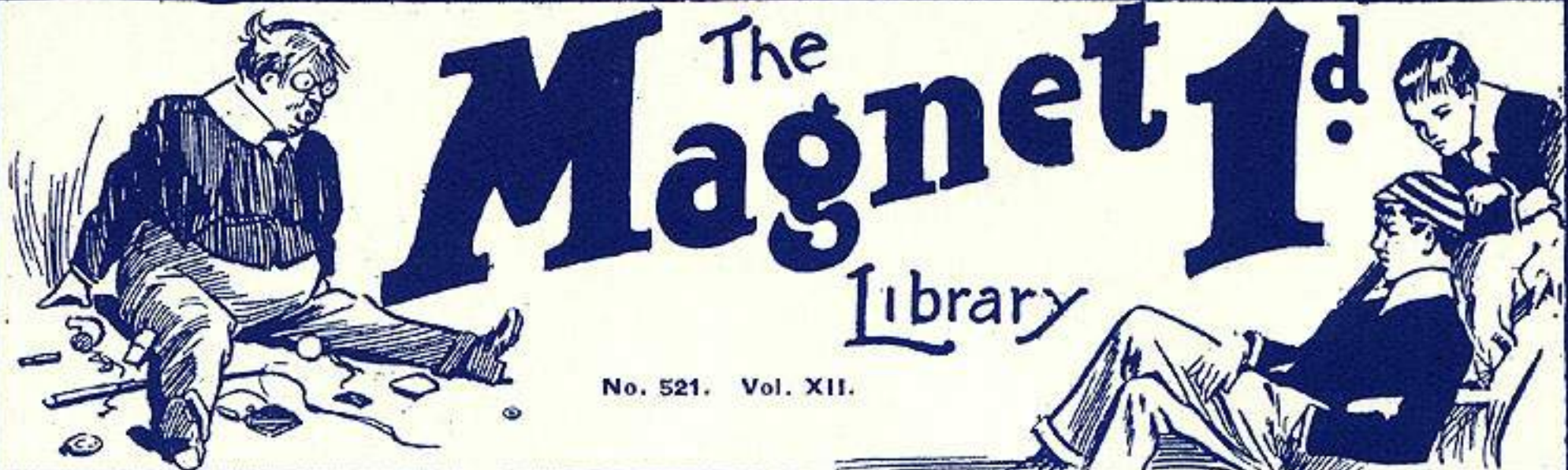
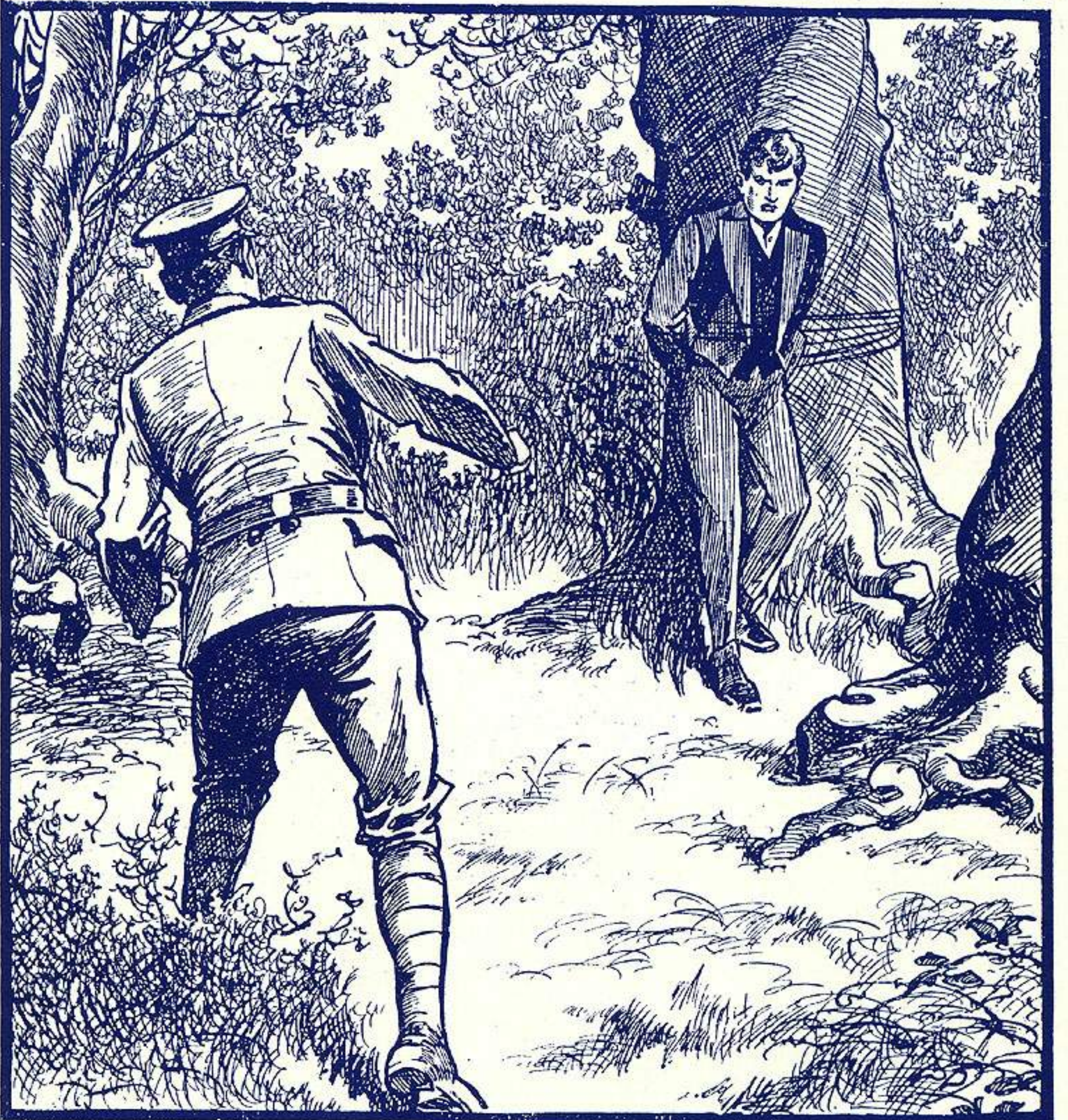


DANGER AHEAD!



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AN UNEXPECTED MEETING!

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DANGER AHEAD!

By FRANK RICHARDS,

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Disappointment for Bunter!

"WHARTON!"
Harry Wharton stopped in the passage as Mr. Quelch called to him from his study doorway.

"Yes, sir?"

Wharton had a football under his arm, and his chums, the famous Co., were waiting for him on the steps outside. But he came respectfully in answer to his Form-master's call.

"Is Clavering within gates, Wharton?" asked the Remove-master.

"I haven't seen him since dinner, sir."

"Will you find him, if possible, and inform him that he had better stay within gates this afternoon?" said Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly, sir."

"You may tell him that his former tutor, Mr. Shepherd, is calling at the school this afternoon to see him. Owing to delay in the post, the letter has only just been received by Dr. Locke. If Clavering has gone out, please come back and tell me."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Quelch turned back into his study, and Harry Wharton went on his way.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are!" said Bob Cherry, as he came out. "What did his ribs want?"

"Clavering, the new kid! Seen him?"

"Has anybody here seen Kelly?" said Bob.

"Ask Smithy," said Johnny Bull. "He generally knows where Clavering is!"

"Well, where's Smithy?"

Bob Cherry put his hands to his mouth, and shouted across the quadrangle. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, was sauntering in the distance.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Smithy, my nippin! Smithy, old scout! Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!"

"Shut up, you ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, laughing. "That megaphone you call a voice can be heard half a mile!"

"Oyez!" bawled Bob, unheeding. "Smithy! Smithy! Smiffkins! Smiff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith looked round in surprise. He came towards the steps, and the Famous Five went to meet him.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded the Bounder.

"Quelch wants the new kid, Clavering," said Wharton. "Do you know where he is?"

"Yes; he's in the Cloisters. Anything wrong?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a look of interest.

"Oh, no! Only his old tutor's coming this afternoon to see him!"

"His—his what?" ejaculated the Bounder.

"His merry old tutor—chap named Shepherd! What the dickens are you blinking at, Smithy? Nothing surprising in that, is there?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured the Bounder. "Are you sure, Wharton? How do you know?"

"Quelch just told me to tell him."

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton started for the Cloisters to look for Clavering. Vernon-Smith stood staring after him with dismay in his face. Why the Bounder should be dismayed was a mystery; but evidently he was.

"Is this Shepherd merchant a hairy old Hun, Smithy?" asked Johnny Bull, in wonder. "Is there a scalping for Clavering when he comes?"

"I—I don't know. I've never seen the man."

"Then why does the esteemed Smithy look struck heapfully?" inquired Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the dusky member of the Co.

"Do I?" asked Smithy.

"Yes, you ass!" said Bob Cherry. "Nothing the matter with the gentle Shepherd coming here this afternoon, is there?"

"Oh, no! Why should there be?" said the Bounder indifferently; and he sauntered away with his hands in his pockets.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"He, he, he!"

That unmusical chortle came from Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove. The fat junior winked in a very knowing way at the Co.

"You don't savvy?" he grinned.

"Savvy what, you fat owl?" demanded Nugent.

"He, he, he! You know the talk there's been about Clavering," grinned Bunter. "Some of the fellows say his name isn't Clavering at all, and he's a giddy impostor. Skinner says Smithy knows it, too. Well, if Clavering's old tutor is coming here, that will show him up, if he's fishy. He, he, he!"

"You silly ass!" growled Bob, in disgust. "Are you getting on to that silly old yarn again?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Oh, scat! Come along to the footer, you chaps! No good wasting time!"

The four juniors went along to Little Side, and Billy Bunter, with another fat chuckle, rolled away in the direction Harry Wharton had taken. But before he entered the Cloisters Vernon-Smith stepped into his path.

"Whither bound, tubby?" asked the Bounder.

"Let me pass, Smithy! I—I'm just going to speak to Wharton!"

"You're just going to listen to what doesn't concern you, you mean," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "Well, you're not! Cut off!"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Bunter. "I can go into the Cloisters if I like, can't I?"

"No!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Travel along!" snapped the Bounder.

"Look here, Smithy— Yow-ow-ow! Leggo my ear, you beast!" wailed Bunter.

Vernon-Smith gripped the fat junior's fat ear and led him away. Billy Bunter went unwillingly—very unwillingly. But his ear had to go, in the Bounder's strong

grip, so Bunter had no choice about accompanying it.

"You—you beast!" he gasped, as he was led away. "Will you let go? I'll lick you, Smithy, you rotter!"

"Go ahead!" grinned Smithy.

"Look here, I want to speak to Clavering!"

"It was Wharton, a minute ago."

"I—I mean Wharton. I say, Smithy— Yow-ow-ow-wooooo!"

Billy Bunter sat down forcibly on the stone step of the fountain. The Bounder sat down beside him, still holding his ear. The expression on Bunter's fat face was more than Hunnish.

"Will you leggo my ear?" he howled.

"No fear!"

"You cheeky rotter—"

"Keep it up!"

"You—you beast—"

"Bravo!"

Bunter spluttered with wrath. He almost made up his mind to hit out at the Bounder, but not quite. If he had done so, it was only too probable that he would have been ducked in the water behind him.

"Toddy!" yelled Bunter, as Peter Todd came in sight. "I say, Toddy! Rescue!"

The long-legged Peter came up, looking considerably surprised.

"What on earth are you doing with my prize porker?" he demanded.

"Keeping him out of mischief!" said the Bounder.

"Make him leggo, Toddy!" wailed Bunter. "You can lick him, you know, especially as he's been ill lately, you know. I'll hold your jacket!"

"Lick him—as he's been ill lately!" repeated Peter Todd. "Bunter, old man, what you want is some more of the same."

And Peter took hold of Billy Bunter's disengaged ear, to the accompaniment of a fiendish yell from Bunter.

"Yarooooo!"

The Bounder chuckled.

"Bunter's burning to use his ears," he explained. "He wants to listen to what Wharton's saying to Clavering, and what Clavering's saying to Wharton. We'll use his ears for him instead! There!"

"Yooooo!"

"And there!"

"Help!"

"And there!" chuckled Peter Todd, giving a pull to the fat ear he held.

"Yarooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, you rotters!" howled Bunter.

"I—I don't want to go into the Cloisters. I—I don't care what they're saying—"

"Ow! I—I want to go to my study— Grooh!"

"Cut off, then!" grinned the Bounder.

"If you're not inside the House in one minute I'm after your flap again!"

Billy Bunter's ears were released, and he sped away to the House. He had had enough. Peter Todd rose to his feet.

"What's that about Clavering?" he asked. "Anything up?"

"What should be up?" yawned the Bounder.

Peter gave him a very curious look, and walked away. The Bounder frowned. The strange talk there had been on the subject of the new boy, Clavering, had died down a good deal, but it seemed likely to revive now. The visit of Mr. Shepherd, the Vicar of Cotswood, was the worst possible thing that could have happened for Leonard Clavering of the Remove—whom Smithy, alone among the Greyfriars fellows, knew to be Tom Redwing, the sailor's son, of Hawkscliff, under a name that was not his own!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Black News!

"OH, here you are, Clavering!" Harry Wharton spoke a little impatiently.

He was anxious to join his chums on the footer-ground, and Mr. Quelch's message had come as an interruption. And really there was no reason why Clavering should have chosen the most secluded part of the lonely Cloisters to take a stroll in, so far as Harry could see.

The captain of the Remove found him at last, however.

Clavering was walking to and fro, with his hands in his pockets, a deep frown of thought upon his bronzed face. It was very cold in the old stone Cloisters, but Clavering did not seem to notice it.

He stopped and looked round as Wharton joined him.

"Yes, here I am," he answered. "Do you want me?"

"Not at all—only a message," said Wharton, with a smile, good-humoured again at once. "Quelchy told me to tell you your old tutor is coming to see you this afternoon—a Mr. Shepherd."

Clavering stood rooted to the ground.

That news had had a strange effect upon the Bounder. Its effect upon Clavering was stranger still.

The junior's handsome face grew so white that Wharton made a movement towards him in alarm.

"Clavering!" he exclaimed.

The junior looked at him almost wildly.

"Mr. Shepherd!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice.

"Yes; that's the name."

"Here! Coming here!"

"Yes, to see you. Quelchy says you'd better stay within gates this afternoon," said Harry, in utter wonder.

"Oh!"

Wharton stood at a loss. Clavering was making almost painful efforts to recover his composure. The colour went and came in his cheeks.

"Oh!" he muttered. "Oh! Coming—he said that he would not come to Greyfriars! He said—he said—" His voice trailed off.

"Mr. Shepherd said he would not come?" said the amazed Wharton.

"No, no! He—he said—"

Clavering stopped himself abruptly.

The crimson burned in his face, and his eyes dropped before Wharton's amazed glance.

"Thank you for telling me," he said, with a forced calmness; "I am much obliged."

"Not at all," answered Harry.

"Do you know what time he—Mr. Shepherd—is coming?"

"Quelchy said this afternoon, that's all. I suppose he thought you might be going out, as it's a half-holiday."

"I—I see." Clavering was himself again now, though his cheeks were still red. "I—I was thinking of going out. Do you know anything about a military camp near here, Wharton, called Wapshot?"

"Yes; we run down there sometimes to see the soldiers," said Harry. "It's

about a mile and a half the other side of Friardale."

"Would a chap be admitted there, to see a man in khaki?"

"Certainly, if he knows a soldier. Not always, I think. But generally you can get into the camp to see a friend."

"Thank you!"

"Some of us are going over there on Saturday afternoon, if the snow's not too bad for bikes," added Harry. "We'd be glad if you would come along, Clavering."

