COMPLETE "SOME PERSON UNKNOWN....." SCHOOL, MYSTERY, AND ADVENTURE STORY WITHIN!

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The MAGNET

EVERY SATURDAY. 2D

"SOME PERSON UNKNOWN..."

AT GRIPS WITH A CRACKSMAN!

(A tense moment in the splendid long complete story of Greyfriars in this issue.)

Ready for a friendly chat? Then——

Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

JUST to commence, and to put us all in a happy mood, let's have a Greyfriars limerick! This one comes from Donald Bishop, of 20, Eglington Hill, Plumstead, S.E.18, and, of course, he gets a leather pocket wallet for it:

Poor Bunter was feasting one night,
When Wharton & Co. loomed in sight.
He was caught unawares
Stealing chocolate eclairs.
And soon very sad was his plight!

The next item on the agenda—as they say at public meetings—is an explanation by "Mr. X." R. Briggs, one of our Cambridge readers, went to a concert a little while ago, and found himself puzzled by a conjurer. He wants "Mr. X." to tell him how the trick of

THE CHINESE RINGS

is done. The conjurer produces some rings which look perfectly sound. The rings are examined, and no flaws are seen in them. But the conjurer immediately begins to link them together, pass them through each other, and make various devices with them, which baffle the people who have examined the rings and found them to be sound. This is how it's done:

The conjurer may have as many rings as he likes, but the trick is based on a set of eight rings. Of these only two are perfectly sound, and these are picked up first, and the audience are allowed to examine them. Now, the conjurer has two similar rings which are, however, already linked together, and he substitutes these rings for the sound ones. Practice allows him to do this without being noticed by his audience—for you must remember that practice is essential to success in every conjuring trick.

When these two linked rings have been examined, he picks up another ring, and links that on to them. This third ring is

A SPLIT RING

—and it is the only split ring in the set. But the conjurer has also three rings which are linked together, and he substitutes these three linked rings for the others, and hands them round. They are found to be perfect, and while they are being examined, he links another single ring with the split ring, making a chain which is composed as follows: one single ring one split ring, and two linked rings.

With a little ingenuity he can make all sorts of chains, and he generally finishes up by making a cross of the linked rings in the following manner: First a long chain is made by linking the split ring between the set of two and the set of three rings, then the two single rings are linked on at the sides of the split ring. When he breaks the links, he merely slips them all off the split ring, and they fall back into their original arrangements.

The set of rings consists of one split ring, two single rings, one chain of two linked rings, and one chain of three linked rings. They may be purchased from any good dealer in conjuring apparatus, and they may be had in pocket size.

NOW we'll have another chuckle. This time it's a yarn which earns a pocket knife for Joe Loewenthal, of 3, Ranworth Road, Town Road, Lower Edmonton, N.9.

"Meat-pies as mother makes them!" boasted the notice on the window of the eating-house; and most of the customers agreed with it. One brave man, however, tackled the proprietor and told him that he regarded the pies as an insult to the great British public. Moreover, he demanded his money back.

"'Ow dare you talk that way of my pies!" said the angry proprietor. "Why, I was making pies before you were born."

"That may be so," the critic replied coldly, "but what I want to know is, why try to sell them now?"

A LOYAL READER

of Chiswick sends me an enthusiastic letter in which he asks me if I can reintroduce the "Greyfriars Herald" into our pages. I am afraid, however, that to do so would mean to disappoint many readers who look forward each week to the laughable yarns which Dicky Nugent contributes. I am sorry that "Loyal Reader" misses Dick Penfold's ripping little poems, but I am sure he will enjoy the series of "Greyfriars Celebrities" in their place. He also makes some excellent suggestions, which I assure him I will bear in mind. Thanks for your letter, "Loyal Reader," and don't hesitate to write to me whenever you feel inclined!

SEND ALONG YOUR JOKE OR YOUR GREYFRIARS LIMERICK—OR BOTH—AND WIN OUR USEFUL PRIZES OF LEATHER POCKET WALLETS AND SHEFFIELD STEEL PENKNIVES. ALL EFFORTS TO BE SENT TO c.o "MAGNET," 5, CARMELITE STREET, LONDON, E.C.4 (COMP.).

Here are some more queries to be answered by

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES!

D. Stevenson (Blackhill): Do I really believe the country is going to the dogs? My dear chap, even in the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" the writers made the same complaint. And greyhound racing wasn't invented in those days!

A. Waugh (Dublin): What has become of the German professor's experiment of firing a rocket to the moon? I believe it has been postponed until next month. At first it was rumoured that both the professor and his rocket had been blown into the middle of next month!

"M. and C." (Glasgow): I am unable to trace the coin you mention, but the curator of your city museum will be able to tell you whether it is of any value.

"Regular Reader" (No Address): "Snow-blindness" is caused by the glare of sunshine on the snow. "Night-blindness," or "Moon-blindness" is supposed to be caused by the rays of the moon falling on the eyes of a sleeper.

S. Bell (Brighton): Does Wigan Pier actually exist? It exists—in the imagination of music-hall comedians, who picture it as festooned with kippers and gorgonzola cheeses, while it is patrolled by a never-ending succession of seaside landladies.

Excuse me a moment! The incorrigible Dicky Nugent has just interrupted me. He wanted to know if I could lend him five bob on account. "On account of what?" I asked him. "On account of me being hard-up," was his cool reply.

Needless to say, Master Dicky has gone out of my den as hard-up as he entered it. So now I can get on with the next query, which comes from a reader who wants to know something about

HOUSE REMOVALS EXTRAORDINARY!

Is it a fact, he wants to know, that sometimes houses are removed bodily from one place to another? It is. They make a speciality of it over in America. They raise buildings from their foundations by means of screw jacks, place them on great wooden blocks, and then on huge motor-trucks to be dragged away. A foundation, of course, is built to receive the house on its new site.

Because of traffic difficulties, houses are generally removed at night, and sometimes telegraph poles and trees have to be removed to allow the house to pass.

Some time ago a whole seven-storied brick building in Los Angeles was raised on to huge rollers and moved a few yards a day. It was moved a distance of just over half a mile, and the job took ten weeks to complete.

I'M getting to the end of my space again, so here's next week's programme. The long, complete Greyfriars yarn is entitled:

"BILLY BUNTER'S BLUFF!"
By Frank Richards.

Like all his yarns, you'll find it a top-notcher, and when I tell you that all your old friends play a prominent part in it, you'll know that it will be full of good things. So don't miss it, whatever you do!

