowed Bunter major, and he rolled out. It was plain to him that there was nothing doing.

Sammy, with one regretful glance at Uncle Clegg's counter, waddled after him.

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Rescue!

"HALLO, Squiff! There's somebody wants stalking!" said Delarey, as the two reached the platform again.

Tom Brown and Sylvester and the two Chinese boys were in front of the wait-

ing-room fire, talking to the station-master, who scratched his grey head till it began to look rather porcupine-like in his efforts to get at what Wun Lung and Hop Hi meant. Only Fisher T. Fish was on the snow-covered platform.

He stood in front of the automatic machine, too deeply engrossed in what he was doing to be aware of their coming. As they watched they saw him extract a box of matches and stuff it into his pocket.

"Getting ready for a corner in matches—what?" chuckled Squiff.

"Yes, and adding to the profits by getting his stock on the cheap!" replied the Rebel. "Just you watch!"

It was even so. Fish was much more ingenious than Sammy Bunter. Whatever difficulties Sammy had found in making his discs work Fish had overcome. For his were working—and they must have been made in a hurry, too.

Light-footed and silent, the two Colonial boys approached him over the snow, with never a crunch or a slip to tell him of their coming. And just as he was slipping in another disc Squiff seized him by the neck and Delarey collared him by the arms, pinning them behind him.

"Yaroop! Wharrer doing?" howled Fishy.

"Taking a rascal in charge!" replied Squiff grimly. "You're no better than a thief, Fish!"

"Oh, rats! Don't be such a jay! This ain't stealing."

"What do you call it, then?"

"There ain't any steal about it, that's a dead sure thing! There are the matches, an' anybody who can make the machine work is entitled to 'em. Waal, I'm the antelope that can do it—yep, sir! No steal about that, I guess an' calculate!"

Delarey forced open his fingers, and took a disc from his unwilling hand.

"No, it's not steel—it's lead, I think!" he said. "Sammy's hadn't weight enough, I suppose."

"Hyer, Rebel, you give me that back!"

"Not so, Fishy—not so!" said Squiff.

Snow had begun to fall again, and it whirled round them as they stood there. Fish wriggled and squirmed, but he could not free himself from the Rebel's strong grasp.

"Feel in his pockets, and collar all the coppers he's got, Squiff!" said the South African. "Might count the boxes of matches, too!"

Through the snow there came to their ears a sound which was not that of a train. No one noticed it particularly, though all heard.

Fish suddenly broke free. Delarey grabbed at him, but he dodged. Next moment, with a yell, he tumbled off the platform, and fell right across the rails.

There came a piercing shout. Something, travelling fast, loomed up through the snow. And just in time Squiff and the Rebel saw Fishy's danger.

They jumped. Neither thought of the danger to himself. It was well that both were so quick, that both went, for perhaps neither could have dragged Fishy clear in time. But between them the two just did it.

Only just! The wheel of the trolley almost brushed his foot. If it had brushed it, Fishy would have gone lame for the rest of his life.

The man on the trolley shouted furiously, and jammed on his brake. The stationmaster came rushing out. Squiff and Delarey picked up Fishy, half dead with fright, and carried him on to the platform, round by the sloping end.

"What on earth——"

"Mad young fools!"

"You silly galoots! Oh, you jays! Perhaps this will teach you to leave——"

"It's all right!" said Squiff coolly. "Glad I didn't have to tumble you off the line to keep this ass from getting a bit squashed!" he added, addressing the man on the trolley.

"I'd way enough on me to have made dead meat of the three of you!" answered the platelayer gruffly. "You know that well enough. If they hadn't acted like rare plucked ones, sir, that youngster with the nose would have lost the number of his mess. I may not be the Flying Dutchman, but I'd have smashed him!"

"Oh, really, Squiff, you don't suppose you could have shoved the trolley off, do you?" asked Billy Bunter fatuously.

"I say, you two, that was good—jolly good!" said Tom Brown.

"Me tinkee not goodee at allee," observed Wun Lung. "Me tinkee Fishee much bettel dead meatee."

But no one took much notice of Wun Lung. He was given to talking in this rather bloodthirsty way about fellows he disliked. The charitable among his schoolfellows assumed that he did not mean it. But it is by no means certain that they were right.

Fisher T. Fish was by no means grateful. Perhaps he might become so when he had more time to think over the affair; but at present he appeared to look upon it as an attempt by Squiff and Delarey—repented of just in time—to make away with him.

Five minutes later Billy Bunter found him in the lamp-room, counting his boxes of matches—and his coppers! The coppers had been forgotten in the excitement, and, after all, Fishy had got what he had tried for. But he had paid dearly for it in the fright he had had.

"Halves!" said the high-principled Bunter.

"Nope, siree!" replied Fish, with decision.

"Ow-yow! Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter. He had grabbed, and Fish had hit out. Next moment Bunter plunged out of the lamp-room with a foot in a pointed American shoe behind him.

"Fishy's himself again!" said Tom Brown.

"Yes. But it's a fair question whether he hadn't better be almost anybody else," replied the Rebel, with his half-cynical smile.

"Much bettel Fishee deadee!" said Wun Lung, with great impressiveness.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Hearty Welcome!

"HERE she comes at last!" said Squiff.

The train which was to bear the Bunters away to the delights of home and the smiles of their cheery Aunt Rebecca was also expected to land the visitors from St. Jim's.

And, sure enough, as it rolled in through the snow two cheerful and tanned faces were seen at a window, with behind them a darker face that had black, flashing eyes and white, flashing teeth.

"Noble and Dane and Koumi Rao," said Tom Brown. "I don't see Finn, though."

"Well, if he's anything like Fish, it's just as well that he has given us a miss," remarked the Rebel. "Considering all the ripping good Americans we know there are, it's a bit rough on Greyfriars that we should be saddled with such a specimen."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry. The four and Vernon-Smith had just appeared in time for the train. "Glad to see you chaps, though it's a case of 'Hail and farewell!'—for we're just off."

"Thanks, old fellow!" said Kangaroo—otherwise Harry Noble—gripping his hand. "But where's Hurree Singh? Our man, Koumi Rao here, has been wondering whether he'd get a glimpse of him."

"More than that," said Harry Wharton, with a sigh. "Poor old Inky's crocked badly, and we've had to leave him behind. He'll be jolly glad to have Koumi Rao's company; but I tell you straight, we wouldn't have left him if there had been any way of bringing him along."

"I am sorry and glad at once," said Koumi Rao, as he shook hands.

He was not much like Inky, in spite of the duskiness which marked them both out among the rest. His aquiline features had a haughtiness that Inky's lacked at ordinary times; but the chums of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had seen some such look as that upon it now and then, when he forgot that he was a schoolboy in an English school, and remembered only that he was the Nabob of Bhanipur, a prince of a long line of warrior princes, whose command had meant life or death to hundreds of thousands, and whose word must not be doubted.

And Koumi Rao did not talk like Inky. He must have lacked the great advantages that the Nabob of Bhanipur had had, for his English was neither weird nor wonderful. It only differed from that in vogue at St. Jim's generally in being less slangy and better chosen.

"Where's the American merchant?" asked Tom Brown.

"On the train somewhere," replied Kangaroo, somewhat indifferently. "We got rather fed up with him, and politely requested him——"

"With a boot!" put in Dane.

"I think that it was with three boots," said Koumi Rao, smiling.

"Right you are, Jampot! You're a oner for accuracy. We requested Buck to buck-jump elsewhere. He ain't entirely a bad sort; but he bucks too much and too often."

"How do you do, Noble?" said Billy Bunter, extending a fat and uncleanly hand.

"How do you do, Noble?" echoed Sammy, holding out one fully as fat for its size, and even more uncleanly.

"Do I know this chap?" asked Kangaroo.

"Ra-ther!" said Dane. "But we're not cashing any postal-orders, Bunter. Sorry to appear disobliging, but it ain't a habit of ours."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Greyfriars fellows, while Billy Bunter sniggered weakly.

"Has he—I mean—— Oh, hang it all, he can't have a son at his age! And yet that other—er—beautiful creature must be——"

"Only his young brother, Noble," said Wharton, chuckling. "You don't know Samivel. Yes, you do, though, really."

"Everybody who knows Billy Bunter knows Sammy," said Johnny Bull gravely. "They're so exactly alike that we none of us know which we bar most."

"Bunter major," said Nugent. "More of him to bar!"

"On the other hand," said Squiff, "Sammy is dirtier."

"I ain't! I'm as clean as you are, Field—now then!" squeaked Sammy.

If the visitors had not already known Bunter his schoolfellows would not have given him away thus. But they did. And it was really very difficult to give Bunter away to anyone; he usually made a present of himself, so to speak, before anyone else had a chance.

"Look out, young gentlemen! Train

starting in a minute!" the stationmaster warned them.

"Lemme get in!" burbled Bunter major, trying to squeeze into the compartment into which the four chums had got. As there had already been four in it, there really was not room for the Bunters.

"Yes, let us get in, you beasts!" squeaked Bunter minor.

"Just you clear off and get in somewhere else, you little sweep!" yelled Billy. "You aren't wanted with my pals!"

"Go and find 'em!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Find who?"

"Whom, Bunty—whom!" corrected Tom Brown.

"Your pals," said Johnny. "If they're on the train, it seems a pity to reb them of the pleasure of your society."

"I mean you chaps, of course!"

"Oh! Are we Bunter's pals, Wharton?"

"Not likely, Johnny!"

"Are we Bunter's pals, Bob?"

"Wouldn't be seen dead with him!"

"Are we——"

"Now then—now then!" cried the stationmaster. "This way! There's room for two here!"

And he hustled the two Bunters into the next compartment, where William George immediately incurred the just wrath of a stout lady with six children—all present—by spanking the head of Sammy.

"Hope you chaps will have the jolliest of times!" shouted Squiff, as the train steamed out. "We mean to!"

"Look after our old Inky, won't you?" yelled Wharton.

"Right-ho!" cried half a dozen voices together.

Amid volleys of good wishes the train departed, and the last those on the platform saw of the Greyfriars contingent which it carried was the cheery and ruddy face of Bob Cherry at one window and the peevish countenance of Samuel Bunter at another. Sammy's major was still in hot argument with the stout matron.

Bob waved a hand. Sammy put his thumb to his nose and spread his fingers out. Sammy Bunter was really not quite a nice-minded youngster.

The six boys from overseas turned. They had just noted the fact that the two Chinese juniors, Fish, and little Sylvester had taken no part in the farewells.

The cause of this was soon obvious.

Mr. Buck Finn, from Arizona, was that cause.

Buck stood in a straddling attitude, with arms akimbo. An expression of haughty disdain sat upon his hatchet face. It was not a countenance of quite the same type as Fishy's; there was less cunning in it—though it had its share of that—and more boldness and openness. But there was any amount of self-conceit. It was plain that Mr. Buck Finn had an exceedingly good opinion of Mr. Buck Finn.

It also appeared that Mr. Buck Finn had no very high opinion of the great Chinese nation.

He was contemplating the calm Oriental features of Wun Lung and Hop Hi with acute disfavour.

Fish grinned, for there was no love lost between the two Chinese boys and Fisher T. Fish. Sylvester looked uncomfortable. He was a very decent little chap, and he liked the brothers.

"Whar I hail from," said Buck, "we calc'late a Chink ain't a heap better than a rat. We shoot Chinks—shoot them dead, by gosh!"

"You shootee many?" inquired Wun Lung blandly.

"Lots! I've shot three before breakfast some days, by gum!"

"Then I t'inkee you bettel be hangee. Hangee Fishee, too! Hangee all Amelicans that blagee and thinkee themselves so clevel!"

"But notee Sylvestel!" said Hop Hi, extending a protecting hand over the youngest of the three American boys present.

"Sylvestel allee lightee. Sylvestel goodee Amelican. But——"

"What's this about?" demanded Kangaroo, catching Buck Finn by the back of the neck in a strong grip.

"Drop it, you galoot! I reckon that if I'd known that I'd got to pig in with Chinks I'd have stayed away, by crikey! Chinks! What the tarnation this little old island's coming to when a galoot finds Chinks acting as large as life at a British school—— Yow-ow! Wharrer doing, Noble, you jay?"

"If you don't like the company, Finn, you can go back by the next train," said Kangaroo decisively. "Remember that these chaps are our hosts. Pleased to to meet you again, Wun Lung! That your young brother—eh? Very like you, I must say."

"But bettel-looking," murmured Hop Hi, with a sly smile.

Noble released Buck Finn's neck to shake hands with the two Chinese juniors. Buck was glad to have the grip taken off; but he wrinkled up his nose, as one does who smells a bad smell, at what he saw. Buck Finn refused to consider a Chinese as anything but an inferior and an intruder.

"They ain't exactly fond of Chinks in Canada, Dane," he muttered.

"They don't bar them any more than they do the wrong sort from other countries, Finn; and you're behaving a good deal like the wrong sort of American now," replied the Canadian.

And he shook hands, and Buck snorted aloud. But he was a bit impressed when Koumi Rao, with a friendly smile, followed suit. The Indian might have a dark skin; but he was a real live Jam, which was all one with being a prince—and Buck had the true Republican love of titles.

"Waal, I swow!" grinned Fisher T. Fish. "I rather calculate you didn't get much change out of that, Finn!"

"Call yourself an American, and go to school with Chinks!" snorted Buck.

"Christopher Columbus! I'm from little old Noo York, I am——"

"New York, by gum! New York ain't America! It's a sink of aliens! The real America is whar I hail from—the rolling plains of the mighty——"

"Better roll back there, hadn't you?" observed Harry Noble, from ahead of them. "Some day, Buck, you'll run up against an American of the right sort—there are heaps of them over here now, come to help the war along. He'll listen to you for fifty seconds or thereabouts, and then he'll say: 'Swat that fly!' He'll swat—exit Buck Finn!"

"Finn seems a bit like our man Fish," remarked Tom Brown.

"I don't know enough about Fish to judge; but Finn has his points. He ain't really half a bad sort; but, though I respect Old Glory no end, as every decent chap does, it ain't the only flag that flies, and I don't want it flying in my face too often. Moreover, I won't have Finn being rude to any of your crowd—unless it's Fish. As they're both Americans, they can squabble if they want to. We haven't given the glad hand to Chinese in Australia—Squiff here knows that—but we used to put up with Huns, who are a hundred times worse!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Meeting Skinner!

"WAAL, this is a little durned old one-hoss show!" said Buck Finn, wrinkling up his nose to express his high contempt for Courtfield.

It was the day after the arrival of the St. Jim's band at Greyfriars, and Fish and Finn had walked over to Courtfield.

They were not exactly the best of pals, but circumstances had combined to force them together.

The circumstances in question were Squiff and Kangaroo. These two had entered into a compact to keep the juniors from across the Atlantic in order. Whenever Finn offended by brag, bombast, or rudeness, Noble attended to him. When Fishy was the culprit, Squiff did likewise by him. Perhaps Squiff was a little less heavy-handed than Kangaroo; but Fishy offended more often than Finn, and there were others to help Squiff. Tom Brown and Piet Delarey were not going to have their chum overworked in holiday-time.

So Fishy and Buck had come over to Courtfield together. The three Colonials of Greyfriars, with Kangaroo, Dane, the two Chinese boys, and Sylvester had all gone to the pool in the Priory Woods to skate. Koumi Rao had stayed with Hurree Singh, who was much better, but still too lame to set foot to ground, let alone to skate.

Neither Fish nor Finn wanted to skate. It was easier to talk about the extraordinary things they could do in that line than to do them. Even that did not work out very well, on account of the attentions of Squiff and Kangaroo.

"Christopher Colombus! What do you expect in a silly little old island like this hyer one?" asked Fish. "Tell you what, Finn, it was a mistake us ever coming hyer to be what these British jays call educated. Who's getting educated? I ain't! What's the use of a lot of Latin, and so on, to me? I guess they don't teach a galoot to git the best of a deal!"

"I guess you don't exactly require any teaching about that, Fish," said Buck. It was impossible to tell whether he meant it as a compliment, but Fish chose to take it as one.

"Waal, I do allow that if you want anyone to put a deal through right sharp an' slick, I'm your antelope!" he said. "Hallo! There's Skinner! What-ho, Skinney!"

The fellow he hailed was walking along the opposite pavement with two older boys. They did not look much older; but Harold Skinner, with his lean, crafty face, might have been taken for eighteen.

"Who's the galoot?" asked Finn.

"Skinner, of our Form."

"The right sort?"

"Yep—I mean nope! Waal, I swow that all depends on what you want with him. I calculate he's got his eye-teeth cut good, and if you're in a deal with him it's healthy to be on the same side of the table. But he'll dust you down even then if you give him a chance, I guess!"

"Waal, I reckon he wouldn't have no any!" said the self-confident Buck.

Skinner had not heard. Courtfield, though Buck considered it such a "one-hoss" show, was really quite busy that afternoon. People from the country villages all around were doing their Christmas shopping, and both pavements bore what Courtfield held a crowd. Skinner and his two companions walked along with cigarettes between their lips and smiles of conscious superiority on their faces. They might glance into a shop window once in a way, but they

turned away from it with shrugs and sneers. The shopping facilities of Courtfield were far below what these high and mighty young gentlemen were used to, evidently.

"Come along, Finn! Git a move on you now! I want to have a jaw with that galoot!" said Fish.

"I guess I don't!" replied Buck. "I ain't a bit struck with delight at the look of his frontispiece."

"Oh, Jerlusalem crickets, you needn't funk it! He can't swindle you here!"

"I don't reckon he can anywhar! I ain't that kinder galoot! I'll come if you want me to, Fish, but I ain't keen!"

Fish was keen. He almost dragged Buck across the street. If he and Harold Skinner had been the closest of chums he could hardly have been more eager. They were not, for each of them was too self-centred to have a real pal.

But Fishy's curiosity was hardly less than Bunter's, and it chanced that he had not heard that Skinner was staying near Courtfield for the first fortnight of the holidays.

"Hallo, Fishy!" said Skinner, recognising the American junior with something like a start. "What are you-after here?"

"Waal, just taking a squint round with my pard here!" said Fish. "Mr. Buck Finn, of Arizona, U.S.A., and St. Jim's College, England. Mr. Harold Skinner, of Greyfriars, Buck. Now I've put you acquainted, I guess!"

The two shook hands, and Skinner introduced his companions. They were cousins of his, James and Anthony Skinner, and they looked it. Their eyes were too close together, and their expressions were much like that of the open-hearted Harold. Anyone who had seen the five as they stood together in the snow-trampled Courtfield street might have been excused for thinking that it would have been hard to match four of them, at least, in all Kent that day for cunning—allowing weight for age, so to speak. And the fifth—Buck Finn—bore the signs of craft, too, though he looked at least honest compared with the other four.

Skinner explained how he came to be in the neighbourhood, and inquired after Inky—though in a manner that suggested he would not be cut to the heart if the news were bad. He asked after the rest, too.

"I guess we've cut them out for to-day," said Fish. "They're a heap too high an' mighty in their notions for plain Amurrican citizens like Buck, hyer, and me!"

"Chinks!" said Buck Finn, with extreme disgust. "Durned if I ever calculated to have to set myself down at the same table with Chinks! It gits my goat, I tell you, Mr. Skinner!"

"Can't stand Wun Lung myself," said Skinner. "He's a cunning little heathen. But he's no worse than those Indian johnnies. You brought one along with you, didn't you, Finn? Glad I'm not there! One of 'em's more than enough for me!"

"Great snakes! They're princes!" gasped Buck.

"Yep, I reckon that counts some, Skinney!" said Fish. "I don't cotton to either of them much myself; but, after all, they're princes."

"Beastly niggers!" snapped Skinner, who had come into collision with Inky only a couple of days before the end of the term, and was still galled by the recollection of what had happened to him. "Do you reckon these mouldy Jams and things are princes, you two?"

"Not if they're mouldy, certainly!" said Mr. Anthony.

"Jam or marmalade, it's all the same to me," said Mr. James. "I don't believe in niggers being allowed to put on frills!"

"Waal, they ain't so bad as Chinks!" growled Buck Finn. "And, come to that, I ain't sure that I don't bar Australians a heap more than Chinks even!"

"Squiff?" asked Skinner, with raised eyebrows.

"Nope—Kangaroo!" replied Fishy.

"Oh, that chap Noble—I see! You don't cotton to him, Finn?"

"I do not, siree! He's too frésh, Noble is! So is the galoot you call Squiff. He ain't ventured to handle me yet, but he's handled my pard Fish here—some!"

Skinner grinned. He understood. These two had made themselves more or less objectionable, and Squiff and Kangaroo had taken them in hand. It tickled Skinner, but for the moment he saw nothing in it that was likely to be profitable to him.

"Let's go and have a game of pool, Harold," suggested Mr. Anthony Skinner. "You chaps on? The Golden Lion isn't so dusty for a hole like this. I wouldn't be seen in any of the other places, but we don't particularly bar the Lion, do we, Jimmy?"

"No; though, you know, Tony, a lion's a thing that's best barred," replied Mr. James Skinner. They all laughed at that, as a joke; but it may have been one of those true words spoken in jest. On the whole, the Golden Lion, and all places of its kind, would have been better barred by the three Skinners.

As they passed into the hotel Fishy caught Harold Skinner by the sleeve.

"I calculate you don't often see a galoot of that sort at Courtfield, Skinney," he said.

"Where? Oh, I twig! No, you don't; though there have been some of them round this way before. Wonder what that particular black rascal is after?"

A rascal the man might be. Skinner should have been something of a judge of rascals. But black he was not, though his face was dark. They could see that he was a Hindu.

The face at the window! (*See Chapter 20.*)

Skinner was very thoughtful after that. The man passed on without glancing at them. He wore European costume, and there was nothing about him to attract particular notice except his dusky skin.

But he seemed to have attracted Harold Skinner's notice, and to have given him something to think about. The game of pool was not a great success, for Skinner was very absent-minded, and Buck Finn refused to take a cue.

Skinner still seemed to be deep in thought when they parted. At the last moment he drew Fishy aside, and said:

"Don't forget to let the fellows hear about that Indian johnny!"

"Waal, I swow! What's the wheeze?" asked Fishy.

"Oh, nothing! I only thought that it might make our beloved Inky enjoy his Christmas more if he knew that there was a chap of his own colour in the neighbourhood, that's all!"

But Fisher T. Fish knew that Skinner was not at all likely to be concerned about the matter for any such reason as that. Moreover, he was well aware of circumstances which might make the news anything but pleasant to Inky—which was much nearer supplying a motive for Harold Skinner's reminder.

There might be more in it than that, though. Fishy was very thoughtful on the way back, and Buck Finn did not find him at all cheery company.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
In the Dusk!

"COOEE-EE!"

The call came through the dusk to the ears of the two American juniors as they drew near to Greyfriars.

"Gee-whiz! Those durned Cornstalks somewhar near!" observed Buck Finn morosely.

The kind attentions of Noble did not please Buck. At St. Jim's the two, being in different Forms, came very little into contact with one another. Moreover, at

St. Jim's Finn had for a long time past behaved better than he was doing now. Not since the time when he had been put into his place by "Jackeymo" Contarini had he broken out badly—until now.

It might be disgust at having to associate with "Chinks" now, and it might be something quite different. It seemed at least possible that Buck's lapse was due to his being away from the home stable, so to speak, and feeling that he had licence to kick up his heels.

Only, luckily for Buck, Harry Noble did not see things in the same light. There is no more hospitable country in the world than Australia, and Noble was a true Australian. As host or guest, he might be counted upon to maintain a high standard. He might also be counted upon to see that others over whom he had authority maintained it—so far as their natures would let them. And, just as Dr. Locke had nominated Squiff head of the Greyfriars band, so Dr. Holmes had given unto Kangaroo the leadership among the St. Jim's contingent.

"Cooee!" came the call again, and now figures loomed up vaguely through the encircling gloom, and the hum of cheery voices was heard.

"Oh, great snakes, we're hyer!" snapped Buck. "What air you making all that tarnation row about?"

"You don't seem to have come back in a very pleasant temper, Finn!" remarked Clifton Dane.

The fellows who had just come from skating on the pool seemed in the highest of spirits. They were as warm as toast, ruddy with exercise, and hungry as hunters. The bleak air which nipped the noses of Fishy and Finn was no more than pleasantly cool to them. Little Sylvester, with an arm through one of Wun Lung's and another through one of Hop Hi's, chattered away merrily.

Buck Finn darted at the small fag a resentful glare. He had learned that Sylvester was an American, and chose to regard him as a renegade. What did the kid mean by chumming up with Chinks?

Koumi Rao was with the rest. He had come along to the pool late in the afternoon, when Inky had insisted that it would do him good to get a breath of fresh air, and had soon shown the others that he had not stayed away at first through any lack of ability in the skating line. No one was charitable enough to doubt that something of that sort had kept away the two bragging transatlantic citizens.

"And how do you like Courtfield, Finn?" asked the Jam of Bundelpore courteously.

"Ugh! A regular one-hoss show!" growled Buck.

"Well, anyway, we didn't tell you to the contrary before you went," said Piet Delarey.

"Holy smoke! You might have warned a galoot, though!"

"We saw one of our chaps there," remarked Fish.

"Who was that?" asked Tom Brown.

"Skinney."

"Oh!" replied Tom.

He did not want to know any more. If the new term came along without Harold Skinner, the Greyfriars Remove generally would not have been inconsolable.

"Saw a pard of yours, too, Jam," said Fish, with easy familiarity.

He could not be quite so easily familiar as Noble and Dane, who usually addressed Koumi Rao as "Jampot." This particular Indian princeling looked to Fishy a more fiery sort of person than the good-tempered Inky.

"Eh? I do not understand you, Fish," returned Koumi Rao.

"He means another durned nig—Hindu, that is!" growled Buck.

The Jam took Finn by the ear.