"I haven't a bike."

"Oh, that's all right; some fellow would lend you one."

"Right you are!" said Clavering.

Wharton moved away, but he turned back again.

"If you're staying within gates this afternoon, Clavering, why not come down to footer practice?" he said. "I've had an eye on you at footer, and you're coming along jolly well for a fellow who's only lately taken up the game. You've a good chance of playing for the Remove if you keep it up."

"I'd like to, no end," said Clavering.

"Well, come and take a hand in the practice."

"Not now, thanks. I—I've something else this afternoon."

"Swotting with Linley?" asked Harry, laughing. "Give it a miss on a fine afternoon like this. Besides, Linley's at footer!"

"No, it isn't swotting this afternoon."

Clavering did not add what it was, however, and Wharton did not question him further. He nodded to the new junior, and hurried away through the Cloisters to join his friends on Little Side.

Clavering stood where Wharton had left him, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyes fixed straight before him in a hard, unseeing stare. He looked like a fellow almost overwhelmed by a difficulty he could not grapple with. He glanced round quickly as a footstep sounded close at hand, and Vernon-Smith came up.

Clavering did not speak, but he eyed the Bounder curiously. Vernon-Smith's face was very grave.

"Wharton's told you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

No answer.

"Look here, Clavering," said the Bounder quietly and earnestly, "you're in a fearful fix! Let me help you. I've helped you before."

Clavering gave him an inquiring look.

"Ponsonby of Highcliffe knew that you were Tom Redwing of Hawkscliff, and that your name was not Clavering at all," said the Bounder, in a low voice. "He came over here to denounce you, and I found a way of bottling him up. You needn't fear Ponsonby—"

"I don't fear him."

"I mean, you needn't think there's any danger in that quarter. Ponsonby dare not speak against my will. I've got the cad under my thumb. But—but—Look here, Clavering, why don't you confide in me? I can't see your game. I know you're Tom Redwing!"

Silence.

"Tom Redwing saved my life when I was wrecked at Hawkscliff," resumed the Bounder. "But for that I should have spoken out at once, and shown you up—I should have thought you were an impostor. Now, I know you are straight as a die—I believe in you. But you're here under a false name, Redwing—a name you've no right to."

The junior smiled faintly.

"I have a right to the name I use," he said.

"You have a right?"

"Yes."

"But it is not your own name!"

No reply.

"Let that be as it may," said the Bounder, after a pause, "Clavering is not your name. You've faced Clavering's guardian, Sir Hilton Popper, because he doesn't know the real Clavering by sight. You can't face Clavering's old tutor, the parson from Cotswood, because he does know Clavering well—and he would know at a glance that you are not he."

Clavering did not speak.

"Cotswood is a jolly long way from here. I suppose you thought the old parson wouldn't travel such a distance. But he's coming. Can I do anything to help you out of this fix?"

"You think I am an impostor, and you want to help me out of a fix?" said the new junior, with a curious look.

"Because you saved my life."

"Even so, an impostor is an impostor, I suppose?"

"I believe you're square."

"Square—under a false name?"

"Yes," said the Bounder quietly. "I don't profess to understand it, but I think you could explain if you liked. I know you're honest, and if I'm mistaken I'll never trust my own judgment again. And I'm generally considered a rather keen chap. You've got to avoid seeing Shepherd, and in some way that won't arouse suspicion. A good many of the fellows are suspicious already, owing to Pon's tattle, and to Redwing's initials being seen in your Horace. The same book I saw the day you fished me out of the water," the Bounder added, with a smile.

The new junior's brow grew darker.

"If you go out this afternoon it will make Skinner and Snoop and the rest talk all the more," said Vernon-Smith. "Bunter knows already that you know the parson is coming. But is there anything else to be done?"

"Will you lend me your bike?"

"My—my bike!" exclaimed the Bounder, quite taken aback by that unexpected question.

"Yes, your bike."

"Certainly I will, and anything else you want," answered Vernon-Smith. "You mean you're going for a spin?"

"I'm going to Wapshot Camp, if you'll lend me your bike."

"Good! You know a chap there," agreed Vernon-Smith. "That soldier chap you spoke to on the road the other day—"

Clavering smiled strangely.

"Go and see him at the camp—and stay there, whether you see him or not," said the Bounder, relieved. "It will look fishy; but it's the only way. I don't know how long Shepherd's likely to stay here, but you'd better stick it out till after evening call-over."

"I shall be back in an hour," answered Clavering.

"Wha-a-at?"

"And I hope I shall not come alone," said the new junior. "Mr. Shepherd will see Leonard Clavering this afternoon, if I can fix it."

The Bounder stared.

"You know where the real Clavering is?" he exclaimed.

The new junior laughed.

"At Wapshot Camp?" asked Vernon-Smith, more and more astonished. Then a sudden light dawned upon him. "That soldier chap you spoke to—My hant! I've got it at last! Clavering's joined up, and you're here in his place!"

Clavering laughed again, but he did not answer.

"I'll get you the bike," said the Bounder. "You won't tell me anything, but I think I can see it pretty clearly. Come on!"

Clavering followed the Bounder.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

What's To Be Done!

"I SAY, you fellows—"
 Skinner & Co. were grouching over the fire in the Common-room, when Billy Bunter rolled in. Skinner and Snoop and Stott were grumbling at the cold, the food regulations, the length of the war, and several other things, as they snuggled about the fire. It did not seem to occur to the slackers to go and get warm on the footer-ground.

The three juniors went through a motion of buttoning up their pockets as the Owl of the Remove joined them.

Billy Bunter blinked at them indignantly through his big glasses. For once in a way the Owl was not looking for a loan.

"Oh, really, you silly fatheads—" he began.

"Nothing doing!" said Skinner, tersely.

"See you after the war!" grinned Snoop. "I shall be able to lend you some of my old-age pension then!"

"Look here, it's about Clavering!"

"Oh, Clavering!"

Skinner & Co. were interested at once. The slackers of the Remove were very much up against the new junior: though why it would have been rather difficult to say. Probably it was because he seemed a thoroughly decent fellow, and never joined in any of the shady relaxations of his study-mates. He was on friendly terms, too, with the fellows they most disliked—the Famous Five, and Squiff and Tom Brown, and Ogilvy and Russell.

The discovery—or suspicion—that he was an impostor under a false name came as a great joy to Skinner & Co. It enabled them to feel that there was quite a virtuous motive for their mean dislike.

"Go ahead!" said Stott. "Has Pon been saying anything fresh?"

"Pon's shut up all of a sudden," remarked Skinner. "I believe Smithy had a hand in it, somehow."

"Bother Pon!" said Bunter. "I say, Clavering's old tutor is coming here to see him this afternoon—a vicar or something, named Shepherd—you've heard of him. If he isn't really Clavering, that will give the game away—what? He, he, he!"

"By gad, it will!" said Snoop.

Skinner sniffed.

"Bet you he will hike off somewhere, so that Shepherd can't see him at all!" he observed.

"That will be as good as confessing."

"It's the only thing he can do, if he's an impostor. But"—Skinner's eyes gleamed—"if he does, we'll take care that all Greyfriars knows it. How do you know the merchant's coming, Bunt?"

Bunter explained.

"Good!" grinned Skinner. "Clavering can't pretend he didn't know, as Wharton's given him Quelch's message. 'Come for a walk, you chaps!'"

"Too jolly cold!"

"Fathead! To keep an eye on Clavering, I mean."

"Oh, all right!"

The slackers tore themselves away from the fire, and walked out into the quad in great spirits. Billy Bunter remained by the fire, quite content to leave the dogging of Clavering to Skinner & Co.

"Hallo! There you are!" exclaimed Skinner. "Going biking, by Jove!"

Clavering was wheeling Vernon-Smith's handsome bicycle down the gravel path as they spotted him. Skinner & Co.

ner winked at his chums, and they joined Clavering.

"Going for a spin?" asked Harold Skinner affably.

Clavering looked at him.

"Yes."

"Good! We'll get our bikes and come, if you'll wait a minute."

"I shouldn't care for your company, thanks!" said Clavering coolly.

"How polite we are!" smiled Skinner.

"But, I say, what about the dear old Shepherd this afternoon? Aren't you risking missing him?"

"That's my business!"

Clavering ran the bike out into the road, and pedalled away, leaving Skinner & Co. grinning after him.

"That settles it, by gad!" said Skinner. "We'll tell all the fellows this! Come on! I fancy even Wharton won't have anything to say for that dashed impostor after this!"

And the three proceeded in great spirits to impart to all the fellows they met the story that Clavering had dodged out of gates to avoid seeing Mr. Shepherd when he came.

Meanwhile, the new junior was riding swiftly away on Vernon-Smith's bicycle. His face was dark with thought: but he was not thinking of Skinner & Co. and their malice. They did not remain in his thoughts for a moment after he had left the gates of Greyfriars.

He was thinking of the strange part he had played, and of the end that must come to it.

He could not face Mr. Shepherd. And he would not be guilty of subterfuge and dodging. He had taken Leonard Clavering's place and name in order that the boy whose father had died in France could join up and fight the Germans. He did not regret it. His regret was that he had to leave Greyfriars, where he had found friends. He had learned to love the good old school, and that regret was bitter.

Leonard Clavering had, perhaps, over-persuaded him into playing that strange part. But Tom Redwing had been glad to accept his offer—and on Clavering's showing it was all plain sailing. It had proved, however, to be very far from plain sailing. He had not lied, he was not an impostor, but he was under a name that was not his own; and he felt now that he ought to have expected that it would never remain wholly a secret.

For the truth will out at all times. His old initials in his Horace—his dislike of speaking of South America, where he was supposed to have spent his early years, and of which he knew nothing—a thousand other slight circumstances conspired to betray him. And then it came out that Ponsonby, of the Highcliffe Fourth, had seen him at Hawkscliff in the old days. The place was some way from Greyfriars, but he might have expected that something of the kind would occur.

The game could not be played out. He felt it.

Surely it had been a fair bargain enough. He had given his name to Clavering in exchange for Clavering's own. He had taken the other's place to allow the soldier's son to realise his darling ambition of joining the Colours. There was nothing wrong in it. But if the game went on he could not always be silent—he would be driven to trickery, perhaps to actual lying; and at that thought Tom Redwing's face flooded with crimson. A lie had never yet passed the lips of the sailorman's son.

It must end—but it was bitter! The education he had longed for—that he had dreamed of in lonely hours—that he had striven to gain from books—was his now, by Clavering's free offer. Claver-

ing did not want it; he wanted to fight in France, and he was big enough to pass in as a recruit. Why could they not be let alone, each to go the way he desired? But it was not to be.

The junior's brow was dark as he rode. But his mind was made up. If Leonard Clavering would release him from his bargain, it must end. But if he would not—and would he?

That was a troublesome question, which could only be answered by the lad who was known as Private Redwing of the Loamshire Rifles.

The Greyfriars junior reached Wapshot at last.

He left the bicycle on the road, and walked to the gate of the camp, where a soldier on guard made a gesture to him to stop as he came up. Clavering—still to give him his school name—halted.

"You can't go in, lad," said the man in khaki civilly enough.

"I want to see a friend here, if I may," answered the schoolboy. "Perhaps you know Private Redwing, of the Loamshire Rifles?"

"What-ho!" answered the sentry. "He's my tent-mate, and my pal. You can't see him this afternoon, though—he's off."

"Off!" repeated the junior blankly.

"Not to France, surely?"

The man in khaki laughed.

"No; he's in training for some time yet, like most of the rookies here," he answered. "He's on leave for the day, I mean."

"And he's gone out?"

"You've hit it."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"Up the river, I believe."

"Thank you!"

"I'll tell him to-night you've called, if you like."

"Tell him Clavering of Greyfriars, will you?"

"Right!"

"Thank you!"

Clavering went back to his machine.

He rode down the hill with a moody brow. He had hoped to be able to see the boy soldier; but the chance was gone. There was little use thinking of hunting for him along the valley of the Sark. He could not see him that day. What was to be done?

He rode towards the school trying to think it out.

Mr. Shepherd was coming that afternoon. Doubtless some business had brought the country parson in that direction, and he was taking the opportunity of calling at Greyfriars. The junior remembered that Leonard had said it was out of the question for Mr. Shepherd to come to the school. It was an unlucky chance, and if he avoided this meeting it might never recur.

And yet—

Mr. Quelch had said he was to remain within gates. He could not feign to have known nothing of Mr. Shepherd's intention of calling. What excuse could he make for deliberately avoiding Clavering's old tutor?

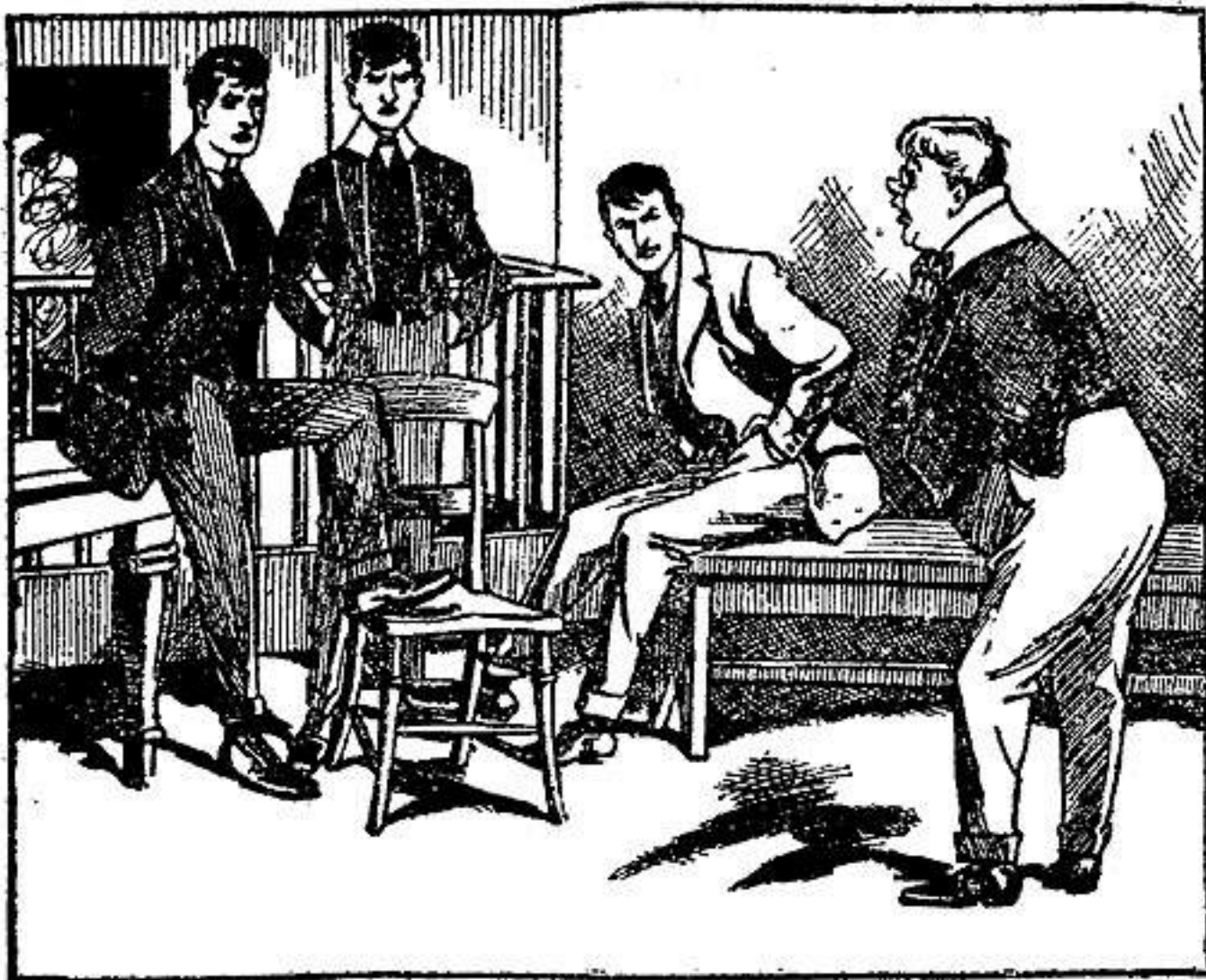
What would the fellows say?