Next comes the final instalment of our sporting serial—

"PETER FRAZER—IRONMASTER!"

and a rattling fine one it is, too, chums. I'll have something to say about our new serial in next week's MAGNET. It's a yarn that's going to prove the biggest hit ever!

Dicky Nugent's rib-tickler is entitled:

"DIDDLED BY THE FOURTH!"

and you'll find it crowded with chuckles.

And then, to complete the programme, there's another "Greyfriars Celebrities" poem, an article on "footer," and my usual chat. Can you tell me of a boy's paper that gives you better value for money? If you can, I'd like to hear of it. If you can't—well, tell your chums about the MAGNET. They'll thank you!

Cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

Thrills and Exciting Situations? You'll not be disappointed here, boys!

The Most Remarkable School Yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars ever told.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bunter, of Course!

"HE, he, he!"

Mr. Richard Steele, the new master of the Remove at Greyfriars, glanced round from the blackboard.

While Mr. Steele's back was turned nearly every face in the Remove had worn a grin.

As his quick, keen glance swept the Form, however, sudden gravity descended on the Lower Fourth.

Every fellow looked as solemn as he could.

Billy Bunter, whose sudden involuntary cachinnation had caused Steele to look round, ceased abruptly to cachinnate, like an alarm clock suddenly shut off.

Two or three fellows glared at Bunter.

It was like that ass, Bunter, to give the show away. In Bunter's fat hand was the paper that had been passing up and down the rows of desks, while Steele's attention was elsewhere. That paper, and what was written thereon, had caused a grin to dawn on the face of every fellow who received it, and passed it on, in turn, to the next. It had caused Billy Bunter, unfortunately, to break into audible merriment.

Steele's look, as he gazed at the Form, did not encourage merriment.

He was a good-tempered and patient master, and there were many fellows in the Remove who liked him, in spite of the strange stories that were whispered about him in the studies and the passages. But he was not a master to be trifled with.

Fellows who had hoped for an easy time when Steele came in the place of Mr. Quelch had not found their hopes realised. Some fellows, indeed, almost wished that Mr. Quelch had not prolonged his vacation so far into the new term. Some were quite fed up with Steele, especially the Bounder, and Skinner, and their set.

Steele was frowning now.

All through third lesson he had been aware that something was going on in the Form, and he guessed—correctly—that the Bounder was at the bottom of it. Not a day passed in the Remove Form-room without Herbert Vernon-Smith giving all the trouble he could, and many of the others were wont to follow the Bounder's lead, though not to the same reckless lengths.

At the present moment, Smithy's face was quite expressionless. He did not want, just then, to meet the Form master's eye.

That eye—a very keen, grey eye—rested on the Bounder, but read nothing in his impassive face. Then it fixed on Bunter.

Once more the Courtfield cracksman is on the prowl. Once more the police have failed. But where the "cops" have failed it looks as though the Bounder of Greyfriars might succeed!

Bunter blinked uneasily behind his big spectacles.

Under his desk his fat hand held the paper that had been passed to him, and he fervently hoped that Richard Steele would not guess that he had it.

Probably his hope was not so fervent as the Bounder's, however, for that paper was written in Smithy's hand. Smithy's face expressed nothing; but inwardly he was feeling far from comfortable.

"Bunter!" said Mr. Steele.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"You laughed, I think?"

"Oh! No, sir! I—I—I was—was coughing!" gasped Bunter.

"Coughing?" repeated Steele.

"Yes, sir. It—it sometimes takes me like that," stammered Bunter. "There—there's rather a draught in this Form-room, sir, and it makes me kik-kik-kik-cough."

"Is it quite impossible for you to tell the truth, Bunter?" inquired Mr. Steele.

"Yes, sir—I mean no, sir! I—I always tell the truth, sir," stammered Bunter. "Mr. Quelch used to say that I was the most truthful fellow in the Form, sir. He—he admired me for it."

This statement was almost too much for the Remove. In spite of Richard Steele's frowning brow, there was a snigger in the class.

Even Steele smiled faintly, though he was evidently annoyed.

"Kindly tell me why you laughed, Bunter!" he said.

"Oh, really, sir——"

"And at once!" rapped out Steele.

"The—the fact is, sir, I—I—I——"

"Stand out before the Form, Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

Steele's glance swept over a silent Remove.

"This Form-room," he said, quietly, "is not the place for jesting. We are here to work."

"What rot!" murmured Skinner.

"Did you speak, Skinner?"

Richard Steele's ears seemed as sharp as his eyes.

"Oh! I—I only said to Snoop that—that you are quite right, sir!" stuttered Skinner, in alarm.

"I doubt whether your remark was really to that effect, Skinner. In any case, you will take fifty lines for talking in class."

Whereat Harold Skinner looked, for a moment or two, as if he were understudying a demon in a pantomime.

"Bunter! Step out! If the Form cannot be serious in lesson-time I must do my best to make it so," said Mr. Steele. "I am waiting for you, Bunter!"

"Oh dear! It wasn't me, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"What was not you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Come here, Bunter!"

"I—I mean, sir," said Bunter, still standing in his place, and obviously reluctant to come any nearer to Mr. Steele. "I mean, I never wrote that limerick, sir."

"What limerick?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I mean, I can't write limericks, sir. Never wrote one in my life."

"Shut up, you ass!" breathed Bob Cherry.

"Take fifty lines, Cherry!"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Now, Bunter——"

"I—I say, sir, I hope you ain't going to pick on me, just because I laughed—I mean, coughed," said Bunter, in dismay. "'Tain't my fault that you've been found out, sir——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, all the fellows think you're a burglar, sir, but I don't; I'm too respectful. I said to Wharton, only this morning, sir, that it was all rot, and that if you were wanted by the police they'd come for you. Didn't I, Harry, old chap?"

Wharton did not respond to that appeal.

Bunter's remark had not been quite as he reported it. What he had really said was that he wondered why the police didn't come for Mr. Steele, who was well known—to Bunter, at least—to be no other than that mysterious night-prowler, the Courtfield cracksman.

Mr. Steele's face was quite a study.

He knew, of course, the talk that was going on in his Form in connection with this strange story that was told about him, and that was already spreading outside the Remove to other Forms.

But certainly he could not have expected to be addressed on the subject like this.

"You—you stupid and absurd boy, Bunter!" he exclaimed at last. "I must make allowances for your stupidity, or I should punish you severely for your impertinence."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I didn't mean——"

"Come here, immediately!"

