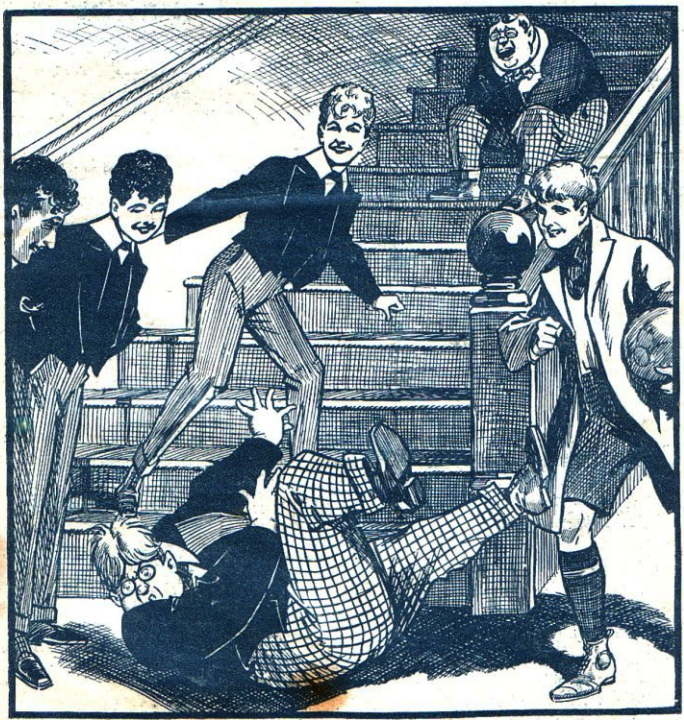
The Magnet Library
WAR TIME PRICE. 1½d.
No. 564. Vol. XIII.

SPRING'S BROTHER!



BUMP! "YOW!" BUMP!

30-11-18

SPRING'S BROTHER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Chumming With the Nuts!

"WHO'S your young friend, Angel, by gad?"

It was Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe who asked that question, and he asked it of Aubrey Angel of the Upper Fourth at Greyfriars.

The great Pon had come along the road towards Greyfriars with his special pals, Gadsby, Vavasour, and Monson minor.

They had just met Angel and Kenney with another fellow whom they did not know, a smaller and apparently younger fellow than either, though a second glance at the face of Spring made most people think again about his age.

"Allow me to introduce my pal Spring," said Angel blandly. "Spring —Ponsonby; Spring—Gadsby; Spring—Monson; Spring—Vavasour. Four bold blados, by Jove!"

There was a mocking smile upon Angel's face as he made these introductions with great formality.

But Spring did not observe it, cunning as he was. He had only lately been taken up by Angel, and he was still a good deal under the spell of the Fourth Former, who had a way with him when he chose to exert it.

So Spring grinned as amiably as Nature would let him, and held out his hand to each of the nuts in turn.

But none of the nuts went out of his way to be specially amiable to Spring.

They were not likely to do that until they had made sure that there was something to be got out of him.

Pon, dropping behind with Angel, mooted that important subject at once, though after his own crafty fashion.

"Going to the kindergarten department for a pal this time, Angel, dear boy?" he said.

"Spring's in the Second," replied Angel coolly.

"By gad! That's your lowest Form-eh?"

Angel nodded.

"Any particular points about the little beast? Looks rather a dashed young worm to me, I must say."

"Well, Pon, he thinks he's no end fly. There are chaps in our Sixth Form who aren't half as fly as Spring."

"Oh, by gad!"

"But my notion is that he isn't half as dashed fly as he fancies himself!"

"Ah!" Pon began to see. "Any oof, dear boy?"

"What do you think, old bean? Lots!"

"Oh, by gad! He wants a flutter, I take it?"

"Yaas, he does. But he doesn't exactly know that he wants it-yet."

"That's queer. I don't quite get you, Angel."

"Well, he needs a little bringin'-on, Pon. At present lendin' cash is more in his line than riskin' it at banker."

"What, is that young Shylock? I've heard about him. I say, though, does he think lendin' ain't risky?"

"In spite of experience, which should have made him dubious, he leans to that opinion, dear boy."

"By gad! I'll teach him differently if I get half a chance!"

And there was little doubt that Pon would.

The word of honour of Cecil Ponsonby was very poor security for money borrowed by that sprig of the aristocracy—or, for that matter, for anything else.

"Don't try to rush him, Pon, that's all. It's a wise head, an' needs careful handlin'. Be kind to it to start with. Later on, when it knows you better—no, let's say when it thinks it knows you better——"

"It doesn't know you very well yet, does it, by gad?" struck in Ponsonby, a trifled ruffled.

"It thinks it does, though, dear boy," Angel replied, quite unruffled.

Cecil Ponsonby was a pretty complete young villain, but in Angel he had met his match in rascality, and more than his match in cool cynicism.

"I suppose he's sharp after gettin' back what he lends?" said Pon, glancing forward to where Spring walked between Gadsby and Kenney, not receiving much attention from either.

"No one sharper, Pon. Nevertheless, he has had, I believe, some failures in that direction, dear Skinner has not yet repaid a loan wangled last term, an' there are others."

"It doesn't sound to me a very profitable game, by gad!"

"But he charges a simply unconscionable interest, dear man," replied Angel languidly. "I forget whether it's a penny per bob per week, or twopence; but some mathematical genius at Greyfriars worked it out—in his head, by gad!—as bein' over 400 per cent. per annum. Don't ask me whether it's right. I'm not a mathematical genius, y'know."

"That's at a penny per bob," said Pon. "It doesn't sound much; but it does kind of mount up. It ain't all violets for the little cad if he loses the cash altogether in some cases, though."

"Dear man, what does the interest matter when one's principles won't allow one to pony up the principal?" murmured Angel. "Spring goes on hopin'—quite poetical, y'know. Didn't some dashed poet or other say, 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast'? An', of course, Spring's more or less human."

"Didn't know you went in for poetry, Angel, by gad!"

"Oh, I go in for lots of things, Pon! It's faith, hope, an' charity when Spring lends money—to you or me, say."

"How d'ye make that out?"

"His touchin' faith in us induces him to lend—no, his touchin' faith works upon him to let us touch him for the dibs—that's better? Hope appears upon the scene after that—when he's expectin' the oof back, y'know."

"An' it's charity to lend us the chink when we're stony—eh?"

"That's it, dear boy."

"How soon d'ye think I could tap him? I'm dashed hard up—had a rotten run of luck lately."

"Mustn't rush it—positively must not! Take him in an' treat him kindly first. Let him win a little to start with—I've noticed that sort of cub can be led on almost any distance if you give him a kind start."

"Does he know much about the pasteboards?"

"Not as much as he thinks he knows. By the way, he has no objection to the sort of thing that the severe moralist styles cheatin'—as long as it's somebody else who's bein' cheated. I twigged him at it the other day, an' he admitted it. But he said he hadn't been playin' it on me—only on Skinner an' Stott!"

"Nice kid! Was it true?"

"It was, Pon. I was watchin' that he didn't play it on me."

"An' I suppose he fancies he can run the rule over us, the young sweep?"

"He suggested somethin' to that effect when the project of bringin' him an' you into touch was mooted."

"Nasty young swindler!" grunted Pon, in virtuous indignation.

"An' he thinks I'm goin' into it with him," went on Angel.

"Well, are you?" snapped Pon.

"My dear man! As if——"

"You'd cheat a pal? Angel, dear boy, you'd swindle your own respected grandmother if you saw a chance!"

"I shouldn't tell her anythin' about it beforehand, anyway, old top!"

"Ass! You've told me! Lwig! Suits you better to stand in with me than with him—eh?"

"That's the size of it, Pon."

"Oh, I'm on, by gad! No good havin' anyone else in the know, is there?"

"I should say not."

"Kenney up to the game?"

"No, dear boy. Kenney is a trifle weak in the back. In fact, that's the fault I find with Greyfriars generally, except for one or two of the Sixth."

"Skinner's up to any sly move."

"Yaas; but unfortunately Skinner's a dashed funk. It doesn't always show. He'll take biggish risks at times. But he can't keep it up when he's in a tight place."

"I've noticed that. Dull hole, Greyfriars! Not that Highcliffe's much better in some ways these days."

"Always, while the magnificent Pon shines refulgent there, I'm sure!"

"Oh, rats! I say, I'd better go an' make myself pleasant to the dashed swindlin' young cub now, I take it?"

"It would certainly be a good move, old bean!"

So Ponsonby ranged up on the other side of Gadsby, and at once began to take trouble to make Spring feel that he was among friends—trouble which Gadsby had entirely refrained from taking.

Spring had not much to say for himself; but he was plainly pleased by Pon's notice. It may have been only because he was thinking of the chance of getting some of the Highcliffe fellow's cash into his own pocket. But it was probably not wholly that. Cunning and crooked as he was, Spring was not above being flattered by the patronage of older fellows of the type of Angel and Ponsonby —age dogs, who had seen what Spring thought of as real life.

Three fellows in the Highcliffe caps passed them without a look, much less a nod.

The three were Derwent, Merton, and Tunstall. They had nothing at all to do with Pon & Co. in these days. Flip Derwent had told three of those four that he never meant to speak to them again; and he held to it. Monson had not been included, but he had ranged himself with his pals. Merton and Tunstall held by their chum.

Spring scowled blackly.

"Chap there you don't quite cotton to—what?" said Pon pleasantly.

"Yes!" growled Spring.

"Which of 'em? Needn't mind tellin' me. They're not pals of mine!"

"I could see that! It's Merton I can't stand!"

"Oh! The dear Merton's no friend of yours?"

"I hate him!"

Spring spoke venomously. There could be no doubt about the bitterness of his feeling against Merton.

"We've a taste or two in common, it seems!" replied Pon, no end."

Into his scheming mind had leaped at once the thought whether it would be possible to use Spring against those three. He could see no way just then; but one might open up later. Pon would not forget.

"That kid seems to have got into nice company now!" remarked Flip Derwent to his chums. "I should say Angel's the worst outsider at Greyfriars, bar none! Did you hear how Snoop licked him the other day? My hat! Fancy being licked by that chap Snoop!"

"And Angel's not exactly a duffer with his fists, either!" said Tunstall. "Snoop must have bashed him no end."

Merton had turned his head to look after the choice company.

"A beautiful crew!" he said. "But there ain't one of them that can teach young Spring anything, by Jupiter!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Spring's Secret!

HAROLD SKINNER, of the Remove, scowled as he came into the study which Angel shared with Kenney and saw Spring there.

"Gettin' pretty thick, this sort of thing!" he growled.

"What sort of thing, dear boy?" inquired Angel affably.

"Dashed fags!" rapped out Skinner. "Look here, man, I don't see them!" replied Angel.

"What's that?" asked Skinner. And he pointed his forefinger at Spring.

"A guest of mine, by gad!" said Angel.

And now his tone was distinctly less smooth.

"He's a fag, isn't he?" demanded Skinner. The cad of the Remove was not in the sweetest of tempers. As a rule, he took a good deal of trouble to keep on the right side of the wealthy and well-connected Angel.

"He's one fag," replied Angel. "But to make the plural, Skinner, you will have to include yourself, y'know!"

"I'm not in the Second, anyway!" snarled Skinner.

"But the Remove's a fag Form!" said Kenney.

"We don't fag for anyone."

"You're liable to be fagged, though."

"We're not! That was settled some time ago."

"What's the matter with Spring?" asked Angel.

"I can tell you that," Spring said resentfully. "Skinner owes me money. That's why he doesn't like to see me here."

"Really, Skinner, that isn't quite——"

"Oh, dry up, do, Angel! Don't you owe the infant shyster money, too, an' ain't that why you——"

"Not at all! Spring knows better than that—don't you, kid?"

"Of course I do, Angel!" answered Spring. "The cash you owe me is all right. I'm not worrying about that—not likely! But I should like to see the colour of Skinner's money. He's been owing me a quid ever since last term, and I think it's above a bit off for him to come in here and object to me, considering that!"

"I quite agree with you, my son!" said Angel blandly.

"I should think I'd better look it, then!" snapped Skinner, with a venomous look at Spring, and one not much less venomous at Angel.

"Not half a bad idea, for you!" replied Angel, smiling sweetly.

"Confound the lot of you, for a set of sharpers an' shysters!" ground out Skinner.

"Don't forget to shut the door after you!" said Angel.

It was hardly necessary to give that hint. Skinner shut the door after him with a crash that reverberated all along the Upper Fourth passage.

"Good riddance!" said Angel lightly. "That chap's precious little use to us, Kenney. It isn't often he has more than a few measly bob to risk, an' he's no blasted spendthrift even when he is in funds. Young Spring, here, is a different sort—what?"

Spring beamed. He did not notice that Peter Kenney's face was far from enthusiastic. In fact, he really did not care much what Kenney thought.

But Angel had fascinated the Shylock of the Second most completely. He had not in the least exaggerated to Pon his influence over the fag.

They settled down to play banker now, and Spring, who in a general way looked after papers as if they were currency notes, and after currency notes as if they were life itself, lost half-a-sovereign, mainly to Angel, without appearing to mind a bit.

Probably he did really mind; but at least he disguised his feelings well. It may have been that he regarded shelling out in this way as paying his footing.

Angel pushed the cards from him with a yawn, and took a gold-tipped cigarette out of his handsome case. He offered the case to Spring before Kenney, and Spring took a cigarette even when he

"Shock the Second to see you puffin' away like that, wouldn't it, Bouncer?" said Angel.

"Bouncer" had been Spring's first nickname at Greyfriars. The Second had dropped it in favour of "Shylock"; but Angel and Kenney had taken it up, though Spring never looked exactly charmed when they used it.

"Silly kids!" growled Spring. "I don't take any notice of them, y'know!"

"They don't take much of you, except to rag you!" remarked Kenney.

"Oh, they won't do much more of that, I can tell you! I can lick any of them if I like, and I'm jolly well going to if they don't leave me alone!"

"I shouldn't start too high!" said Kenney, with a grin. "Take on Sammy Bunter first. He's about the softest snip of the juvenile variety. But, mind, I wouldn't be odds on your lickin' him, I fancy!"

"Look here, I'll bet you even money—a quid—that I lick Bunter minor within twenty-four hours!" said Spring eagerly.

"Take him, Kenney! You'll lose, but it's all in the cause of sport—sacred be its name!" said Angel, grinning.

There really was very little at all sporting about forcing a quarrel upon Sammy Bunter, the most hopelessly incompetent young duffer at the listic art among the fags of the Second. But Angel's notions of what was sporting had a false basis. Anything that one could bet upon was sport of a kind to Aubrey Angel.

"Oh, I'll take him!" said Kenney. "I know he's a funk!"