"There is a distinction between a Hindu and a negro that everyone but thick-headed Americans understands perfectly, my friend," he said, slowly and clearly. "I do not think that you are really thick-headed, and I can only infer that you mean to be rude. Perhaps this will teach you better!"

"Ow—yow! That hurts!" howled Buck. "Chuck it, you jay! I didn't mean to be rude any. It was just a slip of the tongue!"

"It is well that the tongue slips not," replied Koumi Rao coolly. "I think that the man you saw, even if from my country—and it would seem that there is in the minds of Americans much confusion as to such things—is not likely to be a friend of mine. The land of Hind is a wide land, and there be many in it who have never heard of Bundelpore, even as there be many in Bundelpore who have no knowledge of the many States which lie under the British Raj, from the mighty Himalayas to Cape Comorin. A Hindu? Well, there are many millions of Hindus, of many a caste and creed and race."

He spoke as if his mind was back in his own land, as though he saw again the great mountains and the dusty plains, jungle and river, towering minaret and mud-walled village. Little Sylvester, who had known what home-sickness meant, thought he sounded a bit like that. And, somehow, the thoughts of the two Chinese boys flew to far different scenes—junk-crowded rivers and pagodas and fields of tea. And Harry Noble and Squiff had momentary visions of city streets and wide runs, of mobs of thousands of sheep, of packed stands on great cricket-grounds, of cattle-branding and high-loaded wool drays; of Melbourne and Sydney, and the country that lies wide to the back of both. And Clifton Dane saw in his mind's eye the "far-flung fenceless prairie," the long, straight lines of rail, huge grain elevators, vast stretches of ripening wheat.

Perhaps even Buck Finn and Fisher T. Fish were reminded of their homeland, as the others of theirs. Sylvester was, anyway.

And all because of a cadence ever so little sad in a speech made by a fellow who held another's ear between his slim, strong fingers even as he spoke. It seemed but a small thing to account for it. But which of us who has ever left home far behind him does not know how the little things speak to him of it!

It was Dane who broke the short silence.

"Koumi, old chap," he said, "he might be an enemy."

All St. Jim's knew that Koumi Rao had enemies of his own kin, even as had Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. It is no uncommon thing in India, where the laws of succession are less simple than here, and passions are hot and intrigue is rife.

The Jam released Buck's ear. His chest went out ever so slightly, and his chin lifted as he said, without a trace of brag:

"My enemies I know how to meet, O friend of mine!"

That was all. Yet the words thrilled most of them, even as his words a moment or two before had moved them. Afterwards some of them agreed that from that very moment could be dated the feeling of mystery, of something hostile in the air, which all were soon to feel.

But they were jolly enough at tea-time. Mr. Prout was with them, and Koumi Rao listened to his stories of wonders done in the Rockies with the rifle as if he quite enjoyed them. The Nimrod of Greyfriars had never encountered a more polite auditor. But Buck Finn did not impress the master of the Fifth nearly so favourably. Perhaps Buck knew the Rockies too well to imagine that Mr. Prout could tell him anything interesting about them. Anyway, he turned his back rudely, and though Kangaroo kicked him under the table the rebuke was in vain.

"Those two confounded Americans are the fly in the ointment," said Kangaroo to Squiff, after tea. "Look at 'em now, hatching plots together, the bounders!"

"Well, we don't know that they are hatching plots, old scout!" said Squiff charitably. "What tickles me about them is that they don't really cotton to one another a little bit. Buck thinks Fishy a would-be-smart townie, and Fishy considers Buck wild and woolly. But they've joined in a kind of offensive alliance because they're both Americans, and not the right sort."

"If they were the right sort they'd be more welcome than the flowers in May!" growled Kangaroo. "We're looking to America now no end. But who could feel brotherly to chaps like that? Finn's bad enough; but, if you don't mind plain talk, Squiff, your chap Fish is the giddy limit!"

"May help you to see some good in Finn, then, old chap, for I don't mind telling you that Fishy is being quite tolerably decent at present—for Fishy. He hasn't tried on a deal with you, has he?"

"He hadn't better, I reckon. I may forget he's Greyfriars, and swipe him if he does!"

"You have my forgiveness in advance, Kangaroo," replied Squiff. "And you're sure to need it. He will!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
A Plot Against China!

AS it chanced, however, the mind of Fisher T. Fish was not bent upon a deal just then.

They were plotting, those two. Kangaroo had guessed aright.

The plot was of Buck Finn's inception, but Fishy fell in with it readily.

Fishy really had no very special reason for objecting to Wun Lung and his minor. He saw little of Hop Hi; and Wun Lung did not bar Fishy more than—or even quite as much as—some fellows in the Remove did.

But it was easy for Buck to persuade his compatriot that the presence of the Chinese boys was an insult to true-born Americans. Fishy quite saw that it was nothing less than wicked that Wun Lung, rolling in money as he was, should so resolutely abstain from letting himself get the "dirty end of the stick" in a deal—should, in fact, decline altogether to enter into deals with him.

If only for this, Wun Lung must be a wrong 'un. His yellow skin, which aroused Buck's ire—Buck called it "getting his goat," but that was what he meant—did not matter so much to Fish. But he assented, as a general principle, to Buck's suggestion that the two Chinks ought to be put through it.

The juniors, home-birds and visitors alike, were quartered in the Remove dormitory. Last night had been quite peaceful. Everyone had been tired, and most of them had been on their good behaviour.

But Buck calculated that to-night would hardly be as peaceful. He laid before Fishy the plan he had concocted, and Fishy "guessed it would do."

Then they joined the cheery group

round the fire for a while, and joined in the talk, with their usual tendency to dominate it, if only they might be allowed. But Kangaroo and Dane and Koumi Rao all sat upon Buck whenever he spreadeagled too much, and there were more than three to check Fishy.

By-and-by they slunk off separately.

They met in No. 14, the study which Fish shared with Squiff and Johnny Bull in term. But now Squiff had shifted for the nonce into No. 2, Tom Brown's study, where Kangaroo was also installed. Dane had joined Piet Delarey in No. 12. In the absence of Wharton and Nugent, Inky had bagged No. 1 to share with Koumi Rao. Hop Hi had joined his brother in No. 13; and Sylvester shared with them, much to the disgust of his two fellow-Americans. Sylvester was the son of a millionaire, and Fishy would have cherished him no end for that reason alone. Buck considered that he wronged his race by chumming with Chinks.

Naturally, at a time like this, study-life meant less than in term. But even now there were certain advantages in having a den of one's own to retire to when one got tired of the crowd, or of "Prouty," who showed a disposition to mix with the crowd to an extent they had scarcely expected. And fires were laid ready, though there were strict injunctions not to waste fuel.

Fish and Finn felt the advantage of privacy now.

They locked the door to start with. Then the visitor said:

"I guess it's up to you to git the stuff, Fishy! You know where the articles are kept, I calculate, an' I'm a stranger hyer."

"Jerusalem crickets! Just you get it out of your think-box that I'm taking all the risk!" answered Fish, in haste.

"Waal——"

"Rats! When I go to get the goods you come along, old pard—that's what I calculate."

"Waal, that's fair enough, too," replied Buck, who, with all his faults, had courage far in excess of Fishy's.

"What shall we want?"

"Oh, holy smoke, any durned thing that will mix up an' ain't nice!"

"Let's trot round the studies and see what we can collect—eh, pardner?" suggested Fish.

Buck assented, and they started on their foraging expedition.

The result was not too bad, from their point of view.

Ink in plenty was to be had, of course. Jars of ink do not necessarily finish with the end of term, and nobody bothers about putting them away.

They found a couple of sardine-tins, empty, except for some very evil-smelling oil, in one cupboard—it might be unkind to say whose. But quite certainly neither Peter Todd nor Tom Dutton had been guilty of leaving such things about, and Alonzo had been away for the greater part of the term.

They found gum and paste and liquid glue—fag-ends of bottles, but for their purpose the fustier it was the better it was. They found some brown boot-polish and some black in the study of a Sixth Form dandy, to which one of Fishy's bunch of keys obtained the entry.

For soot they had only to stick a hand up their own chimney. It was Fishy's hand that went up—Buck saw to that. Fishy was more cunning, but Buck was the bolder, and had soon become the master spirit.

Still Buck was not satisfied.

"It ain't so dusty," he said grudgingly. "Dusty," by the way, was one of the last adjectives anyone could have thought of applying to the horrible mess. "But it ain't complete yet, I calculate. Say, Fishy, can't you think of something with more snap in it, you galoot?"

"Waal, thar's calcium carbide and there's asafœtida; but I guess they're out of stock just now," replied Fishy, grinning and shivering at the same time.

They were working without a fire.

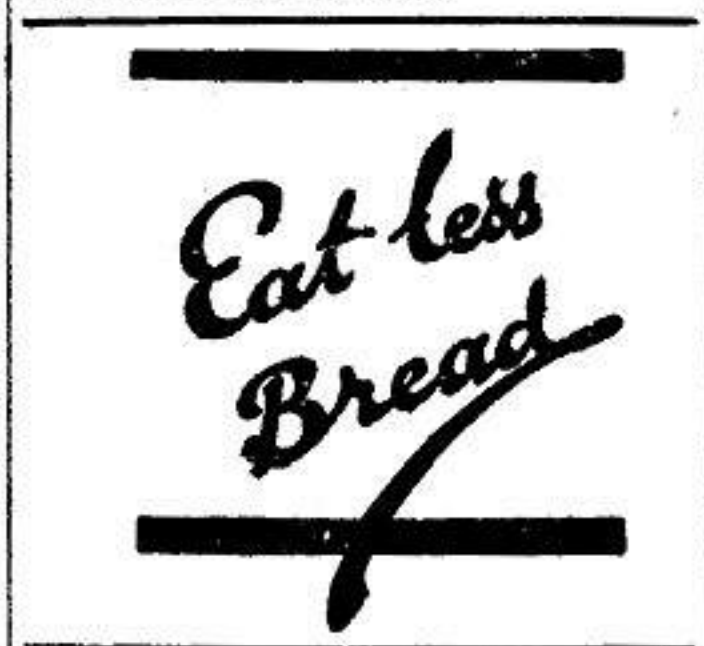
"Pepper—cayenne——"

"Gee-whiz! Don't go forgetting that we've got to sleep in the dorm after it, Buck! We don't want pepper in ours, thank you, siree! Say, let's go next door, and see if we can dig out any of Wun Lung's Chinese muck. He gets preserved ginger and that kinder truck, you know. It's tasty by itself; but it ain't going to be too nice with all this mix-up, I calculate!"

They moved to Study No. 13. It was dark, and seemed untenanted when they entered. Certainly neither of them had any suspicion that anyone was concealed there.

Having lighted up, they made their search, discussing their plan of operations meanwhile. They found some ginger, as well as other stuff—some of it strange to them. And they collared it all, partly to eke out the mess and partly because, having embarked upon a buccaneering career, they did not know where to stop.

Then they put out the light and retreated. Scarcely had the door closed behind them when a short, slim figure stole from under the table.



Hop Hi waited a moment, listening intently. The two marauders had gone back to No. 14, and were at work again.

The little Chince opened the door noiselessly, and stole out without a sound. Down the stairs he went with cat-like tread. At the foot he met Sylvester.

"Why, you haven't hidden, you bounder!" cried the American youngster.

He and Hop Hi had been playing a little game of their own. Probably they did not call it "hide and seek"—that would have been too childish—but that was what it really was. It was also a test of nerve, for it had been agreed that anywhere among the dark studies and dormitories was a fair place for hiding.

"Softlee, Sylvestel—softlee!" cautioned Hop Hi. "Lottels about—badee lottels! Must tellee my blothel. Wun Lung knowee how to do lottels downee!"

"Tell me first, old chap!" said Sylvester eagerly.

And Hop Hi overcame his Oriental love of secrecy, his rooted conviction that no Western was in it with the East when craft was needed, and told Sylvester all about it.

"The beasts!" said the little chap indignantly. "And just because you two are Chinese—as if it mattered! You're real good sorts, and those two are a disgrace to their country!"

"Velly disgraceful—velly badee lottels!" said Hop Hi, shaking his head till his pigtail wagged like a pendulum. "Now me goee tellee Wun Lung. Me t'inkee Wun Lung makee lottels wish they ne-el been boln!"

"Tell the other chaps, too. Squiff will back you up, and those St. Jim's fellows are rippers—especially Koumi Rao! I've had a long yarn with him, and he talked to me as if I was a man. He didn't once make me feel I was a mere kid. But the others don't, either—only Finn and Fish, who ought to be most decent to me. Fish would suck up if I'd let him, but that's only because I've got money."

"Me tellee Wun Lung, and see what he sayee. No goodee open mouthee too widee," replied the astute Hop Hi.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Chez Bunter!

"I CAN'T stand it any longer! I'm completely fed up—and, oh dear, I am so blessed empty!" groaned William George Bunter.

This sounds contradictory, but was not really so. The Owl's fed-upness was mental. His emptiness—but he was not really quite void within—was physical.

He spoke to no one in particular—in fact, to no one at all. There was no one to speak to. William George was in solitary confinement. He had endured his Aunt Rebecca with what patience he might for the space of over twenty-four hours, and then the bitterness of his soul had vented itself in a flood of wild words, and Aunt Rebbecca had put down her foot, and Mr. Samuel Bunter had operated with a cane, and William George had been sent to repent in a cold and cheerless bed-room.

Aunt Rebecca really was a very unpleasant person. But perhaps her elder nephew might have endured her better if he had only realised in the very least degree what an extremely unpleasant person he himself was!

But he did not.

He had been told so often enough, of course. But the criticisms of the Greyfriars fellows rolled off Bunter's hide like water off the well-oiled back of a duck. He thought that they were jealous of his superior beauty, nobility, and general ability.

He himself had come home feeling jealous of Sammy, who had somehow in earlier days managed to find a soft spot in the stony heart of Aunt Rebecca. But no cause for any feeling of that sort remained now.

Sammy had fallen from favour. Miss Bunter did not even now perceive how vastly superior William George was to Samuel Tuckless. She classed them together as "fat, greedy, uncleanly, unprincipled, and impolite brats." Miss Bunter, though not nice, was a lady possessing judgment, it appears.

But Sammy was not a fellow-captive. He had escaped that by keeping a bridle on his tongue. He had had his neck scrubbed till it felt raw, and still he had not told the scrubber, his kind aunt, what he thought of her. Billy had not had his neck scrubbed—though he needed it—but he had been forced to speak out—simply forced to! That was his native nobility of character and strong principles of freedom, of course. Sammy hadn't anything of the sort to boast of, the little worm!

It was a pity Sammy had not talked back, though. Even the company of Sammy would have been preferable to this solitude.

"Oooooh! Ain't it beastly cold! I shall die of a chill, and then they'll be sorry!

"I don't believe they'd care, though. It's awful! Fancy a man deserting his own son for a measly sister, and lamming into him with a cane, too! I didn't

know the pater could whack like that. But, of course, she made him worse—staying there to see me put through it, and gloating all the time. She is the beastliest old geeser I ever came across!"

Bunter rolled disconsolately to the window and gazed out.

The prospect was not cheering. Snow may be all right in the country, but it does not go well with the town. The house of the Bunter family was in a London suburb. It was really not at all an unpleasant suburb, but just now it seemed to William George the very abomination of desolation.

He fairly yearned towards Greyfriars.

Wild thoughts came into his heated brain.

He had never heard of a fellow running away from home—except to sea. And for the sea Billy Bunter had no desire. Certainly he had never heard of anyone running away from home to school!

Never mind that. Why should he not be original?

There they were at Greyfriars—Squiff and the rest of them—enjoying themselves under the mild rule of Mr. Prout, while he languished at home, oppressed by the awful tyranny of Aunt Rebecca. It was too much!

But to get to Greyfriars he must have money. And he had not a solitary copper!

Sammy had money. In spite of the snares of the flesh, Sammy saved. Perhaps it was because it was more difficult to keep tuck to oneself in the Second than it was in the Remove—and Sammy hated whacking out.

Sammy had a money-box somewhere. But where?

Billy began a search. There were two beds in his prison, and one of them was Sammy's.

Probably the box was somewhere in the room. It was just like Sammy's mean, untrustful disposition not to have told his brother where he kept it. That was the sort of thing which hurt William George, and made him feel at times very doubtful whether Sammy would come to any good end.

It was not in the cupboard. It was not in the chest of drawers. It was not under Sammy's mattress. As the box was about the shape and size of a biggish Noah's Ark, it would have been rather uncomfortable to sleep upon. But Sammy was artful.

It was not under Sammy's bed. There was no loose board, either. Misers hid things under loose boards sometimes, Billy Bunter knew. He had come to the painful conclusion that his young brother was a miser. That was not a nice sort of thing to have in the family, and it was quite time something drastic was done to cure Sammy. Confiscation seemed about the most drastic course, and Billy had resolved, at any cost to his own tender feelings, to practise it.

But to do that he must find the money-box. And at present his search had been in vain.

Eureka!

There was a loose board under his own bed!

What an artful young beast Sammy was! But he had overreached himself this time. How many times had he been told that that half of the room was his major's territory, and that he must not trespass? If he had hidden his money-box there it was as good as giving it to William George.

And he had! Billy Bunter thrust a fat arm into the cavity beneath the board and pulled out the treasure!

It chinked very pleasantly, and it felt heavy.

While the Owl gloated over it there came a kick at the door, and a peevish voice squeaked:

"Lemme me in, Billy! I want to speak to you!"

"I can't let you in. I'm a wicked prisoner, and if you came near me your morals might suffer!" replied William George, with laboured sarcasm.

"Rats! I haven't got any—I mean, that's all rot! Look here, you bounder, what are you chinking in there?"

The prisoner held his breath for a moment, and clasped the money-box tightly to his ample chest.

"My money, of course," he replied, after a brief pause.

"Tell us another! You're stony—you always are!"

"Well, it ain't your money, anyway!"

"I ain't so jolly sure about that! Look here, Billy, you rotten swindler, have you got my money-box?"

"Shut up, you little idiot! You'll have somebody hear you!"

"I don't care! I don't care if everybody hears! If you're stealing my oof, I'll jolly well make the whole house hear!"

"Well, I'm not! Will that satisfy you?"

"No; not unless you let me in to see!"

"Oh, really! I'm not going to have you in here. I was told that I was to meditate on my sins. How can I meditate on my sins properly with a fat little beast like you mewing and whining and—and crowing round me?"

"I'd jolly well meditate on my sins when everyone else had gone to a matinee, you bet!" said Sammy scornfully. "I'd see 'em all jolly well hanged first!"

"Have they all gone out, Sammy? I say, what is there for tea?"

"Bread-and-margarine! Not even any jam! Aunt Rebecca is the giddy limit! The old geeser washed my neck!"

"Well, it wanted it—it always does!"

"Rats! She said she daren't tackle yours; it was so dirty she was afraid of catching something!"

"I wish she would catch something! I wish she'd never been born! Are you sure they're all out, Sammy?"

"Duffer! They'd have been on to me like a thousand of bricks for talking to you before now if they'd been at home, wouldn't they?"

Billy carefully hid the money-box away in his own school-chest, and unlocked the door.

Sammy cast a suspicious glance around.

"Show me that tin you were chinking, or I sha'n't believe you!" he said peremptorily.

"I don't care whether you believe me or not, you fat young fool! As a matter of fact, it wasn't really tin; it was these keys."

And as a proof of his perfect truthfulness William George produced a bunch of keys.

"That's a lie! It didn't sound like keys! It sounded like money in a money-box!"

"Well, I haven't got a money-box. Perhaps you have, though?"

"No, I haven't. What would be the good of one to me? I never have any chink!" replied Sammy gloomily. Sammy had no more regard for the strict truth than had William George.

"Yes, you have! I'm jolly sure you have! Look here, Sammy, lend me some tin!"

"Whaffor?"

The Owl put his mouth close to his young brother's right ear—rather cleaner than usual, thanks to the tyrant aunt—and whispered hollowly:

"I'm going to run away!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Flight!

"RATS! You haven't got the pluck!" replied Sammy, with a sniff.

"Oh, haven't I! We'll see about that! I suppose they'll be sorry then!"

"No, I don't think so," said Sammy thoughtfully. "Aunt Rebecca said it was a pity you didn't pop off in that illness you had when you were a kid—you might have had a chance of going to heaven then; she seems to think that's all up the spout now. And the pater said you got fatter and lazier and more useless every time you came home. I'll admit the mater put in a word for you, but she couldn't really deny anything. No, I don't think they'll be sorry. I think the pater and Aunt Rebecca will be jolly glad, and I don't see why the mater should really mind."

"You're an unfeeling little beast!" snapped the Owl.

"I wish I was! When the pater gets fairly down to it I should like to be the unfeelingest chap that ever walked. Tell you what, Billy. I'll run away, too. I'm sick of this. But not if you're going to enlist—I couldn't stand that."

"It's likely I'd have a silly, fat little ass like you trailing after me, ain't it?"

"If you go, I go—that's straight! I'll hang about every blessed minute, and if you try to sneak out, I'll yell. You'll catch it then!"

Sammy did not seem to be the kind of confidant one really needed. He certainly was not the kind of companion Billy wanted. Bunter major had a notion that Greyfriars did not much admire Bunter minor, and he did not want to spoil his own welcome by taking Sammy along.

That suspicious youth kept casting uneasy glances towards his brother's bed. He dared not search openly, lest he should give himself away; but he would have made quite a striking illustration for the text, "Where the treasure is, there the heart is also." Metaphorically, Sammy's heart may be said to have been in the wrong place at that moment, however; for the treasure was not under his brother's bed, as he imagined it to be.

"You clear out, Sammy! I don't want you here!"

"Why don't you clear out? You must be a mug to stay here, now they have gone. There's a fire in the dining-room; I suppose that's because they couldn't take it with them, and thought they might want it when they got back. They ain't having bread-and-margarine for tea, you bet!"

"I'll come in a minute, old chap!" said William George, with a sudden gush of brotherly affection.

"Yah! Now I know very well you are trying to have me! Look here, I hid my money-box under your bed. I ain't going to leave it there if it is there—don't you think it! I'll find a new place. But I don't believe it is there! I believe you've got it, you sneak-thief!"

"Some day, Sammy, you will be sorry for saying that," said William George solemnly.

"Bet you I sha'n't! If you haven't meddled with it that's only because you couldn't find it; and if you have, I wouldn't care if you were gnawed to death by tigers—there! It isn't here! You've got it, you fat, ugly spoofer! Yah! You're sitting on it! I know your tricks!"

Billy Bunter was, in a sense, sitting on the money-box, for he had planted his solid person down upon the lid of the chest which held it.

"You're a disgraceful little rotter,

Sammy!" he said virtuously. "I feel ashamed to have a brother so suspicious. But I'm ashamed of my whole family, come to that, and I'm clearing out."

"Not with my chink, you're not, you thief!"

"You denied having a money-box, or any money. Besides, it has always been understood that everything in this half of the room is mine. If I liked I could stop you from looking under my bed. But I've got more liberal notions than you have."

"I don't care about your rotten, silly notions, or whether they're Liberal or Conservative! You've got my money-box—that's what I'm talking about!"

"I'm going!" said Bunter major. But he did not arise. He wanted Sammy out of the room first.

"Well, go—if you've got the pluck!" sneered Bunter minor. "I sha'n't miss you—as long as my money-box don't go with you!"

William George arose, but only to drop on his hands and knees, and drag out of the chest a huge sweater. With it, muffled in its folds, he brought the object of debate.

"Search, if you can't take my word!" he said, with great dignity.

"Well, I can't! Nobody does, ever! Oh, you rotter! You've got it there!"

"Samuel!"

It sounded exactly like the voice of Bunter pere, speaking from downstairs, and Sammy was completely taken in.

"Yes, father?" he whined. To Billy he hissed: "They've come back! But you're not going to have my money-box, you beast!"

"Come here at once!" sounded the voice.

Sammy went reluctantly.

William George tore off his coat, slipped on the sweater over his waistcoat, thrust the money-box up under it—where it made a big bulge above a larger and more rounded bulge—drew on the coat again, and hurried downstairs.

He was putting on his greatcoat in the hall, when Sammy, having sought his father in vain, suddenly remembered his brother's ventriloquial talent.

"Here, I know now! That was you! Look here, if you're going, I'm coming, too! You've got my oof—I know you have!"

Billy Bunter enwreathed his fat neck in a wrap, put his cap on his head with an air of gloomy resolution, and vanished through the hall door.

But the vanishing trick was not good enough for Sammy. With his overcoat over one arm and his cap all awry, he bolted out, and followed.

Billy turned his back upon the station, which was quite close.

"He's making for the trams!" muttered Sammy, and held on the trail.

They reached the main street, through which the trams ran, Sammy about fifty yards in the rear. A car came along, going townwards. Billy boarded it. Sammy ran as if for his life, his fat little legs fairly twinkling, and grasped the rail just as the car began to move.

"He's up top!" he gasped. "He'll be surprised when he sees me, I bet!"

William George was surprised. But he was also somewhat relieved. For he was engaged in rather a heated argument with a conductress who did not appear to consider that the honour and glory of carrying him would pay for the wear and tear of the tram.

"Fork out, young Daniel Lambert!" she said. William George thought that it would be better if the tramway company employed more refined young women.

"I—I—— Oh, in a minute or two!" he said peevishly. "Go down and collect the fares inside first, can't you?"

There was no one else on top, and he hoped to be able to milk the money-box, so to speak, before she returned.

"Think I'm taking orders from you, fatty? Blessed likely—I don't think! Shell out now!"

"I—I—really, my dear——"

"None of that, now! It's against the rules for me to be made love to by prize pigs, and what's more, I don't like it!"

"I—— The fact is that I've got money, only I can't get at it!" burbled Bunter.

"Oh, you ain't so fat as all that comes to! You could see the toes of your boots, anyway, if you cricked your neck a bit. I dessay your little breeches are a tightish fit, but you could get the chink out of the pockets all right—if there was any there!"