With a heavy heart Clavering realised what they would say. Would not even Mr. Quelch suppose that something was wrong?

"Hallo, kid!"

It was the Bounder. He was coming through Friardale High Street as Clavering reached the village, mounted on Bob Cherry's bike. He wheeled round, and rode on beside Clavering towards the school.

Clavering did not speak. He knew by this time that the Bounder of Greyfriars was his friend. But he had no right to speak of the secret he had agreed with Leonard Clavering to keep.



The Remove slackers! (See Chapter 3.)

The Bounder looked at him curiously.

"Seen your friend?" he asked.

"No."

"Bad luck! Going back?"

"I—I don't know."

"Take my tip, and go back," said the Bounder, with a smile. "The fellows have heard from Skinner already. There's a big jaw going on. If you keep out of gates this afternoon it's all up for you so far as the Remove are concerned."

"You advised me—" muttered Clavering.

"I've thought it out since then. The parson won't be here yet."

"How do you know?"

"I've called at the station. The half-past two train's in, and there was no reverend gent among the passengers," smiled Vernon-Smith. "Next train is four. He can't get here before then."

"Ah!"

"I've chipped in once and helped you out," said Vernon-Smith. "You know that. Don't tell me anything. I'm not asking questions. But rely on me to see that you don't meet Shepherd this afternoon. I can answer for it."

"I don't understand!"

"I won't explain, because it's better for you not to know. You'll see why afterwards. But you know I'm backing you up, Clavering, and you can rely on me to see you through. Were you thinking of keeping out?"

"I couldn't make up my mind. It's very difficult."

"Will you leave it to me, then?"

The junior looked at him.

"If I'm at Greyfriars I must meet Mr. Shepherd," he said.

"You'll go back to Greyfriars, and you won't meet him," said the Bounder. "That is, if you leave it to me."

"I don't care! I can't make up my mind!" muttered Clavering moodily. "I can't go in for dodging and trickery. I never have, and I can't do it! I can't! But—but the secret isn't only mine. If Shepherd makes discoveries, another fellow will be dished. I can't explain —"

"No need! I know who will be dished. A kid of fifteen or sixteen who's

joined up pretending that he's eighteen," grinned the Bounder. "I know now why you came to Greyfriars wearing clothes two or three sizes too large for you. I rather think a certain private at Wapshot joined up in clothes too small for him."

The new junior coloured, but did not reply.

Greyfriars was in sight now, and Clavering had to decide. But he was only too glad, in his troubled and harassed frame of mind, to leave the decision to the Bounder. And he had learned to have faith in the strong-willed, cool-headed Bounder of Greyfriars.

They rode on to the school.

"You'll do as I tell you?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Take your books into the Cloisters, and mug up Latin there. You're rather fond of mugging up Latin. Keep in the Cloisters, and don't stir out before four o'clock. I give you my word that that will see you through!"

"I leave it to you."

"Good!"

They were at the school. A shout sounded in the quadrangle as they were seen. Vernon-Smith waved his hand to his companion and rode on. Clavering wheeled his machine in at the gates, and eyes were turned on him from all sides.

"By gad! He's come back!" ejaculated Skinner blankly.

"C-c-come back!" stuttered Snoop.

"I knew you were only spoofing, Skinner," grunted Russell. "I knew the fellow was straight enough."

Without heeding the Removites, Clavering put up his machine and went into the House. Billy Bunter met him in the Remove passage, and blinked at him through his spectacles.

"Old Shepherd hasn't been yet!" he stuttered. "Why have you come back?"

Clavering passed him without a word, and went into his study. He came back again with a couple of books under his arm. Skinner & Co. sighted him again as he came out of the School House, and, to their utter amazement, he did not turn his steps in the direction of the gates. It really looked as if the astute Skinner was on the wrong track after all!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Pleasant for Skinner!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Come and join up!" called out Bob Cherry cheerily.

Harry Wharton & Co. were at footer practice, with a crowd of other fellows, when Clavering of the Remove came down to Little Side, his books under his arm. Skinner & Co. were following him at a distance.

"Yes, come on, Clavering!" called Wharton cordially.

"The warnfulness of the footer is the esteemed desideratum in this freezeful British weather," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Clavering smiled.

"No. I'm going to swot, after all," he said. "I've just come down to see how you're getting on, that's all."

"Why not take a turn at footer, old scout?" asked Mark Linky. "I've chucked up swotting for a bit!"

"Change into your rags, and come on!" said Bob.

"Mr. Shepherd is coming this afternoon, you know," said Clavering calmly. "I don't want to be playing footer when he arrives."

"Oh, yes! I'd forgotten the gentle Shepherd," grinned Bob. "Now, then, pitch the ball this way, Nugent. I'm going to beat Hazel in goal, or bust a boiler!"

The footer went on, and Clavering stood watching it for some minutes. Skinner & Co. stood watching him.

They were utterly puzzled by Clavering's remark on the subject of the Cotswold vicar. Had he really come in, after his spin, intentionally to meet the reverend gentleman from Cotswold? If so, what became of Skinner's spiteful taunt that he dared not face Mr. Shepherd?

"It beats me!" muttered Skinner quite helplessly. "I suppose he's spoofing, and he means to get out before the parson comes!"

"The man may drop in any minute," said Snoop.

"Clavering may know his train."

"Well, perhaps."

"Keep an eye on him," said Stott.

"I'm jolly well going to!" said Skinner savagely. "He won't dodge the parson without my knowing it, I promise you."

Clavering stood unheeding, watching the footer, though quite well aware that three malicious pairs of eyes were watching him. Bolsover major joined Skinner & Co., frowning.

"There's Clavering!" he snapped.

"I've got eyes!" said Skinner, equally snappishly.

"You said he had gone out to dodge the parson."

"I—I thought he had."

"You're too jolly quick to run down a chap!" said Bolsover major. "I know Clavering stood up to me in a fight like a good man. You're making out that he's a cheat and a swindler."

"So he is!" snarled Skinner.

"Well, this doesn't look like it!" growled Bolsover. "You've spread a yarn about the school that he's dodging the parson this afternoon, because Shepherd will show him up if he sees him. Look at the fellows staring at him now! You've got a lying tongue, Skinner!"

Skinner gritted his teeth.

"It's only bluff!" he muttered. "He knows what train the parson will come by, and he's going to dodge out just before he comes. He's bluffing!"

Bolsover major looked thoughtful.

"Well, that's possible," he admitted.

"It's his game, of course!" said

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Skinner savagely. "He thinks this cheek will throw dust in the fellows' eyes. He's succeeded with you, anyway!"

"Well, I'm down on him if he's a rogue," said Bolsover major. "That's only right. But there's only your word for it so far—and some lies of a Highcliffe cad, who dared not say it out to Clavering's face. I'm going to see fair play for the chap."

"I don't see that it's your business, Bolsover."

Bolsover's rugged face assumed its most bullying expression.

"Don't you?" he snapped. "Well, I'll show you! That fellow checked me when he first came, and we had a fight. He's got pluck. His father was killed at the Front, and for that reason, if there's no other, he's going to have a fair deal here. If he dodges the padre, I'll take it that you've proved your case, Skinner. If he doesn't go out of gates this afternoon, I'll give you such a licking as will stop you slandering a soldier's son for some time to come!"

And with that Bolsover major stalked away, leaving Skinner looking almost green.

Snoop and Stott grinned. They were beginning to think that Harold Skinner had been a little too positive, and they did not envy him his interview with Bolsover major if Clavering did not dodge the padre.

Skinner set his thin lips hard.

"It's only bluff!" he muttered savagely. "The cad's bluffing. I tell you Ponsonby of Highcliffe knows him by sight, and knows his name's not Clavering—though he didn't say what his name was."

"Pon backed out of it."

"That was Smithy's doing, I believe—he stands up for the cad, for some reason. You never know where to have Smithy—he's always playing some queer game," said Skinner bitterly. "I'm not going to lose sight of that cad!"

"Hallo, he's off!"

Clavering strolled away from the foot-ground. Faithful as his shadow, Harold Skinner started after him, and Snoop and Stott followed.

Remove fellows watched that peculiar pursuit, and grinned. Skinner had spread the story far and wide that Clavering had gone on Smithy's bike to dodge the parson. If he had remained out of gates till Mr. Shepherd had come and gone the Removites would have known what to think of him. But here he was—sauntering peacefully in the quad, apparently without any intention of going out. The green, malicious disappointment in Skinner's face amused the fellows hugely.

"Setting up as a detective, Skinney?" called out Peter Todd.

"Br-r-r!"

"Shadowed by three!" chortled Ogilvy; and there was a loud laugh.

"I—I say, we're making guys of ourselves!" muttered Sidney James Snoop uneasily. "I'm going to chuck it, Skinney!"

"That's what the brute wants! He thinks we shall get fed up, and then he can sneak out without being seen!" hissed Skinner.

"Well, you can play the blessed detective without my help. You've got two eyes. You don't want six on this job!"

Snoop strolled away with that, and Stott went with him. Skinner scowled after them, but he still followed Clavering. His face brightened a little as the new junior moved in the direction of the gates. He grew brighter and brighter as Clavering kept on.

Had the fellow given up the bluff, and decided to cut at last? It looked like it, and Skinner could have kicked himself,

and Clavering, and everybody else at Greyfriars, when the new junior stopped at the lodge to exchange a few words with old Gosling. Having chatted to the porter for a few minutes, Clavering sauntered back, and met Skinner face to face.

Skinner stopped, with deadly hatred and disappointment in his face. His feelings were so evident that Clavering could not help smiling. The cad of the Remove could have dashed his fist into the smiling face—but a certain amount of pluck was needed for that, and pluck was not one of Skinner's shining qualities.

The new junior sauntered on, and the self-appointed detective doggedly followed. He followed him into the Cloisters, wondering what Clavering could want there.

Clavering went right along among the old, rugged stone pillars, and stopped. Beyond the Cloisters was a huge iron gate, to which Gosling had the key. There was no exit there. Skinner wondered whether Clavering had asked Gosling for the key, but he was well aware that nothing had passed between them, at all events.

Clavering was fooling him, he told himself savagely. He meant to tire Skinner out, and then escape unseen and unnoticed. But the new junior certainly showed no sign of it. He opened his little book, and paced to and fro, muttering. Skinner caught a few Latin words.

"At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens."

Skinner gave a snort of utter disgust. The fellow was memorising verses from the Aeneid—just one of a swot's tricks. Skinner knew that the new junior often strolled into the quiet shades of the Cloisters to swot. Evidently he was at the game again.

Skinner stood and watched him for ten minutes or more. But it was keenly cold in the Cloisters. Skinner's feet were chilly, and his temper grew worse every minute. Clavering, heedless of the cold, perhaps kept warm by his steady pacing to and fro, went on muttering Latin verses, without one glance at the discomfited spy.

The latter was fed up at last. At all events, Clavering could not get out by way of the Cloisters. Skinner tramped away savagely, and was glad to get back into the winter sunshine on the quadrangle. He went along to the porter's lodge, and obtained Gosling's permission to sit by his fire for a while. There he could keep warm, and at the same time keep his eyes on the gates, in case Clavering should dodge out sooner or later.

With bitter malice in his heart, the spy of the Remove waited and watched. But Clavering did not come. And at length there was a rumble of wheels outside, and Skinner knew that Mr. Shepherd of Cotswood had arrived.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Treachery!

VERNON-SMITH rode away after parting with Clavering, and his path took him through Court-field, and then into the Highcliffe road. It was some time since the Bounder of Greyfriars had called at Highcliffe. His present ways were not the ways of Ponsonby & Co. His last visit had not been a very friendly one, either. But Highcliffe School was evidently his destination now.

Near the school he passed three Highcliffians in the road—Merton, Tunstall, and Derwent of the Fourth—and called to them.

"Pon at home?"

"Oh, yes!" said Derwent, with a grin. "You'll find him in—not in a good temper this afternoon!"

The Bounder laughed.

"I don't mind."

He pedalled on rapidly, and reached the school. Leaving the bicycle at the porter's lodge, he walked quickly across to the House. Courtenay and the Caterpillar were coming out, and they nodded to him in a friendly way, but Smithy did not stop to speak. He went up the big staircase, and in a minute more he was tapping at the door of Ponsonby's study.

"Oh, get off!" came a grumbling voice within.

Vernon-Smith opened the door.

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson were at home. The nuts of Highcliffe did not look in very high feather.

They did not look pleased, either, at the sight of the Bounder of Greyfriars. Three frozen stares replied to his agreeable nod.

"Anything the matter?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"If you've come over for a little game, you've come to the wrong shop!" growled Ponsonby.

"By gad! Have you turned over a new leaf, like my noble self, an' given up paintin' the merry town red?" exclaimed the Bounder.

"I've had to!" groaned Ponsonby. "We're all dead stony—sufferin' from the blight, by gad!"

"Geo-gees?" asked the Bounder sympathetically.

"You've hit it."

"I thought the Government had stopped winter racing!"

"I wish they had!" growled Monson.

"It would have saved me a fiver."

"And me a tenner!" grunted Ponsonby.

"And me a quid! But it was all I had left!" said Gadsby dismally. "You find us in the sere and yellow leaf, Smithy."

"Hard cheese!" said the Bounder.

"Look here, what do you want?" asked Ponsonby aggressively. "You're not welcome in this study! That's plain talk!"

"Very plain; but not quite up to your usual standard of politeness, Pon," answered the Bounder, unmoved. "I've come to do you a good turn."

"Gammon!"

"Honest Injun! If you want to get your own back on a fellow who handled you like a baby, and chucked you about like a sack of coke!"

Ponsonby's eyes glittered.

"Do you mean that new cad at Greyfriars?" he asked.

"I mean Clavering of the Remove."

"You call him Clavering?" sneered the Highcliffe junior. "I've told you what his name is, and that I knew him as a longshoreman at Hawkscliff."

"But, hold on!" exclaimed Monson. "If Smithy's dropped him, after all, there's no need to keep all that secret any longer."

"Oh, good! Is it like that, Smithy?" Ponsonby jumped up, his face quite friendly. "By gad! I'd be glad to come over to Greyfriars an' show him up. You only stopped me by—by—by—"

"By a little trick," smiled the Bounder. "All's fair in war. No, I don't want you to tell your yarn at Greyfriars, Pon—that's a bit too low down. But I've got my reasons for giving you a chance of ragging Clavering this afternoon, if you choose."

"I don't understand you. Are you against him now?"

"For once. Why not? Friendship's a rather brittle thing—as witness my friendship with your noble selves, dear boys."

"Oh, I catch on!" sneered Ponsonby.

"The chap's a dashed hard hitter, and you don't care to cross him. You want us to pull your chestnuts out of the fire!"

"Suppose I do?" said the Bounder coolly. "It suits your book. I can tell you where he is, quite alone, if you choose."

"Honest?" asked Ponsonby suspiciously.

"Honest!"

"It's a go, then. I don't care much whether you've got an axe to grind, so long as I can give that brute something of what he gave me!" said the dandy of Highcliffe viciously. "Where is he?"

"Swotting in the Cloisters at Greyfriars."

Ponsonby grunted.

"You silly ass, we can't get at him there!"

"You can, if you go by the iron gates in the Cloisters, through the ruins. Easy as falling off a form."

"I understand that those gates were always kept locked."

Clink!