Billy Bunter groaned, and rolled out before the class. There was no help for it; and what he had said seemed to have made matters worse, instead of better, though the Owl of the Remove did not know why.

He rolled out with the paper tightly clutched in his fat hand, hoping that Steele would not notice it.

It was a delusive hope. There were very few things that Richard Steele did not notice.

"What is in your hand, Bunter?" asked the new master.

"Mum-mum-my hand, sir?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes."

"N-n-nothing, sir."

"Open your hand at once! I am quite aware," added Mr. Steele, "that a paper has been passed round the Form, and I desire to see it. No doubt it is in your hand at the present moment."

Bunter blinked at him. He wondered if the beast had eyes in the back of his head. It seemed sometimes as if Richard Steele had.

"There—there's nothing in my hand, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"Open your hand at once!"

Bunter held up his right hand, open. His left was still tightly clutched on the offending paper.

"You are wasting my time, Bunter," said Mr. Steele sternly. "Open your other hand at once!"

"Oh, lor'!"

Bunter opened his other hand. A crumpled paper was revealed. Richard Steele took it and smoothed it out, and looked at it. And a dark frown gathered on his brow as he read, in the well-known handwriting of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the following limerick:

There's a master you know, tho' I feel
That his name I ought not to reveal,
But guess it you may
When I ask you to say
Do you know who taught Richard to Steele?

THE SECOND CHAPTER

The Fall of the Chopper!

THERE was a silence in the Remove-room.

Nobody was feeling inclined to laugh now.

Harry Wharton and some other fellows looked uncomfortable. Some of the juniors looked scared. The Bounder's face hardened, doggedly. He knew that his "fist" would be recognised on that precious paper, and he knew that he had gone too far for safety in this latest jest. The pun on the Form master's name had made the Removites grin; but it was certainly not likely to produce that effect on the owner of the name.

Mr. Steele read the limerick through, and read it through again. His brow was frowning, and there was an unusual flush in his cheeks.

If Mr. Steele was, as many of the fellows suspected or believed, no other than the Courtfield cracksman, he was unusually sensitive for a man in that peculiar line of business. The imputation of stealing should hardly have troubled a person who cracked cribs; but it was clear that it hit Mr. Steele rather hard.

The look on his face made even the Bounder feel a tremor.

His square jaw seemed to become squarer, and his lips shut hard. The glint in his eyes was enough to make the perpetrator of that limerick feel very uneasy.

It seemed to the Remove that that dead silence had lasted whole minutes, when Mr. Steele spoke at last.

"Bunter!"

"It wasn't me, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I never——"

"You may go back to your place."

"Oh—oh, thank you, sir!" stuttered Bunter; and he fairly jumped back to his place.

"Vernon-Smith, step out here!"

The Bounder rose and came out with a swagger. He was "for it" now, and nothing remained for him but to carry it off with a high head and a brazen face.

"You wrote this, I think, Vernon-Smith?" said Mr. Steele.

No answer.

"I am asking you, Vernon-Smith, whether you wrote this insulting rhyme?" said Mr. Steele, raising his clear voice a little.

"Am I bound to incriminate myself, sir?" asked the Bounder, with a coolness that won him many admiring glances from the Remove—as it was intended to do.

The Bounder loved the limelight. Half Smithy's troubles with his Form master were due, at bottom, to a desire to "show off" before an admiring Form.

"You do not choose to answer my question, Vernon-Smith?"

"A prisoner in the dock isn't bound to give evidence against himself, sir," said Smithy. "I'm sure you know that, sir."

He laid stress on the "you," and the Remove fellows exchanged glances of wonder at Smithy's nerve. The Bounder could hardly have said more plainly that he believed that Richard Steele had stood in the prisoner's dock in his time.

Mr. Steele was seen to bite his lip. The Bounder, of course, was "for it"; but he was the fellow to bite to the last, rather like a rat in a corner.

Smithy had a bitter tongue when he let it go. And as he was booked anyhow, he considered that he might as well let it go now. Steele could lick him; but he was not going to be left in any doubt as to what Herbert Vernon-Smith thought of him.

"I think, sir, you'll remember that a prisoner is generally warned that anything he may say will be used in evidence against him," said the Bounder, with cool effrontery.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"You may remember something of the sort, in your own experience, sir," said Smithy.

The Remove gasped.

"Smithy's asking for it," murmured Frank Nugent.

"Begging for it," murmured Johnny Bull.

"The begfulness is terrific," breathed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "And the esteemed Smithy will get it where the absurd chicken got the ridiculous chopper, which is neckfully."

A glance from Steele stilled the whispering in the Remove. Then his eyes were fixed on Vernon-Smith again.

"You deny having written this, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir."

"You admit it?"

"No, sir."

"I warn you, Vernon-Smith, that you are trying my patience very hard," said Mr. Steele.

The Bounder ventured on a shrug of the shoulders.

"I shall ascertain the facts of the matter beyond doubt," said Mr. Steele. "I think the writing is yours, Vernon-Smith. Remain where you are."

Leaving the Bounder standing in the middle of the Form-room, Steele went to Smithy's desk, sorted through it for a specimen of the junior's hand, found it, and compared it with the limerick on the crumpled paper.

The Form watched him in breathless silence.

In less than a minute he returned to Vernon-Smith. The flush had died out of his face, and it was impassive as usual; but set in harder lines than was customary.

"This insulting rhyme is your work, Vernon-Smith. This is not the first time, by many, that you have been guilty of insolence in this Form-room. You have ventured, many times, to allude to the absurd story that has been spread about me in the school. I have been patient, I think, and very forbearing. But you have gone too far now."

The Bounder breathed hard.

"I know you're going to lick me," he said hardily. "I'm not asking to be let off."

"I am not going to lick you, as you express it," said Mr. Steele quietly. "I have punished you several times, Vernon-Smith, and it has had no effect on your insolence."

The Bounder started a little.

"The matter passes now out of my hands," said Mr. Steele. "I shall send you to your headmaster to be dealt with."

There was a deep-drawn breath in the Remove, and the Bounder, hardy as he was, paled a little. Sending him to the Head was a drastic step he had not looked for. He could imagine the feelings with which Dr. Locke would read that precious limerick, which in effect accused the new master of the Remove of being a thief. Whether the Head knew, or did not know, what was said of Mr. Steele in his Form, it was certain that his trust in Steele was absolute, and that the insult to the Form master would move his deepest wrath.