"So Sammy's!" said Spring, failing to realise that he was giving himself away by that speech.

"Bouncer licked young Sylvester!" remarked Angel.

"Quite half his weight, an' three or four years younger!" said Kenney, with a contemptuous look at Spring.

"Rats!" said Spring.

"How old do you take our dear young friend to be, Kenney?" inquired Angel.

"Oh, within a few months of our age, I should say! Older than most of the Remove kids. He's practically admitted it!"

"I never admitted anything of the sort!" protested Spring. "I——"

"Perhaps you didn't admit it, then?" cut in Kenney. "Come to think of it, tellin' the truth ain't exactly your strong suit, is it? But I've heard that this little mystery about your age is mixed up with some mystery about your not bein' yourself at all, but a blessed brother!"

"It does sound queer," said Angel. "In fact, it sounds impossible. Can you explain it, kid?"

Spring was breathing hard, afraid and enraged at once.

He cast an almost imploring look at Aubrey Angel. He had not expected his magnificent patron to join in Kenney's chipping of him.

"It's lies—all lies!" he faltered. Then he blazed up with fury. "You've been talking to that rotten cad Merton, Kenney!" he hooted.

"Wrong!" said Kenney coolly. "So Merton knows the secret, does he? That's interestin'."

"I'm goin'," said Spring. "I won't stand any more of this! Mind, I've nothing against you, Angel, old fellow. I know you wouldn't believe such rot."

With that he went.

"Hardly worth while, Kenney," said Angel, as soon as the door had closed behind him. "We've got him on a string quite nicely. You needn't go an' spoil the game by this kind of rubbish!"

"The thing's true," replied Kenney sulkily. "Half the Lower School knows it."

"What's it matter?"

"Why, the young beast is an absolute swindler!"

"Well, what about it? As long as he plays into our hands——"

"I don't see where my profit comes in," said Kenney sulkily.

"Oh, that's the trouble, is it, by gad!" Angel returned, clapping him on the shoulder. "I'll put that right. You shall stand in, old bean!"

"When are you takin' the young cad over to Highcliffe?" inquired Kenney.

He only looked partly mollified. It is possible he had learned that promises cost Aubrey Angel nothing, and were worth about as much as they cost when given by him.

"To-morrow night, I think. Comin', dear boy?"

"Yaas—no—I don't know. Tell you straight, I'm not keen on goin' anywhere with that little cad! But I'll see."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Spring on the War-path!

SPRING left the Upper Fourth passage in a very unpleasant mood, and it chanced that he ran against Sammy Bunter on his way downstairs.

Sammy Bunter was the nearest thing to a friend Spring had in the Second Form. That really meant very little, however, for neither Spring nor Sammy was the kind of fellow capable of anything like real chumship.

"Hallo, Spring!" said Sammy affably. "Where are you off to? If it's to the tuckshop, I don't mind comin' along."

"It's not!" snorted Spring.

"Oh, all serene! You've no need to be huffy about it. I'm not going with you anywhere else, that's flat."

"I haven't asked you to, and I'm not jolly well likely to ask you, you fat young cad!" snapped Spring.

In an ordinary way he would not have been keen on a combat even with an opponent so far from formidable as Sammy Bunter. It might not be true that he could lick anyone in the Second; but it was a fact that he carried too many guns for most of the Form, if he only cared to bring them into play.

But Spring hated fighting. Firstly, because he saw no profit in it; and, secondly, because he disliked being hurt.

Neither of these objections had their usual weight in the present case. There was a prospect of making money by licking Sammy, and there was no danger of being very much hurt in the process.

So Spring was abusive.

Sammy did not rise readily to the bait. Sammy, like his brother, William George of the Remove, was no great fighting-man.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "I don't see any reason why you should talk to me that way."

"You've been talking about me, you cad!" snapped Spring.

"Well, that ain't anything much. Everyone talks about you," replied Sammy, blinking in surprise.

"Well, I won't have it!"

"Won't you? I don't see how you're goin' to stop it. Chaps will talk," replied Sammy.

"I can stop you, anyway, you fat worm!"

"I ain't so sure about that," said Sammy thoughtfully. "I might not say anything if you were civil. Matter of fact, I don't do that now. I think a chap's a fool to go asking for trouble. But I could let out quite a lot of things about you, Herbert Spring; and if you ain't a bit more careful I jolly well shall!"

The threat had less effect upon Spring than a taunt contained in Sammy's speech that might have passed unnoticed by another.

The taunt was "Herbert Spring." In the Greyfriars books Spring had the names of "Conrad Arthur." But two people who had known him before he came to Greyfriars said that his real name was Herbert, and that the other names had belonged to a younger brother of his, with a distinctly better record, who was now believed to be dead.

"You say another word, young Bunter, and I'll—"

Sammy saw his brother Billy behind Spring, and the sight made him bold. Coward as he was, Billy Bunter was not afraid of a Second Former; and, though there was some little brotherly affection between him and his minor, Sammy fancied he could be relied upon to interfere against anyone so low in the school and so generally disliked as Spring.

So Sammy put out a pink tongue, and cut short Spring's angry speech by howling:

"Yah, Bertie! Yarocooh!" he roared next moment.

For Spring had given him a vicious push which took him off his feet and sent him rolling downstairs.

"Here, I say, you can't treat my minor like that!" hooted Billy Bunter.

"Ow-yow!" shrilled Sammy, rolling still.

"Oh, can't I?" snapped Spring.

And, turning on the Owl of the Remove savagely, he so startled that heroic youth that, in stepping backwards, he caught his fat calves against the step above him, and sat down suddenly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" boomed the stentorian voice of Bob Cherry from the foot of the staircase. "What's the merry game, my pippins?"

The rest of the Famous Five—Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—called Inky by Greyfriars—were with the cheery Bob.

Behind them came some of Spring's own Form—Dicky Nugent, Frank's minor, Getty, Myers, Hop Hi, Sylvester, and Castle.

They were all coming from footer, and Bob had a muddy ball under his right arm.

"This young rotter's trying to kill my minor!" howled Billy Bunter.

"He'll never do it that way," grunted Johnny Bull. "You blessed Bunters can run downstairs as easy as two barrels!"

"The rollfulness of the ludicrous and disgusting Bunters is indeed terrific, my esteemed Johnny!" purred Inky.

"Come here, Samwel, and I'll pick you up," volunteered Bob.

But Harry Wharton helped the fat fag to rise, and asked him, kindly enough:

"Are you hurt, Sammy?"

"Hurt? Of course I'm hurt!" replied Sammy peevishly. "What do you think? Here, don't you begin knocking me about, Wharton!"

Harry had only essayed to dust him. But he ought to have known better.

"Stop it," growled Johnny Bull. "No reason why should bother yourself about the fat young beast, Wharton; and we don't want smothering in all the dust the slovenly little sweep has collected in his clobber this term!"

Behind them spoke the voice of authority.

"What are you up to, Shylock?" demanded Dicky Nugent, as one who has a right to be answered. "You can clear out, you fellows! We don't want any Remove bounders in our affairs; and, what's more, we jolly well aren't going to stand it!"

"Well, I must say you've nerve enough, young Nugent!" snapped Johnny Bull.

But the rest of the Famous Five laughed. They were used to Dicky's autocratic ways; and they knew that, on the whole, Dicky's leadership of the Second was for the good of that important Form.

Nugent minor, backed up by his chums, had put his foot down very firmly on Spring's money-making activities in the Second. They had been bitten first, but they were not going to be bitten again.

Spring did by no means love Dicky, therefore. For he had looked to do quite a profitable business in the Shylock line in small amounts in the Second.

He scowled at Dicky now without answering him.

"Oh, really, Nugent minor—oh, really, you fellows, I consider this is my affair!" piped Billy Bunter.

"What, has Sammy made a will in your favour?" inquired Bob Cherry, grinning.

"Even if he has, I don't see how you're going to force Spring to finish him off. It would look a bit bad, you know."

"Are you going to answer me, young Shylock?" rapped out Dicky. "I say, I wish you Remove chaps wouldn't cackle so much! You're like a flock of geese, or a pack of giddy old women!"

"Oh, come on!" said Harry Wharton. "Let's leave them to it. After all, Dicky's right about one thing. These infant school squabbles don't concern us."

And he led the way up the staircase, followed closely by Bob.

Bunter was still sitting where he had fallen, and Bunter was in the way. It was a wide staircase, but it was quite an abnormally wide Bunter.

"Gerrout, oyster!" said Bob cheerfully.

"Oh, really, Bob Cherry, I—Yoooop!"

Bob had tossed the muddy ball lightly into Bunter's face. Bunter, howling, got up in a hurry then.

Spring caught the ball as it fell, and hand-ed it back to Bob.

"Thanks!" said Bob curtly. The Famous Five had but little use for Spring.

They passed on.

"Now then, young Spring!" said Billy Bunter loftily. "Explain yourself, if you please!"

Spring's reply was unexpected. He slapped Bunter's fat face with a very muddy hand. Then he put up his fists.

"Yarocooh!" howled Bunter. "I'll jolly well slaughter you for that!"

"No, no, no!" spoke the voice of Peter Todd. "We can't have any slaughtering done here, tubby! The place ain't licensed for the purpose."

Squiff—otherwise Sampson Field—Vernon-Smith, Tom Redwing, Piet Delarey, and Tom Brown, were all with Peter; and they now filed up the staircase after him.

"Come on!" snorted Spring, putting his right fist within half an inch of Bunter's little nose.

"My hat!" said Tom Brown. "Wonders will never cease! Who said young Shylock had no fight in him?"

"I'll fight that fat rotter, anyway!" said Spring.

"There you are, Bunter! Go in and win!" said the Bounder sardonically. "It isn't often you get a chance to show your brotherly qualities against a kid in the Second."

"What's the good of that, old fellow?" said Tom Redwing. "Bunter's overweight for that kid, and he doesn't mean it, anyway. In my opinion is that neither of them mean it."

"Don't spoil sport, Redwing!" Delarey said severely. "You carry your humanitarian principles a long way too far. We all know that Bunter is much too considerate to damage anyone he scraps with, and it would be a real treat for us all to see Shylock piling in and trying to hurt Bunter."

"Did you chaps ever hear such a lot of wordy asses?" groaned Dicky Nugent. "I say, Toddy, when you've quite finished gassing to our rotter Shylock, you might

just kick him down here! We want him. But please don't hurry yourselves. Squiff's got something clever to say yet, I s'pose; and after that you'll start in again."

Peter Todd and the rest passed on, grinning at the cheek of Nugent minor; and Billy Bunter made as if to pass on with them.

"Here, lard-tub!" yelled Dicky. "You needn't go! You're in this!"

Bunter turned.

"On second thoughts," he said majestically, "I absolutely decline to brawl with mere fags! It's beneath my dignity!"

And he rolled on in haste, for it looked as though Spring's muddy hand was to be brought into play again.

For a moment Spring stood there undecided. He had not really wanted to fight Billy Bunter, but the fat Removite's interference had annoyed him, and perhaps he knew that there was not much real danger of getting hurt. He was shrewder by far than Sammy, whose cunning had a lot of sheer stupidity curiously mixed up with it.

But it was only for a moment Spring hesitated. Then he walked downstairs to the waiting members of his Form.

Sammy Bunter got behind Gatty.

"What's the row?" snapped Dicky. "I expect you to answer me when I speak to you, Shylock!"

"You expect a jolly lot!" said Spring defiantly.

"He's getting his back up," growled George Adalbert Gatty. "The young beast thinks because he's thick with that rotter Angel——"

"That lumey can wait till another time," said Dicky. "Now, then, fat Sammy, what's the matter?"

"The cad pushed me downstairs!" whined Sammy dolefully.

"He hurted me, and I'm going to fight him!" said Spring.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gatty.

The very notion of Sammy Bunter's fighting seemed to Gatty so particularly humorous. Or it may have been the notion of Spring's fighting. Anyway, Gatty was much tickled by that speech.

But Dicky Nugent looked as grave as a judge.

"Well, I don't see why you shouldn't," he said. "Do you, Sammy?"

"Yes, I do, then!" squeaked Samuel. "Why, the cad can lick me!"

"But that's no reason against it, even if it's true," said Myers

"Oh, ain't it? I don't see how a chap could have a better reason!" returned Sammy with entire conviction.

"Buck up, Sammy!" said Dicky encouragingly. "That chap's what Sylvester calls a quitter. You've only got to stick up to him and he'll give in."

"I wasn't a quitter when I fought Sylvester!" snarled Spring.

Roderick Sylvester, the little American junior, flushed. He did not bear malice for that licking, but he hated having it referred to. Seeing, however, how great was the disparity between him and Spring in size and strength, it was really nothing of which he had any need to be ashamed.

"Sammy velly blave. Sammy gives Splingee thick cajee pletty quickee," said Hop Hi.

"I—I—— Look here, you chaps know I don't like fighting!" pleaded Sammy, shaking at the knees.

Dicky Nugent whispered something in his ear. Hampers were not as plentiful in these days as they had been in pre-war times; but Dicky had had one that day, and it was concerning the hamper that he whispered to Sammy.

"I—I—— Well, I wouldn't mind if I was sure he couldn't hurt me," burbled Sammy.

Skinner and the Stranger. (See Chapter 5.)

"Lots of chaps would do no end of fighting if they could only be sure of that!" chortled Castle.

"Getting hurt doesn't hurt much," said Dicky lightly.

"It may not you. It does me. I'm different," replied Sammy.

"I should hope so!" said Dicky contemptuously. "If I thought I was like you, young Bunter, I'd go to a chemist and spend every ha'penny I'd got on rat poison!"

"You—— Look here, Dicky, it's honest Injun about that hamper? And if I can lick him I can have all I can eat?"

"Crumbs, Dicky, you've been promising something now!" said Myers. "There won't be a scrap left for anyone else!"

"Honest Injun, tubby!" answered Dicky, with a wink to Myers.

"Then I'll fight the rotter!" said the heroic Sammy.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Cheap Victory!

"I'M not so sure that's fair," said Spring. "Bribing the fat cad to do all he knows!"

Spring had forgotten, no doubt, that it had required the incentive of a wager to put him on the war-path.

"All he knows doesn't amount to a row of pins," Dicky said. "Still, he may be able to lick you. Hope so, I'm sure! Sammy's a fat young rotter, and no giddy good; but he doesn't suck up to cads in the Upper Fourth!"

"They won't let him," said Spring sulkily.

"And they wouldn't let you if it wasn't for what they reckon to squeeze out of you!" growled Gatty.

"We'll have the great fray in the gym after dinner," said Dicky. "There ain't time for it now. Don't both hide in the same box-room when it gets near the time, that's all!"