The Bounder threw a long, heavy key on the table.

"There you are! I've borrowed it from Gosling's lodge," he explained. "You can let yourselves in. Leave the key in the lock, and I can field it afterwards. All serene—what?"

Ponsonby picked up the key, and looked at his chums. He was in a vile temper that afternoon, and bored and discontented as well. Nothing could have suited him better than to occupy the time in revenging himself upon the junior who had thrashed him—much as he had deserved that thrashing.

He was not surprised that Smithy, who had stood Clavering's friend, had turned upon him like this. Ponsonby was as treacherous as a Prussian himself, and he was never surprised at treachery in others.

"But, I say, is it straight?" asked Gadsby, eyeing the Bounder. "Not a trick to get us there and rag us—what?"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said the Bounder impatiently. "If I wanted that, I'd ask you to tea. You'd come."

"Well, that's so. All right!"

"I don't know what the fellow's done to you, Smithy," said Ponsonby. "But we'll make him squirm for it."

"That's the idea. You can rush him in the Cloisters, and get him out through the ruins," said the Bounder coolly.

"There won't be a soul to see; nobody ever goes over those burnt ruins. Run him down by the path through the wood to the river—"

"Can't duck him—the river's frozen as hard as a brick."

"Better than that! Take him out to the island—and leave him there!"

"Old Popper's island, do you mean?"

"That's it."

"By gad! Leave him there! But—"

"Take a cord, and tie him to a tree," smiled the Bounder. "It's rather cold, but he can stand that! Leave him—tell him you're leaving him for the night. Later on I'll see that somebody happens along—quite by chance, of course—so that he won't stay out all night, and cause a row. I don't see why he shouldn't stay there till dark."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind, not a word about me," said the Bounder. "This isn't the sort of trick I want told at Greyfriars."

"Ha, ha! I fancy the Remove would slaughter you!" roared Monson.

"Naturally, I'm not looking forward to that."

"It's a go," said Ponsonby. "Not a word, of course. I'm much obliged to you, Smithy!"

"Oh, don't mench—it's my game as well as yours, you know!"

"Yes, I know that, or you wouldn't be

doing it. You're sure the fellow's there?"

"Quite. He's swotting; and he will be there a good hour yet. I know he has an engagement at four o'clock, though."

"Lots of time. You coming with us?"

"No jolly fear! I'll join Courtenay at footer here, if he'll let me," grinned the Bounder. "Better for me to be right off the scene."

"Right-ho!"

Five minutes later Vernon-Smith was at footer with Courtenay & Co., who gave him a warm welcome to join in the practice. Ponsonby and Gadsby and Monson, joined by Vavasour, started for Greyfriars. And by the savage glitter in Cecil Ponsonby's eyes it could be seen that there was an ill time in store for Clavering of the Remove.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Amalekites!

"THERE'S the cad!"

Clavering started, and lowered the book in his hand.

He was pacing the lonely Cloisters, at the end near the iron gates, just as he had been when Skinner had grown tired of watching him.

He had told Vernon-Smith that he would remain there, and leave everything in the Bounder's hands. He was glad to do it. What Smithy's plans might be he did not know, but he knew that Smithy had saved him once from Ponsonby's malice, and he trusted him.

He was killing time by learning Latin verses by heart—a very useful exercise for a fellow who was keen to get on with the language. But his thoughts strayed occasionally to the Bounder, and to Mr. Shepherd, whose train was even then speeding towards Friardale Station.

The muttered words outside the iron gates caught his ear. Ponsonby and three other Highcliffe juniors were looking at him through the bars. Clavering glanced at them coolly. He knew that the gates were kept locked, and the key kept in Gosling's lodge, and the spiked top was too high and too difficult for the enemy to climb over.

"Hallo, swotting?" grinned Vavasour.

"Yes, thanks," said Clavering calmly.

"You didn't expect to see us, dear boy?" asked Ponsonby.

"No; and it isn't a pleasure to see you, either! I don't know what you're there for!"

"We've come to see you."

"Well, you can look!" answered Clavering, with a laugh, and he turned away and resumed his pacing among the stone pillars.

As his back was turned Ponsonby quietly slipped the key into the rusty lock. It grated loudly as it was turned, and Clavering spun round at the sound. The big, heavy gate clanged open.

"My hat!" ejaculated Clavering.

"Collar him before he runs!" muttered Gadsby.

But Clavering was not running. The Highcliffe fellows were coming in with a rush, and he knew that he could not escape. Instead of trying to do so—even if he had felt inclined to run—he dropped his book, and put up his hands for defence.

There was no fear in his handsome, sunburnt face, heavy as the odds were against him, and far as he was from help.

"Nail him!"

Ponsonby led the attack.

The four juniors rushed on Clavering in a body, and in a second there was a savage fight raging in the dusky old Cloisters.

The Highcliffians were four to one; but they had not set themselves an easy task

Clavering was as hard as nails, and he had unlimited pluck.

He stood up to the four with cool hardihood, hitting out fiercely as the nuts of Highcliffe closed on him.

Ponsonby went down as if he had been shot, his jaw feeling as if it had been knocked through his head.

Clavering staggered, receiving blows from Gadsby and Monson that he could not stop; but he stood up and faced the two gamely.

"Lend a hand, Vav, you funk!" yelled Gadsby.

And Vavasour piled in unwillingly.

Gadsby went staggering, and Vavasour and Monson retreated before Clavering's driving fists. But Ponsonby was up again and piling in.

Clavering was taken behind, and he reeled back in the grip of the two young rascals.

With a combined effort the Highcliffians got him down.

Clavering was still struggling on the ground, but he was powerless now. Pon's knee was planted on his chest.

"By gad!" panted Ponsonby. "A regular wild beast, by gad!"

"You coward!" gasped Clavering. "I'll fight you two to one, if you like, if you've got pluck enough!"

"Thanks! We didn't come here for a fight. This is a rag, and you're the fellow that gets the raggin'! Here, hold him!"

Clavering made a desperate effort, and nearly threw off his assailants.

But he was forced down again.

Vavasour—brave now that the enemy was down—trampled on his legs, and Gaddy and Monson grasped his wrists and held on to them.

"By gad, he's dangerous!" said Pon. "Anybody got a cord? We'll fasten his fins!"

"Use his necktie."

"Good!"

Clavering's wrists were dragged together, and fastened with his own necktie and handkerchief securely.

Then the Highcliffe nuts dragged him to his feet.

The Greyfriars junior stood panting in their midst, wrenching at the bonds on his wrists, but in vain.

"Got him, absolutely!" murmured Vavasour. "Better get him away before any of the other beasts come!"

"Better get away," said Monson uneasily.

"It's all serene—nobody's heard," answered Ponsonby, rubbing his chin, where a black bruise was forming.

Vavasour looked anxiously along the Cloisters. They were far from the school buildings, but he was uneasy.

"Somebody's comin'!" he exclaimed.

"Bunter!" muttered Gadsby.

Billy Bunter came rolling along, and he jumped as he saw the crowd of Highcliffe juniors gathered round Clavering.

The Owl of the Remove was short-sighted, but he could see that it was not a safe spot for him.

"Oh, crumbs!" he ejaculated.

And after one blink he turned and fled.

Ponsonby made a dash after him; but Bunter, fat as he was, put on a speed that was something like a record. He did not want to share the ragging.

"Come back, Pen!" shouted Vavasour shrilly. "Let's get away, you ass!"

Pon returned.

"Come on!" he said.

The Highcliffians grasped Clavering, and hustled him out at the gate. The Greyfriars junior had no chance of resistance.

Ponsonby locked the iron gates after they were through. He drew the big key out of the lock.

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"Ain't you goin' to leave it there?" asked Monson.

"Not now the alarm's given. There'll be a crowd along here soon, and they could reach through the bars an' get it. We don't want them after us," grinned Ponsonby.

"My hat! That's so! Let's get out of sight!"

The Highcliffians hurried their prisoner away, through the ruins of the building which had once existed on the spot, and which had long since been destroyed by fire.

The spot was a solitary one, and there was none to observe them. They passed through the ruins, and reached the wood that grew down to the bank of the Sark. They were quite out of sight now, and they felt safe. They slackened speed.

"All serene now," grinned Monson.

"Absolutely!" chortled Vavasour.

Clavering was silent.

What the Highcliffians intended to do with him he could not imagine; but he was aware that some cruel ragging had been planned by the fellow he had thrashed weeks before, and who had never forgiven that thrashing. What puzzled him most was how the nuts had known he was in the Cloisters, and how Ponsonby had obtained the key of the iron gates. That was a mystery he could not solve.

The nuts marched him on through the wood, grinning with triumph, though their satisfaction was somewhat dashed by the damages they had received in the combat.

They did not emerge immediately upon the towing-path, but followed its direction, keeping in the cover of the wood, evidently to escape observation.

They were stopped at last by the fence that bordered Sir Hilton Popper's estate, and then they went out upon the towing-path, and stepped on to the frozen river.

Almost in the middle of the river was the little wooded island, and the nuts of Highcliffe headed for it, their prisoner in their midst.

In a few minutes more they were trampling through the frozen thickets, and the wood hid them from the sight of anyone on the river-banks.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Doubting Thomases!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter burst upon Little Side red and panting.

He had startling news.

"I—I—I say—" he spluttered.

"Hallo! The Food Controller after you? grinned Ogilvy. "Have you been caught at last?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say— Groogh!"

Billy Bunter was pumped. He had not paused for breath in his race from the Cloisters, and, exciting as his news was, he could not get it out.

"Pat him on the back!" exclaimed Bolsover major.

Smack, smack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as several hands smote him forcibly. "Gurrrg! Leave off! Yuuurrrp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with fatty?" asked Bob Cherry, coming off the field.

"Yow-ow! Groogh! I say, you fellows— Leave off punching me, Bolsover, you silly idiot! Yow-ow! I say, the Highcliffe chaps— Groogh!"

"Highcliffe chaps here?" exclaimed Bob.

"Groogh! In the Cloisters! They're ragging Clavering! Ow!"

"Rot!"

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"I saw them!" yelled Bunter.

"Bosh!" said Bolsover major. "How could they get into the Cloisters? The gates at the end are kept locked!"

"The gate was open!"

"Rats!"

"They're ragging Clavering!" spluttered Bunter. "They were going to rag me, the beasts, but I fought them off, and ran for it. I—I knocked down three of them, but I couldn't fight six or seven—"

"Not really?" grinned Bob. "I fancy you could knock down six or seven as easily as two or three, Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I knocked down four of the beasts!" howled Bunter, whose imagination was already actively at work. "I felled Ponsonby with one blow!"

"Ha, ha!"

"And ran for it!"

"Well, we'll believe that bit," said Harry Wharton, who had joined the group to see what was on. "You would run for it, certainly."

"But it's all rot," said Bob. "The Highcliffe bounders can't be there. They couldn't get in. Bunter's pulling our leg!"

"The pullfulness of our leg is terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, I swear—"

"Shush! Think of our innocent young ears!" said Bob severely.

*Eat less
Bread*

"I mean, I swear—"

"I mean, I'll punch you if you swear here!"

"You silly ass! I mean, I swear that—"

"You're not going to swear!" said Bob obstinately. "Bump him if he does!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you silly chump!" gasped Bunter. "They're there—I swear they're there! I saw them! Ponsonby and a crowd of them, ragging Clavering!"

"Rot! What should Clavering be doing there, either?" said Ogilvy.

"Swotting, perhaps," said Mark Linley.

"And what was Bunter doing there?" asked Nugent. "Sneaking off to gorge, I suppose! Is that it, tubby?"

"No, you ass!" gasped Bunter. "I was going to keep an eye on Clavering, to see whether he had sneaked away for the afternoon. Skinner says—"

"Oh, bother Skinner, and what he says!" snapped Wharton.

"Look here, the fat Owl is pulling our leg!" said Johnny Bull. "He wants us to go on a wild-goose chase. Let's go, and take Bunter, and if the Highcliffe cads ain't there, we'll bump the fat Owl!"

"They're there, you ass—"

"Well, let's go and see!"

A crowd of the juniors started for the Cloisters, taking the Owl of the Remove with them. The general belief was that

Bunter was spoofing, as it seemed impossible for the Highcliffians to have gained admittance to the Cloisters.

The juniors ran quickly enough along the Cloisters, and arrived at the gates at the farther end. But Ponsonby & Co. were long gone, and out of sight.

Not unnaturally, Harry Wharton & Co. concluded that they had never been there, as the iron gates were still locked.

Billy Bunter's regard for the truth was well known to equal that of the average Prussian, and so a really improbable yarn from Bunter was not likely to find believers.

Bob Cherry shook the gates. They were locked securely enough.

"Locked!" said Bob.

"Where's Pon, Bunter?"

"And where's Clavering, if he was here?"

"You fat spoofer!"

Billy Bunter blinked round him.

"They—they—they're gone!" he gasped.

"You mean they were never there!" grunted Bob Cherry. "I knew you were spoofing all the time!"

"Of course he was!" growled Bolsover major. "The key of those gates is in Gosling's lodge, and there's only one key. They haven't been unlocked since the fire, that I know of."

"The spooffulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh, with a shake of his dusky head. "The esteemed Bunter is lying, as usual!"

"Look here, you silly nigger—"

"Bump him!"

"I say, you fellows, it's true!" roared Bunter, in alarm. "I saw them here. Ponsonby and Gadsby and several more—five altogether of the beasts—"

"It was six or seven, wasn't it?" grinned Frank Nugent.

"I—I mean six or seven—"

"And you knocked Ponsonby down?" chuckled Peter Todd.

"Yes, I did! I gave him an awful blow—"

"Let's look at your knuckles."

"M-m-my knuckles?"

"Yes; if you gave Pon an awful blow, and knocked down some of the others, your knuckles will show it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Bunter.

"N-n-now I come to think of it, I didn't knock Ponsonby down. I—I meant I was going to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you fellows— Yoopl! Leggo!"

"You fat bounder!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "You've brought us away from footer with a silly yarn. If it was a joke, I don't see the point. But we're jokers, too, and we'll joke with you! Bump him!"

"You—you— Yaroooh!"

Bump!

Thrice was William George Bunter sat down on the cold, unsympathetic flags. The juniors left him there, gasping, and streamed away out of the Cloisters.

Billy Bunter sat and gasped.

"Yow-ow-ow! Oh, dear! Beasts! Yow-ow!"

"You fat duffer!" said Sidney James Snoon, who had been looking on. "You shouldn't spin a yarn like that. It's too thin!"

"It's true!" wailed the hapless Owl.

"Oh, come off!" said Snoop. "I know what's true. Clavering has sneaked away to dodge the parson, and he's got you to spin this yarn, to make out that he couldn't help going out. That's the game. How much did Clavering give you to tell the story, you spoofer?"

"I—I—I—" Bunter simply gasped at that unexpected accusation.

"They got in here, and took Clavering away with them—I don't think!" sneered Snoop. "Through a locked gate—what? Tell us an easier one!"

"The—the gate was open—"

"Are you still sticking to it, then?" demanded Snoop.

"Of course I am, you rotter! It's true!"

"Bow-wow!"

Snoop walked away, quite satisfied that he had hit on the true explanation. Billy Bunter picked himself up, grunting spasmodically, and followed him slowly. For once the Owl of the Remove had told the truth; but, like most disciples of Ananias, he did not find believers when he told it. The Owl of the Remove felt bitterly that there was no encouragement for a really truthful chap at Greyfriars.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Private Tom Redwing!

"HERE we are!" smiled Ponsonby. The Highcliffe party halted in the midst of the wood on the little island.

There was snow among the bushes, which were crusted with frost, and it was bitterly cold. The Highcliffe juniors turned up their coat collars against the keen wind that swept along the river.