A Head's flogging, at least, would be the Bounder's reward; and that might not be all. The unpleasant thought of the "sack" came into the Bounder's mind.

Mr. Steele stepped to his desk, wrote a short note, placed it in an envelope along with the limerick, and sealed it.

"I command you to open your hand, Bunter!" said Mr. Steele angrily. The fat junior had no other alternative than to bring the insulting limerick to light.

He handed it to the Bounder, who received it with an extremely unwilling hand.

"You will take that to Dr. Locke, in the Sixth Form room, Vernon-Smith," said the Remove master.

The Bounder did not stir. His face had lost, for the moment, its hard effrontery, and had a troubled look.

Steele's stern face relaxed a little.

"If you are sorry, Vernon-Smith, if you will give me your apology, and your word that there shall be no more of this insolence, I will punish you myself, instead of sending you to Dr. Locke," he said.

It was a chance for the Bounder.

But Smithy was not the man to take it. He was not the man to eat humble-pie before the Form. He would have bitten off his tongue sooner than have uttered the apology.

He stood sullenly silent.

Mr. Steele waited a few moments, and as the Bounder did not speak, he made a gesture to the door.

"Take that note to your headmaster, Vernon-Smith!"

Slowly, very slowly, the Bounder went to the door. All eyes were upon him, and the juniors wondered whether he was going to a flogging or the "sack." At least the first—possibly the second—possibly both! But the Bounder, though there was a deep qualm in his breast, carried the matter off with his usual coolness. At the door of the Form-room he looked back.

"Mr. Steele!"

"You may go, Vernon-Smith!"

"If I go to Dr. Locke——"

"You are going to him, Vernon-Smith!"

"Very well. I shall tell him all I know, sir!" said the Bounder deliberately. "Will that suit you, sir?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Johnny Bull. "Jevver hear a man keep on begging for it like this? Like a bow-wow begging for biscuits."

Steele's face flushed. For a moment the juniors thought that he would stride at the Bounder, and deal with him drastically. Instead of which, he raised his hand and pointed to the doorway.

"Leave this Form-room at once, Vernon-Smith!" he said quietly.

The Bounder walked out. As a last defiance, a sort of Parthian shot, he slammed the door behind him.

Richard Steele seemed unconscious of the slam, and of the breathless excitement in the Form. Third lesson was resumed without the Bounder. But the Remove gave little attention to third lesson. The thought of every fellow in the Form-room followed the Bounder on his way to the Head.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Neck or Nothing!

"THAT'S torn it!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith made that remark to himself, as he went slowly down the Form-room corridor.

He went very slowly. He was in no hurry to get to the Sixth Form room and deliver Steele's note to the headmaster. In fact, the longer that painful moment was put off, the better the Bounder was likely to be pleased.

Not that there was much use in delay. Sooner or later he had to face the music.

The Bounder was no fool. Often his recklessness carried him past the limit of prudence, and generally he had great skill, and wonderful luck, in extricating himself from the trouble that accrued. There were fellows in the Form who wondered why Smithy never had been "bunked" from Greyfriars; but, though he had been near it more than once, he had never gone over the verge.

But he was aware that his many offences had a cumulative effect, and that, unless he was very careful, the chopper might come down suddenly and finally. And instead of being very careful, he had allowed his feud with Steele to carry him to more reckless lengths than ever.

Certainly, he had not intended that limerick to meet Steele's eye. But he had taken the risk of it, and the risk had materialised.

A flogging was severe enough, but the hardy Bounder was not afraid of a flogging. But the discomforting thought was in his mind that the Head might regard this last offence as putting the lid on, so to speak, and might decide to relieve the Lower Fourth of its most troublesome member, and Greyfriars of a fellow who was never likely to bring credit on the school.

The Bounder stopped at a window, and stood staring out into the quad, with a moody brow.

If he was bunked——

It was all very well to take the view that the story told about Richard Steele was true—that he was a wolf in sheep's clothing; that he led one life, openly, as a schoolmaster, and another life, secretly, as a thieving night-prowler. All sorts of circumstances supported that belief—circumstances

that Steele might find it hard to explain.

But the trouble was that Steele was not called on to explain, that whatever the Bounder chose to say to Dr. Locke, the Head would scout the idea of calling on the Form master to explain.

The concrete fact was that a junior in the Lower Fourth had practically called his Form master a thief, and if that was not enough to be expelled on, there never would be enough.

"The rotter!" muttered Smithy, between his teeth. "He'll be glad to get shut of me—shut of a fellow who knows him through and through, knows him inside out. If I'm sacked, it will scare the rest—and he's counting on it. And all the time he's a thief—a thief—a dirty thief, who skulks in this school by day, and goes out secretly to steal at night. If the Head knew—— But he won't know, and he wouldn't listen to a word of it! He won't know till the police come for that scoundrel—and that will be too late for me."

He bit his lip.

"I've played into his hands—given him his chance! Oh, what a fathead I've been!"

The Bounder realised that clearly. If his judgment of Steele and his motives was correct, nothing could be more certain than that he had played into the man's hands. But that reflection came too late to be of any service to Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Still he did not approach the Sixth Form room.

He was thinking—thinking hard!

Steele was the cracksman who had robbed a dozen places in the neighbourhood of the school—he was certain of that! He had fooled the Head somehow—that was not surprising to Smithy, who had fooled the Head himself in his time.

It was stranger that he had fooled Inspector Grimes at Courtfield, the official who had the case of the series of burglaries in hand. It seemed that he must have done so, for Mr. Grimes had heard Wharton's story of having seen Steele late at night at Hogben Grange the night of the burglary there; and it was Steele himself who had sent Wharton to see Mr. Grimes.

And Inspector Grimes had told the captain of the Remove that he knew Steele, knew him well, and answered for him—which had settled the matter for Wharton, if not for the Bounder.

After all, the man was a cunning rascal, or he could not have obtained a post at Greyfriars, and such a cunning rascal could have pulled the wool over the eyes of a rural police-inspector. So the Bounder considered, at least—in fact, he had to consider so, unless he was to give up his belief that Steele was a secret crook.

And the man was guilty—guilty! the Bounder told himself passionately. He was going to get rid, if he could, of a fellow who knew him for what he was. And he was guilty! If the police knew what the Bounder knew, they would not leave him long at Greyfriars.

More than once it had come into the Bounder's mind to get in touch with the police on this matter, but he had never ventured that length so far.