"You won't catch me hiding from any chap in the Second!" retorted Spring.

"Sammy no hidee. Sammy velly blave!" said Hop Hi.

Spring—— Spring—— to high a regard had desired to see licked. If Sammy was feeling very brave he certainly concealed the fact well.

He had not actually to be routed out of a box-room after dinner, but it would be untrue to say that he was making a bee-line for the gym when Dicky and Gatty and Myers came upon him. In fact, he was moving towards the gates, but he said that was absent-mindedness.

Spring did not show any sign of funk. He had done the necessary amount of screwing-up of his courage for this combat, anyway. It should not have needed much.

"Who's going to second Shylock? Don't all speak at once!" said Dicky in the gym.

Nearly every fag in the Second was present, but no one spoke.

"And who's going to second Sammy?" asked Gatty. "Don't fall over yourselves in coming forward, kids!"

But again there was no response. It would have been plain to any stranger that Sammy and Spring were about the two most thoroughly unpopular members of their Form.

Just then there was an influx of fellows belonging to higher Forms. The Famous Five came, with a score more of the Remove, Billy Bunter among them. Angel and Kenney lounged in together. Tubb, Paget, Wingate minor, and Bolsover minor, of the Third, followed, with some more of that Form.

"Do you fellows think this is a cinema show?" asked Dicky Nugent.

"Heaps funnier!" replied Bob Cherry.

"Perhaps one of you would like to second Sammy?" said Dicky, with a touch of sarcasm.

"I intend to do that, of course," said William George loftily.

"Oh, rats! I don't want a fat duffer like you doing anything to me!" grunted the ungrateful Sammy.

But no one else volunteered, and Bob Cherry thrust Bunter major forward.

"Anyone on for seconding Shylock?" shouted Gatty.

"I say, Angel, will you?" asked Spring.

Aubrey Angel's lip curled for a moment, but then he smiled.

"Not the least objection in the world, dear kid!" he said smoothly.

"My hat! I didn't know they were quite so thick as that!" said Dicky to Gatty.

"Thick as thieves!" growled Gatty.

"I don't know that you could exactly call Angel a thief!" Dicky replied.

"You can call Shylock one, anyway, and Angel 'Sammy's it!'"

Harry Wharton was elected referee and timekeeper, and the combatants prepared for the fray.

Spring's jacket and waistcoat came off quickly. Sammy's came very, very slowly. Spring's readiness seemed to discomfort Sammy a good deal. His discontented mouth drew down at the corners more than ever, and it looked as though only one hard punch would be needed to set the waterworks going.

He cast more than one longing glance towards the door, but there were too many fellows between that and him to make a bolt possible.

When his podgy fists were inside the gloves he stood and stared stupidly down at them, as if he really did not know what they were for. Then he rubbed his fists together, and his fat face looked just a trifle more cheery.

For a very brief seconds Sammy cherished the comforting delusion that, with his hands muffled up, Spring could not hit hard enough to hurt him.

Sammy had never had the gloves on with a really hard hitter. Perhaps he had not had them on more than once or twice all told.

Wharton insisted on their touching hands. Both did it with a very bad grace.

"Time!" sang out the skipper of the Remove.

Sammy did not appear to agree with him, and Spring's advance was so slow as to suggest that young Shylock thought the call premature.

But, though neither was disposed to hurl himself at the other, they had but a short way to go before they must meet, and in due course they met.

Sammy swung in a blow in the windmill style, which Spring easily guarded.

Spring punched Sammy on the nose.

Sammy said "Ow!" as if very much surprised, and went back as far as he was able to go.

Spring followed him, waiting with quite unnecessary patience for a good opening.

To everyone who watched it was plain that Spring had only to wade in to put Sammy out of action for good and all. That blow on the nose had not been hard enough to rouse the fat fag's fury, and only getting really furious would make Sammy show fight.

But Spring kept sparring for an opening that was there all the time, if he had but had the resolution to take it, and the round ended tamely with Sammy none the worse for a few taps, and Spring quite untouched.

"My hat! I never saw a mouse-fight before!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Dicky," said Frank Nugent, "if the Second can't show us anything more sporting than——"

"Rats! Those two chaps aren't really Second. We'll bar them no end!"

"He's afraid of you, Sammy!" said William George to his brother.

"That doesn't do me much good. So am I of him!" answered Sammy dolefully.

"Well, don't you bother about trying to remember all you don't know about boxing, because that won't help you," said William George. "Go at him with both fists as hard as ever you can. I believe he'll chuck it if you can give him one real good 'un."

It was not bad advice for one so little qualified to advise as Billy Bunter, but advice was wasted upon the pusillanimous Sammy. Only getting hurt and angry could buck him up.

Angel said nothing to Spring, and did nothing for him. But nothing was needed.

Early in the second round Spring got home with some force on Sammy's chin. The latter's feet flew far without in the least staggering him. He was pretty firm on his legs. He gave a howl of mingled pain and rage, and hit out straight at Spring.

It was an accident that the punch was straight. Sammy's natural style was the windmill one. It was a still bigger accident that it got Spring in the right eye, but it put some life into the fight.

Spring came on in fury, and Sammy stood up to him in equal fury. In the whirling minute which followed both got hurt, for both hit without thought of guarding. One of Sammy's windmill swings got Spring on the left ear, and thickened it "quite some," as Fish remarked; and Spring left his marks on Sammy's fat and unwholesome countenance.

As if by mutual consent, they fell apart, and the arms of both dropped to their sides. Sammy was blowing hard, and his opponent's breath came irregularly, too.

"Go it, you cripples! The round ain't over yet!" called Squiff.

But the round was practically over. There was no more fighting during the forty seconds or so left. Spring walked round Sammy, eyeing him warily, and Sammy, with his fat fists up, glared at Spring, but never attempted to hit him.

"The Bounder's a gentleman," said the Bounder sardonically. "At the next touch they'll both drop, an' politely give each other best."

But it was not quite that that happened, though the third round was wretchedly tame.

"Look here, Billy, I've had enough of this!" whined Sammy at its end.

"Oh, really, Sammy, I must say you're not much of a credit to the family!"

"As much as you are, you fat beast! You're the biggest funk at Greyfriars, and everyone in the Form knows it!"

"You lying young cad!" howled William George. And his hand descended with some considerable force on his minor's head.

"Yaroooch!" roared Sammy. "That's a nice way for a second to——"

"Really, porpoise!" protested Peter Todd.

"Come out of it!" snapped Dicky Nugent. "Sammy's a young rotter, and Shylock ain't giving him half what he ought to get, but that's no reason why he should be knocked about by a Remove bounder!"

"Oh, really, the little beast called me——"

But Bunter's explanation was drowned in a roar of wrath from the Second, mingled with protests more or less serious from fellows of the other Forms.

For a few brief moments Sammy might almost have imagined himself a popular character. No one could recall such treatment of a combatant by his second as that, and all disapproved.

"Clear out, Owl!" snapped Johnny Bull. "This is the giddy limit!"

"Look here, I'll second fat Sammy!" said Bolsover minor good-naturedly.

There were not many fellows at Greyfriars as really good-natured as Bolsover of the Third.

"Don't go a young fool!" snarled his major

But Bolsover minor paid no heed to his major.

Billy Bunter, burbling with wrath, was thrust out of the way, and Sammy came up to the scratch again.

As he did so he put one gloved hand to his head, as though in pain, and contorted his fat face into an expression of positive anguish.

"Oh, crumbs! Twig his game, Dicky?" said Myers. "He's going to make out that that clump on the napper hurt him so much that it ain't poss for him to go on!"

"That's about it," agreed Dicky. "But fat Sammy always was a worm!"

"Well, he won't get that tuck-out now, anyway!" growled Gatty.

"Did you ever think he would? I never did! There wasn't a bit of risk in offering it to him!"

"Push him, an' he'll tumble, by gad!" Angel had said to Spring.

But Spring was risking no more than Dicky had risked. He meant to win that sovereign from Kenney, but he did not mean to get hurt in winning it.

Sammy, quite resigned to being knocked out in that round—ready to drop at anything more than the slightest tap—yet found himself still going at the end of it.

"If you only bucked up, young Bunter, you could lick him," said Bolsover minor.

"Spring's terribly afraid of getting hurt."

"I don't want to get hurt any more than he does!" whined Sammy.

"If she's the gentleman this round, Bouncer," said Angel. "You can finish him off any dashed minute if you'll only show a spark of pluck!"

"Bouncer will never finish him off!" gibed Kenney. "He daren't get near enough for that!"

It may have been Angel's threat, or it may have been Kenney's gibe; certain it was that something put more resolution into Spring.

And so very little resolution was wanted!

As he advanced upon Sammy that youthful hero retreated; and when he could retreat no farther he put his arms in front of his fat face and waited to be hit.

Spring hit him in the chest. Sammy had to fall sideways in order to fall at all; there was not room to fall backwards, because of the human ring which kept him in.

It is hardly natural for a fellow punched in the chest to fall over to the right; but Sammy was not bothering about what was naturally about getting out of this at the earliest possible moment.

He fell, with a hollow groan; and Harry Wharton slowly—very slowly—and with a grin on his face—counted up to nine. Then he paused, and Sammy gave another hollow groan.

"Out!" said Harry.

Not a voice was raised to applaud the victor. The only one who spoke was Paul Kenney. And he said:

"Hero's your dashed quid, Bouncer! But it wasn't worth it! Rottenest scrap an' cheapest victory I ever saw!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Spring's Brother!

"Do you still owe that young rotter Spring a quid, Skinner?" asked Harry Wharton, meeting Harold Skinner of the Remove after classes were over for the day.

"Is that any bizney of yours, Wharton?" snarled Skinner.

"Well, not particularly of mine, perhaps. But there's a general feeling in the Form that it's no class at all for any of us to have financial matters outstanding [illegible]

with that chap.

Wharton spoke mildly and civilly enough. On the whole, he would rather not have spoken at all. But a dozen or more fellows had put it to him that it was his duty, as skipper of the Remove, to say a word or two to Skinner.

There was strong feeling in the Remove against Spring, and not without plenty of reason for it. The event of that day had not served to make it less strong.

No one cared about Sammy Bunter; and, as a matter of fact, Sammy had not really been hurt. He had taken care of that. But Kenney's revelation of Spring's motive for fighting had aroused pretty general disgust. That sort of thing was distinctly off the rails; and it seemed all the more so when done by a fellow like Spring. Which may not have been justice; but was certainly human nature.

"This dashed Form's goin' all to pot!" said Skinner, with a sneer. "Why don't you start a Band of Hope, Wharton? Lots of the chaps would join up like a shot."

"There's no question of anything like that," replied Wharton patiently. "The point is that you owe Spring money that apparently you don't mean to pay, and we think that's rather off, considering especially the sort of young outsider young Spring is."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Skinner morosely. "Or what you have to do with it—or Todd—or the Bounder—or Bull—or Squiff—or Vernon-Smith—or Delarey—or Bulstrode. I think that's a complete list of the chaps who have given me pi-jaw on the subject. Oh, no, though! There was Bolsover, too. Dashed fine shooting on his part as he borrowed some from young Shylock himself!"

"Bolsover's paid it back," said Harry.

"Well, I'm goin' to pay it back—some day—when it suits me."

"We think you should pay it back at once."

"You can jolly well go and eat coke!" snapped Skinner.

"Well, I have warned you. I shouldn't wonder if there comes a time when you'll be glad if any debt you owed once to Spring was paid. But I can't force you to shell out."

"I should dashed well think not! Can't say I'm much obliged for the warning, either. What's the use of you ever tried minding your own business, for a change? It's not half a bad idea!"

Wharton bit his lip, and passed on without another word.

He knew that he had laid himself open to the charge of meddling, as he had often done before, in his zeal for the credit of the Form. He knew that he ought not to mind the sneers of Harold Skinner; but unluckily he could not help minding.

Skinner stood with his back against the wall, half-hidden by a buttress; and a few of the Second halted close by to talk without seeing him.

"Well, they will give the rotter a Form trial to-night!" said Dicky Nugent.

Spring had just passed them, with Angel and Kenney.

"Does why we shouldn't, but there ain't really much fresh to try him for," replied Gatty. "When you come to think of it, 'tain't worth while to make a fuss even with Shylock over forcing a scrap on Sir Sammy. I don't suppose sixpence for fat Sammy. I'd just as soon the Huns had him, myself—they're hungry, and he might be some use to them."

"Ain't that enough?" asked Dicky, nodding towards the backs of Spring and his unpopular friend and patron of the Upper Fourth.

"Of course it is!" said Myers. "We don't allow anyone in our Form to go sucking up to chaps in higher Forms, and especially not to rotters like that!"

"There's the blessed mystery about his name, too," Castle said. "If there's any truth in the yarn that's told he's a regular all-round swindler, and ought to be locked up!"

"I believe it's true. All the same, I don't see how we can prove anything, any more than we can about his boning that money and putting it all on to fat Sammy," replied Dicky.

"There's a chap who could prove it, though," remarked Myers thoughtfully.

"Who's that?" growled Gatty.

"Chap in the Fourth at Highcliffe—Merton. You know him, don't you?"

"I know him all right; but I don't see how he could prove it."

"It's could, though. He know Spring and his brother, too, at home; and he says this chap ain't his brother—he's himself."

"That doesn't take a fat lot of proving," said Pettifer. "I ain't my brother —I'm myself. Gatty ain't——"

"Haven't got a brother, so you dry up, young Pettifer!" growled Gatty. "I s'pose you mean something, Myers, but I'm blessed if I see what!"

"It's clear enough, only you're so beastly thick-headed!" snapped Myers.

"Well, if it's so clear——"

"I'll show it you in a jiffy. There were two young Springs. One was named Herbert, and he was a rotter, every blessed way he could be. The other was named Conrad Arthur, and he wasn't."

"Herbert couldn't have been a bigger rotter than Conrad Arthur. It's Conrad Arthur we've got, and——"

"Ain't!" howled Myers.

"How do you know?"

"We've got Herbert, only he calls himself Conrad Arthur!"

"Blessed if I see——"

"Oh, you are a chump, Gatty!" cried Dicky Nugent.

"I'm not! I've as good brains as any of you—better, p'raps! And I quite believe Shylock's wangled something; but I don't see how he could turn himself into his own brother. His folks would know better. And where is the other chap—Conrad Arthur, or Herbert, or whatever his right name is? They haven't murdered him, I s'pose?"

"He might be dead without having been killed," said Castle.