Clavering, in the grasp of many hands, was slammed against the trunk of a tree. He was quiet and calm, and his eyes gleamed contempt at the Highcliffians.

Ponsonby drew a coil of cord from under his coat, while his comrades held the Greyfriars junior to the tree.

Clavering understood their intention now; but it was impossible to resist—his hands were too securely bound.

But he did not flinch.

Ponsonby ran the cord round him and the tree-trunk a dozen times, knotting it in various places.

In a few minutes Clavering was fastened to the tree, so that he could not stir a limb.

Then the Highcliffians stood in a group before him, chortling.

"How do you like it, dear boy?" queried Ponsonby.

Clavering did not answer.

"A bit parky—what?" chuckled Vavasour.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time we were gettin' off," yawned Ponsonby. "Good-bye, little yellow bird!"

"Are you going to leave me here?" asked Clavering, breaking his contemptuous silence at last.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"An' it's no good tryin' to bog off!" sneered Gadsby. "I've a good mind to punch you before I go, too!"

"It would be like you, as my hands are tied!" answered Clavering, with quiet scorn.

Gadsby flushed with rage, and stepped closer to him, his hands clenched. But Monson drew him back.

"Let him alone, Gaddy!" he said.

"That's a bit too thick! He's tied!"

"Come on, let's get off!" said Ponsonby. "I'm afraid you'll be a bit chilly there, Clavering. Ha, ha! You call yourself Clavering, I understand?"

"Rotten low impostor, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Bit of a change for you since you used to work in the boats at Hawkscliff, dear boy!" grinned Pon.

"Is that yarn really true?" asked Monson, looking very curiously at the bound junior.

Clavering did not answer. Monson's question showed that even the nuts did



Against Odds! (See Chapter 6.)

not wholly place faith in the veracity of their leader.

Ponsonby & Co. disappeared through the crackling bushes, and Clavering heard them tramping away on the ice.

The sounds died away in the distance, and he realised that they were gone, and that he was left quite alone on the deserted island.

The bitter wind from the frozen river chilled him. Fragments of snow were falling on him from the branches above. He was soon shivering.

Long exposure meant a serious risk to his health, but that was a matter the reckless young ruffians of Highcliffe had not troubled to take into consideration. If taxed with their brutal action, they were quite prepared to deny the whole story, and stick to their denial through thick and thin.

Well dressed and elegant in manners as the Highcliffe nuts were, there was little to choose between them and the roughest sort of hooligan when it came to sheer ruffianism.

Clavering shouted several times, in the faint hope that someone passing on the banks might hear his voice and come to the rescue.

But only the echo of his shouting answered him. It was a solitary spot. In summer there were many passers-by on the river and the towing-path; but now the Sark was frozen in the grip of winter.

It was forced upon his mind that rescue was very improbable. He was there to stay—till the Highcliffians chose to return and release him. When would they return? Would they return at all? To be exposed in that dreary spot all night would be nothing short of death, and they could not mean that. But the silence about him was unbroken by a voice or a footstep.

The pale, wintry sun glimmered down through the branches overhead. Clavering had been there nearly an hour when a sound on the frozen river made him start. Someone was on the ice, apparently sliding.

"Help!" shouted Clavering desperately.

Through the thickets he could catch

slight glimpses of the frozen surface of the river. For a moment a figure in khaki was visible through an opening, and then it vanished again.

"Help!"

To his joy an answering shout came back:

"Hallo! Who's calling!"

"Help!"

"Where are you?"

It was a clear, boyish voice.

"On the island—tied to a tree. Come and help me!" shouted Clavering.

"My hat!"

There was a rustling and crackling in the bushes.

The fellow in khaki had landed on the island from the ice, and was making his way through the frost-bitten thickets.

"This way!" called out Clavering.

"Right-ho!"

A sturdy, handsome lad in khaki emerged from the thickets near the tree, and looked round him.

"Here!" called out the Greyfriars junior.

"I see you. I'm coming!" called back the new-comer.

He hurried towards the bound junior, astonishment very plainly written on his face. The sight of a boy bound to a tree on the frozen island astounded him.

Clavering watched him as he hurried up. He was a soldier—a very boyish-looking soldier, though in build he looked about nineteen.

The Greyfriars junior started, and a strange look came over his face as he scanned the features of the new-comer.

"You!" he panted.

The soldier looked at his face, and gave a start of astonishment.

"You!" he exclaimed, in his turn.

"Clavering!"

"Redwing!"

"Get me loose!" muttered the junior.

"I'm freezing!"

"I'll have you loose in a jiffy!"

The soldier opened a pocket-knife, and cut through the cord that held the Greyfriars fellow to the tree.

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The severed cords fell about the junior's feet, and he stood free, shivering from head to foot.

"Who the dickens tied you up like that?" exclaimed the soldier, in amazement and indignation.

"Some cads—for a rotten joke!" gasped Clavering.

"My hat! I wish I'd arrived while they were doing it! Move about! You look half frozen!"

Clavering was already starting to exercise.

The soldier stood and watched him in silence. In a few minutes the colour was flushing the junior's cheeks again, and the warmth was returning to his chilled limbs.

He stopped at last, panting.

"Better now, kid?"

"Yes," panted the junior. "Thank you for helping me out of that. But—but—you—I never dreamed of seeing you here, Clavering!"

The soldier laughed.

"Don't call me that!" he said. "I'm Private Tom Redwing, of the Loamshire Rifles. The name's as good as my old one, and the job's better. I'm on leave this afternoon."

"I know—I know!"

"I don't quite see how you knew," said the soldier, in surprise.

"I've been to the camp to see you, and they told me."

"Oh, I see!"

"And I'm jolly glad to see you!"

"Same here!" said the lad in khaki cheerfully. "The fact is, I came in this direction hoping I might fall in with you, kid. I knew it was a half-holiday at the school. I've had a look at Greyfriars; but I didn't care to go too close. No good risking having questions asked."

"You—you wanted to see me?"

"Yes, naturally."

"You mean you want this to end—you want to take your own name and place at Greyfriars?" exclaimed the junior eagerly.

The soldier shook his head.

"No fear!" he answered emphatically.

"I don't want anything of the sort. I wanted to see how you were getting on, that's all. Besides, it was a bargain. You gave me your name, and I gave you mine. You wanted to go to school. I wanted to go into the Army. It was a fair bargain."

"I'm ready to release you from the bargain."

"I'm not ready to release you, though!"

"But—"

"A bargain's a bargain, and I hold you to it, old son!"

And there fell a silence.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

HAROLD SKINNER came out of the porter's lodge as the station hack drove in at the gates of Greyfriars. Skinner's face was very contented. The reverend gentleman from Cotswood had arrived, and Clavering of the Remove was still within the school gates—at least, Skinner was sure he was.

A rather stiff-looking gentleman in black was seated in the cab. Skinner saw at a glance that it was a clergyman, and he had no doubt that it was Mr. Shepherd. He watched the cab drive on to the Head's house, with a grin.

He did not leave the gates. He was quite prepared to see Clavering make a desperate bolt at the last minute, and atempt to avoid a meeting with the Vicar of Cotswood. In the distance he saw the visitor alight from the cab and enter the

Head's house. The cab waited outside. Apparently Mr. Shepherd's visit was not to be a prolonged one.

Sidney James Snoop spotted him at the gates, and joined him there.

"His nibs has come," remarked Snoop, thus irreverently alluding to the gentleman in rusty black.

"It's Shepherd!" said Skinner.

"Yes. I heard him give his name to Trotter."

Skinner rubbed his hands.

"Now Clavering can look out for squalls!" he said.

"Is he still in gates?"

"I've been watching the gates from Gosling's lodge," chuckled Skinner. "He hasn't gone out. I left him in the Cloisters some time back."

"He's not there now."

"Well, he must be somewhere around."

"I fancy not," said Snoop, with a grin.

"I haven't seen him. Bunter's got a yarn of seeing him ragged by a High-diffe gang in the Cloisters. And it looks to me as if Clavering has put him up to it, and cleared."

"But—but he can't have cleared!" exclaimed Skinner. "I've been watching the gates all the time, I tell you!"

"Bet you he's hooked it over the wall, then!"

Skinner set his thin lips.

"That settles it, if he has," he answered. "If Clavering's not within gates the fellows will know what to think!"

"You bet!" agreed Snoop.

Trotter, the page, came out into the quad, looking about him. He was evidently in search of someone.

"Looking for Clavering?" grinned Skinner. "I wonder what the parson will say when the spoofer doesn't turn up?"

They watched Trotter hurry down to the footer-ground, and followed him there. Clavering was not to be seen.

"Scuse me, Master Wharton—"

"Hallo, Trotty! Anything wanted?" asked the captain of the Remove cheerfully.

"Master Clavering's wanted, sir," answered Trotter. "Gent's come to see 'im—a reverend gent, sir. I can't find 'im nowhere."

Wharton whistled.

"I'm sure he hasn't gone out," he replied. "He knew Mr. Shepherd was coming. He was here some time ago."

"I don't see 'im!"

"Any of you fellows seen Clavering?" called out Harry Wharton.

There was a snigger from Harold Skinner.

"Nobody will see him till after the parson's gone," he said.

"Hallo, you beginning again, Skinner?" growled Bolsover major.

"Well, where is he?" demanded Skinner.

"He can't have gone out!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, his face darkening a little.

"He's not gone out by the gates!" sneered Skinner. "I've been watching the gates all the time."

"Sneaking spy!" growled Johnny Bull.

"It's a chap's duty to keep an eye on a spoofing swindler!" said Skinner loftily.

"Oh, rats! It's not a chap's bizney to spy on anybody."

"Some fellows are born spies," snorted Bob Cherry. "You ought to get a job in the Hun Secret Service, Skinner; that's about your mark!"

"Well, where's Clavering?" demanded Skinner angrily. "Is he going to show up? You fellows said he wouldn't try to dodge the parson. Where is he?"

"My hat!" said Bolsover major slowly.

"It does look—"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Let's look for the chap. We'll find him for you, Trotter!"

"Yes sir."

Most of the juniors were interested and excited. Those whose faith was firmest in Clavering were staggered now; and as the news spread that the reverend gentleman had arrived, and that Clavering was not visible, nearly all the Remove joined in the search for him. Some of the Fourth and the Third helped, as curious on the subject as the Removes.

Trotter returned to inform the Head and his visitor that Clavering could not be seen, but that he was being looked for.

Looked for he was, and thoroughly. The studies were searched, the library, the Common-rooms, the music-room, the gym, the quad, and the Cloisters, even the old chapel ruins—everywhere, in fact, that a junior could possibly be was searched—and drawn blank!

Clavering was not to be found.

Harry Wharton's brow was clouded as he returned to the School House with his chums, after a last look round the Cloisters.

Wingate of the Sixth met them on the steps.

"Have you seen Clavering, Wharton?" he asked. "The Head wants him."

"We've hunted everywhere, Wingate."

"Has the young ass gone out, then?"

"I—I suppose so."

Mr. Quelch came to the doorway.

"Wharton, have you any knowledge where Clavering is?"

"No, sir."

"You gave him my message after dinner, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"He cannot have gone out, then, as he knew that Mr. Shepherd was coming. Do you know whether he went out, Wharton?"

"He went out for a spin, sir, but he came back. I saw him. He was on the footer-ground an hour ago."

"Then he must still be within gates. Please look for him, and tell him that Mr. Shepherd is in the Head's study waiting for him."

"We've searched the whole place, sir, and we can't find him."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Remove-master in surprise. "Are you sure, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, reluctantly enough. "There was no use hiding the fact that the new junior could not be found within the precincts of Greyfriars."

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"You are sure you gave him my message, Wharton?"

"Certainly, sir."

"He must have gone out, then, in spite of it. This is very extraordinary! His former tutor cannot wait long, as there is only one train back this evening!" the Remove-master exclaimed, frowning. "I have never heard of such disrespect."

The juniors looked at one another in silence.

They knew—though Mr. Quelch did not—that there could only be one explanation, if Clavering had gone out of his own accord. He was condemned now in the minds of all the Remove. But Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

"What do you mean, Cherry? Does Bunter know anything of Clavering's movements?"

"Well, Bunter said—ahem—"

"Kindly explain yourself, boy!" said the Form-master testily.

"Here's Bunter!" called out Johnny Bull. "You're wanted, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter rolled up.

"Bunter, do you know where Clavering is?" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir; not since I saw him in the Cloisters," said Bunter. He blinked loftily at the Removites. They were wondering whether he had the nerve to spin his yarn to his Form-master. If he did, it meant that it was true. "I think, sir," Bunter went on deliberately, "that the Highcliffe chaps have done something with him."

"Oh!" murmured the juniors.

"What can you mean, Bunter?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Explain yourself at once! Has Clavering been quarrelling with the Highcliffe boys?"

"They were ragging him in the Cloisters, sir!" purred Bunter, much elated at thus shutting up his disbelievers by repeating his story to the Form-master. "I came on them, sir—"

"In the Cloisters? How could Highcliffe boys gain admittance to the Cloisters?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "The gates are locked!"

"They were open then, sir. The rotters—ahem!—I mean the Highcliffe chaps must have got a key somewhere."

"Nonsense! Do you know anything of this, Wharton?"

"Only what Bunter told us, sir," said Harry. "We went to see if there was anything in it, and we found nobody there, and the gates locked, as usual."

"I saw them!" hooted Bunter. "The gate was open when I saw it. Ponsonby and a crowd of them were ragging Clavering. They were all gone when the fellows got there—they must have rushed Clavering out of the gate, and locked it after them. It's true, sir."

"A foolish schoolboy joke, I suppose," said Mr. Quelch irritably. "Most unfortunate, when Clavering's tutor is here to visit him, and can stay but a short time. Did you see Clavering go out with them, Bunter?"

"Nunno, sir. He was fighting when I saw him. Monson's nose was bleeding like anything, and—"

"You need not give me disgusting details, Bunter. Really, Wharton, if you knew that Clavering had been taken out of gates for a foolish joke, you might have interfered or reported the matter, as you were aware that Mr. Shepherd was coming here to see him!"

Wharton flushed.

"We didn't believe Bunter, sir," he answered. "The gates were locked, so—"

"I understand! I am aware that Bunter is not a truthful boy!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"You need not speak, Bunter. Wharton, kindly go to the lodge, and ask Gosling whether the key to the Cloister gate is missing. That will settle the matter."

"Certainly, sir."

Harry Wharton ran away to Gosling's lodge. The fellows waited anxiously for him to return, and Mr. Quelch waited irritably. In three minutes Harry came speeding back to the School House.

"The key's gone, sir!" he gasped.

"My hat!" murmured Bob. "Bunter was telling the truth!"

"Another blessed miracle!" murmured Nugent.

"Gosling told you the key is missing, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir. It's not on the hook."

"It is extraordinary that a Highcliffe boy can have obtained possession of it. Some Greyfriars boy must have purloined it, and lent it to him!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "This is most annoying. My boys, will you kindly search for Clavering, and bring him back as soon as possible?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

And there was a rush to the gates, while Mr. Quelch repaired to the Head's

study, to inform Mr. Shepherd of the unfortunate state of affairs.

It was rather an extraordinary story to tell, and Mr. Quelch's voice was very snappish as he told it. Mr. Quelch regarded the affair as a reckless schoolboy lark, and he did not approve of larks. But the reverend gentleman smiled good-humouredly.

"It is very unfortunate, but I suppose it cannot be helped," said Mr. Shepherd. "I could remain until six—no later, as the train leaves at six-thirty. With your permission, Dr. Locke—"

"Most certainly," said the Head. "It is very unfortunate, but doubtless the boys will find Clavering long before six o'clock. He cannot be far away. Perhaps you will join us at tea, Mr. Shepherd. Mrs. Locke will be delighted."