Sammy, grinning like a Chinese image, heard all this from his post at the top of the steps. Now his brother looked round, and saw him.

"Oh, there you are, Sammy!" he said. "Pay this very rude young person threepence for me. That's the fare to Victoria."

"You bet!" said Sammy disagreeably.

"Come on! I can't waste any more time over you two. My word, I wonder what them they drowned was like!" snapped the conductress.

Neither of the Bunters quite understood her at the moment. Afterwards, thinking it over, both came to the conclusion that she intended a reflection by no means flattering to their personal appearance.

Her autocratic way had its effect upon Sammy. Scarcely knowing what he did, he parted with a sixpence, and found himself a partner in his brother's adventure—at least, as far as Victoria.

The girl went down, smiling broadly, and Sammy sidled up to his brother.

"Look here, Billy, pax!" he said.

"I am perfectly willing to be friendly, Sammy, if you will only act in a brotherly way!" replied William George, in icy tones. Icy tones were easy, for it was very cold on top of the tram.

"I don't call it brotherly to steal a fellow's money-box!" sniffed Sammy, struggling into his coat, and tying a muffler from its pocket round his fat young neck.

"Oh, really, I don't see how you can have done that, because I have no money-box. But if you have I forgive you, though that wasn't what I was talking about!" replied William George magnanimously.

"I know you haven't got a money-box! You blue all your chink on grub, you fat beast!" howled Sammy. "I'm talking about you boning mine, and you know it!"

"Nothing of the sort! You distinctly told me that you hadn't got one. How could I steal from you what you haven't got?"

"You'd swear black was white if it suited you, Billy, you rotter! Look here, we're both liars! Everyone knows you are, and I'm sure they tell me often enough in the Second that I am—the young beasts! But let's tell the truth for once. There isn't anybody else to hear, so we sha'n't be giving anything away. You're going to Greyfriars, ain't you?"

"I have not said so."

"Well, if you deny it, I jolly well sha'n't believe you! And I don't blame you; it can't be worse there than it is at home. I say, you know, I'll come with you!"

"But who is going to pay your fare?"

"Why, you rotter, you've got my blessed money-box!"

"I don't admit it! How much is there in it, Sammy?"

"Jolly near two quid—I've been saving up for ever so long."

"Then I'll let you come. You know the way to open the thing. Only, mind you, you've got to get the half-ticket; I'm not going to ask for one for you!"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Adventurous Brothers!

"NOW, you hand over that money-box, Billy!" said Sammy Bunter, as he and his brother neared Victoria on the top of the tram.

"Grooogh! Ain't it cold, Sammy?" was the answer he got.

"I shouldn't think it can be under your sweater there."

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"My money-box, fathead!" howled Sammy, quite out of patience. He had not much of that commodity at the best of times.

"Is that the one you said you hadn't got, or some other one?"

"It's the one you're nursing against your great fat sto——"

"Don't be so vulgar, Sammy! What would the conductress say if she heard you?"

"I should think she'd say you were a rotten thief! I'll ask her, if you like."

But Billy Bunter did not really yearn for the opinion of the lady ticket-dispenser. He considered her no lady, and not likely to be an unbiassed judge of his conduct.

The tram stopped near the clock-tower at the top of Vauxhall Bridge Road. Billy and Sammy made haste to descend, the money-box still hugged to the breast of the elder brother. In such haste were they that Sammy tumbled forward against his brother's back, sending him forward in his turn into the back of a stout lady of the charwoman persuasion who was descending from inside the tram.

"Drat the boy, stickin' of his bones into me like that!" she snapped. And she turned, the more effectually to drat Bunter, perhaps.

Her expression changed to one of amazement.

"Lawks-a-mussy!" she gasped. "It couldn't 'ave bin 'is bones, neither! It's a long time since anybody ever see anythink of them, I'll lay a bob! An', lordy, if there ain't another like 'im jest behind! Save us!"

"It's all right, mum," said the conductress, grinning in what Bunter considered a very unladylike way. "They're 'uman beings, an' they've paid their fares, so I had to let them stay on. They ought to be made to pay double; but I haven't got any instructions to charge by weight."

"If you had, she'd have to pay double, too," said William George. "I bet she weighs more than I do!"

"Drat your impereence, you narsty young elephant!" snorted the char-lady, flourishing her gamp.

"You shouldn't be rude to ladies," said the conductress. "If you have the misfortune to be fat enough for a show, that's no excuse for bad manners!"

"You—— I—I'll report you to——"

"Come along, Billy, and don't make a silly ass of yourself—I mean a bigger one than you are already, of course!" broke in Samuel, seizing his brother by the arm.

"The little 'un's got a bit more sense than the big 'un," remarked a smiling man in khaki.

"Perhaps his fat hasn't choked his brains so much yet," replied the conductress.

William George, purple with anger, suffered Sammy to lead him away.

"Tell you what, you'd better hand me over the chink, and let me run this show," said Sammy importantly. "Of course, you'll have to pay me back when you get your next term's pocket-money—if the pater lets you have any. But it's no good going on like this. I don't mind going to Greyfriars with you; in fact, I mean to go, and I'll undertake to land you there safely."

"You'll do what?" gasped William George, recovering his breath sufficiently to speak.

"Land you at Greyfriars right end up, if only you'll keep your silly mouth shut," replied Sammy calmly. "But if you go quarrelling with everyone we run against——"

"You silly little bloated worm! You absurd little—— Oh, my hat, did ever anyone hear anything like it?"

"No good making a row like that, you know. Better hand me over my money-box, or I'll give you in charge for boning it, you fat thief! I can see a bobby over there."

"Oh really, Sammy, don't be such a young ass! Look here, we're bound to use the money from your box—though it isn't really yours, because you said straight out you hadn't got one—but it needn't be used on paying for tickets. I don't see why we should pay for them; the South-Eastern Railway Company never did anything for us!"

"That ain't saying they're going to let us do them—not that I mind, if you know a way," said Sammy.

"I know a way all serene. I wasn't born yesterday, you bet! Platform tickets, that's the wheeze!"

"I don't see——"

"Of course you don't! You haven't got the brains! Leave it to me, that's all."

"Well, you'll only want twopence, then. So just you gimme the money-box, and I'll hand over the two d."

"No, Sammy, I will take care of the money-box; and when we get to Lantham we'll have a jolly good blow-out. I'm hungry now, of course; but if there's a train pretty soon, we'd better not bother about grub. Go and find out, there's a good chap."

Sammy, grumbling, departed to make the inquiry; and Billy, dodging into a waiting-room, got up into a corner, and fencing himself off with himself, so to speak, from the other passengers, there strove desperately to get the money-box open.

"What are you doing, you rotter?"

It was the voice of Samuel, raised high in expostulation.

"Nun-nothing!" stammered his brother. "I say, Sammy, how do you get this dashed thing open?"

"You give it to me, and I'll show you," replied Sammy.

"No, I'm going to hold it. I can't trust you; your principles aren't as high as mine."

"I hope they ain't; yours fairly hum!" Sammy returned. It was not an original sarcasm—Sammy had got it from Peter Todd—but it pleased him as much as if he had invented it; and he allowed his brother to hold the money-box by one end while he did something to it which caused the lid to come up, and revealed the treasure within.

William George's eyes glistened, and his mouth watered. There was the gleam of a sovereign among a pile of silver and coppers. He tried to thrust in his hand, but it was too fat to go in. Sammy's, which was smaller, though scarcely less fat, shoved it out of the way, inflicting a scratch, and grabbed the money.

But William George grabbed Sammy.

"Now, then, my lads, no quarrelling!" said a fatherly old gentleman close by.

"He's trying to sneak my cash!" howled William George.

"'Tain't his; it's mine!" roared Sammy.

"Really, really——"

"Oh, you mind your own bizney!" snapped William George. "Sammy, you young idiot, drop it! We shall get into trouble if we get rowing here!"

The old gentleman turned his back upon them.

"Well, I'm going to have the quid and these two half-dollars," said Sammy resolutely. "I'll lend you the rest, if you like. There's over fifteen bob there."

"All right," answered William George reluctantly. "When does the train go?"

"Not for another forty minutes."

"Then there's time to go out of the station and get some grub first."

"Right-ho! You pay, of course."

"No fear! You've got most of the money."

"Well, it's my money, ain't it?"

"Well, ain't you going to eat part of the grub? Most of it, I expect. I know what a little pig you are!"

"And I know what a big pig you are—so there!"

Another quarrel seemed imminent. But the two became aware that they were attracting an undesirable amount of attention, and they rolled out. They

compromised the matter by each paying half of the bill for the mass of indigestible stuff they loaded themselves with.

As Billy explained, this really meant that he paid more than his share, as Sammy had had most of the contents of the money-box. But Billy's mathematics were too advanced for Sammy, who could not see it at all in that way.

For just three minutes they made peace. That was while they got the platform tickets, and passed on together to the train. The hearts of both were somewhere near their boots when the ticket-inspector looked at them narrowly. They feared he had seen through their dodge.

But he was only interested in them as weird specimens of what it was possible for British boys to become, it seemed, if one might judge by a remark he made to another passenger.

"Well, whoever they've come to meet ain't very likely to miss them on the platform," said the ticket-inspector. "An' if they're bein' fatted for Christmas, he ought to be pleased at the way they've put on flesh. What wouldn't the 'ungry 'Uns give for them two, sir—eh?"

"The beast!" snorted William George.

They made haste to get into the train. But scarcely were they seated when the passenger to whom the inspector had spoken looked in at the window.

"Aren't you boys making a mistake?" he asked. "I understood that you had only platform-tickets!"

"What's that to do with you?" squeaked Sammy.

"Shut up, and don't be rude!" snapped William George. "You are mistaken, sir, I assure you. We have booked for Friardale."

"Oh, indeed! Sorry—if I am mistaken!" replied the passenger. But he appeared to be very doubtful whether he was.

"Interfering old rotter!" snarled the polite William George.

The stranger looked round and scowled blackly. He had heard that.

They were on tenterhooks until the train steamed out, and they snapped at one another continually.

But as soon as it had started their fellow-passengers got a little rest, for the two produced bag after bag of grub, and proceeded to give an amazing, if not exactly improving, exhibition of what two unhealthy appetities could accomplish.

"Go it, young 'un!" said a horsy-looking man encouragingly. "He's a bit ahead of you now, but you'll catch him in the straight if you buck up a bit, and ain't too much afraid of choking yourself!"

"They don't seem neither of them to 'ave no fear whatsomever of that," observed a lean individual enviously. "I should 'ave pains all over me if I was to eat a quarter of that little lot!"

"They'll burst soon!" snorted a lady whose only refreshment was of the liquid kind. She refreshed herself often, and at each swig grew redder in the face and gleamier of eye. "Narsty young pigs, I call 'em!"

"I don't think it'll be as bad as that, mum!" said the horsy man cheerily. "But I'll lay ten to one they're both sick!"

"Don't take any notice of the rude people, Sammy!" spluttered William George, with his mouth full.

"I ain't," answered Sammy. "Let the silly idiots say what they like!"

The red-faced lady leaned across and boxed Sammy's ears.

"If you men are gen'l'men," she shrieked, "you'll hit the big beast!"

"Ow-yow! Stoppit, you cat!" yelled Sammy.

"We don't want to 'it 'em, mum," said the lean man. "Pusonally, I look upon his 'ere business as a 'ighly interestin' scientific experiment. If they croak over it—well, that ain't any funeral of mine, an' I dessay their parents can spare 'em. Wot do you say, Robert?"

"I says ditto to you, George. I don't want to hit the young porkers. I've got some as near like them as matters nothin' in a sty at home now; an' they're a'most human when they gets their backs scratched."

"They're travellin' without tickets—that's my belief!" snorted the lady with the flask. "You heard what that gen'l'man said to them? Well, then! When we stops I shall call the guard, an' we'll see what he says about it!"

Thereafter Sammy and Billy sat for a while in fear and trembling, for it was evident that this determined female meant mischief. But the train rushed on, and before it stopped again the lady with the flask was snoring in her corner. The two men got out, and William George composed himself for sleep.

As soon as he had begun to snore Sammy became active. He made great efforts to get at his brother's money—or, rather, at his own money in his brother's pocket.

But, though Billy slumbered on, it was no go. Possibly Billy himself could not have got his hand into that pocket until the effect of his recent snack had somewhat passed off. Sammy's perseverance was all in vain.

Darkness had fallen now, and the lamp gave but a cheerless light. Sammy was greatly relieved when, peering out of the window as the train slackened speed, he saw lights ahead which he knew to be those of the junction where they had to change.

"Lantham! Lantham! yelled the porters, and Sammy shook his brother, and pinched him, and punched him, and, finding all that of no avail, kicked his shins savagely.

"Br-r-r-r! Lemme alone! 'Taint rising-bell yet!" burbled Billy.

"Oh, you fathead! Let's get out before she wakes up and tells the guard!" squeaked Sammy.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Night!

"NOW then, boys; now then!" said Mr. Prout cheerily. "Quite time for bed! Dear me, it's nearly eleven!"

"But it's holiday-time, you know, sir," said Delarey.

"Quite so, quite so! Still, I am sure you must all be tired. Hurree Singh, you should have gone a long time ago."

"Not at allfully, honoured sahib! I have all this day laid reclinefully upon the couch, and my ludicrous leg will not more reposefully rest, even in bed!"

Mr. Prout had not spent the whole evening with the juniors. He had retired to Dr. Locke's study, where, with a glowing fire, a good cigar or two, an interesting book, and possibly a small drop of something comforting, he had been quite happy. Now he looked into the Common-room, where the juniors were, with quite a fatherly air.

"Where is Squiff?" he asked. In term-time he would certainly have said "Field." But he had two or three times during the day addressed the boy from New South Wales by his familiar nickname, and Squiff took it as a sign of favour—as indeed it was.

Squiff was as fond of a rag as anyone, but he had passed round the word that, while Prouty was on his good behaviour, anyone attempting to rag him would catch it hot. Harmony must be preserved, if possible, "even at the cost of a few thick ears," as Squiff said.

"He was here a minute or two ago, sir," said Tom Brown.

Squiff and Harry Noble came in just then, from upstairs.

They had been to see the preparations made by Fishy and Buck Finn. Wun Lung, on being warned by his minor of the impending trick, had at once told Squiff. The Chinese boy was quite capable of circumventing the two Americans on his own, and it would have been more in his usual way to do so. But he had preferred to tell Squiff, and Squiff had taken Kangaroo and Dane and Tom Brown and Delarey into council; and among them they had evolved a counter-plot.

It was necessary to the full success of their scheme that the mixture should have to be fetched from outside the dormitory. So two of them had gone up to see how matters stood; and, as Squiff had rather expected, the stuff was found concealed elsewhere—under a bed in the Upper Fourth dormitory. They had shifted it under another bed a few yards away.

"Time you marshalled your band for repose, Squiff!" said Mr. Prout.

"Ay, ay, sir! You're not going to sit up all night yourself, are you?"

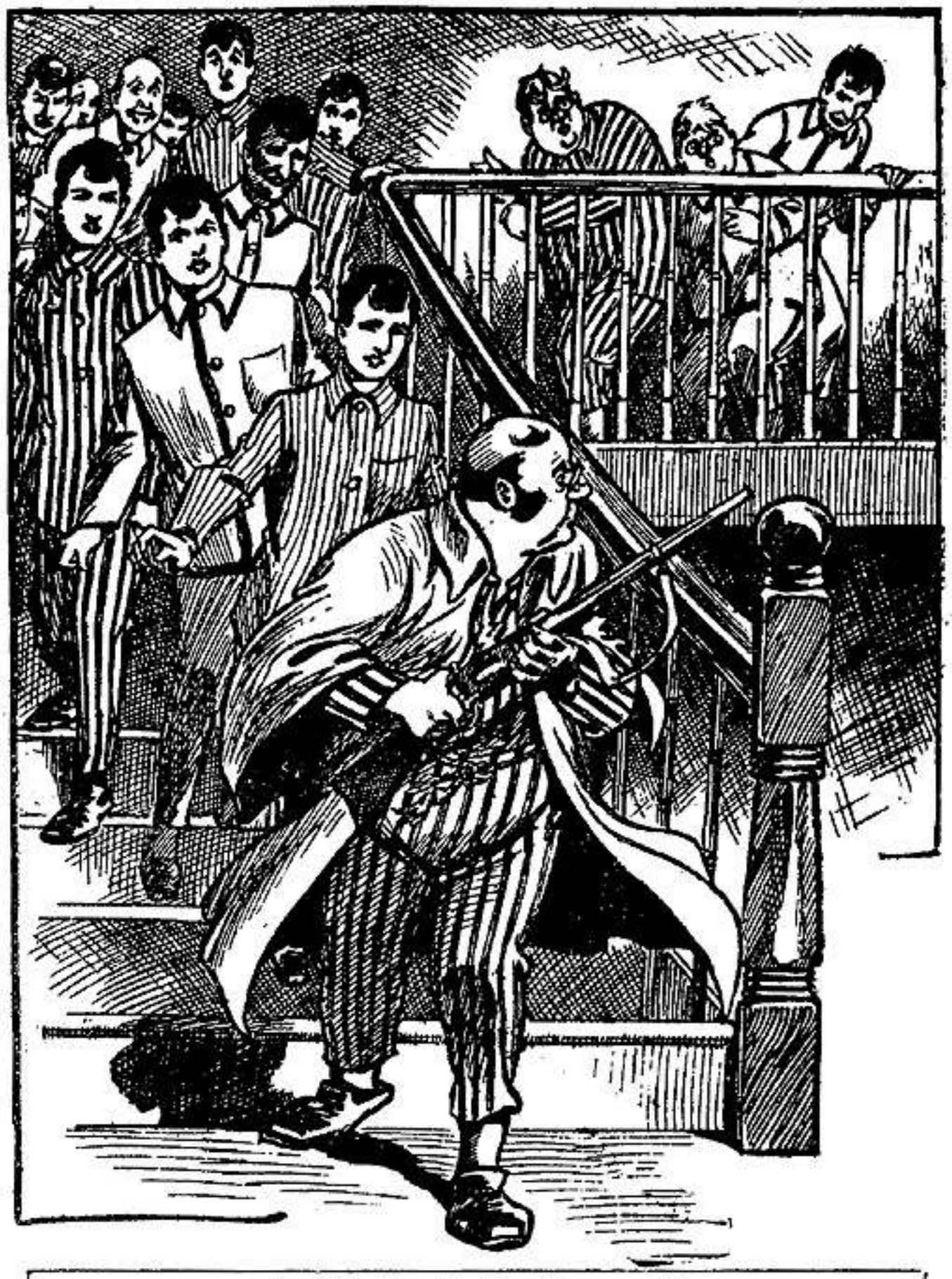
"Bless the lad, what does it matter how long I sit up?"

"Well, if you're coming skating with us to-morrow, sir——"

"Oh, yes, yes! A good night's rest beforehand to get fit, and then I flatter myself I can show you youngsters a thing or two—eh, what?"

"I guess he does flatter himself—some!" whispered Fish in the ear of Finn.

"Oh, I calculate he ain't a bad old has-been! I've seen worse!" said Buck.



A night alarm! (*See Chapter* 21.)

The dormitory was chilly, but the beds were warm. Cook had shown herself great-hearted, and there was a hot-water bottle in each. The hardiest did not disdain it, and the two Indians and little Sylvester appreciated it hugely.

The unaccustomed luxury very nearly led to the trick's falling through. Fishy and Buck Finn had fully intended to remain awake till they were quite sure everyone was asleep, and Squiff had undertaken to lie awake to watch for them.

But within ten minutes of slipping into bed all the twelve were snoozing.

Buck Finn was the first to arouse himself. Buck had plenty of faults; but want of decision was not one of them. He looked at his luminous watch, and saw that he had only slept for half an hour or so.

All around him in the dormitory was quiet. He dropped out of bed, thrust on trousers and dressing-gown, and went over to Fishy.

"Wharrer doing, you jay!" muttered Fishy sleepily, as Buck shook him by the shoulder.

"Git up, you slab-sided galoot!"

"Whaffor? Not likely! You don catch Fisher T.——"

"Oh, you chump! Have you forgotten? You ain't got a memory worth a durned red cent!"

Squiff awoke at this moment. But he was on the alert at once, and the two plotters heard no sound from his bed to rouse their suspicions.

Fisher T. Fish now remembered. He was not so keen on the scheme as he had been, for his bed was warm and comfortable, and he did not at all fancy leaving it. Moreover, he had not the same strong objection to Chinese, as such, that Buck Finn cherished.

But he disliked Wun Lung personally, and it was plain that the resolute Buck would not let him off. So, grumbling in an undertone, he arose.

Until the two had crept out of the dormitory door Squiff did not stir.

But directly it was closed behind them

he was out of bed. He did not wait even to don his trousers, but, clad only in his pyjamas, slipped to the door and thrust against it the nearest washstand.

Then he put on a garment or two, and awoke Hop Hi and Wun Lung.

"Into Fishy's bed, sharp, Wun Lung!" he said. "You into Finn's, kid!"

The two Chinese boys did not argue, or even ask questions. There was no need to ask. They tumbled at once to Squiff's dodge.

With cheerful grins on their yellow faces they obeyed.

Squiff had switched on a light. Now he awoke Tom Brown and Delarey, Dane and Kangaroo. The two Indian juniors and Sylvester were left to sleep, if they could sleep, through the scene which would follow. But that hardly seemed likely.

The bolsters of the two Celestials were thrust down into their beds, replacing their bodies. The trick would not have passed muster with the light on. But Squiff had no intention of leaving it on; and Fishy and Finn were pretty sure to prefer doing their abominable work in the darkness that was fitting for it.

"They're coming back," said Squiff, and he switched off the light at once. "Kangy, put your broad old back against the door, and keep it there until Tom and Piet have moved the washstand back. They'll think the door has stuck. My hat! There's going to be a surprise for those two bounders in a minute or two!"

The three dashed off noiselessly to carry out his instructions.

Meanwhile, Fishy and Buck Finn had visited the Upper Fourth dormitory.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets! The stuff's gone!" groaned Fish.

He was feeling under the bed nearest the door, where he knew he had put the two pails. But Squiff and Harry Noble had shifted them, with the object of gaining time to prepare for the sportive youths' return.

"You jay, it must be thar! Didn't we put it thar?" growled Buck.

"Yep, I calculate we did! But it ain't thar now. Feel for yourself, if you don't believe me."

"I reckon I'll feel under some of the other beds," said Buck. "We came in by dark, and I calculate we must have been mistaken about which bed we put it under, pard!"

"'Tain't likely!" Fishy replied.

"Waal, likely or not, it's so!" said Buck. "For hyer's the mixture. Gee-whiz, Fishy, it niffs some! This doesn't need to be shaken any before taken, I guess!"

They had not lost much time. But Squiff & Co. had worked quickly.

Fish felt more than a little suspicious. Buck, who did not know his way about the school as well as his confederate, did not. To him it seemed quite possible that they should have made a mistake as to which bed the two pails had been thrust under.

He was ahead, and he pushed at the dormitory door, which had been left ajar. He was surprised to find it resist him. But he said nothing until he had twisted the knob and still it did not give.

"Does this durned door ever stick, Fishy?" he growled. "It's sticking now, anyway!"

"Nope! Let me try, you jay!"

Fishy tried, and the door opened readily enough. A second before it opened Kangaroo had dodged under cover. The other three were back at their beds.

"You fellows awake?" asked Fishy, still not quite easy in his mind.

"Oh, snakes! That's a smart sort of trick, I don't think!" came the angry whisper of Buck Finn.

"Rats, you silly chump!" hissed back Fishy. "We don't want to run right into their arms, I calculate!"

But everybody seemed asleep. Someone was snoring in a truly lifelike manner; and the moonlight, which even through the drawn blinds made the room light enough to see a moving figure, showed nothing to alarm them.

Fishy's doubts were dispelled.

"I'll take the kid, I guess!" he said. "You go for Wun Lung, Buck!"

Even at such a time Fishy was prudent. He knew that he was above Hop Hi's fighting weight.

"Swash it well over the durned Chinks!" growled Buck Finn.

And they swashed it!

In the same moment light flooded the room. Together Squiff, Dane, and Tom Brown had switched on.

And the two Chinese juniors sat up, one in Fishy's bed, and one in the bed of Buck Finn!

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!" gasped Fish.

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Buck Finn.

"Me tinkee me stayee hele," said Wun Lung calmly. "Me not likee nasty stuff. Velly good for badee Amelicans!"

"Me stayee hele," chimed in Hop Hi. "Buckee's bed nicee walmee!"

"Not on your durned life you don't, you yellow heathen!" bawled Buck.

"Oh, yes, he does!" said Kangaroo, from behind him. "Get into that bed, Finn!"

"What! Me? I rather guess not, Noble!"

"And I rather guess you will! In fact, I know you're going in. It's your choice whether you get in or are put in!"

"I reckon I'd like to see any galoot put me into that mess!" snorted Buck defiantly.

"Should you like to see any galoot put you into that mess, Fishy?" asked Squiff blandly.

"Hyer, I say—I say, Squiff, I ain't going to——"

"Your mistake, Fishy! You are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody was awake now, and everybody but Fishy and Finn was enjoying himself. Fishy and Finn were not enjoying themselves at all. But it looked as if they were fated to feel worse before they felt better. The two Australians were men of their word.

"You would like to see any galoot put you into that mess, Buck?" said Noble, grasping him by the back of the neck.

"Yep, I would! I ain't——"

"Am I a galoot?"

"Yep, of course! But——"

"Well, it's very near Christmas, and I've always been an obliging chap. Here goes!"

Next moment Buck Finn sprawled upon the bed which Wun Lung had left for safer parts, and Buck's rather aquiline features were pressed hard into the very worst of the horrible mixture by the strong hand of Kangaroo.

"Yow-ow! Yarooogh! Help! I'm being mur—— Oh, stoppit, you cad! Yow!"