Now he was thinking of it, feeling that his desperate situation required desperate measures.

It was no use calling in Grimes, from Courtfield. Grimes was an old fool, who was taken in by this rogue. What he had said to Harry Wharton was a proof of that, to Smithy's mind. Courtfield police station was the nearest to Greyfriars; but Grimes, after all, was not the only pebble on the beach.

"A man from Lantham!" muttered the Bounder.

One of the local burglaries had taken place near Lantham. Lantham Chase had been robbed a week or two ago, and no doubt was entertained that it was the work of that mysterious marauder, the Courtfield cracksman. Vernon-Smith had not the slightest doubt that some of the loot from Lantham Chase was hidden at that very moment in Richard Steele's room at Greyfriars.

Plenty of evidence—heaps of it—if the police would only act! If the man was a cracksman, he must have cracksman's tools, and where could he keep them, except in his study or his bed-room in the house?

If they were found there——

Grimes, so far as the Bounder could see, had the cracksman fairly under his finger, and passed him by. A police-inspector from Lantham might have more sense!

It was a desperate expedient, and the Bounder knew it. Unless a discovery was made justifying his action, it was all up with him at Greyfriars. But Vernon-Smith was desperate now. He dared not take that note to the headmaster, while Richard Steele was still a trusted Form master in the school. It was neck or nothing!

And time was passing! He had already been long absent from the Form-room, and if Steele came out to see what had become of him——

The Bounder made up his mind.

With a steady hand, he tore Steele's note, and the limerick along with it, into tiny pieces, and threw the pieces out of the window.

That settled it! The die was cast now.

He made a step in the direction of Masters' passage, with the thought in his mind of using a master's telephone, and calling up Lantham Police Station. But he paused. He might be interrupted at any moment. Steele was the man to become suspicious, if he had a guilty secret to keep. The Bounder did not want to be walked into his headmaster's presence, with Richard Steele's grip on his shoulder.

Quietly he opened the window and dropped out.

There was a telephone in Gosling's lodge, and if the school porter was not there he could use it. If Gosling was there he could make some excuse. Gosling was always open to tipping.

The Bounder, his heart beating fast, left the House at a run. The quadrangle was deserted. All the fellows were in class, though it would not be long before they came swarming out at the end of third school.

Smithy reached Gosling's lodge breathlessly.

In the doorway stood the portly figure of William Gosling, staring at the junior as he came up with a disapproving eye.

Disapproval intensified in Gosling's crusty face as the breathless Bounder came to a halt.

"Wot you doing out of class, Mr. Vernon-Smith?" asked Gosling suspiciously.

"I want to phone."

"My eye!" said Gosling.

"I want you to let me use your phone, Gosling. Only for a minute. It's important."

"My eye!" repeated Gosling.

The Bounder would have pushed past him into the lodge. But the stubby, portly figure of the porter stood like a rock in his way.

"You ain't using that there phone, Mr. Vernon-Smith," said Gosling. "Not if I knows it, you ain't! Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"Look here, Gosling——"

"Wot I says," repeated Gosling stolidly, "is this 'ere. You ain't using that phone, Mr. Vernon-Smith. You get back to the 'Ouse! You're out of your Form-room without leave, you are; and you're playing truant, and well you know it. You go back at once!"

A ten-shilling note appeared in the Bounder's hand.

Gosling eyed it longingly—indeed, lovingly. Gosling liked ten-shilling notes, exactly half as much as he liked pound notes. In other circumstances, Gosling's horny hand would have closed on that slip of paper, and he would have turned a blind eye to Smithy's proceedings in his lodge.

But in the present circumstances he dared not. Obviously, Smithy was out of his Form-room unpermitted, and up to some mischief. Gosling's place was worth more than ten shillings.

He shook his head, slowly unwillingly, but he shook it.

"There ain't nothing doing, Mr. Vernon-Smith! It's as much as my place is worth! You go back to your Form-room."

"I'm going to telephone," said the Bounder savagely. "Don't be an old fool, Gosling. Take this note, and shut up!"

"I'll report yer," said Gosling.

"Look here, you thundering old donkey!" exclaimed the Bounder, his passionate temper breaking out at this unexpected check.

Gosling's countenance became purple.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he ejaculated, "you're a young rip, Mr. Vernon-Smith—that's what you are, a young rip! I'm going to take you back to Mr. Steele!"

And Gosling stepped out and extended a hand towards the junior's shoulder. Vernon-Smith jumped back.

"Hands off, you old fool!" he shouted.

"Old fool, am I?" exclaimed Gosling, greatly incensed. "Nice langwidge to a man hold enough to be your father."

"Grandfather, you mean, or great-grandfather!" jeered the Bounder. "Take your paw away, you silly old fossil!"

Instead of taking his paw away, Gosling grasped the Bounder's shoulder with the said paw.

"Now you come alonger me!" he said wrathfully.

Crash!

"Oh, jiminy!" spluttered Gosling, as the Bounder, lowering his head, butted him forcibly on the third button of his well-filled waistcoat.

Gosling sat down.

"Oooooch!" he gasped. "Oh, my eye! Ow! I'm winded! Ooooch! You young raskil! Oooch! You wait till I get on my pins!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not wait for Gosling to get on his pins. Leaving the ancient gentleman spluttering and gasping, the Bounder turned and ran. But he did not go in the direction of the House. Gosling was still spluttering in the doorway of his lodge, when the Bounder arrived breathless at the garage, and almost ran into Barnes, the Head's chauffeur, who was polishing the Head's car in the yard.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Surprise for Barnes!

BARNES stared round in surprise at the Removite.

Surprised as he was, he touched his hat respectfully to Vernon-Smith. The Head's chauffeur was a young man of unexceptionable manners.

Vernon-Smith panted.

"You've got a phone on the garage, Barnes?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to use it."

GREYFRIARS CELEBRITIES.

Once again our special rhymester takes up his pen to give you a character in verse of a Greyfriars Removite with whom you are familiar—

PETER TODD.

IF one day you should chance to see
A legal star uprising,
Where none can shine as bright as he,
Then think it not surprising
That he who wears a gown and wig
With dignity replete, a
Pal of ours you're bound to twig—
That's Todd, who's known as Peter.

To be a lawyer like his dad
Is Peter Todd's ambition,
And friend and foe will both be glad
To see it reach fruition.
Through massive tomes the lad will wade,
Absorbing matter legal;
If schoolmates need a lawyer's aid,
He's keen as any eagle.