"It sounds a bit wild, I know," said Dicky. "I shouldn't believe it myself, only Shylock really is such a rotter that I can believe anything about him: and from what Merton says Conrad Arthur, his young brother, was quite decent. Merton might be able to prove it—I dunno! Shouldn't think he'd be bothered, anyway—'tain't as if the sweep was at Highcliffe. And you know, all of you, that the job's above our weight. But we can get at young Spring jolly well with that old Angel, and we jolly well will!"

The four moved away after that, and Skinner yawned and stretched himself.

Skinner had heard something of this story before; but it interested him more now than it had done then.

He wandered out of gates. The sky was gloomy, and twilight seemed to have come on earlier than usual; but it was not yet locking-up time.

Behind him a fat figure emerged from the gates, and Billy Bunter mooched along the road in a desultory manner.

He did not call to Skinner. He had no wish for Skinner's company, or for anyone's company.

William George was under the weather. He had been brought to book sharply for his wrongful conduct as his minor's second. It was felt that he had not only transgressed all decency, but also that he had given Bunter minor cause for turning up the combat at a time when he might otherwise have gone on, and perhaps have licked Spring—whom everyone had desired to see licked.

William George had been bunaped. He was stony-broke. Worse still, Sammy had had a postal-order from Aunt Rebecca, who had lately taken him into favour again; and he refused to shell out even as little as a bob, on the ground that Aunt Rebecca would never send him any more if she knew that he shared with Billy. Billy, naturally, did not see why she should know; and Sammy said she wouldn't, anyway—because he wasn't going to shell out.

So William George rolled on behind Skinner in the dusk, and thought sad thoughts.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you, kid?"

It was Harold Skinner who had spoken, and the words came clearly to Bunter's ears, though the person to whom they were addressed was practically invisible to him.

They rather surprised Bunter, those words, for there was something almost like sympathy in them.

But Harold Skinner, though his heart was by no means soft, was not without a rare occasional touch of something better. The impulse that prompted him to speak to the seeming waif who sat on a heap of stones by the roadside might even have carried him as far as giving the waif a copper or two to help him on his way. But that would have been about the limit of his ordinary generosity.

Bunter halted—he hardly knew why. There was a vague idea in his mind of chipping Skinner later on about being charitable, perhaps——

[illegible]

Even to the obtuse perceptions of William George it was evident that those words were not spoken by any prosperous member of the tramp class.

"You look it," said Skinner. "What are you after in these parts?"

"A place you may be able to tell me the way to, though I shan't get there to-night unless it's jolly close, I'm afraid."

"What place is it?"

"Greyfriars School."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I say, are you a Greyfriars fellow?"

"Yes. Why?"

There was a moment's pause, during which Billy Bunter drew quietly into the shelter of a hedge. It struck Bunter that he might learn something interesting if he stayed to listen.

"Why?" repeated Skinner.

"I—I don't know whether I can tell you. It's rather a hard thing to explain," said the stranger.

Skinner peered at him through the dusk. There was something about his face that was vaguely familiar to Skinner.

For a moment he could not think what it was, or of whom the youngster reminded him.

Then it came to him in a flash. The talk he had lately listened to was probably responsible for that.

The features of this lad were like those of Spring. The latter, far opener and more pleasant; they lacked the look of cunning Spring had. But they were like Spring's, for all that.

"Perhaps I can guess it," said Skinner.

The stranger gave a start of surprise.

"I don't think that's possible," he said, in a low, troubled voice that failed to reach the listening owl of the Remove.

"Rats! Isn't your name Spring, and aren't you looking for Greyfriars because you've a brother there?"

"That is right. But—but how did you know? How could you possibly know?"

"Never mind that," replied Skinner.

"I—I—it sounds queer, but I don't

know that I really want to see my brother so much. Only—only, this can't go on. I can't stand it any longer!"

There was real trouble in the youngster's tone. But that was not what influenced Skinner. He was thinking of his own affairs—of his debt to Spring, which he had no intention of paying if he could avoid it, of Spring's cutting him out with Angela Ward, and of recent interference, which had aroused his resentment against Spring as well as against the skipper of the Remove.

He could not think for a moment what would be best for him to do. One thing was clear to him, and one only—the appearance of the young brother, whose unstained name Spring was said to have taken instead of his own much-smirched one, boded no good to Spring of the Second.

But Spring was cunning and unscrupulous. If he saw his brother at once and alone he might talk him over.

Skinner did not want that to happen. But how to prevent it? That was the problem.

Then a bright thought flashed into his mind.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Three of Highcliffe!

"I SAY, kid, you don't know me," he said. "And, of course, you don't know whether you can trust me or not. But I can take you to somebody who does know—anyway, he knows your brother."

"Can you? I can't think who it can be," answered the youngster wearily. "There's no one in Greyfriars—I know that. If there had been, Herb——"

He broke off suddenly, as if afraid he was saying too much.

Skinner noticed that. He did not fail to notice, too, the name by which young Spring spoke of his brother. It all fitted in with the yarn the Second-Formers had been talking over.

And Merton of Highcliffe had the clue to that yarn. It was known that Merton barred Spring of the Second completely. It seemed likely that he might be in sympathy with Spring's brother, then.

"It's not a Greyfriars fellow," Skinner said. "The chap I mean is at Highcliffe."

"Never heard of the place."

"It's pretty close by—no farther than our show."

That was not exactly the truth. But Highcliffe was not so very much farther off than Greyfriars—a matter of a mile or so, perhaps.

"Who's the fellow?" asked Conrad Spring. For that was the stranger's rightful name, and to call him by it may help to avoid confusion.

"Merton," replied Skinner.

"What, Algy Merton?" cried Conrad. "Oh, I say!"

It was good news to him, evidently.

"They call him Algy. I believe," Skinner said. "I don't know much about him myself, matter of fact."

"Oh, of course, his name is not really Algy. He's a decent chap. His young brother used to be rather a chum mine."

"Why not go to him? You might get more change out of that than by goin' straight to your own brother. You say you're not very keen to see him; and I don't wonder at it, by Jove! Between you and me, your brother's a pretty hard case."

"I must see him sooner or later—I must! You don't understand. But I don't feel fit for it to-night, and—and I don't think Merton would turn me down. He was always decent to me."

"Why not go to him?"

"I will! Which is the way to Highcliffe?"

"Oh, I'll take you there!"

"That's jolly good of you!" said Conrad gratefully.

Billy Bunter repressed a snort of contempt with some difficulty.

Bunter was quite certain that Skinner had his own ends to serve. It was not out of kindness that he was taking this youngster to Merton.

It was in the mind of Bunter to follow the two. But he did not follow. Skinner might chance getting late for locking-up; but Bunter did not feel inclined to do so. Moreover, Bunter had heard quite enough for his purpose.

When the two disappeared through the dusk towards Highcliffe, Bunter left the shelter of the hedge and rolled back towards Greyfriars, turning over in his mind the question of how to use the knowledge he had gained to his own advantage.

Before Highcliffe was reached Skinner had to give Conrad Spring an arm to

help him along. The youngster was faint and footsore; but he was too tired to talk about what he had gone through. Skinner did not mind helping him; but good nature had little part in the help he gave.

The gates at Highcliffe were open, but the quad was deserted.

It had occurred to Skinner that it might serve his turn to remain anonymous. Merton and his chums had little to do with Harold Skinner; but that youth was well aware that they did not like him or trust him.

He piloted Conrad through the quad and into the House unseen by anyone. They made their way to the Fourth Form passage, still without encountering anybody. It was tea-time at Highcliffe.

"Here you are!" said Skinner, stopping at the door of Study No. 7. "You mustn't mind if I bolt; I shall be locked out unless I buzz back. See you again!"

And with that Skinner vanished into the gloom, leaving Conrad Spring standing outside No. 6, almost afraid to knock.

He had no claim upon Merton—he knew that. He was almost too worn out and sick at heart to be able to explain what he was doing there. But he felt as though he had not a friend in the world; and he clutched at the chance of finding one in the Highcliffe junior.

Tap!

It was a timid knock, but someone heard it. A voice that was not Merton's shouted cheerily:

"Come in, whoever you are!"

Conrad turned the handle, pushed open the door, and stood swaying and blinking. The light dazzled him, and his head felt as though it were going round.

Merton sprang to his feet, with an exclamation of surprise.

The new-comer had a vague glimpse of a comfortable tea-table, of three fellows at it, of a white cockatoo in a cage on a smaller table close by, and of a cheery fire. Then everything became blurred to his vision, and he fell forward in a faint.

"It's young Spring, by Jupiter!" Merton had cried.

"Oh, I say! Ain't this a surprise?" crooned Cocky.

Merton was just in time to catch the youngster as he fell. Flip Derwent hurried off for cold water, and Tunstall went to Merton's aid.

Between them they got the youngster on to the couch.

Flip came back with a jug of water. But he did not dash it into the lad's face. He wetted a clean handkerchief, and passed it over his forehead and temples. It did not come away very clean. Conrad's face was distinctly grubby.

"He's been on the tramp," said Flip. "I know that look, and that kind of dirty face. You can't keep clean when you can't get a proper wash. Poor kid! He's almost all-in, and no mistake."

"Do you say he's young Spring's brother, Algy?" asked Tunstall, in surprise. "I thought that kid was supposed to have kicked the bucket."

"Shush! He's comin' to," said Merton.

The youngster gave a long, shuddering sigh, and opened his eyes.

"I—oh, you turn me out, will you, Merton?" he said feebly.

"No fear, kid!" was Merton's prompt reply. "Don't you worry about that."

"I—I'll explain it all as soon as I can, you know."

"Strikes me, my son," remarked Flip Derwent, "that you'd better have a wash and some grub before you start in explaining. You'll be a bit doubtful about me and Tunstall. Any friend of Algy's is a friend of ours—and of old Cocky's too, come to that."

"Quite right, Flip! Good old Algy!" crooned Cocky, with his head on one side.

"I should be glad of a wash. I know I'm beastly grubby," said the waif, sitting up. "And I'm empty, too. But I'd like a wash before I have anything to eat."

"Can't take Fim to the bath-room, Flip," said Merton. "It won't do to let anyone on to his bein' here till we know just what's behind it."

"Oh, teach Cocky to eat peanuts!" retorted Flip. "You chaps had better let me take charge. I shan't lose my giddy head. Tun, trot along and get a basin of warm water, soap, and a towel. Knock three knocks on the door when you come back; it's going to be fastened. Algy, make some fresh tea. I'll look into the cupboard; I don't think it's too Hubbardy to provide a bit extra for our unexpected guest."

Within ten minutes Conrad Spring was

seated at the tea-table, and already feeling much more cheerful. Instead of one friend, he had found three—four, if Cocky was to be included.

They asked him no questions while he ate, though for Merton, at least, it was hard to keep down curiosity.

But when he had finished, Merton said quietly:

"Now, then, young 'un, tell us what's the matter. As much of it as you care to, that is; we don't want to pry."

"How did you get here? That's the first thing," said Tunstall.

"I was making for Greyfriars, though I wasn't at all sure what I'd do when I got there," replied Conrad. "And I ran against a Greyfriars chap, and he told me about you, Merton, and brought me here. Then he went off—said he'd be late for locking-up if he didn't."

The three looked at one another. This was mysterious.

"Who was he?" asked Flip.

"There! I never thought of asking his name. I was pretty nearly at my limit, you know," replied Conrad apologetically. "I ought to have asked, of course."

"No; but he might have told you," Tunstall said. "It's dashed queer, by Jupiter!"

"Decent of the chap to bring the kid here," said Merton. "I'm not grumblin' about that. But it is queer that he should have bunked into that, for the gates wouldn't be locked yet."

"Can't have been Wharton, or any of those fellows," said Flip. "Any of them would have known that they were welcome here. And none of them would have bolted like that."

"Did anyone see you on the way up?" inquired Tunstall.

Conrad Spring shook his head.

"It wasn't a grossly fat chap, I suppose?" asked Merton, a sudden thought striking him.

"My word! You're getting at Bunter," said Flip. "Catch Bunter going away from here without staying to tea, once he'd got to the door, with an excuse for forcing himself on us!"

"Bunter does strange things at times," said Merton. "Was it a fat chap, kid?"

"Oh, no! Quite a thin fellow. I couldn't see his face very well; but I think I should know him again."

"Well, it's easy enough to say who it wasn't," Flip remarked. "It wasn't any of the Wharton crowd, or Squiff, or Todd, or Newland-Smith, or Hazeldene, or Brown, or Bulstrode, or Linley, or Delarey, or Redwing. Any one of them would have come in."

"For the matter of that, it needn't have been one of the Remove at all. We've nothing to go on about that," said Tunstall. "It's hardly worth arguin' about, either. The kid's here, safe an' sound, an' if he's willin' to tell his story you'd better listen to it, Algy."

"I should like to tell you all," said Conrad. "You've been jolly good to me!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Scapegoat's Story!

"GO ahead!" said Flip Derwent encouragingly.

"Speak up, sonny!" croaked Cocky.

Conrad Spring turned a wan smile first upon Cocky and then upon Flip.

Somehow, Flip inspired him with even more confidence than Merton, though he had full faith in Merton's kindly intentions towards him.

Many people felt like that about Derwent. He might still be at times a little too sure of himself. But if there was conceit in him, there was iron behind it. He had proved that during his wanderings with Peter Hazeldene of Greyfriars, when they had run away together.

And it was plain that those other two—Merton and Tunstall—looked to Flip as leader. Already he had taken the lead, without thinking about it. Neither of his chums was a weak-backed specimen; but neither had Derwent's quickness and resolution.

"It's a hard story for me to tell," said Conrad, and the tears came into his eyes as he spoke.

"We can guess that, kid," Merton said, laying a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"And I think we can help you out with a bit," added Flip. "We know something, and suspect more."

The youngster looked greatly relieved.

"If you'll tell me what you know and—and think—" he faltered.

"Well," said Flip, "we know that your brother's about as precious a young rotter as one could find in a day's march. At least, Algy knows it, and what Algy knows is good enough for me two."

"I've never forgiven him for the trouble he got my younger brother into, kid," Merton said frankly. "But, if I'm not mistaken, he's got you into worse trouble."

"He's robbed me!" shrilled the youngster. "He and my mother between them! They are all I have in the world, and they don't care a scrap for me. I think they both hate me!"

He buried his face in his hands, and his thin shoulders heaved.

Over his head Merton looked at the other two, and all three felt lumps in their throats.

"Cheer up, old buck!" crooned Cocky. Somebody tapped at the door at that moment.

Conrad Spring looked up, with wild alarm in his eyes.

"Not at home!" sang out Flip.

"I say, you chaps, I want—"

"Not at home, Nobby! Go and eat grass with the other beasts of the field!"

Smithson went, growling. They heard the door of the next study slam.