"Are you going in of your own free will, or have you to be put in, too, Fishy?" asked Squiff.

"I ain't! Hyer, chuck it, Field—chuck it, I say!"

"Come and give me a hand, Piet! I'm not so strong as Kangaroo, or Fishy's stronger than Finn—I don't know which. But he's going, anyway!"

And, Delarey lending a willing hand, Fishy went!

"Yowwwwwp! Grooogh! Yah! Oh, dear! I'll get even with you for—— Yow-ow! You rotters!"

"What's that?" asked Clifton Dane, with hand to ear.

"Shut up that silly row, Fishy!" snapped Delarey. "We want to listen."

"Ow-yow! I'm poisoned! Oooech!"

"You wantee poison Chince! Now you gettee poison youlself, and Chinee boys velly gladee, you lottel!" said Wun Lung.

"Somebody's shouting outside!" said Tom Brown.

Dane drew up the nearest blind.

"Put the lights out," he said, "and give a chap a chance to see!"

The lights were switched out. The groans of Buck Finn and Fisher T. Fish There was no switching off Fishy, and continued to sound in the moonlight. Buck was little less full of lamentation than he.

"It's a fat chap—it's two fat chaps!" said Clifton Dane.

"It's Bunter!" cried Squiff, gazing over his shoulder down into the quad. "Bunter and his giddy young scrub of a minor!"

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Added to the Party!

SQUIFF threw up a window-sash. The chilly night air came into the room, and the lads from the East, with one accord, shifted lower down into their beds, and pulled the clothes up over their shoulders.

"I do not think that I shall get out of bed to welcome those fat persons," said Koumi Rao gravely.

"I am samefully of the identical mind of the honourable Jam," said Hurree Singh. "Moreover, my ludicrous leg would not standfully support me. It is not of the necessitfulness, esteemed Squiff, that you should excusefully apologise for my absentfulness to the absurd and disgusting Bunters."

"Wun Lung stayee hele," said the Chinese Removite. "Fishy is a lottel, but Fishy's bed is walmee and comfoltable."

Hop Hi said nothing at all. But he had no notion of giving Buck Finn a chance to come back.

"Is that you, Squiff? Come down and let us in!" yelled William George.

"No jolly fear! Just you cut back home!" replied Squiff. "I suppose one of us will have to go to Prouty, Tom," he added, in lower tones. "We can't keep the fat bounders out in the snow; but the old bird might be a bit suspicious in the morning if we let them in by the box-room window."

"I'll go!" answered Tom Brown readily.

"Don't let Prouty in here, old scout," said Delarey, grinning.

"Why not, Piet?"

"He's a soft-hearted old buffer. He might be sorry for Fishy and Finn. And they can be quite sorry enough for themselves, without any help, I fancy."

"Right-ho!" said the New Zealander, and he departed.

"Squiff, you rotter!" howled Bunter major.

"Bunter! Sweet Bunter, my heart's delight!" replied Squiff.

"Oh, do let us in, Field!" pleaded Bunter minor.

"Can't be did. We're locked up for the night," Squiff said, shaking his head gravely.

"Bad porpoises who have run away from home must run back," called down Piet Delarey.

"Who ever heard of a chap running away from home to school?" remarked Clifton Dane. "The thing simply isn't done!"

"Not by human beings," said the South African. "But you don't know the Bunters, Dane."

"Squiff! Browney! Rebel! Oh, I say! Really, you know, you chaps, you

must let us in! We're pretty nearly dead with cold, and if we don't get something to eat——"

"I'm going to lie down in the snow and go to sleep," said Sammy lugubriously. "Then I shall die. Then those chaps will be sorry."

"I don't see why we should," said Delarey.

"That's a jolly good dodge, Sammy!" said William George. "Do it, old chap! That will bring them to their senses if anything will!"

"Well, then, do it yourself!" growled Sammy. "I know you. You think you'll get my oof if I peg out! Yah!"

"You little beast! If you say much more I'll——"

"Hallo, Bunty! Hallo, Sammy! How's your respected aunt?" spoke the voice of Tom Brown. The New Zealander had just appeared round the corner.

William George would have fallen upon his neck in relief. But Tom Brown was not having any.

"She's awful!" grunted Sammy. "We simply had to cut, Brown. We couldn't stand it any longer!"

"Well, you can come in," said Tom. "Arrangements may be made for you to sleep in the boot-cupboard. Or perhaps Prouty will give you a shakedown in his room. You'll see him in a minute."

"I say, you know, Squiff—— Oh, really, we don't want to see Prouty to-night! I don't see a bit why that can't wait till the morning."

"He needn't know we are here at all," said Sammy.

"Rats! He knows, and you've got to come along to him."

They went. They had to go.

But Mr. Prout really was not hard-hearted, and the forlorn aspect of the two fat juniors caused him to postpone the lecture he felt bound to give them until the morrow.

"See that they have something hot to drink, and some food, Brown," he said, "and get them into bed as soon as possible. If there are no beds aired, they must sleep between blankets. They cannot take much harm so. Dear me! Who ever heard of such a thing before? Running away from home—and at Christmas, too!"

"That's just why, sir," whined William George.

"Goodness gracious, what does the boy mean? You two really are the most extraordinary lads I have ever encountered! There! Take them away, Brown! We can keep them till their parents send for them, I suppose."

"They jolly well won't send!" said William George hopefully, as Tom Brown led the two away.

Squiff and the other Colonials came downstairs as soon as they were sure that Mr. Prout had gone back to bed. The Bunters were drinking steaming-hot cocoa and putting away provender at a great pace. Already their natural self-conceit, temporarily impaired by the troubles of the day, was returning to them, and they were inclined to look upon themselves as heroes.

"We'd lost the tickets—that was Sammy's fault," said the Owl, having carried a highly untrue narrative as far as Lantham.

"What was the good of keeping them when they were only——"

"Dry up, Sammy! I'm talking! So this wretched woman told the ticket-inspector that we hadn't any."

"How did she know you'd lost them?" asked Kangaroo, winking at the rest.

"It was just her spite. She was a perfectly horrible female, and drank like a fish. So they wanted to make us pay, and we said we jolly well weren't going to pay twice over—not if we knew it! Then they hustled us out of the station, the beasts!"

"They wouldn't let us take tickets from Lantham to Friardale," grunted Sammy. "We were willing to do that."

"I don't see why you should have been if you'd paid once. I say 'if' because I don't a bit believe you had," said Delarey.

"I don't care what you believe, Rebel! And, anyway, we hadn't any money."

"Being willing to pay didn't help a lot, then," remarked Dane drily.

"Well, they ought to have taken the will for the deed. So we went and had a snack——"

"Thought you hadn't any chink?" said Squiff.

"Really, Field, I don't see how I can be expected to tell my tale if you fellows keep on making senseless interruptions," protested the Owl peevishly. "We had a snack, I say, and then we found a carrier's cart going from Lantham to some village not far from Friardale. Sammy wanted to go back to the station; but I said that after the way we had been treated by the railway company I would have nothing more to do with them——"

"You will to-morrow, though!" said Delarey.

"Not likely! We're not going back. We know when we're well off, I guess. So we arranged to be carried to this village for a bob each."

"Out of the money you hadn't got? Well, there would be lots of that, anyway," said Delarey. "But if I'd been the carrier——"

"He was a worse beast than you are—I mean—— Oh, do shut up, Rebel, and let a chap get on! Sammy, you little pig, you're wolfing all the tongue!"

"Well, you don't need any. You've got some to spare!" grunted Sammy.

"Bunter minor's brains have been sharpened by his adventures," said Tom Brown.

"It was really Sammy's fault. The carrier's wife was in the cart—a great, fat woman she was—and she wouldn't let us have any of the rug, and kept on saying that we took up too much room. So I said we shouldn't shell out if we had any more of her back-chat—we were very nearly there then. And the carrier took Sammy and pitched him out into a great drift of snow. I couldn't stand that, of course. Sammy's a young beast; but, after all, he's my brother. So I gave the man one for himself!"

"That's a lie!" cried Sammy. "You never stood up to him at all. You were too funked. Why, I'd scarcely lit in the snow before you came flying out, not six yards away, howling like fury!"

"I jumped out," said Bunter major calmly. "My well-known high principles wouldn't allow me to desert a brother in distress—even a worm like Sammy, who, I must candidly state, is rather a disgrace to our family. And the beast of a carrier drove away and left us there! He did not care a scrap if we had broken all our bones—not he!"

"Well, with the snow and the fat, there really wasn't much danger of that!" said Dane.

"I am not fat; merely plump and well-proportioned," said the Owl, with dignity. "I admit that Sammy is fatter than a boy of his age has any right to be. But that comes from his gorging so——"

"You don't, do you, you—you giddy boa-constructor!" howled Sammy.

"The cart was out of sight before we could explicate ourselves——"

"Was there any need of that?" asked Squiff. "The carrier seems to have got on to you pretty well without any explication, I should say."

"From the snow, I mean."

"I fancy the word he's searching for is 'extricate,'" said Dane.

"Same thing. You fellows needn't be so blessed particular with a chap who's been through what I have! So we had to tramp all the rest of the way through the snow. I carried Sammy on my back——"

"Oh, what a thumper! If it hadn't been for me you'd have chucked it, you funk! You wanted to lie down and die ever so many times!"

"Why didn't you let him, Sammy? You don't seem to know when you're on a good thing!" said Delarey.

"I am afraid Sammy's memory has been infected!"

"Seems likely, as he's been with you," said Squiff. "I don't know about memory; but you'd be bound to infect him somehow! If you've cleared up every mouthful of food—and it would take a microscope to see anything left—you'd better toddle up and get into bed. Any more whacking lies can be reserved for the next term. Of course, you'll be sent back by the first train to-morrow!"

"Bet you we sha'n't!" grunted Sammy.

In the Remove dormitory, Fishy and Finn, having got off as much of their awful mess as could be removed without taking off the skin with it, had turned into two of the vacant beds. The Bunters were installed in two more, with three or four hot-water bottles each; and Squiff tucked them up, and told them that he was sorry both his tastes and his principles prevented him from kissing them for their mother.

Within five minutes sounds as of two trumpets played by people who were not musicians floated upon the air. After their long and trying day, the adventurers slept the sleep of the full!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Two Telegrams and a Loan!

"BUNTER," said Mr. Prout, "I have heard from your father."

It was about eleven o'clock the next morning. A messenger had been sent to the post-office at Friardale early with a telegram to Mr. Bunter. Now the answer had come, and, judging from Mr. Prout's appearance, he was not altogether pleased with it.

"Yes, sir?" said Bunter, meekly and questioningly.

"I telegraphed to him that you and your brother were here. I naturally expected that, at the least, he would request that you should both be sent home by the earliest possible train. I should not have been surprised if he had himself come to fetch you. But he does not appear to want you back."

"Oh, good!" murmured William George, greatly relieved.

"What do you say, Bunter?" snapped Mr. Prout.

"I—I said that—that——"

"Enough! To ask you a straight question seems only to evoke prevarication. You are a most extraordinary boy in every respect, Bunter. And your brother is no better. I am confident that your father feels this. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to make excuses for his brusqueness—not to give it a more severe name—to me! I telegraphed to him that you were here. His reply, apart from the address and the signature, consisted of two words only. 'Keep them!' I am not accustomed to bear with—— Yes, Trotter! What is it?"

"Another tellergram, sir!" replied Trotter, the page, winking at Bunter with what the Owl considered gross familiarity.

"Wait! A reply may be needed."

Trotter waited. Mr. Prout slit open the orange-coloured envelope.

"Ahem! This is also from your father, Bunter—a second thought, apparently. It has been well said that second thoughts are best."

"You don't mean—you're not going to send us home, sir?" faltered Bunter. "At least, it really does not matter so much about Sammy; but I was horribly treated there—simply horribly!"

"No, I am not going to send you home, Bunter. Your father, though his conceptions of courtesy leave something to be desired, is evidently a man of judgment. His second wire runs thus: 'And cane them every day!'"

"Oh, sir!"

Trotter was grinning broadly. Billy Bunter gave him a glare like the glare of a basilisk.

"Trotter, find Bunter minor, and bring him to the Head's study. Bunter major, you will accompany me!" rapped out Mr. Prout.

"Bub—bub—but you're not going to cane me, sir, are you?"

"Certainly I am, Bunter!"

"It's—it's holiday-time, sir!"

"You should have remembered that before you ran away from home!"

"Bub—but——"

"Expostulation is useless, Bunter! Out of consideration to my own feelings, I shall not embark upon the course of daily execution suggested by your father. Wielding the cane gives me no pleasure at any time. But both you and your brother deserve punishment, and you are not going to escape!"

Some few minutes passed before Sammy appeared. Billy was kept waiting. But Mr. Prout erred if he fancied that it would add to the pangs of either Billy or Sammy to see the other caned. The brotherly love between them was such that it might even be some slight alleviation. But Billy, who had no keenness for the alleviation of the pangs of Sammy, did not relish waiting. Since the thing was certainly to be done, he would have preferred it done, and done with.

Trotter and Sammy came at last. Trotter was gripping Sammy by the neck. Trotter was red and breathless, and Sammy was purple with indignation.

"I 'ad to 'andle 'im, sir!" said Trotter. "'E said as 'ow 'e wouldn't be caned in 'oliday-time, not for nobody. 'An 'e 'acked my shins, sir!"

"Very well—very well indeed!" snorted Mr. Prout. "I am not sure, Bunter minor, that I can make you sorry for kicking Trotter, but I propose to make you very sorry indeed for yourself! No, do not go, Trotter! It is only fair that you should see yourself avenged."

Such howls as proceeded from Sammy during the next few minutes had seldom been heard within the ancient walls of Greyfriars. Mr. Prout had several reasons for being annoyed, and he laid on the cane vigorously.

"I—I should think that's very nigh enough, sir," said the good-natured Trotter. "He 'acked my shins crool—somethink crool, it was, but I don't bear 'im no malice."

So Sammy stood aside, wailing, and Billy took his gruel. It should have been less than Sammy's, since he had not kicked Trotter, though he would have dearly liked to. But it was not; and the mind of William George Bunter was full of a rankling sense of injustice when he and Sammy departed, wailing in complete disharmony, and each accusing the other of being to blame.

Some of the fellows had already gone off to the Priory Pool; but Wun Lung and Hop Hi had not gone with them. The two Celestials did not pretend any sympathy for the victims of Mr. Prout's tyranny; but whatever exultation they felt they managed to keep to themselves. Thus within an hour Billy Bunter found his conscience allowing him to make friendly overtures to them. If they had chortled he might have taken five minutes more; but, as getting something out of them was his object, he might not.

Wun Lung was wealthy. The fact had not been for a long time past of any use to Bunter, for Wun Lung was also shrewd. But the present state of affairs put them on rather a new footing, and Bunter thought he saw his chance. He still had a few shillings left of the money from Sammy's box; but one visit to Uncle Clegg would use up that, and such a chance as this, with "the interfering Colonial bounders" out of the way, might not soon recur.

"I say, Wun Lung, old chap, this is rather jolly, ain't it?" said Bunter oilily. "Everything's been arranged for me to stay here over Christmas. Aren't you glad?"

"Mistel Plout allange it with canee?" asked Hop Hi.

"No, you silly little heath—I mean, no, old chap! That was only—— Oh, you know what a silly old josser Prout is! There's no sense in the man!"

"Velly longee naughty Mistel Ploutee canee handsome Billy Buntee!" said Wun Lung solemnly.

Bunter felt quite encouraged.

"I should think it was!" he said. "But never mind that. He ain't going to do it again."

"Sollee!" said Hop Hi.

"Eh?"

"Hop Hi meanee sollee you caned, Buntee," explained Wun Lung.

"Oh! It didn't sound much like it. But I'll take your word for it. We always were pals, you and I, Wun Lung. Remember what good times we had when we were in No. 14 together?"

"Wun Lung lemembel velly wellee."

"Ah, I say, old chap, could you do me a little favour?"

"Wun Lung velly pleasee do handsome Billy Buntee favoul."

This was great! Bunter thought of subbing for a fiver, but decided that that might be too much to ask for at once.

"Lend me half-a-sov., old chap, will you?" he asked. "I left my purse at home, you know. Silly of me, but there you are!"

The hand of the Chinee was already in his trouser-pocket. Now he drew it out, and Bunter saw in it something that glistened brightly. For the moment it did not occur to him that no Greyfriars boy was very likely to have a half-sovereign—a coin little seen in these days.

His fat hand closed upon it with a convulsive clutch. The faces of the two Orientals were quite impassive.

"Oh, thanks, old fellow; it's no end good of you! I'll pay you back in a few days, of course."

"Wun Lung no wantee handsome Billy Buntee lepay. Make him plesent!"

Billy Bunter looked down at the coin in his hand. This was the sort of present he could appreciate.

Was it, though?

It was not!

The coin in his hand was a bright, new farthing!

"You—oh, you rotten heathen!" he roared. "I'll—I'll——"

"Come away, Wun Lung!" said Hop Hi. "Buntee velly closs. Why Buntee so velly closs, Wun Lung?"

"Buntee not glateful," replied his brother solemnly. "Velly unglateful Buntee!"

"Yah! Go and eat dogs!" yelled Bunter after them.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.
On the Ice!

BUNTER stayed at Greyfriars until after lunch. Sammy and he had that together—not enough of it, both said, though there would have been enough for five ordinary boys. Hurree Singh's meal was taken to him, and the rest were all away on the ice. Mr. Prout and the two Chinese juniors had now joined the others.

"I'm going down to the ice, Sammy," said Billy, when they had cleared the board and finished grumbling because there was no more.

"Yah! You haven't got any skates," grunted Sammy.

"That is where you are wrong."

"Well, if you have, they don't belong to you."

"What's that matter, you silly young fathead?"

"And you can skate almost as well as a brick can swim!"

"As a matter of fact, Samuel Bunter, I am a particularly accomplished skater, as all who have seen me can testify!"

"I dare say—because nobody ever has seen you skate, and nobody ever will. You're no good for anything except that rotten ventriloquism!"

"You shall see whether my ventriloquism is rotten before long, my boy!" replied William George grandly. "I do not intend to hide my great talent in a napkin or under a bushel. You can go and keep Inky company."

"No, I can't, then!"

"Why not?"

"Because the beast says he won't have me in his room at any price!"

That seemed conclusive. It might not have choked William George off, but it settled Sammy.

The Owl rolled off to the Priory Woods, and Sammy made a disgruntled but sharp-eyed tour of the studies, with the object of annexing any unconsidered trifles that anyone might have left lying about.

The fun on the ice was in full swing. Mr. Prout was doing quite astonishing things in the figure-cutting line. They were not always the things he meant to do, but that only made them the more interesting; and, as Tom Brown said, the figure Mr. Prout himself cut in a fur overcoat, with a long cigar in his mouth, was good enough for anything—more particularly when the fur overcoat wiped up the ice-dust what time Mr. Prout floundered on his back, and that gentleman was in danger of swallowing a lighted cigar.

There was plenty of room for his humorous performance without interfering with the activities of the rest, some of whom were quite exceptionally good skaters, though few of them had picked up the art as mere kids, as so many British boys do. Koumi Rao, who did everything gracefully and well, was among the best, and Squiff and Noble were first-rate. Delarey was no duffer. But the best of them all was Clifton Dane—for Canada gives far more opportunities for skating than the homeland.

One fellow was there the presence of whom came as a complete surprise to Bunter, though it had not surprised the rest so much. Harold Skinner and his nutty cousins had come over. Skinner was scuttling about in no very skilful fashion; but he could keep on his feet and move fast enough to get warm—which was more than Bunter could do. And the two cousins were evidently skilled skaters. Mr. Anthony was cutting all sorts of intricate figures with great dignity, and Mr. James had plainly unusual pace.

"Hallo, Bunter! Come and show us how to do it!" sang out Kangaroo.

"Presently. I must have a word with

my friend Skinner first," said the Owl importantly.

He did not put on his skates—or the skates he had brought. Sammy was correct about their ownership, so far as his knowledge went, and it is not quite certain that Billy himself knew whose they were. But that was a matter of no importance whatever.

"I haven't gone into the post-office line, Bunty!" shouted Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really fail to understand you," said Bunter, shuffling along over the slippery surface. "I—— Yoooop!"

He went down with a resounding thwack.

"Bunter," roared Mr. Prout, "if you are guilty of such foolish clumsiness again, I shall send you off! This pool is very deep, and——"

"Oh, really, sir, I suppose I don't weigh any more than you do?"

"That is not the question! I don't——"

Alas for Mr. Prout! For at that very moment he did! His heels flew up; his back smote the ice. He said no more.

Bunter was grinning as he made his cautious way towards his friend Skinner.

Skinner waited for him, with a sardonic smile on his thin face.

"I'm cashing nothing, and I'm lending nothing, Bunty!" he said. "Same thing, of course; and a third name for it is chucking oof away. But I'm not doing it by any name."

"I had no intention of asking you to oblige me, Skinney—though, as a matter of fact, I am expecting a postal order ——"

"It wouldn't be you if you weren't. What are you doing here? I suppose they got fed up with you at home, eh?"

"Nothing of the sort! I got fed up with them, and came away."

"Oh! How do the fellows treat you?"

There was no one else within hearing.

"Rotten!" said Bunter pathetically.

"What can you expect with a gang like that?" asked Skinner, who hated the Colonial juniors and Inky and the Chinese boys. "I say, why don't you make it a bit warm for them with your ventriloquism? You could do it, you know, easily."

"Yes; but they would make it warm for me afterwards," replied Bunter doubtfully.

"Shouldn't wonder. Well, it's no odds to me."

"Couldn't we play them some trick together, Skinney? You outside, and me inside. We ought to be able to work it."

"I've thought of that. Yes, it might be done. My cousins might come in. I'll introduce you to them. They'll jape you about your giddy fat, of course: but you're used to that. There's Fishy, too, and that other American specimen—though I wouldn't trust him too far."

Skinner yelled across the ice to his cousins, and they came up.

The cad of the Remove was quite correct as to the spirit in which Messrs. James and Anthony Skinner would receive Bunter. Those engaging young gentlemen were ready to presume upon a very short acquaintance. They called Bunter "Fatty" with cheerful readiness to be familiar. And Bunter stood it, hoping that in some way or other it might be to his profit to stand it. When Bunter tried to ride the high horse it was always with someone whom he considered it hopeless to try for a loan.

They induced Bunter to put on his skates. They went even further than that. They were kind enough to put them on for him. It is not an easy thing to put on a pair of skates backwards; but Messrs. James, Anthony, and Harold Skinner had minds of a cast which refused to be overcome by difficulties, and they did it.

On the whole, it was scarcely worth while. For Bunter would have tumbled within thirty seconds of getting to his feet in any case. All that the trick achieved was to reduce thirty seconds to three, and to cause him to slip out of his skates as he fell.

They did not stay to help him up. Someone had proposed a race, and all three were keen on joining in it.

"Entrance-fee, sixpence!" said Squiff. "Mr. Prout to hold the money, and not to hand it over to the winner until he is satisfied with the object chosen for its disposal. The winner can buy something with it, or he can give it to a war fund of some sort; but he can't take it in hard cash, because that would make us all professionals!"

"Quite admirably put, Squiff!" said Mr. Prout. "I am willing to do as you suggest, though if it were not for that I should insist upon taking part in the race. But I will hold the stakes, and act as starter and judge."

"It's a good thing for us that you are standing out of the race, sir," said Mr. Anthony Skinner cheekily. "If you are fast enough to start us and be at the winning-post before us, there wouldn't be much chance for anyone else, would there?"

"I'm not aware that you have been asked to take part!" snapped Squiff.

"And as the course will be round the pool, there won't be any necessity for Mr. Prout's bustling, though I dare say he could make rings round us all if he wanted to!" added Tom Brown.

Mr. Prout fairly beamed upon them.

"Thank you, my friend Brown—thank you!" he said. "That was very nicely put! I am—ahem!—somewhat older than the rest of you, but there is life in the old dog yet. I think that, on the whole, this lad should be allowed to compete, Squiff, as he appears to be a friend of one of our number. But I trust that the prize will be carried off by a Greyfriars boy. We must keep up our ends, you know!"

Mr. Anthony Skinner muttered something about lying flat on one's back on the ice being a bit off as a sample of keeping up one's end. But the fists of Kangaroo and Piet Delarey, stuck closer to Mr. Anthony's nose than he quite liked, caused him to dry up.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Race!

"I SAY, you fellows, who's going to lend me a tanner?"

It was the voice of the Owl that made itself heard to this effect.

"What for?" asked Clifton Dane.

"Don't listen to the voice of the fat charmer, Dane!" said Delarey. "He has never been known to repay a loan."

"Oh, really, Delarey, that's a gross slander, and I'm not going to put up with it, I can tell you! Don't take any notice of him, Dane; we all know what a sneering beggar he is!"

"But what do you want the sixpence for, tubby?"

"Entrance-fee for the race of course! I shall buy grub with the money when I get it. I don't see how old Prouty can object to that!"

"No, I really don't think he will—when you get it! Here you are!" said the good-natured Canadian junior. "And it wouldn't be a bad thing if you got your skates fastened on properly before you started!"

"What's the matter with them?" asked Bunter, staring down at them.

He had fastened them himself this time, and fondly imagined that they must be all right.

"Well, for one thing the screw's too loose to grip, and for another you've got everything in the wrong place. Here, sit down, and I'll put them right for you!"

Thus was Bunter enabled to line up with the rest. Otherwise he would have lost his skates again before he reached the starting-point.

Everyone was lining up. Even Fishy was risking sixpence. As he told Buck Finn, all the other galoots might fall down, and then he could sail in a winner. Buck grunted. He could not see Fishy as a winner unless all the rest tumbled several times. Even then, discount would have to be given for Fishy's own tumbles. Buck had hopes for himself, and he really was not such a duffer as Fish.