But don't you get the wrong idea,
And think the lad's pedantic:
Ambition hasn't made him "queer,"
With eyes all red and frantic.
He'll show you on the footer pitch,
Or on the field at cricket,
He's quite aware of which is which—
The goalposts and the wicket!

Of "Number Seven" he's the brains,
The backbone, and the leader;
In everything he takes the reins—
He's sure a good "high-speeder."
Alonzo Todd, his cousin, who
Is simple, soft, and silly,
Shares the room with Dutton, too,
And Bunter—bouncing Billy!

Our Peter is a pleasant lad,
Who even suffers Bunter,
And says there's nothing really bad
About that fat tuck-hunter.
He's popular with everyone,
And quick at books and learning,
But always ready for some fun,
Despite his legal yearning

So fill your glasses to the brim
When pop you're drinking daily,
And raise a hearty cheer for him
Who'll one day raise Old Bailey
To lift its stately head with awe
At one whose heart aspires
To gild the very name of Law,
And honour bring Greyfriars!

Barnes looked doubtful.

The excitement in the Bounder's face, and his evident haste and hurry, would have told a much less keen young man than Arthur Barnes that there was something amiss.

"Isn't it class now, sir?" he asked.

Barnes had no desire to be mixed up in the lawless proceedings of a truant.

The Bounder calmed himself a little.

"Yes, but I'm out early," he said. "It's all right Barnes. Steele himself told me to go out of the Form-room."

It was not necessary, or judicious, to add in what circumstances Steele had given him that order.

"All the fellows will be out in ten minutes," said Smithy, speaking as casually as he could. "I'm an early bird, that's all. I want to phone on a rather important matter, Barnes, if you don't mind."

The chauffeur still looked dubious.

Vernon-Smith, on his side, eyed the man rather curiously. He had not seen Barnes since that night the previous week, when he had been hidden in Steele's room long after lights out, and had seen Barnes enter that room by the window and search it.

Barnes, as well as the Bounder, knew of Steele's strange custom of leaving the House late at night by the french window on his balcony, to go on his mysterious nocturnal excursions. Barnes, the Bounder supposed, suspected and distrusted Steele as much as he did, or what could that search in the mysterious master's room have meant?

He wondered what Barnes would have thought had he known that the Bounder had seen him searching Steele's room that night.

But there was no time to lose. At any moment now the Bounder dreaded to hear the footsteps of Richard Steele. And third school would be over soon and the fellows swarming out.

"It's all right, Barnes," he repeated. "What the thump, you can let me use your phone for a couple of minutes! I'll pay for the call, of course. And if a half-crown's any use to you——"

His hand went to his pocket.

"Thank you, sir, no!" said Barnes quietly. "I am not, of course, supposed to let the young gentlemen use the telephone here——"

"Don't be a rotter, Barnes! Look here, it's important——"

Barnes still hesitated. But he nodded at last.

"Very well, sir; if you assure me that it is an important call you wish to make——"

"Jolly important!" said Smithy.

"This way, then, sir."

The Bounder almost gasped with relief. A minute more and he was standing at the telephone, the receiver in his hand.

Barnes did not leave him.

The Bounder rang up the exchange, and then glanced round at Barnes. Barnes looked apologetic.

"I am afraid, sir, you must let me hear the call you make," he said. "I am very anxious not to be brought into trouble with my employer, sir."

The Bounder grinned. He wondered whether Barnes suspected him of wanting to get through to a bookmaker, or something of that kind. Possibly Barnes had heard something of Smithy's reputation in the Lower School.

"You can listen if you like," he said.

"Thank you, sir!"

"Number, please?" came a second time from the exchange.

"Lantham police station," said the Bounder into the transmitter. "I don't know the number. But it's urgent! Please put me through as quick as you can!"

Barnes made a movement as the Bounder stood holding the receiver, waiting to be put through. But the chauffeur did not speak, though he eyed Vernon-Smith very curiously.

A rather gruff voice came through after a pause.

"Hallo!"

"Is that Lantham police station?" asked the Bounder.

"Yes."

"Speaking from Greyfriars School! I want to speak to the inspector in charge."

"Inspector Carter speaking."

"Good! I can tell you where to find the burglar who robbed Lantham Chase! Do you want the information?"

The Bounder heard a gasp over the wires.

"What? What? Who is speaking?"

"Herbert Vernon-Smith, from Greyfriars School," answered the Bounder. "You most likely know my name; my father's Mr. Vernon-Smith, the millionaire. I can give you information."

"But how——"

"I know the man! I can put my finger on him! Come over to Greyfriars, and I'll point him out to you."

"Do you mean to say that the man is at the school?" came the perplexed voice of the Lantham inspector.

"Yes."

"If this is a schoolboy joke——"

The Bounder snarled.

"Nothing of the kind! I tell you the man who is called in the papers the Courtfield cracksman is here at Greyfriars, and I can put my finger on him any minute. I—— Oh!" gasped the Bounder. He got no further; for a grasp of iron on the back of his neck wrenched him away from the telephone.

The receiver fell from his hand, hanging at the length of its cord. The Bounder, gasping with astonishment and rage, glared at Barnes. He was more amazed at the expression on the chauffeur's face than at his action in wrenching him away from the telephone. Barnes' face was white, and his eyes blazing, his teeth set hard under snarling lips.

"What——" panted the Bounder.

With a swing of his arm Barnes threw the Bounder away from him, and he tottered and fell.

The chauffeur picked up the receiver and replaced it on the hooks. Possibly Inspector Carter, at Lantham, was rather surprised at being cut off so suddenly.

The Bounder, more amazed than angry—though he was angry, too—stared up at Barnes.

The chauffeur stood over him threateningly. The cause of the rage in the chauffeur's face was a mystery to Vernon-Smith. But it was plain that the man was labouring under some intense excitement.

"Now tell me what this means, Vernon-Smith!" said the chauffeur, his eyes glinting down at the gasping Bounder. "Tell me what it means, you young fool!"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Vernon-Smith, staggering to his feet. "How dare you lay your hands on me!"

"I've asked you what this means!" snapped Barnes. "Tell me at once what you meant by what you said to the police station!"

"Mind your own business!" snarled the Bounder.

Barnes made a stride towards him with so fierce and lowering a face that Smithy involuntarily started back a pace.

"What the thump's the matter with you, Barnes?" he demanded. "This has nothing to do with you, you fool!"

"Nothing to do with me?" repeated Barnes.