That nickname of Nebuchadnezzar was the only thing Smithson had against Johnny Gogys, whose brief stay at Highcliffe had endeared him to every decent fellow in the Fourth. It always got Smithson's goat to be called "Nobby."

"It's all right, young 'un," said Flip. "The door's fast, and we don't open it for anyone. We're going to see you through this, by Jupiter!"

The promise was a pretty wide one, all things considered. But Flip gave it in all cool sincerity, and neither Merton nor Tunstall dissented.

"This is what we believe," said Merton gravely. "You needn't bother now about what led us to think as we do, only tell us where we're wrong, if we are wrong anywhere. Your mother got that brother of yours into Greyfriars by giving him your name, an' puttin' his age back to yours. Dr. Locke—that's the Head of Greyfriars—doesn't take a chap in without knowin' somethin' about him, of course. Easiest way is a reference to his last headmaster, an' the reference the old bird had was really yours—Conrad Arthur Spring, not Herbert Spring—eh?"

Conrad nodded. His eyes were gleaming, and his cheeks flamed.

"You'd a decent name. I don't remember a dashed thing against you," went on Merton.

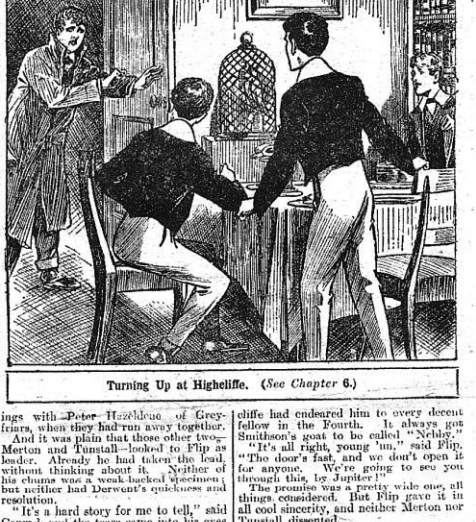
"There wasn't anything," said Conrad, in a low voice that faltered a little. "Beef always said I was a smug young hypocrite. But it wasn't that. I like to keep straight. I don't want to do the cruel things he does. My father was decent anyway!" he added bitterly.

Flip understood what he meant and was not sorry. It was tolerably obvious that his mother was as crooked as his brother.

"So your brother comes along to Greyfriars as Conrad, your—well, what I thought was that you'd kicked the bucket, you know, an' been put under the daisies as Herbert Spring."

Merton spoken more lightly than he felt, and his face was very sympathetic as the youngster broke out with a cry of:

"Oh, I wish I had! I wish I had! I should be better dead! It wouldn't matter to anyone then!"



Turning Up at Highcliffe. (See Chapter 6.)

"Never say die!" spoke Cocky gruffly.

"Why, he seems to understand!" said Conrad, with wide-open eyes.

"Of course he does!" answered Flip cheerily. "Old Cocky knows all I know, and I know lots. One thing I know, old fellow, is that you're all wrong about that, and you'll see it if you only think."

"About—about being dead, you mean?"

"Yes. If you were, you couldn't show up your cad of a brother, and he badly needs showing up!"

"I—I— But I'm not sure that's what I want. I came here because—because I knew it was no good going to my mother. Best's everything to her—I'm nothing at all. But I don't want to do him any harm if he's going straight now."

"He's not!" snapped Tunstall.

It was the first time Tunstall had spoken, and his interrupted remark may have sounded lacking in feeling. But it was not so, and Conrad knew it was not. The words brought him to his bearings sharply.

"If—if he's doing the same sort of thing at Greyfriars that—that he used to do," he said slowly, as if weighing every word, "I'm not going to stop it! I owe it to me. My—my father, he always said that if you went straight you needn't fear anyone. But—but it's hard when your own folks turn against you!"

"How did they work it?" asked Merton.

"When we moved I was sent away into the country—I wasn't over and above well, and my mother said I needed a change. And when I got back our new home Bert had cleared out. She wouldn't tell me where he had gone; but one of the servants told me it was to Greyfriars. Mother sacked her that day. Then she took me to a school in Nottinghamshire—not a bad place, though it didn't come up to what I've seen of this. There weren't any studies there. She'd gone away before I found out that I'd been booked as Herbert Spring."

He paused. They could guess how bewildered the youngster must have felt when he had found that out, what suspicions must have crept into his mind, knowing his mother and brother as he did.

"What did you do?" asked Flip.

"I told them it was wrong—there wasn't anything else to do. But I didn't say anything about how Herbert had carried on, getting himself a bad name. The Head took very little notice—he was a slack sort of man. It was a private school, and I don't think it was very flourishing. They hadn't bothered about references in my case, I suppose."

"Well?" said Flip, as he paused again.

"I didn't go home for the holidays. I suppose Herbert did—he was different. I had to stay at the school. I don't know that I minded much. What's the good of going home when it isn't really a home at all? They were decent enough to me up there. But a new master came when this term was half over, and he'd been at my old school. He'd heard all about Bert, and—oh, you can guess how they got on to me! They thought I was a rotten young liar—fancied I'd made up my brother's name in case anything should come out. It didn't seem to strike them that he might have bagged mine. And at last I couldn't stand it any longer. I bunked!"

"What licks me," said Merton, "is why you couldn't have been sent to Greyfriars an' your brother to some school where they weren't so particular."

"Oh Bert wanted to go to a big school—a swell place! And it never mattered what I wanted."

The whole miserable story seemed summed up in that speech, more despairing than bitter.

The young blackguard at Greyfriars had been the very apple of his mother's eye—was still so, in spite of all he had done. This decent little chap, who wanted to go straight, who had never forgotten what his father had said to him, was of no account to her.

Later they learned that his father and mother had been dead to one another for years before Mrs. Spring had actually become a widow, and that Conrad had spent his early years with his father, never seeing his mother.

That accounted for much—not only for the difference between the two, but for the mother's lack of affection for the younger boy.

"You've brains, Algy, though we've never suspected it before," said Flip. "You were right about jolly nearly everything—except, luckily, about this young fellow having the bunker."

"I don't know that that's lucky!" muttered the youngster.

"But we do, old scout! Buck up!"

"Buck up, my sou'!" crooned Cocky. "Phil-lip! Cocky wants a peanut!"

Cocky had a peanut, of course. Conrad smiled as he saw the bird take it. Somehow, Cocky did him good.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Tunstall.

"This chap sleeps here to-night," replied Flip readily. "I can spare a blanket, and there's a rug or two. Quirke won't notice—he can share Cocky's peanuts, if the worst comes to the worst. In the morning we must find a hiding-place for him in one of the boxrooms. You'll be all serene, won't you, young fellow?"

"I'm sure I shall!" said Conrad gratefully.

"But about puttin' things straight for him?" said Tunstall.

"We shall have to scratch our heads a bit over that!" admitted Flip. "All the evidence must be ready before we start in."

"There's Molly Gray!" remarked Merton.

"Oh! Is she here?" asked the youngster quickly.

"Not here. But she ain't far off. She an' I ought to be able to prove that you're yourself. But there's lots more than that to be proved."

"Never mind about the rest of it now," said Flip, seeing that Conrad's face had fallen at that. "Tell you what—there's quite a lot about this kid's brother and what he's been up to at Greyfriars that it might be useful for us to know. And there are fellows there who have their heads screwed on the right way, and might give us a helping hand in this."

"You're right!" Tunstall said. "Wharton, I'm instance!"

"Not sure I wasn't thinking more of Vernon-Smith and that long-nosed, clever bounder of a Todd!" confessed Flip. "But Wharton's one of the best, and sharp enough."

"Glad you didn't say Hazeldene!" growled Merton.

"Oh, Hazel's all right!" Flip replied. He was still, as far as possible, wayward Peter Hazeldene's chum. But neither Merton nor Tunstall had any use for Hazel.

"Not sure that our own old Caterpillar an' Courtenay don't lay over all the Greyfriars chaps for brains, though," Merton said.

"But they don't know what we want to find out!"

"I say, do you remember that we saw Spring with Pon an' that crew the other day?" said Tunstall suddenly.

"Yesterday, wasn't it? But I don't think Angel would bring him here," Flip answered, a trifle doubtfully.

"My brother? Oh, I do hope he won't come here!"

"You're all right, kid! We'll look after you!" said Flip reassuringly. "But don't ask us to love your brother for your sake, because that's no part of the giddy contract, by Jupiter!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Bunter on the Make!

"SKINNEY, old chap, I want to borrow half-a-crown!" said William George Bunter, rolling up to Harold Skinner in the Close.

"On the postal-order that's coming at the next Greek Kalends!" inquired Skinner sardonically.

"Nothing of the sort! It's nothing at all to do with the calendar!

"I didn't say the calendar, you fat fool! I said the Greek Kalends! There never were any Greek Kalends—that's the point of it!"

"What do you talk about them for, then? I don't see any point in it at all. I call it merely silly!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Skinner glared at the Owl of the Remove ferociously.

Harold Skinner was feeling very morose. Angel seemed to have thrown him over. Stott was in sanny. Snoop was taking a new line of his own—rather a high line, for Snoop. Skinner considered—and the two erstwhile pals were barely on speaking terms. And the Bounder had refused to let Skinner have a loan. Altogether, though he was not absolutely stony-broke, Skinner was in the doldrums.

Even the secret of Spring's which he held did not seem to him feel happy, though the possession of anything of the sort in connection with a fellow he disliked usually gave Skinner quite a lot of malicious pleasure.

He did not quite see how he was going to use it. When he had, as it were, handed over Conrad Spring to Flip Derwent & Co., he had parted with rather more than he realised at the moment.

It need not with them now what should be done in the matter, not with him.

And he was getting impatient.

Nearly twenty-four hours had passed, and as yet nothing had been done. Perhaps nothing would ever be done.

Skinner began to wish that he had handled the matter himself. It might have been better to bring the youngster to Greyfriars and take him straight to the Head.

That was what the famous Five or Squiff or Toddy would have done, Skinner knew. But then, they would never have thought of anything except getting justice; whereas justice was a thing that Skinner never had had much use for.

"You'd better talk more civilly, Skinner!" said Bunter loftily. "I don't allow myself to be called a fat fool, I can tell you!"

"Why, you fat fool, what's bitten you?" hooted Skinner. "Who the merry dickens can you call a chap shouldn't call you what he dashed well likes? And what do you mean by asking for the loan of half-a-crown—or the gift of one—came thing—without playin' the postal-order racket? We all know it's a dashed lie, but it's enough to give anyone fits for you to try to wangle a loan without it!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter here?" called Bob Cherry, passing at

BILLY BUNTER BUYS BUNS.

that moment with Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull.

"This fat idiot——"

"You'd better go easy, Skinner!" hissed Bunter, with quite a vicious look on his fat face. "I know something—something that happened between classes and tea last night!"

Skinner was taken aback. If he had had time to reflect he might have realised that he had had many more shady secrets than this one to keep in the past.

But he had not time, and he did not want this particular secret to leak out.

"It's nothin'," he said sulkily. "Nothin' much, that is. Only Bunty tryin' on the borrowin' gadget without a fictitious postal-order as security. Enough to make a chap surprised—what?"

"Who says the days of miracles are past?" returned Bob.

But neither Bob nor his chums felt any interest in Bunter's efforts to extract a loan from Skinner, with or without a postal-order insecurity, so to say. They knew Harold Skinner was quite capable of taking care of himself.

They passed on.

"Now, then!" said Skinner. "I don't admit anythin', an' I've certainly done nothin' that you can blackmail me about. But what have you got up your silly fat sleeve?"

"Oh, you needn't ask that, Skinney! You know very well!"

"I'm not shellin' out half-a-dollar on anythin' that you pretend to know. You see, I know you, Bunter!"

Bunter looked round in a mysterious manner. There was no one near; but he put his mouth very close to Skinner's ear before he whispered:

"Spring's young brother! Now will you lend me five bob?"

"Half-a-crown you said, you fat shyster!" corrected Skinner, in virtuous indignation.

"That was my mistake. I beg your pardon, I'm sure, Skinney! I should prefer to carry through this little—er—financial transaction in a friendly spirit, as between gentlemen. But if you——"

"What shall you do if I refuse? What can you do?"

"Well, I could go to Spring. I ain't sure whether he'll be pleased to hear that his brother's about; but I fancy he might find it useful to know. Or I might tell Wharton. I don't know why you took that Spring kid to Highcliffe, but I'm jolly sure it was for some cunning——"

"I'll let you have half-a-dollar, you fat spy!"

"Five bob!" said Bunter inflexibly.

Skinner had only five-and-sixpence, and he was always a bit of a screw.

But he gave way now, though he could not see clearly where his profit in the matter came in. One thing he was sure of—he did not want Wharton and the rest to know that he had taken Conrad Spring to Highcliffe and left him there anonymously, as one might put it. They were always down on him, Skinner reflected bitterly, and they would be certain to scent something fishy in that.

Which reflection was not, of course, at all due to the fact that there had been something fishy in Skinner's motive—not in the least!

"Thanks!" said Bunter. "I knew you would behave like a decent chap, Skinney, when it was put to you in a tactful way. I sha'n't tell anyone about your taking that kid to Highcliffe, of course; that will remain a secret between us."

And Bunter rolled off—on his way to find Spring.

Cunning and unscrupulous though he was, Skinner did not expect any such immediate treachery on the part of the Owl.

Bunter himself did not consider it as treachery. He thought it quite enough if he kept his promise to Skinner in the letter; and he had no intention of mentioning Skinner to the young cad of the Second.

Five bob was all very well; but in these days of expensive foodstuffs it represented merely a snack to Bunter. Spring was to be good for at least half-a-sovereign.

Bunter forgot that Spring was far closer-fisted than even Skinner, and at least as suspicious.

He found Spring without much difficulty, and managed to get him into the deserted Close.

He did not pretend friendliness, which was just as well, for he would certainly not have taken in the Shylock of the Second by any such pretence.

"Well, what is it?" asked Spring impatiently. "I'm fed up with you Bunters! You're a couple of grasping, tattling pigs, and——"

"You'd better be civil, young Spring!" said William George in his loftiest tones.

"Civil to you! I think I can see myself!"

"You'd better, all the same, as I warn you! Suppose I told you that I knew where to put my hand on your young brother—the chap whose name you won't—know where to find him this very minute—eh? Suppose I told you that? Yah! That would fetch you, I guess!"

Spring's face, none too healthy at the best of times, turned very sickly at that. But it was only for a moment. He thought himself too astute to be bluffed by Bunter.

"Rats!" he snapped. "You've got hold of that rotten silly yarn that some young cad in the Second cooked up, and——"

"It wasn't any young cad in the Second who cooked it up; it was Merton of Highcliffe—so now, then!" snarled Bunter.