The course was three times round the pool. As it was impossible to stake and rope it, a fairly liberal margin from the edge was allowed. But Mr. Prout, from his watch-tower on the bank, was to send out anyone who took unfair advantage of this.

There was a small scramble for places farthest from the bank at the start. It was prevented from being a bigger scramble by the fact that some of them did not take part in it. Without a word to anyone, Dane lined up nearest the bank, and Squiff, Kangaroo, Delarey, Koumi Rao, and Tom Brown fell into place near him. But Fishy and Finn, the three Skinners, and Bunter all pushed and barged for the outside place, while the two Chinese, steering a middle course, seemed contented with places near the middle, where little Sylvester bore them company.

"Yow! Chuck it, you cad!" howled

Bunter, as Mr. James gave him a vicious push.

"Hyer naow, jest you drop that, Fishy!" yelled Buck Finn.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Haven't I got as good a right——"

"Yooop!" came from Bunter. The push had sent him sliding along fully ten yards, to come down with a bump at the finish.

The Skinners made no noise. They merely pushed. And when at last the line was complete all three of them had got well to its farther end.

From the start Mr. James got ahead on one end, with Clifton Dane and Squiff only just behind him on the other. The manœuvring which Mr. James had practised made their twenty yards nineteen for him. But, speedy as he was, his victory was no foregone conclusion; for, once they were well clear of the rest, Dane and Squiff had no need to concede him all the advantage he had at the outset. They could close in.

They did not seem to care about doing it, however. With his arms behind his back, and his body poised forward, the Canadian skated with rare grace. Squiff's style was scarcely as graceful, but it was effective enough. And both kept well out to the edge.

A little behind them came Koumi Rao, almost as graceful as Dane, Tom Brown, with a method that involved none of the flourishing of arms that Mr. Anthony Skinner seemed to find necessary, Kangaroo, and the said Mr. Anthony himself. Delarey, who had a natural turn of speed, though not much style, Wun Lung, who glided along apparently without exertion, and Buck Finn were not far behind them. But Buck hardly looked like keeping it up.

Hop Hi and Sylvester were ahead of Harold Skinner, who, in his turn, scratched and scuttled along in front of Fishy. Last of all, travelling chiefly on his back, came Billy Bunter.

The end of the first round found Squiff abreast of James Skinner, with Dane just a little behind them, quite unbreathed, and Wun Lung only a few yards in rear of Dane. Kangaroo and Tom Brown had shaken off Anthony Skinner, and had got a bit in front of Delarey. The rest were as before. Bunter was about fifty yards from the starting-point, and it was almost a miracle that he had got so far.

"Not so wide, there, or I must rule you out!" shouted Mr. Prout to James Skinner as he passed. But that youth paid no heed. If he had been a Greyfriars boy he would have been called off. But Mr. Prout regarded him as more or less a visitor, where everyone else except his brother belonged to the school, and let him go on, only hoping that he would not win.

One after another they glided, shot, or scuttled past Bunter and past Fishy, who was now regretting the recklessness which had caused him to waste sixpence in a hopeless effort. Even Buck Finn and Harold Skinner went past them.

"Oh, durn it, Fishy; show these galoots what an Amurrican can do!" yelled Buck.

And as he yelled he tumbled all over himself, and came down with a crash.

"Finnee showee allee company what an Amelican can doee!" grinned Hop Hi.

"Americans are all right!" panted Sylvester. "It's only—those two—rotters! America—can't help—that!"

Fish now showed what one American could do by retiring from the hopeless chase. But the fag representative of the great nation held on gallantly. He had no chance of winning, but he meant to finish.

Bunter also stumbled across the ice to the bank, and sat himself wearily down.

"These are rotten skates!" he puffed. "Oh, dear! If I'd only had a decent pair I'm sure I'd have won!"

The leaders were completing the second round. Squiff was in the front place now; but, though he meant to do his best, he had little hope of staying there. For hard behind him the sharp blades of Clifton Dane and Wun Lung drew music from the ice; and as the muscular Canadian, who knew that he was using his muscles to the full, easy though his style seemed, glanced at the little Chinee, he could not choose but wonder at his effortless speed. But Wun Lung's feats on the ice had surprised others before Clifton Dane.

Mr. James Skinner had dropped back a bit. But he was not done.

Kangaroo, Tom Brown, and Delarey had caught him up. His brother was only just behind, side by side with Koumi Rao, who did not seem to care about winning.

Early in the third round the leaders lost ground somewhat. Half a dozen were hard on their heels, and the race looked anybody's—that is, to anyone who had not knowedge of the game enough to see that Dane and Wun Lung were keeping themselves fresh for the final spurt.

And now something happened. James Skinner, still intent on taking all the advantage possible, cut right across Delarey, baulking him in his stroke, and very nearly capsizing him. As he swayed Anthony crashed full into his back, and they tumbled together.

"You rotter! You did that on purpose!" yelled Anthony. But he could hardly have believed what he said, for he had seen that it was his brother's action which had brought the Rebel athwart him.

Tom Brown and Kangaroo and James Skinner sped on. None of them had yet given up hope of winning. But Koumi Rao stopped.

Delarey lay panting, quite unable to speak for the moment.

Anthony Skinner kicked at him savagely.

A grasp of steel fell upon the shoulder of Mr. Anthony. He was pulled to his feet, squirming.

"You hound!" hissed Koumi Rao. "You cowardly hound!"

"The cad tumbled me over!" shouted Mr. Anthony.

"Your brother was the cause. How could Delarey, having his back to you, have got into your path by design?"

Piet Delarey was on his feet now. But he was hurt. The skate had caught his ankle when Skinner kicked. There would be no more skating for the Rebel for a day or two.

"Leave him to me, Koumi Rao!" he said. "It's my quarrel!"

"No, my friend. It is mine!" answered the Jam of Bundelpore gravely. And as he spoke his dusky hand struck Anthony Skinner's scarlet cheek. He had made it his quarrel.

"You dirty nigger!" yelled Anthony.

The Jam's dark eyes flashed. It seemed to Delarey that all his face flashed.

"If you were with me in my native land," he said, "your head should leave your shoulders for that! But I am in England now, and I will do as my English friends do! I will thrash you!"

"If you can!" gritted the other.

Now Harold Skinner came up, loud in support of his cousin, though he had not seen what had passed.

And now, from the opposite bank, there came shouting. Mr. Prout was yelling his loudest, forgetting that he was a master and judge of the race.

The race was finishing, and it was a finish worth seeing!

Up to the last moment four seemed to have a chance. Tom Brown and Kangaroo had never quite made up their leeway; but James Skinner, putting in all he knew, had gained on the leaders, and twenty yards from where Mr. Prout shouted and danced on the bank, Wun Lung, Squiff, and Clifton Dane raced neck and neck, with the stranger only a yard in their rear.

Then Wun Lung glided ahead for a second, and Skinner had passed Squiff. Dane had passed him, too—Squiff's bolt was shot. But now Dane and James Skinner were abreast of Wun Lung. Skinner's arms were going hard, but the other two still kept their seemingly effortless styles.

And in the last five yards the stranger fell back, almost as if some invisible hand had seized and held him, and side by side the Canadian and the Chinee skated past the judge, with not an inch to choose between them!

"Dead-heat!" cried Mr. Prout, in wild excitement.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Face at the Window!

YES, it was a dead-heat between a Greyfriars fellow and one from St. Jim's; and, on the whole, no better result could have been asked.

Clifton Dane and Wun Lung were perfectly satisfied, anyway; and so were those who had finished close behind them, with the one exception of Mr. James Skinner. And, really, no one minded much about Mr. James' feelings. Skinner's cousins had not made themselves exactly popular.

Little Sylvester and Hop Hi raced each other home for seventh place with as much keenness as if it had been first. Sylvester won by a yard. Buck Finn was the only other who finished, some distance in their rear.

"And now, before I hand over to you this large sum of money," said Mr. Prout jocularly, "it is my bounden duty to inquire to what purpose you propose to put it."

"Mo buyee nose-ling fol Buntee!" said Wun Lung promptly.

"What?" demanded Mr. Prout, in astonishment.

"Oh, really, sir, I don't think you should allow that beastly heathen to be so rude to me!" said Bunter indignantly.

"Be silent, Bunter! I do not quite follow you, Wun Lung!"

"Says he'll buy a nose-ring for Bunter, sir—like the other pigs have, you know," explained Squiff cheerfully. "It ain't half a bad idea, is it?"

It seemed that Mr. Prout preferred not to express an opinion upon that subject, although there was a suspicious twinkle about the corners of his mouth as he turned to Clifton Dane.

"I'm afraid it won't run to what I want, sir," said the Canadian. "That's a little present for someone, too. A microscope. If a certain member of our party looked at himself through it he might get a more correct idea of his real importance."

If he did not mean Buck Finn he should not have looked so straight at that youth. But it is to be inferred that he did, and that Buck knew he did, for Buck scowled, and that others knew he did, for Squiff remarked that Finn might lend it to Fishy now and then.

"The small end of a cheap telescope might serve the same purpose, Dane,"

said Mr. Prout, as he handed over the cash.

"I say, though, where's Koumi Rao?" asked Tom Brown.

"And Delarey?" said Squiff.

"Ovel the othel side—see?" replied Hop Hi.

Not only the two mentioned, but Harold Skinner and his cousin Anthony were there. And now James Skinner was skating hard across to join them.

Most of the others followed.

"There's something up!" said Noble. "Look at Delarey! He's hurt! And look at Jammy! Something's put his princely back up, you bet!"

"What are they going into the wood for?" said Tom Brown.

That question was soon answered. By the time they had reached the other bank, and followed the rest under the snow-laden trees, Koumi Rao and Mr. Anthony Skinner were hard at it.

Piet Delarey explained briefly.

"It's a pity," he said. "We didn't want a row, and I hope Prouty won't smell a rat. But that Skinner fellow really is too thick!"

"Takes after the dear Harold," remarked Squiff.

"Oh, I don't know—there are points about our specimen!" replied the Rebel, who now and then surprised his chums by sticking up for Skinner.

"Blessed if I can see where they come in!" growled Squiff. And Harold Skinner, hearing them, made a black mark against Squiff, and one of quite another kind as far as Delarey was concerned, in his retentive mind.

"Go it, Tony!" howled Mr. James Skinner.

Tony needed encouragement. The course of the fight was by no means encouraging to him.

Koumi Rao attacked hotly, seeming not to care a scrap for any blow his antagonist got in. That sort of thing was not in Anthony's line. It looked too much like a licking, for he cared very much when he was hurt; and he was being hurt.

He was older than the Indian boy, at least as strong, and a more capable boxer than the Greyfriars fellows would have expected any relative of Skinner's to be. But from the first he fought a losing fight, and his chief notion seemed to be to get out of it as soon as possible.

There is always a way out for him who feels like that. Anthony took that way. Deposited on his back in the snow by a swift upper-cut, which got him on the chin, he lay there, and announced that he could not go on.

Without a word, the Jam of Bundelpore turned on his heel. His aquiline nostrils quivered like those of a high-bred horse, and his dark eyes had a lurid light in them. He would have liked much better to go on. But he had learned of Figgins and Tom Merry and his other chums at St. Jim's that one could only hold one's hand when the other fellow said he had had enough, and he did not forget the lesson.

He put on his skates again, for the other side of the pool was the nearer to Greyfriars. But he skated straight across, and then sat down to take them off.

"Not going, old chap, are you?" asked Squiff.

"Yes, I am going!"

"But not because of that chap's rotten conduct, I hope? Don't let that spoil your day!"

"It is not that, my friend," said Koumi Rao, with his slow, grave smile. "I regard not such low-caste dogs. With him I have finished. But it is in my mind that Hurree Singh should not be left alone through all the day, and I go to him."

"I'll go with you, if you don't mind a lame dog for company," said Delarey. "That rotter's spoiled my day, anyway!"

"It will give me pleasure, my friend," said Koumi Rao, with grave courtesy.

"He's taken to you fellows," remarked Kangaroo, as the two moved away together.

"What makes you think that?" asked Tom Brown.

"Because he said 'my friend' both to Squiff and Delarey. Our Jammy is a queer beggar about that. Once in a way he may say it sarcastically—he did last night to Finn. But you can always tell by his tone. When he says it as he did to you two it means that he feels—oh, real brotherly! He'd do anything and risk anything for you. I don't remember he ever said it to me till the other day—or to Dane, either. But when he says it to our man Figgins, or Tom Merry, there's a kind of music in his voice that you can't help noticing."

It rather surprised those who heard at the time that Harry Noble, not at all a specially imaginative fellow, should think so much of the tone in which this young prince of India spoke certain words. But some of them remembered later, when all had had proof of what the friendship of Koumi Rao, Jam of Bundelpore, meant!

The Indian gave Piet Delarey his arm, and, though they talked but little, the bond between them had grown stronger by the time they reached Greyfriars. In their different ways both were more than usually proud, and that may have helped them to understand one another.

Koumi Rao went straight to the room in which Hurree Singh was sitting alone, and got a very hearty welcome. The sociable Inky was quite tired of his own company, and, naturally, he and the Jam had many interests in common that their friends could hardly share.

So thought Delarey, and he settled down to write a letter to his father, still with the Union forces in East Africa, in another room.

Twilight crept across the sky, and deepened into dark. The talk between the two boys from the land of Hind died away. They sat there silent for a while in the flickering firelight, that illuminated the room only by fits and starts, each thinking hard. Perhaps the thoughts of both were thrown forward into the days to come, when they must return to their own land to take up each a heavy burden. For one of them, at least, it would be a sad wrench—maybe for both. Koumi Rao had learned to care for England now.

Just for one brief moment a strange face appeared at the window, and gleaming eyes swept over the two boys, with something of surprise and doubt in them. Neither saw.

And now it had gone. But Piet Delarey, who had gone to the window thinking he heard his comrades returning from the ice, saw something dark flit past, and, with a vague instinct of suspicion, ran out.

He was just in time to see the figure clamber over the wall!

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

The Skinners' Plot!

"I'LL be even with that black beast for this!" snarled Mr. Anthony Skinner, feeling gingerly a swollen nose.

"That can be done easily enough," replied Skinner of the Remove. "I've had a notion of the sort in my mind ever since we saw that Hindu chap at Courtfield."

"What's he got to do with it?" snapped the wounded Skinner, turning his attention to his right eye.

"More than you think, old man! I put Fishy up to telling them he was about, because I fancied that might make our beastly nigger, Hurree Singh, none too comfortable. There's a kind of opposition gang in his one-horse little kingdom, and some of them nearly got him once."

"That's all very well," said Mr. James. "But your nigger ain't our nigger. It's this particular beast Tony wants to get at, and hanged if I blame him! I'm game to help."

"Wait a moment! You chaps go too fast! There's the same sort of how-d'ye-do at his home. Seems to me there always is in these rotten holes. There was with Ranji, the cricketer, though they didn't try kidnapping him, as far as I know!"

"Dashed if I see now!" exclaimed Anthony. "Fifty to one that dark-skinned beast hadn't anything to do with either of them. And even if he had, I ain't on for anything so serious as that. I want this thing that calls itself a Jam—or is it marmalade?—bashed, but I wouldn't take a hand in getting him done in, or even kidnapped."

"No need to. I wouldn't. I've too much respect for my own skin," Harold Skinner answered. "The dodge would be to get them properly scared, and then play Indians ourselves. See? There's an old shyster at Courtfield who could rig us out all serene, and if I don't know my way in and out of Greyfriars by night—well, nobody does!"

"It's a notion!" said James Skinner. "But, Harold, my bright and bonnie youth, suppose we're copped?"

"Then it's just a joke!" replied the cad of the Remove, shrugging his shoulders. "They won't drop on to us harder than we can stand for a mere jape. But if you let me give you a lead we aren't going to be caught!"

"By Jingo, I wish we could do it at once!" mumbled Mr. Anthony, in whom lust for vengeance burned hotly. "If only I could get hold of that nigger all by himself, and properly tied up, I'd make him believe his last day had come, you bet!"

"It can't be done all in five minutes," answered the sweet Harold. "We have to see about the props, and all that sort of thing."

"But we might do something to-night to make them sit up," suggested James. "Get inside the place, and leave a giddy note to say that the avengers were on the giddy track, or somethin' of that sort—just to make them sit up an' feel worried, you know!"

"Jolly likely chaps like that would leave notes of warning, isn't it?" sneered his cousin. "Still, the idea ain't altogether rotten, Jimmy. We could get inside after they've all gone to bed, I guess, and alarm them. Easy enough to get out unseen, as long as you haven't to worry about leaving a window open."

"Look here! If there's any place round here where we can get grub, an' put in our time till midnight or so, I vote we do it!" said Anthony, eagerly. "It doesn't matter what time we get in at our shanty. Aunt Emily always goes to bed at ten, and we can cook up an excuse to her in the morning for bein' out late. She'll swallow anything we can tell her."

"Then we'll say we looked in at Greyfriars, and were kept late," said Harold Skinner. "That won't be a lie—not that it matters about a whacker or two! Grub? Well, we can get a blow-out of sorts at Uncle Clegg's; and it's easy enough to put in the time between that and midnight. Cobb and Hawke, at the

Cross Keys, will be delighted to see us, as you chaps are well heeled!"

"We'd better get back to the ice now," said Mr. James. "No good arousin' suspicion."

So the three went back. No one took much notice of them. Koumi Rao and Delarey had gone, they saw.

It was late before anyone but Mr. Prout left the pool, and then there was delay, due to the fact that Bunter was missing. They searched for him in the woods, calling his name, but they got no answer. As a matter of fact, Bunter, assailed by what he took for the pangs of hunger, had rolled off to Friardale to visit Uncle Clegg, and get rid of the few shillings left to him. It was concluded at length that he must have returned to the school alone, and the rest started back.

The three Skinners made for Friardale and the establishment of Uncle Clegg. They just missed Bunter in the darkness—no great loss, to them or to the Owl.

It was almost pitch-dark as the party made its way along the snowy road, and they were but dimly aware of a man who passed them within half a mile of the school, walking fast. None of them caught even a glimpse of what he was like; in fact, they hardly knew whether it was a man or woman who had flitted past.

But when, a couple of hundred yards or so down the road, they met Piet Delarey, limping badly, they wished they had noticed more.

"Did you fellows pass a man a bit back?" asked Piet.

"Yes, or something like one," said Squiff. "Why, old scout?"

"He was hanging round inside the walls—at least, someone was, and I should think it would be the same chap. I saw him slink past a window, and cut out after him, but my wretched ankle wouldn't give me a fair chance, and after he had once dodged over the wall I never got near him again."

"That's queer—very queer!" said Tom Brown thoughtfully. "If he had been an ordinary visitor there wasn't any reason why he shouldn't have gone out by the gates."

"But who could it have been? Why should anyone want to prowl round?" asked Clifton Dane.

"I guess I'm onter it!" said Fish eagerly. "I calculate it was the dark-skinned galoot we saw at Courtfield. Eh, Buck?"

"Oh, ask me another!" returned his compatriot. "What in tarnation should that chap want at Greyfriars?"

"Waal, he was a Hindu, and he might have been after Inky or the other jay," said Fishy. "Yep, I calculate that's about the size of it. It's happened before, and what's to hinder it happening again? Savvy?"

"There's something in that," Squiff said. "Fishy does talk sense by accident at times. And it's suspicious this fellow hanging round inside the walls. We shall have to look after our man Inky."

"Just as likely to be our Jammy he's after," remarked Kangaroo. "Same thing with him, you know."

"My hat, yes! And we can't even tell which of them," said Delarey. "Not that it's much odds which. I suppose we're all game to help guard them both?"

"Not in mine!" said Fisher T. Fish determinedly. "I calculate I wasn't sent hyer to play private bodyguard to any nigger! Nope, siree! I was sent here to get educated, I guess!"

"You were. And we've done a bit to educate you, and we'll do more yet!" replied Squiff grimly. "However, I don't fancy that either of our princeling potentates will object a heap to your playing the 'nootral' in this bizney. You ain't man enough to protect a mouse!"

"We shall have to tell them," Kangaroo said. "Koumi Rao would never forgive any of us if we tried to keep it dark from him. He fears nothing, and he's no end proud. I take Hurree Singh to be much the same sort, though not so fierce as Jammy."

"You're right there," answered Squiff. "And Inky's no lamb when he is pushed hard, though he's a rare good-tempered chap as a rule."

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.
A Night Alarm!

THE Skinners left the Cross Keys a little before midnight. The Skinners had been skinned to some extent—that was almost a certainty for anyone having dealings with Messrs. Cobb & Hawke—but not too severely, for the rascals with whom they had been playing wanted to see them again.

They made their way towards Greyfriars through the moonlight.

There was no unlocked box-room window as an easy entrance to-night; but the catch of a window in the Remove Form-room yielded to the pressure of a knife-blade, and the three crept in.

"Don't seem very much in it now we've got here," grumbled Mr. James, in low tones. "It's all very well for you, Harold—you know the way about the place. But if the bounders here should be a bit more spry than we look for, Tony and I may lose ourselves, and then where should we be?"

"Oh, don't funk it, Jimmy!" sneered the cad of the Remove.

"I'm not funkin' it, you idiot! I'm only askin' what dashed good it is?"

"You wanted to give them a fright, and I've brought you here to do it. I don't know of any dodge for making them think that it's niggers after Jam and Pickles—Nabob Pickles, you know—to-night. But I can get hold of Fish to-morrow, and put him up to telling them yarns that will make them dead sure of it. It all helps for the bigger scheme, you know!"

"Oh, go on!" growled Anthony. "Jimmy can wait here if he likes. I'm coming with you."

"Better not! You'd only be in the way if I have to scoot in a hurry. The best dodge will be for you both to wait here near the window. And, I say, do a bunk if you hear the pursuit rolling close. I can find plenty of places to hide in till it's gone past and all is quiet again. But if you're copped it gives the game away for me completely."

"Right-ho!" said the brothers together, and one of them breathed a sigh of relief. He had not expected so great a measure of boldness as this from his cousin Harold.

There was not much pluck about it in reality. It was quite true that Skinner could easily hide, and that course struck him as rather less risky than immediate flight.

He crept up the stairs, and pushed open the door of the Remove dormitory.

It was not quite dark within. Though the blinds were down, the full moon, shining high in a sky now cloudless, prevented that.

Bunter and Sammy were snoring. Skinner knew of old the trumpeting of the Owl. Fish, lying on his back, was making gurgling sounds between a snore and a choke. Most of the others were breathing regularly. There was nothing to suggest that anyone was awake, and after the long day they had had on the ice it was quite unlikely that anyone would be.

Skinner paused.

Now that he was there he felt a little uncertain what to do.

But his mind was soon made up.

Merely to make a noise was not enough. There must be something to give the notion of a definite attack upon one or the other of the Indian juniors.

He chose Hurree Singh. There were two reasons for that. One was that Inky was crocked. The other was that it was Inky Skinner hated, as he hated all the Famous Five. Koumi Rao was little more than a stranger to him; and Harold Skinner was not the kind of fellow to be really keen on avenging another's supposed wrongs.

Up to Inky's bedside he crept. With nervous fingers he touched the Indian junior's throat. He knew that Inky was a light sleeper. It would not be necessary to throttle, or even half-throttle, him to wake him.

The fingers closed for just a second. Inky writhed and woke. The fingers unclasped. Skinner bolted.

He ran into a bed in his haste, and came down with a thump. He was up again in a moment and out of the door. But that bump had aroused more than half the dormitory.

"What's the jolly row?" asked Squiff.

"Someone was herefully present who had not the rightfulness!" gasped Inky. "I awoke from the esteemed sleepfulness to feel a claspfulness at my throat!"

Koumi Rao was first out of bed, but Squiff and Kangaroo and Tom Brown were not a second after him. Somehow, not one of them doubted that something really had happened; not one thought that Inky had merely dreamed it.

"That chap who was hanging around!" exclaimed Tom Brown.

"That's the merchant!" cried Delarey. "Oooch!" he added, as he came down with a nasty jar upon his injured ankle.

"I'll go and tell Mr. Prout!" said little Sylvester pluckily.

His bed was near the door, and he was out of the dormitory before anyone could stop him.

Squiff bolted after him. It was not safe, he thought, to let the kid go alone. There might be danger in the dark passages. Tom Brown went after Squiff. He thought of the danger, too—perhaps as much as Squiff's danger as of Sylvester's. Delarey limped after them.

"We don't want Prouty, Squiff!" said Tom.

But it was too late to stop Sylvester. And now the rest came pouring out of the dormitory, and Mr. Prout's voice was heard.

"Goodness, goodness! What does this mean? Eh, eh, eh? Speak up, my lad! Here, let me get my rifle! Some scoundrel in the house, you say? Trying to choke Hurree Singh—eh? Let me get my rifle! I'll choke him!"

Mr. Prout's rifle was in his bed-room. He came out with it in another moment, and commanded everyone to get behind him. Down the staircase, bold as a lion, went Mr. Prout. It was impossible not to respect him, even if one did feel that his rifle was more likely to be a peril to those behind than to the mysterious midnight visitor.

They followed him in. Some hung back. The Bunters and Fish came out of the dormitory because they dared not stay there when others had gone. But they stopped on the landing. The rest pushed hard on the heels of Mr. Prout. Buck Finn was not in the lead; but, at least, he showed far more pluck than Fishy.

Down below, Skinner had halted a while. But when he heard the sound of many footsteps, the hum of excited

voices, the high tones of Mr. Prout, he sped back to the Remove Form-room. The time had come for him and his confederates to clear.

They cleared, without difficulty. Keeping in the shadows, they made their way to the wall, clambered over it, and were a full half-mile away before the unlocked window in the Remove Form-room was discovered.

"That's something for a start!" said Harold Skinner. "They are sure to think that someone's hanging about on the look-out to do one of those niggers in. Spoil their fun for a bit—eh, you chaps? They'll have to be on the watch, and shivering in their boots at what may happen. They won't guess it was only their dear friend Skinner who squeezed the nig's throat a little!"