The reverend gentleman stayed to tea in the Head's house. Meanwhile, the search for the missing junior was going on in the direction of Highcliffe School, but the search was in vain. In the winter dusk Harry Wharton & Co. turned back to Greyfriars at last, disappointed. Clavering of the Remove was not to be found.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Stick It Out!

THE lad in khaki sat on a log under the frosty trees and regarded Clavering with a whimsical smile. The Greyfriars junior's brow was dark with thought. He had missed the soldier at Wapshot Camp, but this chance meeting gave him the opportunity he had sought. But he was slow to speak. It was the soldier who broke the silence at last. The dusk was creeping over the island and the frozen river.

"You're looking down in the mouth, old scout. Don't you like your life at Greyfriars?"

"I like it," answered the junior.

"You're glad to be there?"

"Very glad!"

"It's a change, I suppose?"

"A great change, after working with my hands for my daily bread," said the junior, with a sigh. "It's what I've always dreamed of. But—"

"Then what's the trouble?" asked the soldier, in wonder. "You've got the life you want, and I've got the life I want. I passed in as eighteen—I look it; but if old Shepherd got on my track he would soon yank me out of the Army again. And I'm looking for my chance in a draft for Flanders." His eyes gleamed, and his boyish face grew hard for a moment. "I'm going out to kill Germans, kid. I'm big enough, if not old enough. Aren't you satisfied with the exchange?"

"Yes; but—"

"They wouldn't take a kid like you in the Army, if that's what you're thinking of. You're fifteen, and look it. I'm nearly sixteen, and look eighteen or nineteen. That cock won't fight."

The schoolboy smiled.

"I wasn't thinking of the Army," he said. "I'm satisfied with Greyfriars. I'm glad to be there. I've made some friends, too—splendid chaps. One especially has been very decent to me. But—"

"Well?"

"It's a game that can't be played out. I'm suspected already."

The soldier whistled.

"I don't see how."

"There were were trifles—little things, but they count. I stood all that. But this afternoon Mr. Shepherd's coming to the school."

"Oh, great Scott!"

"What would happen if he saw me?" said the junior.

"My hat! He wouldn't think you

were Leonard Clavering, that's a cert. But what on earth brings old Shepherd to the school? He lives twenty or thirty miles away, and he's a home-sticker. I believe he doesn't go outside Cotswood parish once a year, let alone this distance."

"I suppose some business brought him this way, and he thought he would call in. Perhaps to see whether Clavering had given up his idea of becoming a soldier," said the Greyfriars junior, smiling.

"What rotten luck! But he hasn't seen you?"

"No!"

"Easy done, then. Stay out while he's there. He certainly can't come again in a hurry. I wonder you never thought of that!"

"I did think of it," said the junior. "But it would have finished me with my Form. They would take it as proof of what they suspect already."

"H'm!"

"That's why I tried to see you at the camp—to tell you that it can't be played out," said Tom Redwing, in a low voice. "I—I can't dodge and trick and lie—I can't! You wouldn't want me to. I—I hoped to see you, and—and to find that you'd got tired of soldiering—"

"To ask me to break our bargain?" demanded the soldier gruffly.

"No," said the junior slowly. "A bargain's a bargain. I stick to it if you want me to."

"That's settled!"

"Right! If I'm bowled out, I shall have to clear off from Greyfriars. But I shall say nothing about you. If—if you wanted your own name and place, I'd give them up."

"I don't!"

"Then the bargain stands—as long as it can stand."

The soldier knitted his brows.

"But Shepherd can't come again in a hurry, and you've missed him," he said. "You came out—"

"I didn't come out. I was rushed off by a gang of rotters from Highcliffe School." The junior's eyes gleamed.

"It was a rag."

"About the best thing that could have happened, I should say."

"Why?"

"You've missed Shepherd, and you can prove that it wasn't of your own free will."

The junior started.

"My hat! That's so! And it's true! Shepherd will be gone before I get back—that's a cert!" he exclaimed. "Ponsonby has done me a good turn without knowing it!"

"Depend on it, old Shepherd won't call again in a hurry," said the soldier confidently. "He sticks at home like an oyster as a rule. I've lived in his place for two or three years, and I know. You're safe on that side."

"But—but—"

"Safe as houses," said the soldier. He paused. "Look here, kid. I asked you to play this game. But if you fairly ask me to let you off the bargain, I'll do it—unwillingly. You're not a slave. Only, since you're glad to be at Greyfriars, stick it out till I get into a draft for Flanders. After that, old Shepherd can't get me back if he tries ever so hard."

"I'd like to stay for good, but—"

"Stay for good, then. You're wronging no one."

"I know. But—"

"Stick it out!" said the soldier.

"I'll try," said the Greyfriars junior simply.

He was about to speak again when there came a sound in the deepening dusk, and the lad in khaki started to his feet.

"Somebody's coming!" he said hastily.

"We mustn't be seen together, kid. It might give the show away. I'll cut!"

"I shall see you again?" exclaimed Clavering.

"If you want to, yes. I'll come along here next leave, if you like."

"Good! I—"

The soldier made a sign for silence, and disappeared into the thickets in the opposite direction from that in which footsteps could be heard.

The false Clavering waited, his heart beating. He wondered whether it was Ponsonby & Co. returning to release him. If so, his soldier friend was near enough to help him, if he needed help.

He started as the thickets rustled and a junior came into sight. It was the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Smithy!" exclaimed the junior.

Vernon-Smith started, and looked at him.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "I thought—"

He broke off. The Bounder had expected to find Clavering bound to the tree. The junior looked at him oddly.

"Did you come here for me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Vernon-Smith frankly. "I've been at Highcliffe, and I heard—"

"Thank you! Ponsonby and his crew left me bound to a tree," said the junior. "I was set free by a soldier chap who came along."

"Oh, good!" said the Bounder. "I've come along for nothing, then. Where's the soldier chap?"

"He's gone—now."

"Time you got back to school," remarked Vernon-Smith, looking at his watch. "It's close on calling-over now, and it's a fair distance."

The new junior hesitated a moment.

"We needn't hurry, of course," said the Bounder, with a smile. "Give the gentle Shepherd plenty of rope."

Clavering smiled.

"He must be gone before we get in," he said. "The last up-train from Friar-dale goes at half-past six, I believe."

"Six-thirty," agreed the Bounder; "and it's past six now. Did you have a bad time here?"

"Rotten, until I was set free." The new junior's brow darkened. "I'll make Ponsonby smart for it, too. Though, as it happens, he's done me a good turn."

"How do you make that out?" asked the Bounder carelessly.

"I've missed Mr. Shepherd, and I can prove that I didn't leave Greyfriars of my own accord, if they want to know."

"What a stroke of luck!" said the Bounder calmly. "Ponsonby couldn't have guessed how useful he would be. Let's get going. It's cold here. We needn't hurry, though. Never mind call-over for once."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Shut Up, Skinner!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came in at the gates just as Gosling was about to close them. They had put in a thorough search for Clavering, up and down and round about, but they had not seen a sign of him or of the Highcliffe fellows. Harry went at once to Mr. Quelch's study to report.

Then he joined his chums in the Common-room. There was a rather excited discussion going on among the Removees.

Billy Bunter had told his yarn over again several times, and he was finding believers now.

Skinner & Co. persisted that Clavering had gone deliberately out of the school to avoid the meeting with the Cotswold vicar. Bunter's story was rather a facer

for them, as the fact that the Owl had ventured to tell it to the Form-master was proof enough for most of the fellows.

Skinner savagely declared that Clavering had put Bunter up to spinning the yarn, and paid him for it—an accusation which the fat junior indignantly denied.

"That's all rot!" said Harry Wharton, coming in as Skinner was repeating his statement. "You know it is, Skinner!"

"It's the truth!" snarled Skinner.

"Rot! Bunter would tell any amount of lies, I dare say—"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"But he never sticks to a yarn he's made up without contradicting himself," said Harry. "And we all know that Clavering hasn't any money to give him. He's got less tin than any other chap in the Form, I believe!"

"As if I'd touch his money!" snorted Bunter wrathfully.

"You would, if he had any!" grinned Bob Cherry. "But I don't believe he has any. Bunter's told the truth for once, amazing as it is!"

"Looks like it," agreed Bolsover major. "I know Bunter was as keen on proving Clavering an impostor as anybody!"

"I believe he is an impostor!" snapped Bunter. "I've said so all along! All the same, it was true what I saw in the Cloisters. He licked Pon a few weeks ago, and the cad's got his knife into him!"

"How could he get a key of the gate?" growled Skinner.

"I shouldn't wonder if he got it through you, Skinner!" said Johnny Bull, in his slow, deliberate way

Skinner jumped.

"Through me!" he howled.

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Yes; you pal with Ponsonby, and it must have been a Greyfriars chap who gave him the key. It's queer that Pon should have dragged Clavering off just at this time. It looks to me like a put-up job."

"Wha-a-at?"

"A put-up job!" repeated Johnny Bull stolidly. "You wanted to make out that Clavering was dodging the parson, and you got your Highcliffe friends to yank him away, to look as if he had gone out of his own accord. You gave Pon the key to do it. That's what it looks like to me!"

"My hat! To me, too!" exclaimed Squiff.

Skinner simply gasped.

As a matter of fact, Johnny Bull's suspicion looked reasonable enough, and it quite fitted in with the well-known tortuousness of Skinner's character. It was exactly one of his deep-laid tricks—if it was true.

Accusing looks were cast at Skinner from all sides.

"Is that how it is, Skinner, you sneak?" boomed Bolsover major.

"Own up, you worm!"

"Own up, Skinner!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Skinner. "It's a lie! I—I don't know anything about it! I—I—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's call-over!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The juniors went into Hall for call-over. Two of the Remove failed to answer to their names—Clavering and Vernon-Smith.

Mr. Quelch marked them absent, and dismissed the school; and then he went to the Head's study. Mr. Shepherd was there.

The black-coated gentleman was growing rather uneasy. He glanced many times at the clock.

"Has Clavering come in?" exclaimed the Head, as the Remove-master entered.

"I am sorry to say, no," answered Mr. Quelch.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Shepherd. He rose from his chair.

"This is really most unfortunate, sir!" murmured the Head, greatly vexed by the untoward happening.

"Extremely so, as I fear I shall not find myself in this direction again for a very long time!" said Mr. Shepherd regretfully. "However, it appears that I cannot see my former ward."

"I am sure, Mr. Shepherd, that it is not the boy's fault," said Mr. Quelch. "I have always found him a very respectful and considerate boy."

"Quite so, sir—quite so! I quite understand—simply an untimely joke on the part of some rather lively young gentlemen," said Mr. Shepherd, with a nod. "I am quite sure that Leonard would not intentionally neglect me. He is a good boy—a little wayward, but a really fine and good-hearted lad. He will be as sorry as I am, I am sure!"

"You could not wait a little longer?" remarked the Head.

"I fear not! I have already left myself very little time for my train." The reverend gentleman was evidently disappointed, but there was nothing to be done. "I am afraid I have taken up a great deal of your time!"

"Not at all, sir!" assured the Head politely.

And Mr. Shepherd took his leave.

As he went out to his cab the eyes of nearly all the Remove were upon him. He was departing without seeing Clavering.

The cab drove out at the gates, and rumbled down the dark road to Friar-dale.

Gosling closed the gates after it.

Harry Wharton & Co. remained in the hall, looking out for the two absentees. It was past seven when footsteps were heard in the quad. The juniors had heard the gate.

Vernon-Smith and Clavering came into the School House together.

They were surrounded at once.

"Where have you been, Clavering?"

"Shush! Here's Quelch!"

The juniors drew back as Mr. Quelch came on the scene, frowning.

"So you have returned, Clavering?" he exclaimed sharply, taking no notice of the Bounder for the moment.

"Yes, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"On the island, sir, in the river."

"And what were you doing there, Clavering? Am I to understand that you left the school intentionally, knowing that Mr. Shepherd was coming here to see you?"

The juniors almost held their breath.

"No, sir," answered Clavering quietly.

"I was taken away by force!"

"Tell me what happened, Clavering!"

"I was going over my Latin, sir, in the Cloisters, when some fellows came in—fellows belonging to another school!"

"Highcliffe!" struck in Bunter.

"One of them was a chap I had fought with," went on Clavering, unheeding the Owl's interruption. "They collared me, and I resisted!"

He rubbed his left eye, which had a dark shade round it—in fact, there were many traces of that tough combat on Clavering's face, bearing out his story. "They were too many for me, sir, and they rushed me out. One of them had a key to the iron gates. They forced me away, and tied me to a tree on the island in the river. That's all, sir. It was what they'd call a jape, I suppose!"

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"Scarcely a joke, to my mind!" he snapped. "And when did they release you, Clavering?"

"They did not release me, sir. I was found there by a soldier, who set me free. I met Vernon-Smith, and we came home together."

Mr. Quelch gave him a searching look. "Very well, Clavering, I accept your explanation," he said. "It is very unfortunate, as Mr. Shepherd has had to leave without seeing you. Vernon-Smith, you have only just returned?"

"Sorry, sir!" said the Bounder meekly. "I was over at Highcliffe, and Courtenay asked me to stay to tea after the footer, so—"

"That is no excuse. You will take two hundred lines!"

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Quelch rustled away.

"I don't believe a word of it!" snarled Skinner, when Mr. Quelch was gone.

The Bounder smiled.

"Don't you, Skinner?" he asked. "By the way, can you explain how Ponsonby got that key, Skinner? Somebody must have given it to him!"

"I didn't! I don't believe—Yaroooh!" roared Skinner, as Bolsover major smote him, and he sat down suddenly. "Wharrer you at?"

"I told you I'd do it!" said Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clavering went up to his study, a smile upon his face. His explanation was doubted by few—or, rather, none. The truth could easily be found out at Highcliffe—all the fellows knew that. And they knew that even if Clavering wanted to lie, he would not tell a lie that could be found out next day. Even Skinner did not really doubt.

Vernon-Smith dropped into Clavering's

study later that evening, after Snoop and Stott had done their prep and gone down. Clavering was still working, but he looked up with a smile as the Bounder came in.

A weight seemed to have rolled from the new junior's mind.

"Merry and bright?" asked Vernon-Smith, smiling.

"Yes, quite," said Clavering, also smiling. "I wasn't much hurt, after all, as it turned out. Only my eye and my nose!"

"That's nothing!" smiled the Bounder. "Ponsonby did you a good turn without knowing it!"

"That's so!" Clavering became grave again. "You had some plan in your head, you told me this afternoon. I'm much obliged, all the same, though it wasn't needed."

The Bounder chuckled.

"Wasn't it?" he asked.

"No, as it turned out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clavering looked at him quickly.

"Smithy! You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do, my innocent infant!" grinned the Bounder. "That was the little game. Pon thought I'd turned against you, you see, when I put him up to it. He was glad of the chance. Bunter's seeing them collar you was just a stroke of luck."

"You—you didn't warn me!"

"It was better not. You had to be able to tell the exact truth afterwards, being a stickler on such points!"

"Oh!" said Clavering blankly.

"It was better for you not to know—till after. I'm afraid they handled you a bit roughly; but I thought you wouldn't

mind that, considering. It was rather deep of me—wasn't it?"

"Very deep!" said Clavering, after a pause.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"It's fairly dished Skinner!" he said. "Hallo! What's that thumping row?"

The two juniors looked out of the study.

Bump, bump!

It was Skinner's voice, raised in anguish. Harry Wharton & Co. were bumping him on the floor of the Remove passage.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Bounder.

Bob Cherry looked round.

"Gosling's found his key in the lodge; it's been put back," he said. "Skinner says Clavering must have put it there, and we're fed up with his yarns about Clavering. Give him another, you chaps!"

Bump!

Skinner gave a fiendish yell, and tore himself away and fled. A roar of laughter from the Famous Five followed him.