"I don't care! It's a lie, and a silly lie! You can't blackmail me on the strength of it. That's your game, of course! You can go and tell fat Sammy that he'd better try it on himself, if he wants another licking. Now send you!"

"I know it's true. And it wasn't Sammy told me, either. I've done with Sammy, after yesterday, the little fat beast! Your brother——"

"I had a brother once, and Merton knew him. That's all the truth there is in the silly yarn," broke in Spring. "I haven't a brother now, because he's dead. Does that satisfy you?"

"Oh, really, Spring, I can't understand any fellow being such an awful liar as you are!" said Bunter, his eyes growing rounder and rounder behind his big glasses as he dwelt upon the extreme mendacity of Spring. "I should expect to be struck dead if I——"

"You? Why, you're the worst liar in Greyfriars, bar none! And you're a beastly low blackmailer, too! You think you can work cash out of me by raking up that silly old yarn, that was done and done with last term! Why, for two pins I'd pull your ugly fat nose! I'd do it for nothing, but I ain't sure that there's enough of it for me to get hold of!"

Spring's victory of the day before, and Billy Bunter's funk on the staircase, had combined to produce this unusual display of warlikeness in him. But it is extremely unlikely that he would have carried out his threat if Bunter had not also displayed unusual martial spirit.

Bunter felt that he really had a secret that mattered a good deal to Spring, and he failed to realise that Spring had no faith in his possession of it. He felt himself in a position to pummel Spring first, and to extort hush-money from him afterwards.

So he punched at Spring's head.

He was nearly twice Spring's weight, though in height there was no very great difference between them. He ought to have been able to make mincemeat of the Second-Former.

But, in spite of his dislike of getting hurt, Spring was no duffer with his fists, and he was far quicker than the Owl.

He guarded the clumsy blow with ease, and his left fist shot out.

It took Bunter fairly upon the nose, and Bunter felt as though that somewhat inconspicuous feature of his face had been squashed.

A blow upon the nose is rarely a knock-down blow, and Bunter had plenty of weight to stand up against the hardest punch Spring could have given.

BOB CHERRY BUYS BONDS.

But this was so utterly unexpected that it floored Bunter.

"Yarooooh!" he howled, as he took a sudden seat upon the flags.

"Bunter!"

That sounded like Mr. Quelch's voice.

"Yessir?" gasped the Owl.

"Come here at once! I must teach you to know better than to strike a boy so much smaller than yourself, you cowardly fellow!"

"I—I say! Oh, really, sir, it was Spring who hit me!"

"Do not prevaricate, Bunter! I saw you strike at him."

"But—but——"

"Come here at once, Bunter!"

"I don't know where you are, sir!"

"Just round the corner, you fat ass!" said Spring, with a grin of triumph.

Bunter hurried away. Mr. Quelch was not just round the corner, and, on the whole, Bunter did not think it worth while to go in search of him. There was a chance, he considered, that the Remove-master might forget.

But there was really no chance of that. It was not necessary, for Mr. Quelch did not know.

"The silly fat lout forgot that I can ventriloquise as well as he can!" muttered Spring.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Three Meddlers!

"TELLERGRAM for you, Master Spring!" said Trotter, the page.

He had had some little difficulty in finding Spring, who was mooching disconsolately about the far end of the Close in the dusk; and, having handed the flimsy envelope over, he stood expectant of a tip.

Twopence would have satisfied Trotter, but it would have hurt Spring to part with twopence. It seemed to hurt him even to part with a word of thanks. At any rate, he offered neither thanks nor tip.

"What are you waiting for?" he snarled, looking up, after tearing open the envelope, but before taking out the slip inside.

"Nothink!" said Trotter gravely. "An' that's what I'm goin' to get, it seems. Thank you, Master Spring!"

And Trotter departed.

Still Spring did not take out the message.

He was feeling nervous.

He knew that the wire was from his mother. Something had begun to worry him after his interview with Bunter that morning, and he had telegraphed to her. After all, there might be some truth in Bunter's yarn. Anyway, he wanted to be reassured.

Now he hesitated. He feared what he might learn.

Half a dozen times he looked around him before he summoned up courage to read the telegram. He could not have read it with anyone's eyes upon him.

But there was no one in sight, and at last he read.

The dusk made the pencilled words difficult to decipher for a moment. And when he did read them Spring could hardly believe his eyes, for they ran:

"Your brother is dead."

A stranger might have said that that message, sent by a mother, was brutal in its curtness.

Spring had no such thought. It was not sorrow that shone in his eyes as he lifted them from the telegraph-form.

Something like a grin overspread his cunning face.

"My hat!" he muttered. "That makes me safe!"

He cared nothing about his brother—never had cared anything for him. If he had any feeling for anyone but himself it was for his mother. But it was doubtful whether there was much strength in even that.

The form, crumpled up, was thrust into his pocket, and he made his way upstairs and to the Upper Fourth studies.

He stopped at the door of that which Angel and Kenney shared, and tapped.

"Come in!" sounded Angel's voice.

Spring walked in.

Angel favoured him with a smile. Kenney gave him a glance that was not specially friendly, but said nothing.

"I say, Angel, I've come along with you to-night, if you like," said Spring.

"Where, dear boy?" inquired Angel.

Spring, standing with his back to the door, did not hear it open again directly he had passed through, or see the lean visage of Harold Skinner behind him.

"To Highcliffe, of course!" he said.

"Oh, yaas! I'd clean forgotten our little engagement. I'm on, by gad!"

"Goin' to Highcliffe to-night, Skinner?" asked Kenney, with a grin in which there was some malice.

Spring whipped round with a start.

"I didn't know you were there, Skinner," he said. "Angel and I were just talking about going over to Highcliffe to tea."

"Were you?" replied Skinner coolly. "They have tea a bit later than we do, I suppose? Never mind—no blurry of mine. By the way, Spring, I'll settle up that quid I owe you next week."

"It's somewhere about thirty bob now!" said Spring sulkily.

"Deuce! Shylock!" retorted Skinner lightly. "Don't worry, dear nature—my ship's comin' home next week. Are you goin' to tea at Highcliffe, too, Kenney, or can you waste five minutes of your valuable time with me?"

"I'm not goin' to Highcliffe at all!" growled Kenney.

And he and Skinner went out together.

"I don't think Skinner smelt a rat, do you, Angel?" said Spring.

"If you're satisfied he didn't it's no odds what I think, kid!" replied Angel lightly. "You're a dashed sight more suspicious than I am, y'know!"

He thought that Spring seemed more easily satisfied than usual. In fact, the Second Form page was not so much older than his supposed age, seemed quite chirpy.

But Angel did not comment upon that. If he had known that Spring's good spirits were due to hearing of his brother's supposed death he would not have been particularly shocked—he might not have been shocked at all. When Angel and Spring were together they formed a pair whose like could not have been found in all Greyfriars for sheer callousness.

Skinner had nothing in particular to say to Kenney; he only wanted to account for his following Spring into the study. But he did not let Kenney know that.

Within two minutes he had left the Upper Fourth landing and was out in the quad with his cap and coat on.

It was not very often Skinner acted on impulse. His plans were generally laid after due deliberation. He had come very near to acting on impulse then, for he was actually on his way to Highcliffe before he began to wonder whether it was worth while.

But he had not got as far as the gates when he began to wonder, and he turned back before he reached them.

It was not worth while, he decided. If Derwent & Co. were to be warned of Spring's arrival, Skinner would have to admit having been Conrad Spring's guide of the night before; and he did not want to admit that.

He was not quite sure why he wanted them warned. What could they do?

Then a notion struck him. He went indoors again, took off cap and coat, and in the seclusion of No. 11, where Snoop was plugging away at lines, wrote a brief note in a carefully disguised handwriting.

After that he went in search of someone to take it; and he chanced upon Sammy Bunter.

Sammy was not considered at Greyfriars a specially brainy young person. But he was keen enough to have his share of cunning, and in one respect at least he was well ahead of his major. He could refrain from blabbing if he was paid to do so. William George, though he often achieved a minor success in the blackmailing line by promising to refrain, was always liable to let things out.

"Will you do an errand for me, Sammy?" asked Skinner oilily.

"What will you give me?"

"Two bob."

"Two bob! What is it?"

"To go to Highcliffe."

"What, now?"

"Yes, of course!"

"That's worth five! Why, I might be late for locking-up!"

"Oh, you can shin over the wall if you are."

"Not jolly well likely! Not for less than bob, anyway!"

"Right-ho! You shall have five bob when you come back."

"Rats! I don't trust you all that much, Skinner, I can tell you! I want it now!"

Skinner had evidently negotiated a loan since dinner. But he was not parting with his borrowed money thus easily.

"Half-a-dollar down!" he said.

Distrust at last appeared struggled in the fat breast of Sammy.

"Right-ho!" he said at length.

Even if he did not get the other half-crown—and he hardly hoped to—he would have been fairly well paid for his task.

"You're not to say who sent you," Skinner warned him. "This note's for Merton—you know him? He's always about with that chap Derwent. Best not to give it to him yourself. Hand it over to one of the kids at Highcliffe, and punch his young head if he asks questions. You're no end of a fighting-man, I know, Sammy!"

Bunter minor scowled as he turned away.

Skinner had done himself no good by that cheap sneer. Already it had occurred to Sammy that he was quite possible to dodge the trouble of going to Highcliffe and the risk of being locked out. Now that he knew no answer to the note was expected, this seemed easier; and the gibe at his expense almost caused him to make up his mind.

But he went out at once, and wended his way across the dusky quad to the gates.

Outside he paused, and took Skinner's note from his pocket. He also took out a box of matches.

He felt the envelope, and grunted. It was plain that he would have to treat it open in order to see what was inside. He tore it open, and threw away the envelope, which had no name upon it.

Then, just as he struck a match, a voice said close by him:

"I say, Sammy, what are you up to?"

"Nothing! Just you lemme alone, you fat beast!" squeaked Sammy, trying to thrust the note into his pocket.

"Don't make such a silly row! You'll have old Gosling hear us!" hissed his major.

He had gripped Sammy's fat wrist, and now he tore the note from him.

Resignation came upon Sammy suddenly.

"All right!" he said. "Takin't mine,

and I sha'n't take it to Highcliffe now for anyone, so there! You can answer for it to Skinney!"

Skinner sending you to Highcliffe, is he?" inquired Billy Bunter eagerly.

"I'm not going to tell you anything, you fat rotter! Lemme go!"

"Strike a match, Sammy!"

"Sha'n't! They're my matches, not yours!"

"I must say you ain't very brotherly, Sammy!"

"I don't want to be. I wish you weren't my brother; I should be a jolly sight better off without you, I know that! But I'll strike one match—only one, mind you!"

One proved enough. There were only a few words in the note. It merely told Merton that Spring was coming over to Highcliffe that night with Angel, to visit Pon & Co.

Skinner had not been taken in by the going-to-tea story.

"Ah!" said William George, with immense satisfaction. "It's quite a good thing you shoved this to me, Sammy!"

"I didn't show it to you, you fat beast! You grabbed it, and I shall tell Skinner so if—"

"Oh, really! I suppose you'll tell him that you were just going to read it, too?"

"No, I sha'n't! And I shall deny it if you say so!"

"But that would be a lie, Sammy!" said William George, in tones of sad reproof.

"Yah! Who cares?" retorted the unrighteous Samuel.

Certainly his major did not care. But he pretended to.

"Your best plan will be to say nothing whatever to Skinner," he said. "Don't mention me, anyway. I will see after this matter—really, it concerns me, and it's always best to keep clear of trouble."

Sammy reflected a moment. He had one half-crown in his pocket; he had no faith in Skinner's promise to pay the other; and he rather funked the dark walk back from Highcliffe. It would be quite dark before he could get back.

"Right-ho!" he said. "It's nothing more to do with me—don't forget that!"

And he waddled through the gates into the quad again.

William George rolled off towards Highcliffe.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter at Highcliffe!

"IS Merton anywhere about?"

Bunter made this inquiry of Yates of the Fourth, whom he happened to sight as he reached the gates of Highcliffe.

"I believe so," replied Yates. "Haven't heard of his kicking the bucket, or getting a holiday, so I think he must be. Do you think he wants to see you, Bunter?"

"Oh, really! I want to see him—I suppose—"

"That seems to very much the same thing! Then there's something badly wrong with your supposer!"

"Got 'em, Yatesy?" called Smithson through the gloom.

"Yes."

"Who's that with you?"

"A whale I've landed!" chuckled Yates.

Smithson came up, hands in trousers-pockets, blinking at Bunter in the dark.

"Oh!" he said. "I wondered. But they call it a porpoise at Greyfriars!"

"It wants to see Merton," said Yates.

"Well, it can try, I reckon. I won't answer for any more than that; No. 5 ain't so easy to get into these days. Those three have some jolly mystery in there, I fancy!"

"You can follow us, Bunter," said Yates.

The Owl of the Remove followed them into the House and upstairs.

He thought they might have been more civil. But somehow Highcliffe follows never were polite to Bunter.

"That's the door," said Smithson, and he and Yates disappeared into No. 7 without paying any more attention to Bunter. Bunter tapped—hard.

"Who's there?" yelled Flip Derwent.

"Me—Bunter!"

"Who's he?"

"Oh, really, Derwent, you know me!"

"Too, too well! Bunk, Bunter!"

"Oh, but I say, you fellows, I've something important to tell you all—I have, really!"

"Have you a grandmother, Bunter?"

"No, you silly chump!" howled Bunter, fast growing furious.

Quite an appetising smell came from somewhere near. It might be from No. 7. There was little doubt that it was grub of some kind Yates had been out to get. But Bunter thought it was from No. 6, and he was grimly determined to stay to tea with Derwent & Co.

"Pity!" answered the voice of the Australian junior. "I was going to suggest that you should eat and tell it to her. But as you've no old lady isn't available, why not try the Marines?"

While Flip was talking Tunstall and Merton were hiding Conrad Spring. The three chums meant to hear what Bunter had to say. It seemed to them more than likely that it had some reference to the youngster they were protecting.

Conrad was still at Highcliffe, and less than half an hour earlier Harry Wharton and his chums had been there, and had heard from Merton the fugitive's story. There was in fact, even a kind of council of war—a discussion as to what could be done to get justice for the lad who had suffered under such abominable treatment.

But nothing had been decided. The case was no easy one to be handled by schoolboys. The Famous Five had gone back after promising to give any help that they could, but without having been able to suggest a plan of campaign.

They had not seen Bunter on the way home owing to their having taken a short cut.

Hiding Conrad had not been very difficult, though the youngster had had several narrow escapes of discovery which could hardly have been good for his overstrained nerves.