"What could it have to do with you, you silly idiot? Can't you mind your own business?" snarled the Bounder.

Barnes gave him a very singular look, and it seemed as if his penetrating eyes would read the Bounder's very soul. Smithy stared at him in angry surprise.

"What's the matter with you?" he snapped. "What the merry thump do you mean by breaking out like that? Have you been drinking?"

Barnes' face was calm again now.

"I must ask you to excuse me, sir," he said smoothly. But what you were saying on the telephone surprised me so much——"

"No reason why you shouldn't mind your own business, all the same!" snarled the Bounder. "And if you lay your paws on a Greyfriars man, Barnes, you'd better look out for trouble! Confound your impudence!"

"I am really very sorry, sir," said Barnes. "I forgot myself for a moment."

"I should jolly well think you did!" growled Vernon-Smith, rubbing the back of his neck. Barnes' grip had fastened there like a steel vice.

"But, sir," went on Barnes, "what you were saying on the telephone was so startling——"

"Rubbish! You've heard about Steele——"

"Steele?" repeated Barnes.

"Our Form master in the Remove—that's the man I'm going to point out to the police."

Barnes smiled.

"I remember now, sir; I have heard something——"

"And you jolly well believe it, too!" snarled the Bounder. "Now let me get back to that telephone——"

The chauffeur shook his head.

"I cannot possibly let you use the telephone for such a purpose, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he said respectfully but firmly. "Dr. Locke would certainly discharge me if it came to his knowledge. He would be very angry indeed if a policeman came to Greyfriars——"

"Look here——"

"You cannot use the telephone, sir!" said Barnes finally. "You will please leave the garage at once. I am sorry, but I have no choice in the matter."

The Bounder breathed hard. He realised that Barnes certainly was likely to get into trouble if he allowed the telephone to be used for the Bounder's purpose. Smithy cared little for that, perhaps; but it was natural that Barnes should care a great deal.

"You must not drag me, a servant of the headmaster, into a dispute with your Form master, sir," said Barnes. "It is scarcely fair to me, sir, considering my position here, in employment. I am sure you will see that, sir?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped the Bounder ungraciously.

He strode out of the garage.

A buzz of voices in the distance told that the school was out. He had no doubt that by that time Richard Steele was looking for him. The outer gate of the garage stood ajar; and Vernon-Smith, without a moment's hesitation, darted out into the road.

"Mr. Vernon-Smith!" called out Barnes, staring after him.

The Bounder paid him no heed. It was neck or nothing, and Smithy was desperate. At a rapid run he started up the road to Courtfield.

Half an hour later a taxicab was bearing the Bounder swiftly in the direction of Lantham.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Where is Smithy?

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Where's Smithy?"

"Goodness knows!"

Billy Bunter wanted to know, and so did a good many other fellows.

Third lesson had finished in the Remove-room, without the Bounder returning there after his visit to the Head.

Where the Bounder was, and what he was doing, nobody knew—and there were many surmises.

Harry Wharton & Co. were feeling rather concerned about the reckless fellow. Smithy had asked for it—had persisted in asking for it—but if it was the "sack" they could not help sympathising.

Bunter was bursting with inquisitiveness. He was not much concerned for the Bounder, perhaps, but he wanted to know what was going on. Bunter always wanted to know.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five. "He ain't in the Head's study. Skinner thought the Beak might have sent him there, to wait for his flogging till after class. The Beak don't like being interrupted in class. But he ain't there—I've looked."

"Can't be gone!" said Frank Nugent, looking round at his chums with a rather startled face.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"He ain't in Steele's study, either," said Bunter, "and I've looked in the Remove passage, and he ain't there. Where is he?"

"The wherefulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"Must be sacked," said Bunter thoughtfully. "I suppose if the Beak bunked him he might clear him off before the fellows came out of class, to avoid a fuss. What?"

"He can't be gone," said Harry Wharton uneasily.

"Well, I fancy he's gone," said Bunter. "Where is he if he isn't?"

"Perhaps Redwing knows. Hallo, hallo, hallo, Redwing!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Tom Redwing was walking in the quad, alone, with a moody brow. As Smithy's best chum—indeed, his only real friend at Greyfriars—he naturally took the matter rather to heart. He glanced up and came across to the group as Bob hailed him.

"You fellows know where Smithy is?" he asked eagerly.

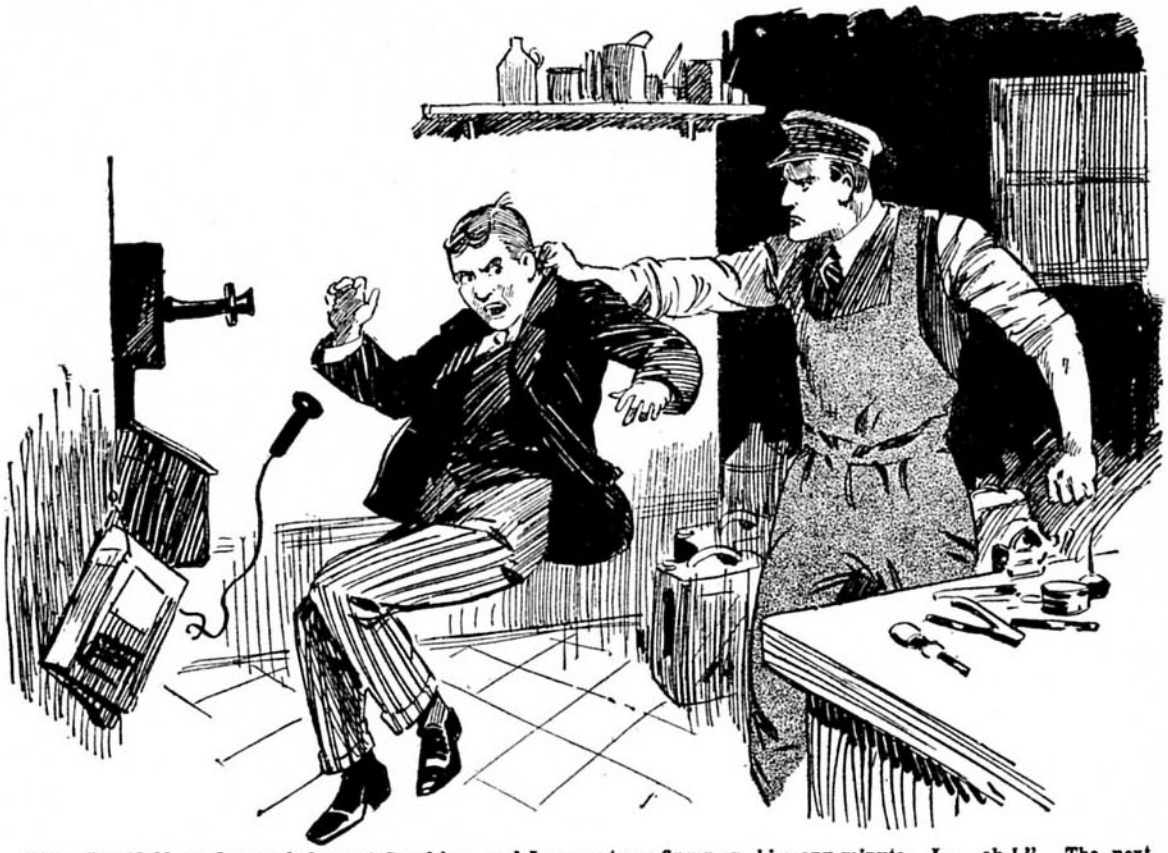
"Just going to ask you," answered Bob. "Don't you know?"