"We'd better put off the other dodge for a few nights, though," said his cousin James. "Somethin' better to do on Christmas Eve an' Christmas night—what? Besides, they'll have it hanging over them all the time."

"I hope it spoils their Christmas dinner!" said Anthony spitefully.

. . . . . .

But it failed completely to do that. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, and Koumi Rao, Jam of Bundelpore, were no cowards. Nor were their chums. And as for Bunter and Fish, it was none of their funeral, as Fishy elegantly remarked.

There was a darker shadow than any that Skinner and his cousins had power to throw hanging over some of the chums, and before long courage and loyalty were put to the test. But of that another story will tell.

Christmas was jolly enough, anyway. Mr. Prout came out strongly. If he had been uncle to them all he could not have come out better. They drank his health with a round of cheers at the late—and ample—Christmas dinner; and he beamed upon them like the full moon, and told tales of the Rockies till he was hoarse, and was listened to! So, you may be sure, Mr. Prout was happy.

Bunter, by the way, did not consider the dinner bountiful. There was enough, he had to admit. He was loaded up to the Plimsoll line, and a bit beyond, before he had finished. But, as Bunter said, nothing short of too much was enough; if you didn't get a heap more than you needed you didn't have half what you wanted!

Sammy, who had eaten himself ill, only grunted at that. But even Sammy was not wholly unhappy. It was something to eat till you were sick without being interfered with by Aunt Rebecca!

(Don't miss "FOUR FROM THE EAST!" — next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

EDITORIAL CHAT.

For Next Monday:

"FOUR FROM THE EAST!"

By Frank Richards.

Next week's story will be to some extent a continuation of this week's, though I think you will all allow that "The Greyfriars Christmas Party" makes a story in itself! But there is left untold the outcome of the Skinner plot, and you will also be curious to know what the face at the window meant, and what was the shadow that hung over the school.

Well, you will know next week!

GREETINGS!

You will find a pictorial greeting on another page. But I cannot write my Chat without saying a few words here. The best of good wishes to you all, wherever you may be! I don't except those with whom I have had "a few words" in the past. At such a season as Christmas I can wish well even to "Disgusted" Colemans and First, Second, Third, and Fourth "Accusers." Perhaps they don't want it, and perhaps they don't deserve it; but I wish them well. I hope they will enjoy themselves, without offence to the Food Controller, and come to a better frame of mind! As for my many thousands of loyal readers, whose encouraging and welcome letters pour in day by day—well, there is nothing good that I don't wish them! That's why I am giving them this number, you know. Could they ask for anything better?

NEXT WEEK!

The Great Special Christmas Number of

"THE BOYS' FRIEND"—

with such attractions as "Frank Richards' Christmas," and "De Courcy's Chum"—by the author of "The Twins from Tasmania." You cannot do without this splendid number, and it's

ONLY TWOPENCE!

"THE MUDHOOK."

A reader in the trenches—to whom be thanks—has sent me a copy of a paper with the above curious title—and a most interesting paper it is, full of really good stuff, serious and humorous. The only fault with it, to my mind, is that there is not nearly enough of it.

In Gallipoli the gallant Royal Naval Division had its own paper—"Dug-Out Gossip"—a little typewritten sheet. Now the R.N.D. blossoms out over in France into a well-printed magazine of 20 pages and cover, artistically illustrated. It is the real stuff, and I should like to quote quite a lot of it. But I have only room here for one really fine set of verses by A. P. Herbert, which tell of what men feel when they go back to districts where they have fought against great odds, and have seen their comrades fall, after those districts have passed again into the realm of civilisation. I am not sure that all of you will appreciate the verses—I know that many don't care for poetry—but I am sure some of you will.

BEAUCOURT REVISITED.

I wandered up to Beaucourt, I took the river track,
And saw the lines we lived in before the Boche went back.
But peace was now in Pottage, the front was far ahead,
The front was flying Eastward, and only left the dead.

And I thought: "How long we lay there, and watched across the wire,
While the guns roared round the valley, and set the skies a-fire."
But now there are homes in Hamel, and tents in the Vale of Hell,
And a camp at Suicide Corner, where half the regiment fell.

The new troops follow after, and tread the land we won;
To them it is so much hillside, re-wrested from the Hun.
To us 'tis almost sacred, this dreary mile of mud;
The shell-holes hold our history, and half of them our blood.

Here at the head of Peche Street 'twas death to show your face.
To me it seemed like magic to linger in the place.
To me, how many spirits hung round the Kentish Caves.
But the new men see no spirits—they only see the graves.

I found the half-dug ditches we fashioned for the fight.
We lost a score of men there—young James was killed that night.
I saw the star-shells staring, I heard the bullets hail,
But the new men pass unheeding—they never heard the tale.

I crossed the blood-red ribbon that once was No-Man's Land;
I saw a winter daybreak and a creeping minute hand;
And here the lads went over, and there was Harmsworth shot,
And here was William lying—but the new men knew them not.

And I said: "There is still the river, and still the stiff, stark trees
To treasure here our story, but there are only these."
But under the white wood crosses the dead men answered low:
"The new men know not Beaucourt, but we are here—we know."

BACK NUMBERS, Etc., WANTED.

By Miss Elsie Staff, Terania Street, New Lismore, N.S.W., Australia—"Black Footballers."

By Miss R. Legros, 10, Grosvenor Gardens, St. Leonards.—MAGNET, Nos. 303-340, Please write before sending.

By W. H. Price, 33, Gaywood Street, Southwark, S.E. 1.—MAGNET, No. 1.—Offers 1/-.

By Ernest G. Earl, 16-18, Hunter Street, Sydney, Australia.—MAGNET and "Gem."—Nos. 1-350, or any between.

By Robert MacDonald, King Harold Street, Lerwick, Shetland.—Any 25 back numbers of MAGNET between 1 and 300.

By Frank Halley, 41, Upper Church Path, Sandport, Portsmouth.—"Penny Popular," No. 222, "Wingate's Secret," "Wingate's Chum," "Wingate's Folly," "Outlaws of the School," "The Upper Hand," "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves."

By Miss Betty Jury, The Mall, New Glenelg, South Australia.—"Self-Condemned."

By Jack Makin, 12, Whitby Street, The Brook, Liverpool.—"Gem" and MAGNET back numbers.

By Miss D. Munnings, St. Peter's Vicarage, De Beauvoir Square, Dalston, N. 1.—Any back numbers of MAGNET.

By Miss Jessie Lohr, 6, Selwyn Avenue, Richmond, Surrey.—"Boys' Friend" 3d. Library—story, "The Unconquerable."

By Albert A. E. Heron, 54, Doverfield Road, New Park Road, S.W. 2.—"Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "The Fall of the Fifth," also any MAGNETS about Bunter, Wun Lung, or Kipps; any "Gems" containing stories about House rivalry.

By R. W. Reed, 7, Townshend Road, St. John's Wood, N. 8.—"Nelson Lee Library," Nos. 1-14, 39, and 53—clean.—Please state price.

By C. Whitehead, 51, Market Square, Pocklington, Yorkshire.—MAGNET, 412-466—clean.—Please state price.

Your Editor

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 49.—DESMOND and MORGAN.

NEITHER Desmond nor Morgan is among the leading figures of the Remove. One cannot recall either as the central figure of any story, for in "Micky Desmond's Luck" the Irish junior did not play a part any more prominent than that of Bunter or that of Skinner. Morgan has not even had a story named after him.

That is one reason why they are being taken together. Another reason is that they have always been good chums, and for a long time study-mates. They share No. 6 with Rake and Wibley; but they were there before Rake came breezily in—he was with Johnny Bull and Fish at first—or Wibley strolled along to explain to the Amateur Dramatic Society what acting really means.

Micky's proper name is Michael. But Micky is about as little concerned with what is "proper" as anyone in the Remove, though that does not mean that he is not as keen on fair play as another. He has a laugh and a jest for all; and if worry gets him down, it cannot hold him down. Desmond is a famous name in Irish history—a tragic name, too. But there is nothing tragic about Micky!

David Morgan is Welsh; his name tells that. There is kinship between the Welsh

Michael Desmond

and the Irish; both races belong to the great Celtic family. But it is a mistake to suppose that they are therefore much alike. Take an Irishman from Tipperary—it is thence Desmond hails—a Highlander from Argyll or Inverness—a Campbell or a Cameron, say—and a man of Cardiganshire or Merioneth, and you will have three people quite unlike the typical Englishman—and also quite unlike one another. The difference is not perceptible to everyone. There are many who cannot see it at all. If a man has two arms and two legs—flesh or wooden—something in the nature of a face, and the ability to speak without giving himself away as a foreigner—then he is an "Englishman" to them. But these are not people of discernment.

Morgan is not so light-hearted and irresponsible as Micky. He is scarcely as good-tempered. There is a fieriness in him. The very look of him shows you that he is more serious than his Irish chum. But that does not mean that every Welshman is more serious than every Irishman.

These two were among those at Greyfriars when Harry Wharton came. Frank Nugent was the only one of the Famous Five who was there before Harry; Bob Cherry came just after him. Bulstrode was the Form captain then; and Morgan and Desmond were among those who were pretty well fed up with Bulstrode as leader.

It was Micky who drew Son o' Mine in Carberry's swindling sweep. Son o' Mine won, but Micky's mother's son didn't, for Carberry proved a defaulter. The Sixth-Former had wanted Desmond to sell the ticket, but Micky refused all his offers. It was Micky who asked someone to punch his head, so that he might lose his memory like Bunter, whose loss of memory had landed him in clover. But Micky was wroth with Donald Ogilvy when he obliged. It was Micky who proposed Alonzo Todd as captain of footer—and then wouldn't vote for him! Lonzy thought it very inconsistent—as it was.

Micky put up for the captaincy once, when Wharton was called away for a time. So did Morgan. Neither got in.

There must have been a memory of Ogilvy's promptitude in the mind of Micky when he came near to causing a big row with Bulstrode on the St. Jim's ground—where, of course, a row between two Greyfriars fellows would have been even more out of place than at home.

Micky had been in, and come out with a blob. Bulstrode said he hoped someone would kick him if he failed to score. Bulstrode added the same number to the score as the ruddy-faced Irish junior; and Micky kicked him, and Bulstrode was not pleased!

It was Micky who got the contents of the frying-pan over his trousers in Study No. 1 through Bunter's clumsiness. But it was Morgan who punched Bob Cherry's nose during Bob's footer captaincy. The hot Welsh blood was up when David heard that he was not centre-forward. But Bob, having knocked him down, told him that he was inside-right, and then it was all right!

It was Morgan who wanted to sing "The Bells of Aberdovey" in Welsh at an entertainment; and Micky who sang "Molly Aroon" at Bob Cherry's benefit, and "The Widow Malone" at another performance. They are both tuneful. It would be a wonder if Morgan were not, seeing that he is Welsh—that is to say, of a nation that has probably a bigger percentage of good voices than any other in Europe.

Morgan was one of Billy Bunter's ventriloquial pupils. It was a do, of course. Bunter can't teach ventriloquism. He is only a ventriloquist by accident, and is utterly ignorant of the principles of the art. Both of the chums were taken in by his translation bureau swindle. They were together in refusing to help Bulstrode & Co. out of No. 14 when Wun Lung had put those very unwelcome guests in deadly fear that they were going to perish of suffocation. They were together in Bulstrode's silly deputation to the Head to protest against Mr. Quelch, and they wished heartily that they had kept out of it. And they were together again in Bulstrode's foray against the Lambs of Pegg, which was no more successful. Morgan wanted to have Bulstrode bumped in the dormitory for that failure; but, as Wharton pointed out, the blame could not fairly be put wholly on the shoulders of Bulstrode.

Both of them have usually backed up Wharton. They were on his side in the long struggle between him and Bulstrode; but there were times when they wavered, for they could not always understand Harry's ways of looking at things, and it annoyed them when he refused to turn up at an election in which he was concerned. What was the use of voting for a fellow who wasn't there to know that one did it?

It was Micky who played a jape on Ferney, the junior with a head full of blood-and-thunder ideas. Micky had been left out of the footer team by Bulstrode, and didn't like it. He and Trevor and Vane were invited by Ferney to join a secret society. Micky suggested signing the deep, dark, deadly oath with their own blood, and Micky undertook to get chloroform for Ferney to use upon Bulstrode. But the chloroform came out of the water-tap! Micky saw Mr. Prout caught in the booby-trap which Wharton & Co. had designed for Coker, and regarded it as a huge joke. That is his way of looking at things. It was no joke for Mr. Prout, and it looked like being none for the culprits. But Mr. Prout was merciful—sentence, one hundred lines each.

When the Bounder came along and raised the standard of revolt against Wharton both Micky and Morgan fell away more or less. Bulstrode, acting as aide to the new rebel leader, persuaded Morgan to resign from the footer team, but the Welsh junior soon repented. Micky had backed Harry up to the point where Mark Linley was so cruelly deceived by the wire, but he refused to credit the accusation of having sent that wire which Wharton levelled against the Bounder. Micky was wrong.

It was Micky who was put out of the train on the way to a cricket match at St. Jim's. He had got into a row with a crusty old gentleman through Bunter's ventriloquism, and when authority demanded his ticket he could not find it. When it was found the train had gone, and he had two hours to wait for the next. And when he got to St. Jim's there was more trouble. Bunter, whom Micky had offended, put into his mouth opprobrious epithets levelled at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But Gussy was placated by the explanation offered, and all was calm and bright.

Morgan it was who got asafœtida from the laboratory to drive out Walker when that prefect was given a study on the Remove corridor. Morgan was among the moonlight footballers; Micky, too, no doubt, though one is not quite sure. Morgan, who has a barrister brother, was prosecuting counsel in the trial of the Bounder for being concerned with Pon & Co. in rotting up a

Remove footer match in the snow. And very eloquent Morgan was!

"Look at the scowling face, the beetling brow—that whole countenance cast in the mould of wickedness!" said Morgan. Rough on the Bounder—what! "The last word in moral depravity!" is another gem from his speech.

Morgan played a jolly British tar, who cheerfully sang "Hearts of Oak" while waiting his turn to walk the plank in "The Red Rover"—that thrilling drama which Wharton wrote, and Micky knocked into shape—according to Micky!

It was Micky who had the dream of wealth—the Sandwich Islands stamp, supposed to be worth a cool thousand or so, which he had found among the stamps given him by his Uncle Murphy; also Irish, if one may venture a guess—Murphy is not a Hun name, anyway. But after both Skinner and Bunter had tried to steal it the stamp was found to be a mere reprint, of no value. Micky is no fool, though he may be erratic. Loder & Co., who welcomed him in his new role of plutocrat, wanted him to gamble. He was very much obliged to them for their kindness in asking him up to the Sixth Form quarters. But he wasn't having any!

Like a true chum did Micky stand by Dick Rake in the trouble caused by Rake's cousin being accused of the crime which Carthew's father had committed. And Rake could have counted on Morgan, too—ay, and on Wibley as well—for the same backing, though there was no need to ask them as things were.

"THE MAGNET" WHO'S WHO.

READERS must not take what follows as a complete list. A complete list of all the masters and boys at Greyfriars would include many names unknown—and never likely to be known—to the stories. The space occupied by nonentities, if such a list were given, is, I consider, better used in presenting the leading characters outside the school walls who figure in the yarns. You will find some information about Highcliffe, Cliff House, and the Courtfield Council School. The method adopted is quite as easy for reference as that of two years ago, when a special supplement of Greyfriars was given, and the list is far more comprehensive. Mr. Richards has given me much valued help with it. His list includes a few characters who are not familiar to me, well as I know the stories; but I have no doubt that we shall hear some day of any he mentions who have not yet come to the fore. Anyway, his authority is good enough!—THE EDITOR.

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL.

Headmaster: THE REV. HERBERT HENRY LOCKE, D.D.

There is no division into Houses at Greyfriars, though in the event of any considerable further increase of numbers a new House would no doubt have to be established.

School colours: Blue and white.

Sixth Form.

Form-master: DOCTOR LOCKE.

WINGATE, GEORGE BERNARD. — The skipper of Greyfriars. A tall, burly, athletic fellow, with a rugged but by no means bad-looking face; one of the very best, trusted and respected alike by masters and boys.

CARNE, ARTHUR WOODHEAD.—Chum of Loder, and only inferior to him as an utter rotter. Plays the gay dog. Also plays cricket and footer with ability, but overvalues himself. Was once a prefect; is so no longer. Has escaped expulsion as yet, but his turn may come, as Carberry's did!

COKER, REGINALD. — Coker minor, younger brother of the great Horace. Particularly clever, but under-sized and weakly. A good fellow, but not anyway great at keeping up his end against bullying, and hopeless at present as a disciplinarian.

COURTNEY, ARTHUR EVANS.—A prefect, and one of Wingate's best chums and staunchest supporters. A high-souled, chivalrous fellow, incapable of meanness, and an all-round athlete of ability.

FAULKNER, LAWRENCE.—A prefect of good average ability, but not distinguished.

GWYNNE, PATRICK.—Irish, and a real good sort. Prefect, chum of Wingate, and altogether one of the leading lights of the Sixth.

HAMMERSLEY, VINCENT.—A prefect of the right type.

LODER, GERALD ASSHETON.—The worst fellow at Greyfriars, bar none. Dissipated, something of a funk, given to intriguing, never out of trouble, and always trying to bring others into it. Hates Wingate.

NORTH, TOM.—A prefect of the right sort, though of no marked fame.

VALENCE, RUPERT WINGFIELD.—Not quite as black a sheep as Loder and Carne, and has of late picked his way more carefully; but at best an unreliable fellow, without pluck or principle.

WALKER, JAMES.—Has more in him than Valence, but has associated too much with Carne and Loder to escape their taint. Is a prefect, and has shown now and then that he has good impulses.

(Average age of the Form about 17. There is considerable variation. Coker minor is only 16; Loder and others are at least 18.

Fifth Form.

Form-master: PAUL PONTIFEX PROUT, M.A.

BLUNDELL, GEORGE.—Captain of the Form. A good fellow, and a valuable man in the school cricket and footer elevens. (Study No. 1.)

BLAND, BERTRAM. — Blundell's close chum, and much after his pattern. (Study No. 1.)

COKER, HORACE JAMES.—Coker major. "Nulli secundus"—"facile princeps"—and everything in that way one can think of—in the opinion of H. J. Coker. His one other believer is his Aunt, Judith. A big and powerful fellow, with the brain of twelve and the muscles of twenty—years of age, in both cases. Spells worse than badly, and is no credit to Mr. Prout in other respects. Imagines himself good at everything, like Grundy of St. Jim's, and in tact and judgment is second only to D'Arcy. But as straight as a gun-barrel, as brave as a lion, and very generous. May be heavy-handed with the fags—he includes the Remove in that category—but is no bully in reality. (Study No. 4.)

FITZGERALD, TERENCE.—From Old Ireland. Capable and humorous. Pokes fun at Coker—and at most other people and things. (Study No. 2.)

GREENE, WILLIAM FREDERICK.—One of Coker's two special chums. Quite a decent fellow. Fond of Coker, but does not sympathise with all his notions. Can only be led to a certain extent, and declines to be driven. A bit of a poet. Good at games. (Study No. 4.)

HILTON, CEDRIC.—Not a distinguished member of the Form at present. (Study No. 6.)

POTTER, GEORGE.—Coker's other chum. Much of the same type as Greene, but occupies a somewhat more prominent position in the Form and the school, as a regular first eleven man both at cricket and footer. Both he and Greene appreciate Aunt Judy's frequent tips, of which they reap a full share of benefit. (Study No. 4.)

PRICE, STEPHEN.—One of the rank and file. (Study No. 5.)

SMITH, EDWARD WILLIAM. — Smith major—has a brother in the Remove. The right sort, but not famous in any special direction. (Study No. 2.)

TOMLINSON, THOMAS TROTTER.—Tomlinson major—brother in Upper Fourth. Nothing against T. T. T. in the records. (Study No. 6.)

(The ages of the fellows in the Fifth would range from a trifle over 15 to 17. Boys are not put into Forms on their age, but in general—there may be a few exceptions—in accordance with their scholastic attainments—or lack of them!)

Shell.

Form-master: HORACE MANFRED HACKER, B.A.

HOBSON, JAMES. — The muscular and robustious skipper of the Form. Not ladylike; quite a good fellow, however, on the whole. A capable half-back, and a decent cricketer. Used to be a chum of Coker's—is not now! (Study No. 5.)

CARR, ALBERT.—Not a personage of note. (Study No. 1.)

CHOWNE, CHOLMONDELEY.—Something of a nut. (Study No. 2.)

CHURCHILL, LUKE.—Not an easy fellow to understand. Not too popular in consequence. (Study No. 2.)

HOSKINS, CLAUDE. — A long-haired musical genius, suspected by some of being potty. Gets on well with Hobson, however, and can hold his own at games, so cannot be far wrong. (Study No. 5.)

MILES, SAMUEL.—Shares the obscurity of No. 1 Study—up the corner—with Carr. May emerge into the limelight some day.

RAYNER, NEIL.—Not distinguished, but sound enough. (Study No. 3.)

STEWART, EDWARD.—A Scot, and a good sort. (Study No. 3.)

(Average age a trifle lower than that of the Fifth, but range of age scarcely less wide. There are, for instance, a number of fellows in the Fifth younger than Hobson, while there are a few in the Shell no older than some of those in the Upper Fourth or Remove.)

Upper Fourth Form.

Form-master: ALGERNON JASPER CAPPER, M.A.

TEMPLE, CECIL REGINALD.—Captain of the Form. A good fellow, but not as good a skipper as he thinks himself. A would-be autocrat, something of a nut and exquisite. Often up against Harry Wharton & Co., but does not as a rule get much change out of it. No duffer at games, but not the Admirable Crichton that he is considered by one person—to wit, himself. (Study No. 2.)

DABNEY, WILLIAM WALTER.—One of Temple's closest chums. Has more commonsense than his chief, but does not always find it sufficient to restrain Temple. A useful athlete. But the standard of athletics in the Upper Fourth is not too high. (Study No. 2.)

FRY, EDWARD.—Temple's other chum. Bucks against him at times, and has a trifle more in the way of a will of his own than Dabney, but on the whole plays "follow-my-leader" pretty cheerfully and consistently. (Study No. 2.)

MACDOUGALL, RONALD.—A Highlander; plucky and quick-tempered. (Study No. 4.)

MURPHY, SHAMUS.—A wild Irishman from Connemara. Quite a decent fellow in his own queer way. (Study No. 1.)

SCOTT, JAMES KENNETH.—The worthy bearer of a famous name. The most level-headed and able fellow in the Form. Would make a better skipper than Temple. Probably knows it, but is on perfectly good terms with the great Cecil Reginald. (Study No. 5.)

TOMLINSON, TEDDY.—Tomlinson minor. Shares Scott's study, and is a firm believer in his stable companion. Has a tendency to embonpoint, but is not a Bunter.

(Not much difference in age between Upper and Lower Fourth.)

Remove (Lower Fourth Form).

Form-master: HORACE HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, M.A.

WHARTON, HARRY.—The central figure of the stories. Skipper of the Remove, and leader of the Famous Five. Brave, chivalrous, tender-hearted, proud as a Spanish Don, yet never vindictive. Has real qualities of leadership, and if his strong desire to keep the members of his Form in the right way tends to make him seem to worry too much at times about other people's affairs, still, it cannot be said that he is ever prying. A fellow in a thousand. A fine all-round athlete. (Study No. 1.)

BOLSOVER, PERCY.—Bolsover major—has a brother in the Third. The oldest and biggest fellow in the Form. Something of a bully, something of a dunce, something of a gay dog in a dingy way; yet by no means "wholly vile." Has a way of doing the straight thing in a most ungracious manner when he sees it, but is rather slow to see it, and, though quite self-opinionated enough, can be led by the nose by the crafty. (Study No. 10.)

BROWN, TOM.—A good sort in every way, and capable, too. One of the most valued members of the Form cricket and footer teams. Cheery, full of humour, can tell a story by word of mouth or on paper well, likes a jape, and plays the game. Comes from Taranaki, New Zealand. (Study No. 2.)

BULL, JOHN, JUNIOR.—His uncle is John Bull senior. One of the Famous Five. Painfully candid at times; grumbles like a true Briton; but sound and generous at heart. Good with his fists, with his feet, and with a bat. Also considers himself a proficient on the concertina. (Study No. 14.)

BULSTRODE, GEORGE.—Once Wharton's deadly foe and resolute rival. Did not scruple then to play tricks worthy of Skinner. A different fellow now, still a trifle rough perhaps, but scorning meanness. A good goalkeeper, though not up to the form of Hazeldene at his very best, and no duffer at cricket. Also a hefty fighting-man. (Study No. 2.)

BUNTER, WILLIAM GEORGE.—Bunter major—has a minor in the Second. Gormandiser, spy, liar, coward, and cadger—and yet, somehow, not wholly unlikeable, probably because he is so amusing, for it is difficult to find anything good to say of him. A curious compound of craft and simplicity. Fancies himself an Adonis, by whose charms no girl can remain unmoved. Is still waiting for his postal-order, and suffering from a complete inability to tie his bootlaces so that they will stay tied. (Study No. 7.)

CHERRY, ROBERT.—The sunniest-tempered and most lovable of them all. Loyal utterly, seldom cast down, shirks no danger or fatigue, plays his part manfully through all sorts of trials. Perhaps a little rough at times, scarcely realising his own strength, but as tender-hearted as Wharton, and far less proud. Good at all games, and the champion fighting-man of the Form. (Study No. 13.)

DELAREY, PIET.—From South Africa, and the bearer of a famous Boer name. Quite a good fellow, though not so easy to read as Bob Cherry or Tom Brown. A useful all-round athlete, and more than commonly good with the gloves—or without! (Study No. 12.)

DESMOND, MICHAEL.—"Rale Irish." Full of fun and mirth. No duffer at anything. One of four who share a study and get on well together. Has always been chummy with Morgan, and more lately Rake and Wibley have joined them. (Study No. 6.)