But it could not go on long; luck would scarcely hold. And it was plain to all three that Conrad was not fit for this kind of existence. He had pluck enough, but his journey from Notts to Kent, and all there on food, had taxed his bodily strength almost to its limit.

Altogether the three realised that they had taken on a bigger job than they had fancied at first. But not one of them had any thought of giving it up and they had found every member of the Famous Five in agreement with them that it must be put through.

Johnny Bull frowned a bit, but Johnny's growls meant nothing except that he was being forced to think. Wharton's sympathy they had been sure of, and Frank Nugent's. Warm-hearted Bob Cherry was keen on anyone, and the interest of Inky was positively "terrific."

"Ready?" said Tunstall.

It was time. Bunter was very impatient.

"Are you going to let me in?" he howled. "It's about——"

The door was unlocked and flung wide before he could finish.

Flip bowed low before Bunter.

"Stop this way, your Grace!" he said.

"Better lock the door again!" said Bunter, breathing hard. "I've secrets to tell you!"

Flip locked it.

"Though we don't really believe——" he began.

"Just you wait!" broke in Bunter. "I know who it is you've got here. It's young Spring—our rotter's brother. But where have you hidden him?"

"Gentle shepherd, tell me where?" crooned Cocky dreamily.

"I don't want to talk to you," said Bunter, looking at the bird in no very friendly fashion. "You're vicious. Where is he, Derwent? I say, I don't mind having a snack while we talk. I came away without my tea, because I'm one of those chaps who hate letting a pal down, and——"

"Sit here!" growled Tunstall.

The seat indicated had its back to the door.

"Have a kipper or two, Bunty?" said Derwent blandly.

"Thanks, I will!" replied Bunter. "I knew I could smell kippers. I suppose you chaps have finished?"

It seemed an unwarrantable supposition, as all the plates were clean, and the dish of kippers was steaming.

But Tunstall growled. "Oh, get on with it!" and Bunter took three of the half dozen kippers upon his plate, to make sure of them. He could not make room for more, and he eyed the others longingly as he ate.

Merton was behind him. Very silently and cautiously Merton unlocked and opened the door. Then Conrad Spring, at a touch from him, wriggled out from under a pile of raincoats in the corner behind Bunter, and slipped through the doorway.

In the passage Merton at once switched off the only light. Conrad glided swiftly and silently to the box-room, and Merton stepped back into the study after he had switched on the light again.

"I feel a draught in my neck!" grumbled Bunter, looking round just as the door closed once more.

"Have you a neck?" asked Tunstall. "First I've heard of it. I thought your tummy came right up to your chin!"

"I think you fellows might be more civil when a chap's come here at considerable personal trouble just to do you a kindness," said the Owl.

"Where's the chap?" inquired Merton.

"I am, of course!"

"What's the kindness?" asked Flip. "Saving us from any chance of getting what-d'-ye-call-it pneumon by swilling all our kippers? Are they at all wangy, Bunter? If so, you're more than welcome, I'm sure."

"Oh, really, Derwent! But I know you don't mean anything. You and I have always been good pals."

"First I've heard of that. We are hearing things, you fellows. Can you tell us who it was brought young Spring here last night, Bubby?"

Merton and Tunstall almost gasped. Bunter arrested a forkful of kipper on its way to his mouth.

It was a bold stroke, but it was not reckless. Bunter knew something; Flip was sure of that. And Conrad was out of the way now. Bunter would not see anything that would tell him more than he knew.

"Yes, I can, then! It was Skinner!" replied the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, Skinner, was it? Well, it was decent of him, though one doesn't exactly expect decent things of Skinner."

"It's daddy's due to be decent, Merton—don't you believe it!"

"Any more than you're tellin' us to be decent, by Jupiter!" snapped Tunstall.

"What did he do it for?" asked Flip.

"He's got a down on Spring—our Spring, I mean. So have I, come to that.

"I thought so!" growled Tunstall.

"Well, so has everybody. We don't like rotters at Greyfriars. I don't know whether you do here, but I can tell you we don't!"

"Unpleasant for you!" muttered Tunstall.

"But we don't really get much forarder by knowing that Skinner was the chap who brought the kid here," Flip remarked.

"Oh, that ain't all! Pass the cake, will you, Tunstall? It doesn't look very fruity, I must say, but I dare say I can eat a morsel of it. And there ain't any more kippers."

"Berry!" growled Tunstall, as he passed the cake, and Bunter took a trifle more than half of it.

"What else is there?" inquired Merton.

"Our Spring's coming here to-night, with Angel. They're coming to gamble with Pon and that crowd—the sweeps!" said the highly virtuous Bunter.

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Needn't be surprised, Algy," said Flip coolly. "It is rather cool cheek, but Pon & Co. have tried it before. After all, even if they're bowled out, it's no worse than being caught at the Cross Keys, if it's as bad. Pon has a key to the empty study up in the corner. I've heard all about it. Not our bizney, is it?"

"An' Spring's comin' along with Angel to-night?" said Merton.

"Yes. I had it straight from the horse's mouth, as one might say," replied Bunter importantly.

Tap, tap!

Merton flung open the door. It was policy to do so. There was nothing to conceal just then.

Mr. Mobbs stood there.

"Oh!" said the snobbish little master of the Fourth. "That is a Greyfriars boy, is it not? Bunter, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. He'd looked in to take tea with us," said Flip cheerily.

"And to talk on subjects best left alone by mere schoolboys!" snorted Mr. Mobbs. "In passing your door I could not avoid hearing a reference to horses. I took the speaker to be some low racing person. I am relieved to find that it is only——"

"Oh, really, sir!" protested Bunter. "It is the first time anyone has suggested that I speak like a low racing——"

"Silence! You had better allow me to see you out, Bunter!" snapped the master.

Bunter had to go. He was surprised that Derwent and the other two said nothing to combat the accusation made against them. He did not know that they were content to treat with silent scorn these attempts at being nasty on Mobby's part, and they were by no means sorry to get rid of Bunter.

Mr. Mobbs led him off.

"Good riddance!" growled Tunstall.

"He's told the truth for once, though," said Flip.

"Who—Mobby?"

"No, Algy—the other fabricator."

"He may have. I think he has," said Merton. "But I don't see what we can do about it."

"I do!" said Flip, his eyes gleaming with a new notion that had just come into his head.

"What?"

"That rotter Spring shall see a ghost to-night!"

If Philip Derwent had had the slightest idea that Herbert Spring believed his brother to be dead he would never have thought of risking any such thing as that. But he had no such idea, and his heart was hot against the callous young rascal who had usurped the decent name of his brother, and was proceeding to make it as dirty as his own.

And Spring was to see that "ghost." But of how he saw it, and what befell in consequence, the next story will tell.

(Don't miss "SACKED!"—next Monday's Grand Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

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

STILL MORE FRAGMENTS FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM THE GORGEOUS BUNTER.

With Some Notes by PETER TODD.

IT is noe good faing what is not true, bekause that is unvoracious.

(And Bunter could never be unvoracious.—P. T.)

Even sen you are riteing things onely for yore own sekret I you should be truthful, I am.

The fellows hear say I have two mutch imaginashun. Butt that is not soe. My life has been a feerfully valid wun—that is awl. What they kall imaginashun is facks.

Fore instans—they snear wen I hint that enemy girls have fallen a victim to my eckstrawdinerry faschinashuns. Yet that is the littoral truth. It wood not be the thing to give naimes, and I am nothing if not korrect. My standard of honner is wun that theas loe persons fale to understand, beeing what they are.

(And as long as we are what we are, and Bunter is what Bunter is, I rather fancy we shall continue failing to understand his standard of honour—if any.—P. T.)

There is M——— H———. I knoe that H——— W———. immagens she likes him noe end; and R——— G———. also thinks that he kums neckst to W———, if not furst. Butt nothing of the sort! I knoe better. In fact, I have it from her own moer, my drey! Not that this is exackly a drey, beeing sumthing mutch grater and moor importuns, but let that pass.

You have no ideer how dredfully swete M——— is on me. She———

The rest of this is blue-pencilled. There is no decent fellow at Greyfriars who does not think heaps of the young lady to whom Bunter is deeply devoted, after in his way, or who does not know that the softest thought she has ever had of Bunter was one of pity for him for being Bunter.—P. T.)

Their was a girl at Cliff House. Perraps I shood doo beter not to wrefer to her. Germans not being popler in these days. But after awl, Frawline Wilhelmine Limberger did not maik the war, and she had the sens to valyew me at my true wirth. She admired me, end of. I never did sea a girl who cood putt away the grub as she cood—it was a treet to sea her eat it, if sumwun else was around. She wos bewtiful my appetite koloral, but it was a meer setkumstans to hers. (This is an American eckspression which I have in Fisby yoose. It meens that she reelly liked me into fits.)

(Bunty means flicked him into fits." We never saw the end of Wilhelmine. I don't think I ever saw Miss Wilhelmine; but then do say that she really was a match for Bunter in shifting the eats. Well, it took a Hun girl to be that!—P. T.)

Wunse we ett between us thirtene sossige rolss, sixteene eggs, twenty-three kreem buns, fore pownds of biskits, too large plumm kakes—the sort you never see now-a-ffitch and fifteene pownds of apels, about too duzzen bananers, and varus trifels not worth enewmerating. I never saw a girl my life enewmerating. I never saw a girl my life injoy her self so mutch my appetite! And after it and she putt away a bob's worth of tofee—I knoe her lips wear awl sticky with it wen—I hear I am a jolly good salg.

Their was a girl in a bun-shopp at home who was verry fond of me. She was so herself. She was older than me—about thirty, I suppoe—and the bun-shopp belonged to her. I had had a verry unpleasant stroke of luck. Sumone had droped a fiver, and I hapened to pik it up befoar they knew it. By being kareful I maid that fiver last me nearly a wek. I used to go to the bun-shop every day; I wasn't half popler their, I can tel you. They always yoused to fetch Miss Mugley—that was her nkime—wen I kame in, and she wood stand and sea me eat like wun fashinated. She sed that never had she seen anything like it. She was so kompletely gone on me that she yoused farely to beg me to kome again. There was a rude girl in the shopp which I did not like at all; this girl sed that Miss Mugley wood be abel to retire on a kompetens if my hollerdays and my nunsense onely lasted long enuf.

Butt I am kwite shore that Miss Mugley had noe such sawdid ideers. She was verry nicekitty, except for a red nose and a skwint in the rite I, witch was hardely noticable if you sat on the left sighted of her; and she had lovely hare. I don't for a moment believe what the rude girl sed—witch was that she bowt most of it.

But she wel liked me. That she loved me as I loved her, witch was easy, for her kreem buns reelly wear a knok-ovt. She must have bin fond of me, or she wood not have given me that sickspenny paket of toffe witch was found on exsmermashun to bee a little bit hard. She wood not so much as that I cood not eat sum of it, and, being in a genrous mood, I gave Sammy the wrest, thow he did not deserve it. She did not like it wen I offe-not reelly kwite off, but gone suggary, you knoe—I am shore.

I think it was the rude girl who kaim between us at the end. She must have sed things about me to Miss Mugley. Girls are too-faving barts parted by the whiles of the wikked!

It was like this. I had reerly got throw

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. England. Subscription, 6s. 10d. per annum. Agents for Australasia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z. South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg. Saturday, November 20th, 1915.

my fiver, and I had made a grate resolv. Of coarse, it was only daks for me to think of geting engaged; but I was verry fond of Miss Mugley, and thele points about being engaiged to a girl who has a bun-shopp and her own. Besides, the engaigment woodent hold good in turm-time, wen I was away from home; and I really meant to mark up to Miss Mugley—Araminta, as I ment to kall her in futcher—for any little lappses of afektion towards my rival, Mr. Bunter, being noticed atentive in the holterdays. I kood almost have lived at the bun-shopp.

(For some of this I can't believe Bunter. Usually it is not even possible. This story of Miss Mugley is partly true, I fancy. I don't suppose that Bunter is fond of her; but then Bunter says he could almost have lived at the bun-shop I believe him. I have believed Bunter—sorry to say so!—P. T.)

I had only one and seven of my fiver left wen I maid up my mind; but, haveing maid it up, I went in like a Bunter and a Britton.

Furst I walked into the bun-shopp and had my youseal wack—about fifteen bobs' worth, I supose, but I shan't mentiney two mutch to be presighs on that point.

It wood planely—I may say obwershusly—have been a meer insult to Miss Mugley to ofer her the same present wen the bil was presented. But it kood not be regarded as anything but a kompliment to ofer her the hand and hart of William George de Bunter, whoso aumsisters—

(Deleted! I really think we have had enough of Bunter sisters.—P. T.)

Soe I did. But mischeef had been maid betwene us by the machernashuns of that girl, who, as I have reseeded, was persewbersting with biter jelosy.

(If she wanted to bite Bunter she must have been feeling badly! But I think our truthful genius means "bitter." These great men cannot be bothered to spell properly. —P. T.)

I rekwested a privite intervoo. The rude girl tossed her hed and sniggered. Miss Mugley led the way into a parlor. I had never seen before, and toled me I mite speek owt. I thowt she seamed kwite enkurriging. But I did not know of the maschernashuns of the rude girl, whom I shal ever look upon as an enmemy. I saw her last holterdays, and kut her dead with the skorn of kontempt.

I fel on my nees, and klasped my hands upon my brest.

"Miss Mugley," I sed, in impashuned tones, "be mine!"

And what kond I say farer than that?

But alas! It was noe goe! I am not shore to this verry day wether she progperly understood awl that was being ofered her.

(There is a touch of Bunter; but I should think Miss Mugley must have noticed that. She had seen him eat. There was proof enough for anyone. The stowage capacity required—but let us not be beguiled into tackling problems of practical nature which the unfortunate Bunter is still on his knees, with his hands clasped on his sto—er—beg pardon!—chest.—P. T.)

She looked at me in a verry kweer way, and she sed:

"Kan't you pay yore bill?"

Now how did she gess that? It must have bean the biter jellusy of the rude girl!

And I sed hortbly, but with luv trembelling in my akcents:

"Bil me no bils, adoored wun! I ofer you the hand and hart of a Bunter de Bunter!"

"Oh!" she sed. "Is you single mane? If youle give me yore adress two I shal have the bil sent to yore parrents—that is, unles you settle it at once!"

Such aggony wil jellusy inflikt!

I rows to my fete. Their was an expreshun upon my face which no words of mine kood describe.

(That's an easy one! Words fail to describe the face of Bunter when he feels the expresshun which was no doubt worth a guinea a box.—P. T.)

I think she felt uneesy. Perraps she reelized two late what a luv like mine ment, thow even then she mite have rekawled her injuries expreshun how she did, and everything in the garden wood have been luvly.