Clavering of the Remove went quietly back to his work. Skinner was, as the Bounder had said, dished—for the time, at least. The threatening cloud had passed by. The new junior who had so strangely come to Greyfriars was safe. But for how long? That was the question Tom Redwing, alias Leonard Clavering, asked himself, without being able to find an answer.

(Don't miss "TOM REDWING'S RESOLVE!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"TOM REDWING'S RESOLVE!"

By Frank Richards.

You all like Tom Redwing—alias Leonard Oswald Clavering—I don't think there can be any doubt about that. A little more serious and studious than your favourite heroes, no doubt, but a rare good fellow—straight, for all the deception he has carried on at Greyfriars, generous, good-hearted, likely to be a credit to his Form, and the friend of all the fellows in it—if he stays!

But will he stay? He is sailing under false colours, you know; and he hates it. Sir Hilton Popper, who grudges the money spent on—as he believes—the real Clavering, certainly would not pay for the education of Tom Redwing. Mr. Vernon-Smith would be only too pleased to pay the Greyfriars fees. But Tom is proud. That would be accepting charity, he feels.

What is the end of it all? That you will learn next week, when, through the spying of Skinner & Co., Greyfriars comes to know the truth. And when you reach the end of the story I am sure you will like Tom Redwing better than ever, and will hope to hear more about him.

THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 4d. LIBRARY.

With the New Year the "BOYS' FRIEND" LIBRARY was advanced in price—a step made absolutely necessary by the general rise in the cost of paper, ink, and labour in connection with it. But if the charge had been made sixpence the little volumes would still be more than value for the money.

The same remark applies to the companion series, the "SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY." Everyone who cares for first-class detective yarns, full of incident and mystery, should get these books with their attractive, coloured covers and their closely-packed pages.

The February issues of the "BOYS' FRIEND" LIBRARY are:

No. 413.—"THE FEUD AT ROOKWOOD."

By Owen Conquest. An absolutely new and really great story of Jimmy Silver & Co., and the first Rookwood tale to be published in this series. Not likely to be the last, I think. Look for it at once, or you may get left!

No. 414.—"THE WORLD'S CHAMPION." By Clement Hale. A boxing yarn this, by a man who knows the game he writes about inside out.

No. 415.—"OVER THE STICKS." By Andrew Gray. Steeplechasing, jockeys and trainers and horses, plots and races, and all that sort of thing. And if you like that sort of thing, as I know many of you do, this is just the story for you.

No. 416.—"THE SEVEN STARS." By Maxwell Scott. A fine yarn of detective adventure and mystery, by the famous creator of Nelson Lee.

The two "SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY" volumes are:

No. 49.—"THE CASE OF THE TWO BROTHERS; or, THE SHADOW OF A CRIME." By the Author of "Vengeance!" "The Barrier Reef Mystery," etc.

No. 50.—"WHOSE WAS THE HAND?; or, THE CASE OF THE STOLEN PILLAR-BOX." By the Author of "When Conscience Sleeps," etc.

FOURPENCE PER VOLUME EVERYWHERE.

"THE MUDHOOK."

Another issue—the second—of this very interesting and amusing trench journal has reached me. It is a thing to wonder at that our dear fellows out there should be able to keep up their spirits as they do in spite of everything; but no one who turns over the pages of the "Mudhook" can doubt for a moment that there is fun in the trenches. Not rollicking fun of the sort that means freedom from care, but rather the fun that real men can feel when they are hard up against it, and persist in taking even the most abominable discomforts and the gravest dangers in a spirit of humour. And that is the way in which the average man with pluck and backbone finds it easiest to take them—easiest and best. The sense of comradeship helps him; what he suffers he does not suffer alone. Thousands of others are getting it, too, and they can laugh at one

another without offence because they are laughing at themselves. To some too serious-minded people this seems a wrong view of a way of life which has death so near it all the time. But I do not think it is so. We must all die, and none of us knows when. We shall not die the worse when our time comes because we have made a jest of our troubles. It is well to make a jest of them if we can, but it is not easy when they have to be borne alone. That is where our lads at the Front score. And it seems that some of them recognise the fact that there are also troubles at home. Personally, I don't look upon the Hun air-raids as anything but minor worries; but they mean more to some, and, of course, they lend themselves very well to such a comparison as "D.C.O." makes in his clever verses, "Et Tu—Blighty," in the "Mudhook." I cannot quote the whole five stanzas, but here are three:

"There are times in France or Flanders
When it's hard to raise a laugh;
When the mud's up to your armpits,
And old Fritz is on the strafe,
When a whizz-bang spoils your dinner,
And your dug-out's blown to —;
But the Homefolk back in Blighty
Have their little trials as well.

"When the harvest moon is waxing,
And the nights are wondrous clear,
And the shrill, blood-freezing siren
Shrieks that Gotha-planes are near;
How they skurry from their bed-rooms
As the startled coverts whir!
They've no time to put their hair up—
It's a hasty *sauf-qui-pout*.

"Oh, it's not all bliss in Blighty,
As in days long since gone by,
When they're praying for bad weather,
And the casks and kegs are dry.
When the submarines are shelling,
And the cook and maid have gone,
And they've lost their sugar ticket—
They, too, know a war is on!"

Your Editor

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD"
and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

BY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH!

By EDGAR LAWRENCE.

BREAKING bounds at night has always been a jolly risky business in the New House. Ratty, our respected House-master, has a habit of coming down like a thousand of bricks on anybody who goes astray from the path of virtue; and when he catches a fellow creeping into the school building at about one in the morning, he fairly dons the black cap, as it were.

In short, Ratty's a tyrant. And his tyranny comes a bit hard on fellows like Reddy and Owen and me, who are fated to be free.

But Ratty's latest was the limit and the last straw combined. It appears that he's buttonholed a party of seniors from both Houses, and made them form a picket, to be called out in times of emergency—when a fellow was known to be out of bounds, for instance.

This happened at a most inconvenient time. The Burlesques had just started giving their twice-nightly shows in Wayland, and we were crazy keen to go and see them. Reddy vowed that wild horses wouldn't prevent him from going; and we were with him to a man.

"It'll take more than Ratty and a handful of sleepy seniors to stop me," said Reddy. "It's a big risk, of course, but that only adds spice to the adventure. Are you game for the little excursion to-night, kids?"

"We is—we are!"

We went to bed in the usual way, and it was lucky we did, for Knox, who saw lights out, made a searching inspection of all our beds, to see if anybody happened to be fully dressed.

Half an hour later, when we calculated the coast was clear, we hopped out of bed and got into our togs. We put on light shoes, and buttoned raincoats round our necks, so that we shouldn't have to run the gauntlet of the bobbies in Wayland.

"Keep close behind me," whispered Reddy. "It would be too thick to get nailed before we've got clear of the building!"

So we tiptoed down to the bike-shed, got our jiggers, and wheeled them across the quad. It was a pitch-black night—not a mouse stirring.

We nipped over the school wall, and lit our lamps. The next minute we were soaring away like the wind.

There was a bobby on duty on the outskirts of Wayland, and he peered at us pretty closely; but we were past him in a flash.

"Our luck's in," said Reddy. "My sons, this is to be a regular joy-night!"

"It will be, if you're treating us to the show," I said. "Personally, I'm only worth a chunk of toffee and a Coronation medal."

"Be not alarmed, fair youth! I'm standing treat all serene."

"Good man!" said Owen.

We put our bikes up in the garage, and then trotted into the music-hall.

It was a stunning show. The beauty chorus, for all its powder and paint, made a big hit; and the fellow in a farmer's smock who came on and sang "Apple Doompings" fairly brought the house down. We cheered, and we encored, and we behaved like a trio of tame lunatics.

And then, just before the conclusion of the show, Reddy sighted Knox! He was sitting in the front row, with his back to us, and his attention concentrated on the stage.

We gave a gasp, and grew serious again. It wouldn't do for Knox to spot us. He would report us instantler, and it would be no use our questioning his right to be at the music-hall, because he would vow he went there to rout us out.

"We must play our cards carefully," said Reddy.

"Better take time by the forelock, and clear off now," I muttered.

"All serene!"

We had got to the door, when, to our dismay and disgust, we saw that Knox had risen to his feet, and was coming out, too.

He had spotted us, I think, though in the dim light he didn't know who we were.

We flew round to that beastly garage like three hungry wolves, and snatched at our oikes.

Then Owen gave a yell.

"Both my tyres are punctured!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Reddy. "You'll have to ride on the step of my jigger. It's the only way. Why—Great Scott!"

"Is your bike crooked, too?" I asked.

"Yes."

"So's mine. Somebody's been improving the shining hour while we've been watching the snow. What shall we do?"

"Run!" said Reddy. "Run like fury! Ten to one Knox has got his bike here, and if that's so we shall have to put up a record. Come on!"

"But our bikes!" I protested.

"They'll be all right. Knox won't come nosing in here."

The next moment we were streaking along the High Street, with the warning clang of a bicycle-bell behind us.

Knox was on the trail!

II.

IT'S curious that when your mind is in a fever of excitement, as ours were then, you can never think of the obvious thing. What we ought to have done, of course, was to lie in wait in the hedge, and bowl Knox over when he came along, without giving him a chance to see who we were.

Instead, we raced on and on, and the pursuing bike drew closer and closer.

"Afraid it's all up!" panted Owen. "We can never keep up this pace all the way to St. Jim's!"

I was about to suggest dodging down a side-turning, when Fate suddenly smiled upon us—not only smiled, but chuckled.

A bullseye lantern flashed out from the darkness, and the bike we had so much dreaded came to a sudden standstill. Then the imperious voice of a bobby said:

"Got you! Ridin' without a light! I arrest you under the Defence of the Realm Act!"

"Let me pass, you fool!" we heard Knox hoot.

But that bobby had come as a boon and a blessing to men—to us, anyway. He wouldn't budge.

We left Knox to his tender mercies, and raced on.

"This is top-hole!" I chuckled.

But Reddy looked grim.

"We're not out of the wood yet," he said.

"If you had any foresight, Lawrence, old man, you'd see as clear as noonday what's going to happen."

"I must be jolly dense," I said.

"You are! You've summed yourself up to a T. Look here. Knox will probably have to go round to the police-station."

"Well?"

"And as soon as he gets there, the first thing he'll do will be to ring up Ratty, and say that several juniors have broken bounds, and are out on the spree."

"My hat!"

"Then Ratty will call out his confounded picket, and we shall walk into a hornets' nest!"

We saw the force of Reddy's logic. Knox wouldn't be likely to throw up the sponge without a struggle. He would make things as warm as he could for us.

We approached St. Jim's with great caution.

There seemed something sinister and suspicious about the place, and there were rustlings close at hand which were certainly not caused by the wind.

"The picket's out!" murmured Owen, pulling up short.

"We must dodge our way through it, that's all," said Reddy. "Se'lot the weakest spot in the armour, and break through!"

We clambered silently up on to the school wall, and peered round.

A few yards away, pacing up and down, was a tall figure. We watched it intently, waiting for the fellow to turn about and reveal his face.

A moment later he did so, and we felt a thrill of joy.

It was St. Leger of the Fifth!

"Follow your leader!" murmured Reddy.

We dropped down on the inside of the wall, and rushed at St. Leger with one accord.

Reddy let fly with his right, and Owen and I got a blow in somewhere.

St. Leger went down with a crash, not knowing what had bit him, and the next instant we were sprinting like hares across the quad.

Ratty had certainly made elaborate preparations for our capture.

There seemed to be outposts everywhere, and when we eventually clambered through a window and got into the building, we could still hear people prowling about.

"Bolt for the dormitory!" said Reddy.

"The position looks as though it may become desperate!"

"It already has, if you ask me!" I returned.

"Shush!"

We had reached the head of the stairs, when a tall, spare figure came up with a rush, and Reddy drew us promptly into the shadows.

"Ratty!" he said, in a scarcely audible voice.

Reddy was right.

Ratty, like a raging lion seeking whom he might devour, shot past us, and disappeared into the dormitory.

Something else disappeared at the same time. Our hearts bobbed down into our boots.

After having overcome a crowd of obstacles, it seemed as though we were beaten at the last hurdle. We just stood and looked at each other like a set of dummies.

Then we began to hear other footsteps.

The alarm had spread; and to remain where we were, at the head of the stairs, was to court certain capture.

"This way!" muttered Reddy.

We were down those giddy stairs in the twinkling of an eye. When we reached the foot of them we bowled over a fellow who was lying in wait for us. It was Monteith.

"Come along!" urged Reddy. "He didn't twig who we were!"

Paper-chasing wasn't in it. We'd got almost to the door of Ratty's study, and thrown Monteith off the scent, when, to our horror, we saw Ratty himself approaching from the opposite direction.

We were fairly cornered. If we attempted to rush past Ratty, he would twig us, because there was a gas-jet burning in that part of the passage. If, on the other hand, we went back the way we had come, we were pretty certain to run into Monteith. And we shouldn't be so lucky a second time.

"The merry game's up!" muttered Reddy.

"I believe this is what they call Nemesis!"

At that instant the telephone-bell rang loudly in Ratty's study.

"Inside!" rapped out Reddy.

We dashed in, and he took up the receiver.

"Hallo! Who's speaking? This is St. Jim's—Mr. Ratcliff's study. What's that—a raid? Thirty Gothas have crossed the coast? My hat!"

Ratty came stalking in just in time to hear the news. His face went an art shade in green. Air-raids don't agree with Ratty.

"Pedfern!" he gasped.

"Sir?"

"What—what are you doing at my telephone?"

"We heard it ringing, sir, and stepped inside the study to answer it. It appears that some slight aerial activity is expected, sir. Thirty Gothas have already crossed the coast."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm waiting for you, sir."

"And it's advisable for people who value their skins to take cover at once, sir!" added Reddy; and we marvelled at his cheek. But Ratty was not to be got rid of so easily. He pulled himself together.

I suppose he thought that justice must be done, though the heavens fell.

"You three boys," he said, fixing his glittering eyes on us. "Why are you here? Who gave you instructions to leave your dormitory? Answer me! Have you been breaking bounds?"

Silence.

"I demand an explanation without delay—"

Boom!

Ratty leapt a clear four inches off the linoleum.

"Good gracious! Those—those pests of the skies—those slaughterers of innocent civilians—they are here!"

Boom! Boom!

"Oh, dear! I—I am undone!" gasped Ratty.

Reddy put on a fine expression of alarm.

"I distinctly heard bombs, sir!" he said. "Pretty hefty ones, too, by the sound of 'em! Listen! I—"

But Ratty didn't wait for more. Clutching his gown, he flew out of the study and along the passage like a champion of the cinder-path.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Owen. "We owe a vote of thanks, for once, to our friend the enemy!"

Ratty had gone to take sanctuary in the cellar; and we stayed in his study, and watched the fireworks from the window.

A few minutes later the gunfire died away, and things became normal again.

Chuckling to ourselves, we trotted out into the quad. It wasn't likely that Ratty, after his undignified retreat, would take any further action with regard to our being out of bounds.

"What luck!" I said joyfully. "The gods

have been good to us this journey, and no error!"

But our cup of joy was not yet complete. Close to the school wall, we saw Knox and St. Leger locked in deadly embrace, and each seemed to be doing his best to wipe the other off the face of the earth.

It appeared that Knox had, in the excitement of the raid, escaped from the police-station in Wayland, and scorching back to St. Jim's on his bike, and that St. Leger had met him, and charged him with assault and battery—our assault and battery, no doubt!

The charge was untrue, of course; but it was true enough next morning, when Knox appeared at the breakfast-table with a badly-damaged optic, and St. Leger's nose was swollen to considerable proportions.

And Reddy and Owen and I, as we pitched into our brekker, felt that all was distinctly for the best in this best of all possible worlds!

THE END.

THE CASE OF THE FINANCIER!