DUTTON, THOMAS.—Suffers from the handicap of being very deaf. Apart from this, as able as most; good at footer, and a skater of speed. Has a firm belief in Peter Todd, and an equally firm disbelief in William George Bunter. Appreciates Alonzo's good points, and has, like him, a taste for reading. (Study No. 7.)

ELLIOTT, NINIAN.—Comes from the Scottish border. Has never made much of a mark, but is not a bad sort on the whole. Has generally sided against Wharton in times of crisis, but is not a Skinner or Snoop. (Study No. 10.)

FIELD, SAMPSON QUINCY IFFLEY.—Called "Squiff" owing to the proverbial shortness of life. Comes from New South Wales. A great japer, a fine all-round man, and a first-rate fellow in every way. The chief of the brotherhood of three—the Three Colonials—which also includes Delarey and Tom Brown. (Study No. 14.)

FISH, FISHER TARLETON.—From New York. An American with a great bent towards what he calls "business," and others call "swindling." Puts dollars before anything else, even common honesty, and has played many shady tricks, but is not such a rotter as Skinner, and is tolerated by fellows who cannot stand that youth. Squiff and Johnny Bull bear with him, but do not love him. Speaks a weird lingo. Not, it need hardly be said, perhaps, intended in any way to represent the typical American boy. (Study No. 14.)

GLENN, CHARLES GEORGE.—A rather quiet fellow, of whom we never hear much. (Study No. 5.)

HAZELDENE, PETER.—Neither black nor white, but rather a dingy grey. A better fellow than he used to be in the days when the Remove called him "Vaseline," and his oily craft was a byword. But weak, wayward, and passionate; a victim of the gambling fever, and not to be trusted much farther than one can see him. Except his sister Marjorie, he has never had a better friend than Harry Wharton; but he is not often or for long grateful, and seems at times to hate Wharton because of the contrast between them. At his best a brilliant goalkeeper, but has his bad days. A useful cricketer, but not reliable there. His study-mates help to keep him from going utterly wrong, but he is often too obstinate to heed them or anyone. (Study No. 2.)

KIPPS, OLIVER.—A conjurer of great ability. Otherwise not specially distinguished, though he can hold his own in the playing-fields, and is the right sort. (Study No. 5.)

LINLEY, MARK.—A scholarship boy, who had worked in a Lancashire factory before coming to Greyfriars, and was greatly persecuted by the snobs because of that fact. Clean grit all through, slow to take offence, but a young lion when roused, forgiving and staunch; clever in a plodding rather than a brilliant way, but not a mere plodder; a very glutton for work, actually keen on Greek; and as good at play as in class. Perhaps Bob Cherry's best chum, though it would be a close thing between him and Wharton for that. (Study No. 13.)

MAULEVERER, THE EARL. — Christian names, Herbert Plantagenet. Several more, no doubt, but it is easier—and more correct from the point of view of etiquette—to sign just "Mauleverer." His friends—who are many—shorten it to "Mauly," as do some who are not his friends, including Billy Bunter. The laziest ever—yet can be roused, and has no end of pluck. Has heaps of money. Would give away his head to a chum, if it were removable, and could possibly be of any use to anybody; but is shrewd enough to kick at cadgers. Gets on wonderfully well with Delarey and Vivian, the two widely different fellows who share his study. Has been known to fall in love. Fell out again without serious damage. (Study No. 12.)

MORGAN, DAVID.—From the land of Cymry. Every Welshman will understand that—even if the word is not rendered quite correctly—and what do the others matter? A sterling good fellow, with a quick temper but no malice; and a capable fellow, too. (Study No. 6.)

NEWLAND, MONTAGUE.—Of the race of Israel, and a credit to it. A generous and plucky fellow, rather more thoughtful than most, but able to use his hands effectively as well as his brains. (Study No. 9.)

NUGENT, FRANK.—Nugent major—has a brother in the Second. Harry Wharton's closest chum. Like him in many ways—as proud and as plucky, but lacking Wharton's strength of character. Rather girlish of face—can make up well as a girl if need be—but not by any means effeminate. Unselfish, and forbearing unless his pride is aroused. A good man at games, and within the limits of his strength an able opponent with gloves or without. (Study No. 1.)

OGILVY, ROBERT DONALD.—A sturdy Scot from the eastern Highlands. Cool, resolute, courageous, and able. Can be very obstinate in a good cause—or what he considers one. (Study No. 3.)

PENFOLD, RICHARD.—The son of the Friardale cobbler, and one of Nature's gentlemen. A scholarship boy, who had a rough passage of it at the outset. Good at games, and one of the three or four leaders in the Form-room. (Study No. 9.)

RAKE, RICHARD.—But more commonly "Dick" or "Dicky." Has plenty of fun in him, and plenty of pluck and resolution. Was inclined to buck against the domination of the Famous Five at one time, but was never their real enemy, and even had he been would have kept their respect, for it is not in him to be mean or spiteful. Quite a hefty all-round sportsman, and especially good with his fists. (Study No. 6.)

RUSSELL, RICHARD.—Another "Dick," and, like the other two, a good sort. At one time suspected of cowardice, but proved himself later, and developed unusual skill as a boxer. There is a slight strain of weakness in him, but the comradeship of Donald Ogilvy has stiffened his backbone, and he has shown that he can go his own way for a friend's sake in defiance of everyone. (Study No. 3.)

SINGH, HURREE JAMSET RAM.—Nabob of Bhanipur. It is technically incorrect, perhaps, to treat the "Singh" as the equivalent of our surnames; but the fashion was set when the cricket reporters gave us "K. S. Ranjitsinhji." An Indian, of the great fighting Rajput race, the descendant of a line of princes, and the ruler of a territory. And just a simple, fun-loving, companionable schoolboy with it all, though now and again the Rajput pride shows through. Talks a weird and wonderful kind of English, due to the very best native tutors, but could express himself otherwise at a pinch if he chose. A deadly bowler, a speedy forward, and a fine goalkeeper when needed. The fifth of the Famous Five—alphabetically, that is, for it was the addition of Johnny Bull that made them five. The other three are, of course, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Bob Cherry. (Study No. 13.)

SKINNER, HAROLD.—The worst fellow in the Remove—unless Snoop can be considered such. But Skinner has more strength of will, more cunning, and more hardihood than Snoop. Spiteful, treacherous, a gay dog in a dingy way, and the enemy of every decent fellow in the Form. Better to have as enemy than friend, for he is not to be trusted. Not a very congenial study-mate for Vernon-Smith. (Study No. 4.)

SMITH, ROBERT FORTESCUE.—Smith minor—has a brother in the Fifth. Not a character of note. (Study No. 8.)

SNOOP, SIDNEY JAMES.—In some ways worse than Skinner; certainly more of one piece throughout, though there is little enough of good in Skinner. Mean, fawning, snobbish, cowardly, and inclined to dingy dissipation. (Study No. 11.)

STOTT, WILLIAM.—Snoop's study-mate, and tarred with the same brush, but scarcely so heavily. Is always on the wrong side, but never leads, and has seldom—if ever—been known to originate a piece of rascality. Not so utter a funk as Snoop, and has at times shown glimmerings of conscience. (Study No. 11.)

TODD, ALONZO THEOPHILUS.—In him is no guile. The most innocent fellow in the school—so innocent as to make people wonder at times whether he is "quite all there." Obliging to a fault. Soft-hearted and soft-headed. Has the best of intentions, and is capable of making a mess of anything in carrying them out. Transparently honest, and with really high principles. Called the "Duffer. He is a duffer, but he is no coward, and as an Early Christian would probably have been fed to the lions—perhaps canonised afterwards as Saint Alonzo. There are saints in the calendar who had not half his meekness or his love of his fellows. (Study No. 7.)

TODD, PETER.—Alonzo's cousin. Quite "another guess sort." As straight as Lonzy, but far from being as guileless. In some ways the cleverest fellow at Greyfriars. Great at devising schemes, and hardy in carrying them out, however audacious they may be. A fine all-round athlete, in spite of his spindle legs and his curious resemblance to the Duffer. Reads law in his spare time, and will no doubt be a great lawyer one day. Leader of Study No. 7—a queer menagerie! Has been in rivalry with Wharton, but without malice. Keeps an eye on Bunter, and says he will make a man of him yet! But one doubts. (Study No. 7.)

TRELUCE, ANTHONY.—Not a leading member of the Form. Rather more likely than not to be found on the wrong side when there is a cleavage, but not to be classed with the out-and-out black sheep. (Study No. 9.)

TREVOR, HERBERT BEAUCHAMP.—Much the same type of fellow as Treluce, but with rather more decision of character. The son of a big Lancashire manufacturer, and has plenty of pocket-money. Shares a study with Newland and Penfold, but is scarcely of their sort. (Study No. 9.)

VERNON-SMITH, HERBERT.—Called the "Bounder," and fully deserved the name when he first came to Greyfriars. The spoiled son of a purse-proud millionaire who had a hold over Dr. Locke. Hard and cynical, yet not as hard or as cynical as he fancies himself. He has learned many lessons at Greyfriars, and not least among them has been that of coming to care for others besides himself and his father. There is little he would not do for Harry Wharton or Marjorie Hazeldene, and he has done generous things for people whom he has no cause to like. Even at his worst had a cool resolution and a fearless spirit that one could not help admiring. Brains he has in plenty. He plays all games well, including some that it were better he should not play at all. Can use his fists, too. (Study No. 4.)

VIVIAN, SIR JAMES, BART.—From Carker's Rents. Brought up in the slums, rescued thence and sent to Greyfriars by Sir Reginald Brooke, Mauleverer's guardian. Related to both Sir Reginald and Mauly. Has no money, and no manners worth mentioning—or had not when he came to Greyfriars; has picked up some since. Quick and really clever, with a honest, loyal heart. Devoted to his two study-mates, especially to Delarey. (Study No. 12.)

WIBLEY, WILLIAM.—An amateur actor of quite unusual ability, famed for his many impersonations, and not for much besides. But he is sound and decent, and well up to the average in other directions than acting. (Study No. 6.)

WUN LUNG.—A "heathen Chinee." Crafty; has no regard for the truth; flatters to deceive; does extraordinary things in the cooking and other lines, but with it all is a very likeable little chap, with the good qualities as well as the faults of the Orient. There are several fellows—including Harry Wharton and Mark Linley—for whom the little Celestial would risk anything; but for Bob Cherry he would die by slow torture were it necessary. Never forgets a kindness—or an injury, if intentional. Has a younger brother in the second. (Study No. 13.)

(The average age of the Remove is about 15. There is variation to the extent of well over a year, however.)

Third Form.

Form-master: EUSEBIUS TWIGG, B.A., B.Sc.

(Mr. Ernest Blaine, who was formerly master of the Third, is now in the Army.)

BOLSOVER, HUBERT.—Bolsover minor, brother to the heavy Percy, who was not too pleased when he had a young brother from the slums (lost in infancy, and discovered only after he had been sent to the school by his philanthropic father to be the missing

youngster) planted on him. Bolsover minor, like Vivian, had a good deal to learn, and suffered in learning it. But the youngster has a heart of gold, and in time the Third came to appreciate him at his true worth. He is now quite a leader among them.

BOLTER, OLIVER.—Not at present of any distinction—it may await him in the future, and may or may not be pleasant.

LUNN, HAROLD.—One of the rank and file.

O'ROURKE, TOM.—Another of them—Irish, of course.

PAGET, PERCIVAL SPENCER.—Tubb's right-hand man. In strong contrast to his chum, is a little dandy, but manly and plucky enough for all that.

TUBB, GEORGE.—Shock-headed, and inclined to grouse and growl; but a good sort, and leader of the fag tribe.

WINGATE, JACK.—The captain's minor. A wayward and rather spoiled youngster, with too big an idea of his own importance, but also with courage and spirit. Has gone wrong, and may go wrong again, but could never be an utter rotter.

(There is a widish variation in age in the Third. Some of the older boys are 14; some of the younger ones are only about 12. This is not a complete list—only the Remove is accorded the honour of mention right through the roll-call.)

Second Form.

Form-master: BERNARD MORRISON TWIGG, B.A. —(Brother of the Third Form's master.)

BUNTER, SAMUEL TUCKLESS.—Bunter minor, and a smaller edition of his brother. 'Nuff said!

CASTLE, THOMAS.—Not a leading member of the Form as yet.

GATTY, GEORGE ADALBERT.—The boss of the show. Calls himself skipper; but this is unofficial. A decent youngster, and a staunch chum.

HOP HI.—Wun Lung's minor, and very like him.

MYERS, EDWIN.—"Teddy." Gatty's lieutenant, and all serene.

NUGENT, RICHARD.—"Dicky." Frank Nugent's minor. Mischievous and spoiled and wrong-headed; a big trouble to Frank, but with good stuff in him.

SYLVESTER, RODERICK.—The son of an American millionaire. A nice, decent little chap, and a far better representative of the U.S. than Fisher T. Fish.

(The ages of the Second range from 10½, or thereabouts, to a little over 12.)

First Form.

A book on Iceland had a chapter headed "Snakes." All it contained was this: "There are no snakes in Iceland."

There is no First Form at Greyfriars. And if you want to know why the Second is not the First, we will tell you—when we are told why some railway lines have first and third classes, but no second!

Among the other masters at Greyfriars, apart from the Form-masters, must be mentioned:

CHARPENTIER, HENRI. — The French master.

GANS, OTTO.—The German master—from Saxony, and no lover of Prussia.

The following members of the school staff must be mentioned:

GOSLING, WILLIAM.—Porter and lodge-keeper.

KEBBLE, MRS.—Matron.

MIMBLE, MRS. (JESSIE.)—In charge of the tuckshop.

MIMBLE, JOSEPH.—Her husband, the gardener.

TROTTER, FRED.—Page.

CLIFF HOUSE.

A school for girls, situated near the fishing-village of Pegg, and only a short distance from Greyfriars. A mere mushroom compared with that ancient foundation, but a flourishing institution nevertheless. Only a few of the girls come into the stories.

Headmistress: MISS (PENELOPE) PRIMROSE.

Next in command: MISS (HYPATIA) LOCKE.—A Girton girl, and sister to Dr. Locke. Away now, doing war work; but will doubtless return.

BELL, ALICE.—Has not been seen often of late, but is a friend of the young ladies whom we have come to know so well.

DERWENT, PHILIPPA.—"Flap" to her friends—among whom Billy Bunter does not rank. The charming twin sister of "Flip" Derwent of Highcliffe.

GRAY, MOLLY.—A small and cute red-headed junior, with a lisping speech. Quite a nice kid.

HAZELDENE, MARJORIE.—The pretty and gentle sister of wayward Peter Hazeldene; the staunch chum of the Famous Five, and especially of Harry Wharton. Bob Cherry fairly worships her, and Vernon-Smith thinks she has no equal among girls.

HOWELL, PHYLLIS.—One of the four who are such close chums. The other three are Flap Derwent, Marjorie, and Clara Trevlyn. A handsome, dashing girl, with somewhat masculine tastes, but not a mere tomboy. Thinks a lot of Bob Cherry, but not in a spooney way.

SMITH, KATIE.—Another member of the Form to which the four belong.

TREVLYN, CLARA.—A really nice and pretty girl, inclined to be more slangy than Marjorie approves, and apt to turn up her nose at mere boys. Is rather partial to Johnny Bull, whose outspokenness she shares to some extent.

HIGHCLIFFE SCHOOL.

A much more modern foundation than Greyfriars, with higher fees, and numbering among its pupils many scions of the aristocracy. But it is rather slackly conducted, and the "well-connected" boys are allowed to go too much their own way.

Headmaster: THE REVEREND PATRICK RHODES VOYSEY, D.D., M.A.

School colours: Black and old gold.

Not a great many of the boys come into the stories, and there would be no use in naming more than a few who have done or may do so.

Sixth Form.

LANGLEY, ARTHUR DE BOHUN.—Captain of the school. He and most of the Sixth are of the nutty, sporting type, somewhat slack in athletic matters, and inclined to take things easily. Other members of this Form are:

BEAUCHAMP, MAURICE.
CHILCOTE, ARTHUR.
INGRAM, RICHARD INGRAM.
ROPER, BOB.
SPENCER, EUSTACE VERNON.

Fifth Form.

MONSON, MILES MAURICE. — Monson major—has a brother in the Fourth. A burly, bullying, hectoring individual.

REEDMAN, GEORGE HAMER.—A fellow of a more decent type, but rather weak.

Fourth Form.

This is the only one which matters much to the stories.

Form-master: ALBERT HICKS MOBBS, M.A.

COURTENAY, FRANK.—Captain of the Form. A splendid fellow, honourable, kindly, good at all games, and a born leader. Has made Highcliffe a different place for quite a number of the Form. (Study No. 3.)

BENSON, PERCY CHALMERS.—Quite a good sort, and a staunch adherent of Courtenay. (Study No. 5.)

BLADES, BENJAMIN ARMADALE.—One of the nuts, but not a leading member of the confraternity. (Study No. 2.)

DE COURCY, RUPERT FITZROY.—Called "the Caterpillar." Courtenay's great chum. A fellow who can do most things more than commonly well, but has to be roused before he will exert himself. His laziness is, however, partly an affectation. Is more worldly wise than Courtenay, and on principle always suspects Ponsonby of being up to mischief. Has a distinct bent for sarcasm. Might describe himself as a mere looker-on, but when he does take a hand in the game it is always with effect. (Study No. 3.)

DERWENT, PHILIP.—Called "Flip." From Tasmania; twin brother of Philippa Derwent of Cliff House. Bright, cheerful, plucky, a born athlete, and a good chum. Just a trifle too cocksure sometimes. (Study No. 6.)

DRURY, EDWIN ETHELBERT.—One of the nuts, but a more decent fellow than most of them, and by no means hopeless. (Study No. 2.)

GADSBY, REGINALD HAVERS.—A nut, and not a nice one. Is revengeful, and crooked in his dealings. (Study No. 1.)

JONES, JAMES EDWY.—Jones minor—has a brother in the Fifth. One of the rank and file on Courtenay's side. (Study No. 5.)

MERTON, JOHN ARTHUR.—Another nut, but has lately rather cut the connection. Languid and slack, but can buck up. Called "Algy." A chum of Flip Derwent's. (Study No. 6.)

MONSON, ROBERT MIDDLETON.—Monson minor—his brother is in the Fifth. One of the worst of the nut brigade, but rather less spiteful than Ponsonby or Gadsby, and not so empty-headed as Vavasour. (Study No. 4.)

PONSONBY, CECIL.—The leader of the nuts. A fellow of ability and not by any means without courage, though he hates getting hurt. Is full of malice and cunning, and will stoop to any low trick. Has the possibility of better things in him, but the tares have choked the wheat. Might be a fine all-round athlete if he cared to, but, like the nuts in general, prefers nap and banker to cricket and footer. Hates Courtenay poisonously, and some of the Greyfriars fellows hardly less. Was captain of the Form till Courtenay took over the reins. (Study No. 1.)

SMITHSON, GEORGE.—A good, sound fellow, who backs up Courtenay through thick and thin. (Study No. 6.)

TUNSTALL, FREDERICK GUEST.—Must be classed as one of the nuts, but has not much in common with them now. Was always a better fellow than most of them. One of Flip Derwent's two special chums. (Study No. 6.)

VAVASOUR, ADOLPHUS THEODORE.—An empty-headed nut, who seldom has two ideas to rub together, but can be cunning when his spiteful instincts are aroused. A sheer funk. Dandified in the extreme. (Study No. 1.)

WILKINSON, CHARLES EDWARD.—Wilkinson major. The Wilkinsons are twins, and, unlike most brothers, close chums. Supporters of Frank Courtenay, and very useful men at all games, with rather a special forte for boxing. (Study No. 8.)

WILKINSON, EDGAR WELLS.—Wilkinson minor. See above. The brothers are very much alike in face; but Charles (sometimes called Bob) is darker than his minor.

YATES, JAMES EDWARDS.—A follower of Courtenay, and a great chum of Smithson. (Study No. 6.)

COURTFIELD COUNCIL SCHOOL.

The friendly foemen and frequent opponents of the Greyfriars Remove—looked down upon by the nuts of Highcliffe and the snobs of Greyfriars. Not many of them need be mentioned, but some have figured often in the stories.

Headmaster: BENJAMIN LEGGE.

School colours: Black and royal blue.

BROWN, RICHARD.—"Dicky." A very decent little fellow, and rather a favourite of Harry Wharton & Co.

GRAHAME, WALTER.—Ready with tongue or fists, and good at all games; a chum of Trumper's.

LAZARUS, SOLOMON.—Son of the Courtfield pawnbroker—straighter than his father. A rare hefty fellow with his fists; knocked out Bolsover major at a time when he seemed to carry too many guns for anyone in the Remove. Solly speaks with a lisp. As shrewd as they make 'em!

MONTGOMERY, LEONARD.—Another of Trumper's chums.

TRUMPER, RICHARD ARTHUR.—"Dick." One of the best—frank, manly, plucky, and loyal. Son of an old fisherman at Pegg, and acknowledged chief of the Courtfield clan, though not a Courtfield boy.

WAYWARD, JACK.—Another of Trumper's liegemen.

WICKERS, WILLIAM PERCIVAL.—Ditto.

(Most of these lads are about 15.)

OUTSIDE the four schools which come into the stories there still remain to be mentioned quite a number of people who have played parts in the stories, but a brief mention must suffice for each of these.

BANKS, JOE.—A scoundrelly bookmaker.

BROOKE, SIR REGINALD, BART.—Mauleverer's guardian, and related to Vivian also. A very good sort.

BULL, MR. JOHN, SENIOR.—The uncle of Johnny. A quick-tempered and good-hearted old buffer.

BULL, MISS MARTHA.—Johnny's aunt and Mr. Bull's sister.

BUNTER, WALTER.—A cousin of William

George, very like him in appearance, but utterly different in character. A fine sportsman.

CHERRY, MAJOR ROBERT.—Bob's gallant father.

CLEGG, NEHEMIAH.—Known to several generations of Greyfriars boys as "Uncle Clegg." Reason unknown—is not a specially amiable person. Keeps the tuckshop at Friardale.

COBB, BEN.—The licensee of the Cross Keys Inn at Friardale. A fat, low-bred rascal.

COKER, MISS JUDITH.—The doting aunt of the great Horace and the mild Reginald. A very strong-willed lady.

FISH, MR. HIRAM K.—Fishy's "popper." Fishy says he is a millionaire; if so, he is a very stingy one. Has visited Greyfriars.

HAWKE, JEREMIAH.—A bookmaker and a scoundrel. Lives at the Cross Keys, and is hand-in-glove with Cobb.

LAMBE, THE REVEREND ORLANDO BEALE.—Vicar of Friardale.

LASCELLES, LAWRENCE.—Mathematical master at Greyfriars—in days of peace. Now at the Front.

LINLEY, THOMAS.—The worthy father of Mark; a man with brains and character.

LINLEY, MISS MABEL.—Mark's sister.

LINLEY, GERALD.—Mark's wilful younger brother; figured for a brief time at Greyfriars as Linley minor.

LOCKE, MRS. (ELEONORA).—The wife of the Headmaster.

LOCKE, MISS ROSALIE.—The elder daughter of Dr. Locke—not now at Greyfriars.

LOCKE, MISS MOLLY.—The Head's younger daughter, a very attractive child.

LOCKE, FERRERS.—The famous private detective. A cousin of the Head. Has more than once been called in to elucidate some Greyfriars mystery.

LOCKE, PERCY.—The Head's nephew. A one-time ne'er-do-weel who has pulled straight.

NUGENT, MR. FRANCIS.—Frank's father. A hasty-tempered and not too judicious man.

NUGENT, MRS. (MAUD GWENDOLEN).—Frank's mother, but more especially Dicky's. Dicky has always been the favourite, and has been spoiled.

PENFOLD, THOMAS.—Dick Penfold's honest and worthy old father. The Friardale cobbler.

POPPER, SIR HILTON, BART.—A crusty and tyrannical landowner—owns also the river, the air, and everything else above, beneath, or around—as he considers. At constant loggerheads with the Greyfriars juniors. Was a member of the school's Board of Governors, but is no longer so, owing to the fact that his fellow-members would not always obey orders.

SNOOP, JOSIAH.—The father of Sidney James. Convicted, sentenced, and imprisoned for swindling; escaped; through the help of Wharton and the Bounder, and is now in khaki.

TODD, MR. BENJAMIN.—The whimsical uncle of Alonzo and Peter, whose opinions Lonzy so often quotes. A good sort—made many friends when he visited the school.

VERNON-SMITH, SAMUEL.—The enormously wealthy, purse-proud father of the Bounder. Vulgar and cunning, but has his good points, and is very fond and proud of his son.

WHARTON, COLONEL JAMES HAVELOCK.—Harry's uncle—an officer and a gentleman. The best of guardians, though Harry did not always think him so.

WHARTON, MISS MARY GRACE.—Harry's aunt—a sweet and dignified middle-aged lady, with no objection to boys, and counting her nephew's friends as her own.

THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!

An Unexpected Guest!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry's powerful voice was like unto the voice of a megaphone.

It was the morning of Christmas Eve, at Wharton Lodge.

Harry Wharton & Co. were home for the holidays, and they were a cheery party, especially Bob Cherry.

Wharton and Nugent and Johnny Bull were at breakfast when Bob came in, with a ruddy face and a hearty voice. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, followed him in. The Bounder had joined the party in the place of Inky, after all.

"Good-morning, Miss Wharton! Good-morning, everybody!" continued Bob. "I say, it's simply ripping on the ice! I cannoned into Smithy, and sent him fairly spinning! How many bumps have you got, Smithy?"

"About fifty, you ass!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

Miss Wharton, Harry's aunt, greeted Bob with a kind smile. She liked Bob, as everybody did. Bob plumped into his chair, and made a ferocious attack upon the breakfast.