She kawled alowd:

"Bill!"

(I don't wonder Bunty thought there was rather too much bill about the fair Miss Mugley!—P. T.)

A grate hulkeing chap abowt seven feet high, moor orr less, apeered, and glared at me in a mosst unfreendly maner. He had a skwint, soe he may have bean Miss Mugley's brother; but he had not a red nose, soe he may have bean her allmost. If soe, she was verry of almost ikredible perfudy towards me.

"Bill," she sed, "this fat kid ofers me his hand and hart!"

Then she gigled sum. But I knoo it was awl the work of the rude girl who had kum bek from the shop.

"Like his dashed cheke!" growide Bill.

"What shal we do with him?" sed Miss Mugley.

Bill konsidered.

"Throw him!" he sed, as if struk with a happy thowt.

"We won't anything big enuff," she ansered, giging sum moor.

"Kik him owt, then!" sed Bill. He apeered to be a fellow of few words, moostly nasty wuns.

He grunted like a pig wen he herd that I sed seventeen bobs' worth, and had only one and seven to spair with. But the mene breests took the one and seven. Then Bill—— But over the subsekwent proceedings a vale had beter be drawn.

Awl the salim I knoe that Miss Mugley lived me in her hart. It was the fait of the rude girl and Miss Mugley's brutle monster Bill that we faled to get engaiged. I have often regreted it. I should like to live at a bun-shopp.

Thus does fait play' triks with the hiest and best of us!

(That must have been Bill—seven feet, more or less—and Miss Mugley, who, despite a pink nose and a squint, was a far more estimable person than our Owl I'm sure. But I fancy Bunty means Bunty!—P. T.)

THE END.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING MS.

A Story of Herlock Sholmes. By Monty Lowther.

I.

SHOLMES and I sat at breakfast in our apartments in Shaker Street. My amazing friend was reading the telegrams he had received, and I was trying to deal with a bun-shopp and her own. Besides, the engaigment woodent hold good in turm-time, wen I was away from home; and I really meant to mark up to Miss Mugley—Araminta, as I ment to kall her in futcher—for any little lappses of afektion towards my rival, Mr. Bunter, being noticed atentive in the holterdays. I kood almost have lived at the bun-shopp.

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"Pshaw!" grimed Pshaw. "What is it?

"I am attending the funeral of one of my patients, Sholmes."

"You do that any day, Jotson."

"That is true, Sholmes. I shall have pleasure in accompanying you."

"That surely goes without saying, Jotson!"

"Yes, Sholmes. But I did not see why I should go without saying, Sholmes."

Sholmes did not appear to see the joke.

"You have heard of St. James' School, Jotson?" he said. "Every one must have heard of that famous scholastic establishment."

"Yes, Sholmes. Are we going there?"

"That you will see presently, Jotson."

We took a taxi to Victoria, and went thence by train to Ryhouse. Here my anticquated growler conveyed us to the school gates, and we were admitted by a porter who seemed to have a peculiar sense of humour, for he sniggered at Sholmes, and laughed outright at me. But that may have been due to the fact that Sholmes, after his playful fashion, had made use of my collar as a pipe-rack.

Inside the fence we saw a thin youth with a large and bumpy forehead. He very politely conducted us to Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form passage in which Sholmes inquired. On the way there he discoursed in a most philosophic strain.

"Come, Jo, fathead!" yelled a youthful voice as Sholmes tapped at the door of the study indicated by our guide.

There were four fellows in the apartment. One of them at once apologised for the term of endearment used in giving permission to enter. But Sholmes waved aside the apology in his usual airy fashion.

"Which of you answers to the name of D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Depends a good deal on what D'Arcy's wanted for," said the smallest of the four. "But it ain't often for any good, so——"

"Weally, Dig! I am D'Arcy, sir, an' I presume you are Mr. Herlock Sholmes?"

"At your service, my young friend."

"Pway take seats, gentlemen! I will wefah bwiefly the twouble which caused me to wite to Mr. Sholmes."

D'Arcy struck me as a very engaging young gentleman, but his ideas as to brevity were scarcely on all fours with mine.

Bodily down to about the fifth of the length at which he told it, his story practically amounted to this.

He, his youthful companions were all in a state which he described by a picturesque phrase new to me as "stonay."

Visitors' day was approaching, which by honour was expected; and D'Arcy—as I gather, without the approval of the other three—had undertaken to regarded as an excellent method of "raisin' the wind"—another of his picturesque phrases.

He wrote a story entitled "Lord Topper's Trousers," and had intended to send it to a well-known London paper which is rumoured to pay high prices for really first-class contributions, as there is no doubt this was—no doubt in the wisest sense—that is.

But this story mysteriously disappeared on the very day on which he had meant to post it. So he wrote to Sholmes.

II.

SHOLMES sat wrinkling his thumbs and twirling his brows, after his usual fashion, when I had finished. Then he said:

"May I ask, D'Arcy," he said at length, "whether your friends entertained a high opinion of your story?"

D'Arcy was not suffered to answer that question.

"It was utter piffle!" said the fresh-faced athletic youth.

"Really, Dig——"

"Stowing the guff, one.

"Weally, Dig——"

"Rot!" said the short one, grinning.

Sholmes sat staring in an absent-minded sort of way at a large big-toe which peeped coyly from his right boot. I fancy he was deducing the fact that the boot needed repair.

"May I see your frying-pan?" he asked, after a few minutes.

"Frying-pan!" Of course, Mr. Sholmes! But wealthy——"

Blake produced the required utensil from the cupboard. By the way, I deduced the fact that his name was Blake from the other three calling him Blake by that name, which shows that I am making progress in the deductive methods of my great chief.

"You read this pan on the same day on which D'Arcy missed his story, my young friends," said Sholmes.

"So we did, sir!" said the short youth.

"Ah! Before using it you wiped it out?"

"That's so, sir. We always do," said Blake. "Lots of things get cooked in that pan, and we don't like the flavours too strong."

"Where do you usually throw any paper used to wipe out the pan?"

"Into the waste-paper-basket, sir."

"You will find your story in the waste-paper basket, D'Arcy," said my wonderful friend, "and it will be greasy. The other part will be dusty, for I observe that the bookshelves have recently been dusted, and that it was done with something other than the article commonly employed for that purpose."

Blake upset the waste-paper-basket, and the correctness of Sholmes' deductions was at once manifest.

I will really one of the most amazing cases in which Herlock Sholmes was ever concerned, for who would have thought that the great mind would descend to the minutiæ of schoolboy methods in such matters as cleaning frying-pan and dusting bookshelves?

But it cannot be said that the fee was in proportion to the genius shown. Sholmes, in fact, refused to accept any fee at all, and we had to travel back under the seat, and pay the ticket collectors at both ends by a method which I am not at liberty to disclose.

THE END.

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 98—NINIAN ELLIOTT.

I HAVE pointed out before, I believe, that Scots readers were wrong in saying that Donald Ogilvy was the only representative of the "land of wild heath and shaggy wood" at Greyfriars. Ninian Elliott was from the other side of the Border, though only just from the other side. His name is a famous one in Border legend—song and story tell of the Elliotts with the Armstrongs and the Fenwicks, the Musgraves, the Forsters, and the rest of those stark, cattle-lifting, hitting moss-troopers whose deeds have been told of by that great genius and greater gentleman, Sir Walter Scott.

They were hard cases, these reivers of the Border and the "Debatable Land"; but at least they were men and strong men. I am afraid Elliott of the Remove was rather a degenerate specimen.

In any case, there was little about him out of which the Scots readers who wanted heroes of their own could get much comfort. He never played any very prominent part in any story until the time came for him to go, and the part he played then was hardly one to be proud of.

Yet I can remember him in quite early stories, described as "from Teviotdale, and singing a song from Wagner on one occasion, and a ballad in the Scots dialect made familiar to us by Robert Burns on another. He never gave the ballad full title—was it "Banks and Braes o' Bonny Doon"?—but he was not a success with the Wagner item. The gentleman with the name that is spelt with a "W" and pronounced with a "V," and which seems through the long "a" to require an "r" that does not appear in the spelling — the correct pronunciation is Varner—was too much for Elliott, whose "F" was like a frog's croak, as someone kindly told him. He said that that was the worst of Wagner—he bounded caught you at the top as well as at the bottom." "I don't know; I dare say he was right. One gathers that Elliott had musical ambitions, at least, and probably musical tastes.

Nothing against him in that, of course. Rather to his credit, perhaps, if there be little else distinctly to his credit, though nothing very black against him.

On the whole, he seemed rescued to be on the wrong side, when he took any side at all. He was inclined to back Bulstrode and Vernon-Smith in their opposition to Wharton. But his backing never counted for much, any more than did that of Trelawney or Tregellis-West, two other malcontents of the Remove whose inclination was similar.

There is something very misleading in the dictum that all men are born free and equal. The equality is deceptive, if existent at all. Men should have equal rights—admitted. But they have not equal brains or brawn or willpower. And the boy—who is said to be father of the man, and who certainly comes into this argument, as every man must be more or less of a boy at some stage of his life—is like unto the man in this. Elliott and Trevor and Trelawney and Stott and the rest of the half-and-halfers, so to call them, are the equals neither of the fellows who are keen on the right side nor of those who have the will and the strength to lead on the wrong. I don't mean that it is worse for them—or for others—that they are weak in wrongdoing; but the fact that they are just as weak in the other way shows them as being of no very special account.

When Elliott does appear prominently in a story Bolsover major shows up much more

than Elliott, and when one has finished reading the story it is Bolsover's part in it that stays most in one's mind. But that is quite in keeping with what has already been noted, Percy Bolsover is much more decided character than Ninian Elliott—more decided for good as well as for evil. Bolsover's general trend is in the wrong direction; and even in his better moments he is apt to be rough and ungracious. But whatever he means he means it hard.

At Greyfriars Elliott had never done much good for himself, and when an uncle who was going to Canada offered to take him along he caught at the chance. Probably he will not achieve much in Canada; but there he will be thrown more on his own resources, and that may develop manhood in him.

There was a complication in the way of the Canadian project, however, and Harry Wharton found out about it. He had it straight from Elliott, indeed.

Elliott had been playing the fool. He had got mixed up more or less with the shady doings of Skinner & Co.—not so much from inherent viciousness as from a silly habit of drifting. He owed a rascally bookie and sharper and moneylender named Smiles a debt of several pounds—how many it was hard to say, for Mr. Smiles had methods of computation almost impossible for anyone else to follow.

If Elliott could have cleared out leaving that debt unpaid, he would have done so. And in that event Mr. Smiles would have deserved no sympathy, though Elliott would have deserved blame. But there was no chance of doing that. Mr. Smiles knew too much. Uncle George was to hear all about it unless his nephew cashed up, and if Uncle George heard the Canadian project would be off, once for all.

Wharton did his best to help, and made a considerable sacrifice for a fellow who was no chum of his. He failed, through no fault of his own. And Elliott's letter of gratitude was fulsome. The curtishness of him showed up then. A fellow with any generosity would have seen that Wharton had done all he could, and even if matters had been made worse would not have reproached him.

Elliott and Bolsover major shared a Study No. 12. They became quite chummy, and they had tolerated one another. About this time, however, Elliott's strained nerves made him intolerable to a fellow of Bolsover's hectoring, imperious stamp, and there was a fight between them—a fight in which Elliott never had the ghost of a chance.

Then Bolsover felt rather sorry for what he had done. He is taken with these spasms of remorse at times. Under all the bluster of Percy Bolsover there is a certain rough sense of fair play. He learned what was really the matter with Elliott, and he undertook to deal with Mr. Smiles. And he did it! The methods he used were emphatically his own, and not to be recommended for imitation. But not many boys of his age could imitate them. Their success was in a measure his own work.

Elliott was very grateful to Bolsover. He showed some gratitude for Wharton's attempt to arrange matters for him before he left—but that is not the sort of person who could ever see how much more Wharton tried to do than Bolsover did. Wharton took on a job he hated out of pure good nature; Bolsover did what on the whole he rather liked doing, partly out of good nature, but rather more to set himself right with himself.

Greyfriars lost very little when Elliott went. But we will hope that in time to come he may make a good Canadian citizen.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"SACKED!"

By Frank Richards.

My readers will have no difficulty in guessing who it is that gets sacked. I say sure. This week's story shows Spring well on the way to the sack—and to the order of the boot.

But the certainty of the fate in store for Herbert Spring is not at all likely to lessen interest in the story. Spring has a brother to be accounted for—a very different sort of fellow—and one wants to know what becomes of him.

In these two stories more of the action than usual takes place at Highcliffe, and this week the Famous Five are not much in the picture. But I do not think many will grumble on that account. We want a change now and then, and Harry Wharton & Co. are not likely to suffer from neglect. They play more prominent parts in next week's yarn.

READERS' LEITER.

A letter lately received from T. F. A. (he will recognise himself by the initials) may be referred to here. T. F. A. says that for some time past we have heard of no one but the juniors, and that a change would be welcome. Since he wrote we have had "Walker of the Sixth," which was a senior yarn. But it would not do to be always running over to the Sixth to look all the limelight. The interest of the large majority of readers is naturally with the Removites.

A Handsworth reader writes me one of the very nicest letters I have had for some time. He is dealing with Libraries, though perhaps it should rather be dealt with in the "Gem," for, though equally keen on the two papers, he confesses to loving Gussy beyond anyone else in the stories. He wants to know whether anyone else feels like that. Well, I rather think I do. We could not do without Gussy, the one and only, the miracle of tact and judgment. But we could not do without Billy Bunter, whose fat joy in mere existence, whose appetite, whose unique combination of qualities, or rather another very strong character, or genial Bob Cherry—and, of course, Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Independent.

"Since the commencement of the war," says my Handsworth reader, "I think you have carried on magnificently. Even men in spite of the reduction of size and the increase in price, your papers are more than worth the money. It really amazes me to think of what a penny would buy before 1914! Never again, I imagine, will so little buy so much—at least, not for many, many years to come."

NOTICES.

Correspondence Wanted By.

K. M., 112, Commercial Road, Bournemouth, wishes to correspond with boys in the Colonies interested in travelling or inclined to be literary.

Harold Miss K. Megson, 23, Oak Building, Walmarsham Street, Johannesburg, South Africa, communicate with an old chum, W. T. B., of Staines, Middlesex. He thoughts letters sent have been lost at sea.

URGENT.

Will the brother of the late Harold Baker, or his family, communicate his address to Gordon, 26, Clifton Road, Peckham, London, S.E. 15. Harold Pearce was Baker's working chum, and wants to express his sympathy with parents.

YOUR EDITOR.

30-11-18