An Adventure of Herlock Sholmes.

:: :: ::

By PETER TODD.

EVEN Herlock Sholmes looked a little impressed when Mr. Goldgrind, the celebrated financier, was shown into our rooms at Shaker Street.

Kings, princes, and even emperors had visited Shaker Street to consult my amazing friend, but such small fry paled into insignificance beside our present visitor.

Mr. Goldgrind was a power behind thrones, his nod was sufficient to make many a powerful potentate shake in his gilded palace.

That Sholmes was impressed I could see by the fact that he removed his feet from the mantelpiece and rose to greet the visitor.

"Mr. Sholmes?" asked the financial magnate, as he seated himself, with a musical clink of many articles of expensive jewellery, in the chair I at once placed for him.

"Quite so!" said Herlock Sholmes. "You may speak freely before my friend Dr. Jotson.

"I have been swindled, Mr. Sholmes!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Herlock Sholmes.

For once in his life Sholmes was surprised.

"You have been swindled?" he repeated.

The millionaire frowned.

"Yes, Mr. Sholmes."

"You have perhaps invested in one of your own companies by mistake?" asked Sholmes.

"I am not likely to make such mistakes!"

said Mr. Goldgrind, frowning. "Nothing of the sort!"

"In what way then, have you been swindled?"

I shared Sholmes' surprise. Knowing the great financier's reputation well, I was prepared to hear that he had swindled, but not that he had been swindled. So far as swindling was concerned, Mr. Goldgrind was supposed to be always in the active, and never in the passive, voice.

"You have heard of Smelowiski?" asked Mr. Goldgrind.

"The Russian Anarchist?"

"The same."

"I have, of course, heard of him," said Sholmes. "It was Smelowiski who blew up several Tsars and Tsaritsas before the Russian Revolution. Since the Revolution, he has been inactive, either because there are no more Tsars to blow up, or because of a shortage of explosives. He is in London at the present time, I believe."

"That is the man I want you to find, Mr. Sholmes. Smelowiski has swindled me—me! I will explain the circumstances. You are aware that the uncertainty of affairs in Russia has caused a general fall in the value of Russian securities?"

Sholmes nodded.

"Russian Fives, for instance, fell from eighty-three to seventy-three," pursued Mr. Goldgrind. "Other securities in proportion. Every fresh rumour from Petrograd caused a further fall. If you read the financial news in your morning paper, Mr. Sholmes, you must have observed the fluctuations of Poppemoff Oil shares. The one pound shares were at ten shillings premium before the Revolution, and they are now marked at only five shillings for the one pound share. Poppemoff Oil, of course, is a first-rate proposition, and when the Russian Exchange recovers, big dividends will be paid. It was my intention to mop up all the Poppemoff shares on the market."

Sholmes nodded again.

"Having decided on this operation, I made my plans as usual," continued Mr. Goldgrind.

"It was necessary, of course, for affairs in Petrograd to take a very bad turn, so that the price would fall to the lowest possible mark, enabling me to scoop in Poppemoff Oil at next to nothing. After I secured the shares, it would then be necessary for reassuring news to arrive from Petrograd, causing the price to rise again, enabling me to sell out at a handsome profit. But you are probably acquainted with the methods of high finance?"

"Quite so."

"Well, sir, as this Anarchist, Smelowiski, has great influence with the Red Flag party in his native country, I approached him with a business offer, and he agreed to arrange an Anarchist outbreak in Petrograd, the news of which would make Poppemoff shareholders uneasy, and anxious to sell for anything they could get. Later, his friends were to be reconciled to the Provisional Government, and declare themselves in favour of a great offensive on the Eastern Front, which, of course, would have the effect of steadying the market and raising prices all round. Naturally, this cost money. Anarchist outbreaks are not arranged free of charge, as you are doubtless aware. Bombs are expensive, to mention only one item."

"And Smelowiski failed to carry out the arrangement?" asked Sholmes.

"Exactly. Having pocketed the sum advanced for expenses, he failed to keep faith with me. The Anarchist rising has not taken place in Petrograd, and Poppemoff shares, instead of falling to a shilling, have actually risen to seven-and-sixpence! The operation, which would have netted me a hundred thousand pounds or so, has been rendered impossible!" Mr. Goldgrind's voice thrilled with indignation. "I have been swindled—I, sir, who have been accustomed to skinning the public for fifty years or more, have been skinned! Smelowiski has disappeared, with the considerable sum advanced to him; and you, Mr. Sholmes, must track him down and bring him to justice!"

"Rely upon me," said Herlock Sholmes.

And Mr. Goldgrind took his leave.

II.

HERLOCK SHOLMES wore a thoughtful expression after the millionaire financier had gone.

I did not venture to interrupt his meditations.

He looked up at last, and took a swig from the cocaine cask.

"A very serious case, Jotson," he remarked.

I nodded.

"I sympathise with Dr. Goldgrind," I observed. "A most promising stock operation has been nipped in the bud by Smelowiski's fraud. The man must be brought to justice."

"Undoubtedly, I shall take up the trail at once, and never rest till Smelowiski has paid the penalty. You may go and attend your patients, Jotson, if any of them are still living."

And Sholmes left me.

I did not see Herlock Sholmes again for some days.

I knew that he was very busy, however, and I waited with perfect confidence to hear the result.

He came into our rooms at Shaker Street one afternoon in the following week, and from the smile that wreathed his expansive mouth I deduced that he had been successful.

"You have found him, Sholmes?"

He nodded.

"I have found him, Jotson."

"And the rascal is safe under lock and key?"

"As it happens, no," said Sholmes. "It appears that Mr. Goldgrind was labouring under a slight misapprehension. I found Smelowiski engaged upon the construction of a new bomb. Engrossed in his congenial task, he had forgotten the instructions of Mr. Goldgrind, and had omitted to communicate with his friends in Petrograd. However, it is not too late. Immediately upon my acquainting him with the state of affairs he thrust his unfinished bomb into his pocket and took a taxi to Mr. Goldgrind's office, in order to reassure him at once. All will be well."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Then the operation will be a success after all?"

"Undoubtedly. The Anarchist outbreak will take place, and Poppemoff shares will fall to a mere song, and Mr. Goldgrind will scoop them in. The Anarchists will then submit to law and order, the market will be reassured, and prices will rise, and Mr. Goldgrind will sell out and secure his hundred thousand pounds. Upon the whole, Jotson," added Sholmes thoughtfully. "I am glad I am not a shareholder in the Poppemoff Oil Company. I am glad I have invested my life's savings in a War Savings Certificate."

"True!" I exclaimed.

"However, come with me, Jotson," added Sholmes. "I have a cheque to collect from Mr. Goldgrind for my services, and we shall not only be able to pay the instalment on the furniture this week, but I think it will run to fish and chips for supper."

Sholmes took me by the nose in his playful manner and led me down to the waiting taxi. A minute more and we were buzzing away for Mr. Goldgrind's office in Spoofem Street, in the City.

We stopped outside the palatial block of buildings.

We were about to alight when a terrific report rent the air.

Sholmes caught me by the shoulder.

"Wait, Jotson."

"Why, my dear Sholmes?"

"I fancy, Jotson, that an explosion has taken place."

"Sholmes! From what do you draw this deduction?"

Herlock Sholmes smiled.

"It is quite simple, Jotson. There was, a moment ago, a terrific report—"

"True!"

"Mr. Goldgrind's office has been blown sky-high—"

"Most true!"

"And is now descending in fragments on the pavement. From these circumstances, Jotson, I deduce that an explosion has taken place."

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated.

"Not at all, my dear fellow! Elementary."

Needless to say, Sholmes' deduction proved absolutely correct.

The bomb in Smelowiski's pocket had exploded at an inopportune moment, and the palatial office had been blown to fragments, and both Mr. Goldgrind and the Anarchist had disappeared skyward.

Whether they ever came down again cannot be said with certainty, as Herlock Sholmes' connection with the case ended at this point.

Gems From Second Form Exercise-Books!

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—How the things got there I don't know, but I found about half a dozen Second Form exercise-books in our coal-scuttle, and selected from them the following brilliant feats of composition. They appear to be letters to the Prime Minister—no doubt an exercise set by the unhappy ruler of the Babe Form!—H. W.]

By SAMUEL TUCKLESS BUNTER.

Dear Loid Gorge,—I sor a dohnut in a shop-windho, and I put my fut throo the windho, and tuk my fut owt of the windho, and put my hand throo the windho, and tuk my hand owt of the windho, and. The dohnut was in it. Unkel Cleg glayerd at me throo the windho, and put my tung. Owt at him. I think this Wor is roten don't yoo?—Yoor troo frend
S. BUNTER.

MASTER'S COMMENTS.—Pay more attention to spelling. The action described, if true,

would be dishonest and illegal. But no doubt this is a flight of the imagination.

By RICHARD NUGENT.

Dear Lloyde Jorge,—Just a line too let you no I am in gud heith. Well, I spose you are jolly bizzy with the War. Well, I am, anyway, keping these kids in order, give the Huns what for, I will when Ime old enough. Well, I hope you get enough to eat, because I don't. Well, wishing you a happy Crismus, I remane,—Yore old freind,
DICK NUGENT.

MASTER'S COMMENTS.—As we are now in the height of summer, your Christmas wishes are unnecessary. Why begin every sentence with "Well"? Spelling needs improvement.

By EDWIN MYERS.

Dear Lollyd Gorge,—A roter asked me what I thort of you and the Wor. Then I sed "O Llylod Jorge is all rite, but the

Wors roten." Then he sed "O is he all rite?" Meaning you. Then I sed "Yes he is." Then he sed "Yure a fibber, cos he isent." Then I sed "Do you want a thick eer?" Then he sed "Yes I do" and thumped me on the nose. Then I swiped him rownd the study and booted him out.—Yure chum for alwase,
EDWIN MYERS.

MASTER'S COMMENTS.—Don't begin every sentence with "Then"! Your spelling is atrocious.

By GEORGE A. GATTY.

Dear Loide George,—I am a box-calf boot. I was once in a Hun shop window. Then I fownd miself on a Hun sniper's fut. I nipped him. Serves him rite. I made him so that he cudn't run away, and he was collard.—Yors trooly,
G. A. GATTY.

MASTER'S COMMENTS.—(The only comments visible here are four parallel lines down the page and three across!—H. W.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 57.—OLIVER KIPPS.

KIPPS is quite a favourite with many readers, and they want to know why they cannot have more about him.

Well, a conjurer is naturally an attractive and interesting person—while he is conjuring. At other times he is pretty much like other people. And Oliver Kipps is quite a normal boy apart from his sleight-of-hand skill. He does not play any big part in the life of his Form, for he is not one of the leaders.

Everybody cannot lead. And a conjurer cannot keep on conjuring all the time. He would get himself very heartily disliked if he did. Kipps loves conjuring, but he has to restrain his keenness. Other people do not greatly love having mysterious things happen to them, and more than once Kipps has got himself into hot water before the time has come for him to explain how excellent his intentions were.

Kipps has had rather a queer early boyhood. His father is a professional conjurer, and the son began to assist him in his work from the time he was old enough to be of any use. He was born to conjure—he had the eye and the hand and the brain—but that does not mean that he attained his present skill without much practice and many failures. He could tell you fellows that there is no short cut to success. How good soever one's natural gifts may be, they need development. Kipps knows that.

When his father warned him not to perform the disappearing trick with the headmaster's gown or the Form-master's books, not to produce rabbits and ribbons from the porter's neck, Kipps knew that he had not been able to do the disappearing trick through natural genius alone, and that the production of rabbits and ribbons and other miscellaneous articles from apparently impossible places had meant much hard practice.

Well, Kipps senior had made a goodly pile, and he very rightly resolved that Oliver should have a first-class education, so he made arrangements for him to come to Greyfriars. Kipps wasn't so keen on either the education or on coming to Greyfriars. He would have been quite satisfied to go on conjuring, which is certainly livelier work than studying languages and mathematics. His father enjoined earnestly: "No larks!" But at the back of Oliver Kipps' mind there must have been the thought that the biggest penalty possible for any lark he might get up to was one that he could bear unmoved—getting the sack!

No doubt his intentions were good for all that. But he could not straightaway deny himself the joys of conjuring.

His wandering life had naturally made him pretty wide. He saw through the attempt made by Vernon-Smith, Bolsover major, and Snoop to get him into the London express at Courtfield instead of into the local train. And he frustrated it by getting them in and

staying outside himself. That did not need conjuring ability; but the mental powers of the conjurer—quickness of brain and of hand—came into it.

And, once at the school, Kipps began to conjure at once. He juggled in the air first his own hat and Gosling's, then Coker's also, then Potter's, and then Bob Cherry's as well. He kept five going all the time, and never missed. They were all spinning when Mr. Quelch came along. Kipps, on explaining, was excused that time; but the Form-master was not exactly pleased.

The Bounder and his aides wanted to get even with him, of course. They tried it in the dormitory, and Kipps spoofed them into believing that he had fled through the window, and had crashed to death or disablement on the flags below. But he had only



shipped under a bed; and at length he was found calmly reposing in bed.

He went on playing tricks. He took beetles from Loder's collar when the prefect wanted him to tell what he preferred to keep dark. He charmed banknotes into Bunter's pocket, and Bunter claimed them as his own. But they were only Bank of Elegance notes, and had not the cash value that Bunter fondly deemed. He was put in goal, and conjured there. When the football came along he was spinning coloured balls in the air. He collared the big ball, and kept that spinning with the rest, never letting one down. But that was not the

Remove's notion of the way footer should be played, and he soon found himself outside the ropes.

There was more ragging. The Bounder—at his worst then—had no mind to admit defeat at the hands of a new boy. He concocted a very shady scheme—so shady that Bolsover major, who draws the line somewhere, would have nothing to do with it. If it had been a success it must have got Kipps into heavy trouble with Mr. Quelch. But it was not a success, for Vernon-Smith's handkerchief, deftly abstracted by Kipps, was hidden, and Kipps' handkerchief, bearing the incriminating red ink-marks that were to have convicted the new boy, but otherwise unmarked, was found in the Bounder's pocket. And the Bounder was flogged, as he well deserved to be. And then Kipps explained how he had worked the trick. There was no room for doubt as to who was really the guilty party.

Kipps' ability in sleight-of-hand has played a part in more than one other story. It was prominent in "The Conjurer's Capture," which told how, on the way to tea at Cliff House, the schoolboy juggler so annoyed the Famous Five by his tricks that they shut him up in a loft over a barn. And while there he heard a blackguardly plot fixed up between Snoop and a German scoundrel. It would have ruined Johnny Bull if it had succeeded. But Kipps took care it should not succeed. The banknote trick was foiled, and when Snoop tried again with marked coins the coins were found in his own pocket—and he knew he had put them in Bull's! But Kipps had been at work after him.

It was Kipps who foiled Loder's plot to get money out of Mauly by representing that Wharton was in grave trouble for want of cash. Here again sleight-of-hand played its part, as it did when Kipps helped to rescue Wibley from the custody of Mr. Mobbs, after that histrionic genius had been caught out in personating the Highcliffe master, and while he was being taken to Greyfriars for the Head's judgment.

This skill would be dangerous in the case of a boy with wrong tendencies. The expert conjurer can be an expert pickpocket if he chooses, and the fellow who can plant coins and banknotes can use his skill for the purpose of bolstering up false accusations as easily as for better purposes.

Fortunately, there is no danger of this kind of thing in the case of Oliver Kipps. He is too soundly honest and honourable. He may not be of any special distinction apart from his conjuring ability—though he is no duffer at anything—but he is the right sort all through; and his bright and smiling face is a true index to his fun-loving character. Not but that he can look serious enough when seriousness is needed for the part he has to play; no one could appear more entirely innocent than he at the critical moment. But that's part of the game.