"I wish old Inky were here!" he exclaimed. "If he had seen me cannon Smithy, he would have said that the bumpfulness was terrific. What are you wrinkling your baby brow about, Harry? Is that a letter from Hurree Singh?"

Harry Wharton had a letter in his hand, which he had opened a few minutes before. His brows were knitted, with a puzzled and somewhat worried look.

"No bad news this morning, Harry?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Don't say anything's happened to your uncle in Flanders!" exclaimed Johnny Bull anxiously.

Wharton shook his head.

"No, no! Nothing of the sort! I—I can't quite make this out. You fellows ever heard of a chap named Trimble?"

"Trimble!" said Vernon-Smith. "There's a fat chap named Trimble at St. Jim's—a fellow like our Bunter, only more so."

"I've seen him," said Bob. "His Bunterfulness is terrific, as dear old Inky would put it. Pass the eggs, Franky."

"Is he a chum of yours, Bob?"

"Eh? No fear!"

"Of yours, Frank?"

"Mine?" exclaimed Nugent, in surprise. "I don't chum with porpoises."

"What about you, Johnny—is he your dearest friend?"

"Rats!" was Johnny Bull's reply.

"Then it must be Smithy!"

"What are you driving at?" demanded Vernon-Smith. "I only know the fellow by sight."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Then he must be my chum, though I've scarcely spoken to him," he said.

"Off your rocker?" asked Bob.

"Well, this letter is from Baggy Trimble, of St. Jim's, and he says that as his old chum from Greyfriars is here, he's sure I sha'n't mind him running down for Christmas," said Harry.

"My only hat!"

"Let's hear what he says!" said the Bounder curiously.

Harry Wharton read out the letter from Trimble, the ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. It ran:

"Dear Harry,—Don't be surprised if you see me for Christmas. I understand that one of my best chums at Greyfriars is at your place, and I'm sure you won't mind my giving him a look-in. I shall be very glad to see you again, and all the fellows.

"Your pal, BAGGY TRIMBLE.

"P.S.—Arrive at 9.30 a.m. train Christmas Eve."

"Another friend of yours, Harry?" asked Miss Wharton, in her gentle tones. "He will be very welcome. I will have a room prepared for him."

"Thank you, auntie!" said Harry. "But ——"

Miss Wharton rose, and Frank Nugent opened the door for the kind old lady.

When the juniors were left at the breakfast-table on their own they were able to speak a little more freely, in Greyfriars Remove style—and they did!

"The cheeky cad!" said Johnny Bull. "He's not got any chum at Greyfriars. It's cheeky spoof."

"I'm sure Inky would remark, at this point, that the spoof-fulness is terrific," grinned Bob Cherry.

"He reminds me of our beloved Bunter," said Nugent. "But this would be rather thick, even for Bunter."

Harry Wharton was silent, and rather troubled.

He hardly knew Trimble; in fact, he did not know him at all. The fat fellow had fastened on the Greyfriars footballers during a visit to St. Jim's. They remembered him chiefly as a fat, unwieldy slacker with a boastful tongue.

Certainly they had not taken to him—and they had almost forgotten him. His coolness in inviting himself to the Lodge for Christmas almost took their breath away.

"Does he know you well enough to call you 'Harry'?" asked the Bounder, with a whimsical smile.

Wharton coloured with vexation.

"He doesn't know me at all!" he exclaimed warmly. "I—I suppose he means to be friendly—but—but he is rather an offensive beast."

"He doesn't mean specially to be friendly," grunted Johnny Bull. "He means to plant himself here for Christmas. Like his cheek!"

"I—I suppose I can't refuse!" said Wharton.

Bob Cherry grinned, and looked at his watch.

"You haven't much time to refuse, old scout. His train will be in in half an hour."

"If he really had a chum here!" said Harry. "He may know one of the fellows who ought to have come here with us, if things had shaped better. Inky may have been civil to him; old Inky is sweet as sugar to everybody."

"More likely it's all spoof."

"Well, a chap must be hospitable," said Harry, at last. "I wish it were anybody else—almost any other St. Jim's chap would be welcome. I can't say I'm gone on this chap. But he must come, I suppose."

"Suppose we meet him at the station?" suggested Johnny Bull. "We can take him by his fat ear, yank him into the next up train, and see him off. That will settle the matter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton laughed, but he shook his head.

"We'll let him come," he said. "It can't really be helped. It may be true about his being chummy with one of our friends. I dare say we can stand him. I—I think I'll walk down after brekker and meet him at the station. You fellows can come along if you like."

"Oh, I'll come!" said the Bounder. "A cheeky ass like that will be worth seeing. Quite a remarkable character, I should say."

And after breakfast the five juniors walked away down the snowy lane to Wharton Magnus, to meet the junior from St. Jim's at the station.

Nice Boy!

"TRAIN'S in!" remarked Vernon-Smith, as the party from the Lodge arrived at the little station of Wharton Magnus.

"And so is Trimble!" said Bob, as they entered the station. "Look there!"

A dispute was going on at the barrier between the ticket-collector and a fat youth with podgy, red cheeks.

"I tell you I've dropped it!" the fat youth was saying. "How can I give up my ticket when I've lost it?"

"If you ain't got a ticket you must pay the fare!" snapped the official.

"Nonsense! I'm not going to pay twice."

"Look 'ere, I don't believe you never had a ticket," said the collector. "You're trying to swindle the railway company, that's what you're doing!"

"My good man——"

"Don't good man me! You'll give me your name and address, and you'll hear from the police."

"I tell you——" spluttered Baggy Trimble. He broke off as he caught sight of Harry Wharton & Co. "Hallo, you fellows! Lend me a hand, will you? I suppose you know this man, Wharton? Tell him it's all right."

Harry Wharton came forward. The railwayman touched his cap; his manner to Harry

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was quite different from his manner to Baggy Trimble. Trimble had not impressed him favourably.

"You know this young gentleman, sir!" asked the man. "That alters the case."

"What's the trouble?" asked Wharton, without directly answering the question. He was not keen to lay claim to Baggy Trimble as an acquaintance.

"Young gent says he's lost his ticket——"

"Dropped it in the carriage," said Baggy cheerfully. "But it'll right. You pay the man Wharton, and I'll settle with you when I've had time to drop a line to Trimble Hall. It's only twelve-and-six."

"Only!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Wharton's face was a study for a moment. Twelve-and-six was a serious matter to him, whatever it may have been to Baggy Trimble.

But he put his hand into his pocket, and paid over the money without a word. He felt that he could scarcely do less, as Trimble was his guest—in a sense, at least.

"Thanks!" said Trimble airily. "It's only for a day or two, you know. I happen to have left Trimble Hall without my purse. Rather careless of me."

"Come on!" said Harry abruptly.

Trimble picked up his bag, and trotted on with him. The railway-man looked after him expressively. He knew a spoofer when he saw one.

"The money will be returned by the company if the ticket turns up," said Vernon-Smith, with a keen look at Trimble. "It may be found."

"Oh, I shouldn't bother!" said Trimble carelessly.

"By the way, how did you manage to take a ticket at all, if you left your purse at home?" asked the Bounder.

"I—I—I——" Trimble stammered.

Wharton compressed his lips. It was pretty plain that the young rascal had contrived to get on the train without a ticket, trusting to luck to get out at the other end.

"Did you take a ticket at all, Trimble?" he asked quietly.

"Well, the fact is, I didn't," said Trimble cheerfully. "I don't believe in wasting money in war-time, you know."

"Great Scott!"

"This is the way to the Lodge?" asked Trimble calmly. "Much of a walk?"

"A good mile."

"You haven't brought the car?"

"My uncle's car has been on war work for the last two years."

"This war-work stunt is a bit overdone, I think," said Trimble discontentedly. "I'm a good walker, but I don't care for it to-day. I suppose there's a cab in the village? Rather a Sleepy Hollow, I must say," added Baggy, looking round with a curling nose.

"I'm afraid we shall have to walk," said Harry, rather perplexed to know how to deal with his guest. "There's no cab here now."

"I don't mind waiting for one. We can go into the buffet. I'm rather peckish after my journey."

"There isn't a buffet."

"Oh, crikey! What a hole!" said Trimble. "Any refreshment place in the village?"

"Only the inn."

"Oh, I don't mind a pub! Might get a game of billiards, too."

"I think we'd better walk," said Harry firmly. "Come on!"

"By the way, who is your pal at Greyfriars, Trimble?" asked Vernon-Smith, who seemed to take a great interest in the remarkable Baggy.

"Bob Cherry, you know," said Trimble. "We're no end pals——"

"Me!" roared Bob, coming up.

Trimble jumped. He had not observed Bob.

"I—I mean Bull, you know!" he stammered. "Old Johnny, you know. Oh, my hat! I—I didn't see you, Bull!"

Johnny Bull snorted.

"I—I really meant to say Hurree Jampot Bang Singh," said Trimble, having ascertained that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was not in the party. "We're great pals—almost like brothers. He's not with you?"

"No," said Harry. "Come on!"

"If one of you fellows wants to carry my bag, I don't mind," said Trimble affably.

Wharton took his bag quietly. The five Greyfriars juniors and Baggy Trimble walked away up the lane together.

Baggy grunted discontentedly as he went. He did not like walking. Apparently he saw no reason to hide any dissatisfaction he might feel.

"Beastly fag walking!" he said. "By the way, I haven't brought a sugar-ticket, Harry. Lots of sugar at your place, I suppose?"

"Very little," said Harry.

"Haven't you laid in a lot?"

"What?"

"Well, you must be soft!" said Trimble. "Your people are rich, ain't they? Lots of rich people have laid in supplies of sugar—hoarding it, you know—at least, I've heard so."

"Perhaps you've heard wrong," said Harry quietly. "I think you have, Trimble. Anyone who did that would be a rascal."

Trimble winked knowingly.

"Oh, come off!" he said. "The patriotic stunt is all very well in the newspapers—it sells them. But between ourselves—— I say, don't you fellows walk so fast; I'm a bit short of breath. Never mind the sugar, Harry; I can do without."

"I'm afraid you'll have to," said Harry drily.

"I don't mind, so long as there's plenty of honey—I like honey. And, of course, a chap can have lots of chocolates and marzipan and things. It comes to the same thing, so long as you've got plenty of money. I don't really care what I eat, so long as it's something I like, and there's plenty of it."

Baggy Trimble kept up a cheery chatter all the way, but he received very monosyllabic replies.

Harry Wharton & Co. hardly knew what to make of the cheerful Baggy.

But they knew that they could not stand him at any price, and that they would have given a great deal to see him off in the next train for Trimble Hall—if Trimble Hall had any existence outside Baggy's fervid imagination.

Too Much Trimble!

"OH, dear!"

Bob Cherry made that remark sadly in the evening.

Bob's great cheerfulness seemed to have deserted him.

All the chums, in fact, were a little subdued. Baggy Trimble was worrying them.

A day with Baggy was a day to be remembered.

During that day Baggy seemed to have used his inventive powers in devising means of making himself intolerable.

Uninvited guest as he was, he grumbled without restraint when anything did not meet his views. He was uppish to the servants, and below stairs Baggy was even more unpopular than above stairs.

He persisted in his belief that a well-off man like Colonel Wharton was certain to have stored up things before the Food Controller started work. He laughed at the idea of self-sacrifice in war-time. That, according to Baggy, was a stunt indulged in by busybodies in search of limelight.

Indeed, he told Wharton during the afternoon peevishly that it wasn't quite the thing to press him to come if he wasn't going to let him have enough sugar and things.

"D-d-did I press you?" gasped Wharton.

"There's such a thing as looking after a guest," said Trimble. "I shouldn't treat a fellow like this at Trimble Hall."

"Oh!" said Harry.

By evening Baggy had succeeded in banishing the joyousness of the Christmas-party at Wharton Lodge. He had even alluded to Miss Wharton as an old maid—for which Bob Cherry had taken the liberty of knocking Baggy's head on the wall. Baggy wasn't his guest, anyway.

In the evening Baggy, replete with many meals, dozed off in an armchair before the log-fire, and the chums were relieved of him for a while.

Wharton was quite sombre.

"I'm afraid this is spoiling the holiday for you fellows," he said dismally.

"Ahem!" murmured Nugent.

"Why don't you turn the cad out?" grunted Johnny Bull. "You never asked him here."

"Well, I—I——"

"Christmas hospitality!" growled Bob Cherry. "That can be carried too far, you know. Even Miss Wharton can't stand the toad, and she's an angel. The servants would like to boil him!"

"So would I!" said Johnny Bull.

"And his blessed lies! Ananias was a George Washington in comparison! He's told us about his uncle, a colonel in the Guards—and ten minutes later a staff-officer in Salonika—and then, again, a captain in the Buffs! He forgets one brag as fast as he makes up another."

"Kick him out, Harry!"

"I—I can't," said Harry, colouring. "I wish he'd go, goodness knows! But——"

"Leave it to us, then," said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton looked uneasy.

"After all, he's a guest, in a way," he murmured.

"Suppose he went of his own accord?" asked the Bounder.

"I wish he would; but he won't."

"Well, then, leave it to us, and perhaps he may go of his own accord."

Harry Wharton looked doubtful; but the other fellows chimed in:

"Hear, hear! Leave it to Smithy!"—

Miss Wharton called to her nephew, and Harry left his chums. Bob and Nugent and Johnny Bull gathered round the Bounder.

"What's the game, Smithy?" asked Bob hopefully. "This is hard on Wharton, and hard on us. He didn't ask us here to be worried to death by a disgusting, swindling food-hog and swanking cad. Br-r-r-r! The fellow actually isn't honest. And his lies—— Pah!"

"I think he may be made to go," said the Bounder, with a grin. "He was on the ice this afternoon, and you noticed him turn blue when there was a crack. He's a funk."

"Funk all over!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Well, then, suppose he saw the ghost of the Lodge?"

"The—the what?"

"The ghost of Wharton's ancestor who was beheaded for high treason, and who walks about at Christmas-time with his head in his hands."

"Great pip! First I've heard of the family ghost."

"Trimble won't know that! And he doesn't know that we're the shining lights of the Remove Dramatic Society at Greyfriars."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh woke up Baggy Trimble, and he sat up in his chair and blinked across at the juniors by the window.

"Hallo! What the joke?" he asked. "I say, I'm getting hungry. At this time the butler comes down with wine and cake at Trimble Hall."

"Bed-time," grunted Johnny Bull. "I'm off!"

The juniors said good-night to Miss Wharton, and went upstairs; Baggy going with them grumblingly. He had over-eaten, and then dozed before a fire, and naturally he was feeling irritable. He did not appear to think it necessary to conceal the fact. Baggy's manners, indeed, left very much to be desired, and Wharton was looking forward with dismay to his presence at the Lodge on the morrow, when old friends of his uncle's would be there.

He did not feel that the laws of hospitality allowed him to shunt the unwelcome guest. But he would have been immensely relieved if Trimble had cleared off of his own accord.

The five juniors occupied a large, long room, with five beds in it, Baggy having an adjoining room to himself. The Bounder took him affectionately by the arm, and walked him through the communicating doorway.

"Here you are, Trimble!"

"Is the hot-water bottle in the bed?" grunted Trimble.

"Yes," said Harry.

"Oh, good! Anything to eat up here? I always have a snack before going to bed."

"I can get you something, if you like."

How Trimble could eat anything so early after a terrific supper was a mystery. But he had to have what he wanted.

"Do!" said Trimble. "Get me a cigarette to smoke afterwards, will you?"

"I have no cigarettes."

"You can get some, I suppose?"

"I'm sorry—no."

"I suppose this is what you call looking after a guest!" sneered Trimble.

Wharton left the bed-room without replying. His chums looked at Baggy in wonder. Baggy was an animal of a species new to them. Billy Bunter of Greyfriars was a polished gentleman beside this fellow.

"You sleep soundly, old fellow?" asked the Bounder.

"Yes—when I have enough to eat!" snapped Trimble. "I haven't had enough to eat here. Wharton's mean!"

"You fat cad!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Johnny Bull stalked into his own room. He felt that he would hit Trimble if he remained with him any longer.

But the Bounder was quite urbane.

"Well, I hope you'll sleep well, dear boy," he said. "Of course, you don't believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts? What rot!"

"All serene, then."

"I—I say, I suppose there ain't any ghosts here?" said Trimble uneasily.

(Continued on page 32.)

THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!

(Continued from page 31.)

"What does it matter, if you don't believe in them?"

"Well, I—I don't, of course. I—I say——"

"Tell him the story, Smithy, said Bob. "Christmas-time is just the time for a ghost-story."

"All right! The story goes that Sir Tristram Wharton was beheaded by King Henry the Fifth for high treason," explained the Bounder. "He was innocent of the charge, and that's why he never could rest in his grave. Every Christmas he reappears, clad in armour, and carrying his head in his hand——"

"What rot!" said Trimble.

"Of course it's rot," agreed the Bounder. "You wouldn't be afraid, anyway—a brave fellow like you."

"Oh, I'm as brave as a lion!" said Baggy. "All the Trimbles are. That's why we've won so many Victoria Crosses and things at the Front. I——. Yah! What's that?"

Nugent had suddenly turned off the electric light, and the room was plunged into darkness. Trimble gave a startled yell.

There was the sound of a deep, blood-curdling groan.

"Yarooh! Put on that light!" shrieked Trimble.

The light came on again.

Trimble was quite pale, and trembling in every fat limb. He blinked from one to another of the juniors. Nugent and Bob and Vernon-Smith were very grave.

"Did you fellows hear a groan?" whispered the Bounder.

"I—I heard something!" muttered Bob. "Wha-a-at was it?"

"What could it have been?" stammered Nugent.

"I—I say, I know you're only pulling my leg," mumbled Trimble. "It was one of you fellows. What made that dashed light go out?"

"The light always vanishes when the ghost appears," said Vernon-Smith. "That's the legend, anyway."

"I—I don't believe it!"

Harry Wharton came back into the room with a tray. Trimble recovered his good spirits as he saw the good things on the tray. He sat down to demolish them.

"It's all rot about a ghost," he said, with his mouth full. "I don't believe in ghosts, for one. All rot!"

"Ghosts?" said Harry, with a stare.

Nugent trod on his foot.

"You fellows may be afraid of ghosts," said Trimble; "I'm not. I'm brave."

"Oh!"

Wharton remained with Trimble till he had finished gorging.

"I'll keep that light on to-night," said Trimble, as Harry said good-night. "I don't believe in ghosts, of course. But I'll keep the light on."

And Trimble went to sleep with his room brightly illuminated. But when Baggy's deep and resonant snore resounded, a hand glided from the adjoining room, and the light was turned out. Baggy Trimble, all unconscious, continued to snore in the darkness.

The Horror of the Night!

CLANK!

Baggy Trimble started and awoke.

Clank, clank!

"Wha-a-a-at!" stuttered Baggy.

The room was in darkness, but through the darkness there came a faint glow of phosphorescent light.

It was past midnight. Outside, the snow was falling, and a wild wind howled round Wharton Lodge.

Baggy Trimble sat bolt upright in bed, with the bedclothes huddled round him. He was wide enough awake now.

His fat jaw dropped.

Clank!

A figure in armour—such as he had seen downstairs in the hall—was crossing the room with a steady, clanking tread.

Trimble's eyes fastened on it in horror.

For the figure had no head!

Above the corselet and the steel collar there was—nothing!

But in the hands of the fearful apparition was a head, with a strange, eerie light glowing from the eye-sockets.

Trimble's tongue clove to his teeth.

He tried to shriek, but he could not.

Clank, clank!

With steady tread, the ghost of Wharton Lodge strode across the room.

Trimble sat frozen.

The horrible apparition reached the opposite wall and turned. A deep, low groan echoed in the silence of the night.

Clank, clank!

It passed Trimble's bed, with Baggy's terrified eyes glued upon it. His tongue broke the spell at last, and he yelled:

"Help!"

The fearful form tramped on, unheeding. It passed through the doorway into the adjoining room.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's sleepy voice. "Was that somebody calling? Why—what—who—— The ghost!"

"The ghost!" shrieked Nugent.

"Help!"

"Mercy!"

Clank, clank, clank!

Trimble was yelling frantically. There were cries of terror in the room occupied by Harry Wharton & Co.

The clanking died away.

Bob Cherry, in his pyjamas, dashed into Trimble's room.

"Help! Save me, Trimble! The ghost!"

"Ow," gasped Baggy—"ow! Yow! Help!"

"D-d-d-did you see it, Trimble?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Look out!" shrieked Nugent. "It's coming back!"

With a howl of terror Baggy Trimble plunged under the bedclothes. Clank, clank, clank! The sound rang beside his bed, an iron hand groped over him, and Trimble yelled and squirmed!

He rolled out on the opposite of the bed, roaring.

Clank, clank, clank!

"Oh, oh, oh!"

There was no more sleep for Baggy Trimble that night!

Very Merry!

HARRY WHARTON was looking very grave when his chums came down in the morning. Baggy Trimble followed them, pale and worn. Daylight had relieved him of the worst of his terrors, but he was still palpitating. He was not even hungry.

Bob Cherry and Nugent, Johnny Bull and the Bounder gathered round Wharton, with serious looks.

"There's one train this morning, I understand?" said Bob.

"Yes, Bob."

"You—you'll excuse me, old fellow, if I don't stay over Christmas."

"Same here," muttered Nugent. "I—I couldn't stand another night like that!"

"I—I couldn't bear it!" moaned Vernon-Smith. "That dreadful vision——"

"I—I'll walk," said Johnny Bull. "I—I can't wait for the train. We could walk across to Woodford, and pick up something. No brekker for me, thanks! I'll go now, if you don't mind, Wharton."

"I'm sorry, you fellows," murmured Wharton. "I—I couldn't help it happening—it's the misfortune of our family——"

"I—I know! B-b-but you might have warned us!" said Bob Cherry reproachfully. "Is Trimble staying? He must have a nerve. I'm off!"

"I'm not staying!" yelled Trimble. "Wait for me, you fellows. As soon as I get my bag——"

But the Greyfriars fellows did not wait. They did not even wait to say good-bye to Miss Wharton. They cleared off, and tramped away through the snow in the direction of Woodford.

Baggy Trimble gave Wharton a basilisk look.

"So this is the kind of time you give your guests!" he exclaimed. "Your own pals have cleared off, and serve you right!"

"You—you won't go, Trimble—you won't desert me?" said Wharton brokenly. "Think of me, alone here, with that fearful phantom! Oh, dear!"

"Catch me staying!" said Trimble fiercely. "Of—of course, I wasn't frightened! Not at all! But—but I'm not satisfied with you, Wharton. You're inhospitable! You're mean! That's why I'm going. The least you can do is to lend me twelve-and-six to pay my fare home."

"I—I——"

"Look here, I'm off! I'm not staying here!" shouted Trimble. "I'm not going up for my bag, either; you ought to get it! And—and I shall want twelve-and-six."

"If you're really going to desert me, Trimble——"

"Rats! You're not a friend of mine! Like your cheek to ask me here, if you want my opinion! Gimme my bag, and let me get out of this rotten place!"

Wharton fetched Trimble's bag, and brought the sum of twelve shillings and sixpence, without a word. Baggy Trimble snorted, and rolled out of the house. He did not breathe freely till he was outside.

Harry Wharton carried his bag to the station, and saw him into the train, with a saddened, woebegone countenance.

"Good-bye, Trimble!" he said sadly. "Perhaps next Christmas——"

"Catch me!" snarled Trimble.

And the train rolled out.

Harry Wharton was smiling as he walked back to the Lodge. And, strange to relate, as he entered his home he found four grinning juniors waiting for him in the hall. Nugent and Bob, Vernon-Smith and Johnny Bull had not gone to Woodford, after all, apparently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fat fraud's really gone?" howled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

"Oh, what a little bit of luck!" sang Bob.

"Blessed if I could quite believe my eyes when I spotted you taking him to the station from the park!" grinned the Bounder. "The thumping ass thinks we're gone, of course?"

"Ha, ha! He does!"

"And to think of his going because a chap got into a suit of armour from the hall!" remarked the Bounder. "It never occurred to his powerful brain that a chap in a big man's suit of armour naturally wouldn't have any head. There was lots of room for my head behind the breastplate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the ancient wheeze of a carved turnip, with an electric torch inside to light the eyes, and a touch of phosphorus——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me! You young people seem very merry this morning!" said Miss Wharton, coming downstairs.

"Merry Christmas, Miss Wharton!"

"The merrifulness is terrific!" said Bob Cherry. "Trimble's gone! We're—ahem!—awfully sorry! He found he had to go. We didn't want to lose him, but we thought he ought to mizzle!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Wharton.

She did not look sorry.

There was much merriment among the Greyfriars chums that morning. Baggy Trimble had vanished—to Trimble Hall or Trimble Villa, as the case might be. They did not care which. The great point was that he was not at Wharton Lodge. And it was a Merry Christmas at Harry's home which certainly it would not have been but for the startling appearance, in the nick of time, of the Ghost of Wharton Lodge!

THE END.

—:o:—

THE DYING HALF-BACK.

By BOB CHERRY.

Tune: "The Dying Lancer."
("Wrap Me Up in My Old Stable Jacket.")

A stalwart young half-back lay dying,
And as on the touch-line he lay, he lay,
To the footballers round him a-sighing,
These last dying words he did say:

"It was quite a fair charge. I don't grumble,
I'm not at all sorry I came, I came.
Pass the hat round to buy me a coffin,
And then get along with the game.

"I'm sorry I took that bad tumble,
And got that big boot on my brain, my brain.
But throw in the leather, my comrades;
Let me see you get going again.

"These incidents often will happen.
You don't want the thing to be tame, be tame.
If you get a big boot on your brain-box,
Don't worry; it's all in the game.

"So long as you beat the United,
My comrades, it don't matter much, matter much.
So pile in, my friends, and look lively,
And leave me to perish in touch."