Redwing shook his head.

"I haven't seen him since he was sent to the Head," he answered.

"Nobody seems to have seen him," said Harry. "But the Head wouldn't buzz him out of Greyfriars like that!"

"Oh, he's sacked all right," said Bunter.



"The Courtfield cracksman is here at Greyfriars, and I can put my finger on him any minute. I——oh!" The next moment Vernon-Smith was wrenched away from the telephone.

"Shut up, you ass!" said Redwing, with a glare at the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Redwing! Of course, he's bunked," said Bunter. "If he isn't bunked, where is he? He's not in the school. I say, you fellows, I've looked into his study, and his things are all about as usual. The Beak didn't give him time to pack."

"That's rot!" said Harry. "He can't be gone."

"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Oh, he's bunked all right! I say, you fellows, if he doesn't send for the things he's left in his study——"

"Shut up, ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! This is rather important! If he doesn't send for his things——"

"You fat idiot!" said Redwing.

"You dry up, Redwing," said Bunter, with a severe blink at the sailorman's son. "If you think you're going to bag the things just because you're Smithy's study-mate, you're jolly well mistaken, see? As Smithy's oldest friend in the school I shall naturally take any few things he may leave here——"

"Bump him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I shall expect you fellows to back me up, as my old pals," said Bunter firmly. "There's a lot of things in Smithy's study—quite a lot. Back me up, and I'll see that you don't lose by it. As for you, Redwing, I'm surprised at you, thinking you're going to bag Smithy's things. Disgusting, I call it. What do you fellows think?" exclaimed Bunter, appealing to the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not state what they thought. They let their actions speak for them.

They grasped the Owl of the Remove, up-ended him, and sat him down in the quad—hard!

Bunter roared.

The juniors walked away and left him roaring.

There was excitement all through the Remove on the subject of the Bounder. It seemed unlikely that, even if he was "bunked," he had been whisked away from the school so suddenly, without even packing his box. But it was soon clear that he was not within the precincts of Greyfriars—which was difficult to account for, unless he had been expelled and sent away immediately.

Skinner, who had been rather a pal of the Bounder's—at least, when his occupations were shady, did not seem to be mourning for him. He was already alluding to him humorously as the "late lamented Smithy."

Harry Wharton & Co. had had a good deal of trouble with Smithy at various times, and perhaps did not like him very much personally. But they were on more or less friendly terms. But even if they had been unfriendly they would have felt this as a blow. Whatever the Bounder was, reckless and domineering as he certainly was, he had filled a prominent place in the Remove, and Greyfriars would not seem the same without him.

And the juniors, too, felt that there was a tincture of injustice in it, if he had been sacked. True, a junior who insulted his Form master as the Bounder had done, could hardly expect anything else. But there were extenuating circumstances. Harry Wharton, who had steadily refused to take any part in the feud against the suspected Form master, was strongly inclined now to take the part of the fellow who was down.

"Smithy asked for it," he said. "If he got a flogging nobody could say he hadn't begged for it. But, after all, Steele has asked for the trouble, too! A Form master isn't supposed to have a lot of mysterious and suspicious circumstances attached to him. It's all rot about Steele being a cracksman, and hiding here from the police, and all that; but his weird ways are quite enough to put the idea into fellows' heads. If the Bounder's sacked, I call it rotten!"

"That's so," agreed Bob. "A Form master who dodges out of the school of a night, and trots about the country after dark, is really asking for trouble. And everybody knows that Steele does."

"And he was seen at Hogben Grange on the night of the burglary there," said Johnny Bull. "He shouldn't have been there. Goodness knows what he was up to; but a Form master should be more careful."

"That was before he came here as a Form master," said Harry.

"Makes no difference. The fact is that there's something jolly queer about Steele, though, of course, it's all rot to suppose that he's the Courtfield cracksman. He oughtn't to have got Smithy sacked!"

"Perhaps he hasn't," said Nugent; "though goodness knows where Smithy is if he hasn't been bunked."

"I'm going to ask Steele," said Harry resolutely. "After all, we've a right to know, and if they're thinking of sacking Smithy, I'm jolly well going to put in a word for him."

Harry Wharton went into the House and went to Steele's study. He found the Remove master there. Steele gave him a smile and a nod as he came in, but the junior could see that he was worried. His first question surprised the captain of the Remove.

"Do you know where Vernon-Smith is, Wharton?"

"N-no!" stammered Harry. "I came here to ask you, sir. Some—some of the fellows have been thinking that he's sacked—I mean expelled."

Mr. Steele shook his head.

"I am quite at a loss," he said. "I have spoken to the Head and learned that Vernon-Smith did not go to the Sixth Form room this morning, and did not deliver my note to the headmaster."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry.

"Gosling has informed me that Vernon-Smith came to his lodge and asked to use the telephone, which Gosling very properly refused. Since then it appears that he has not been seen. You know nothing of him?"

"Nothing, sir."

"It is surely impossible that the foolish boy has left the school," said the Form master. "If you see Vernon-Smith, or hear anything of him, Wharton, please come to me at once."

"Certainly, sir."

The captain of the Remove left the study, deeply perplexed. Smithy had not been sacked—he had not seen the Head at all that morning. Then where was he, and what had become of him?

All the Remove fellows were asking that question; but no answer was forthcoming.

When the Remove went in to dinner the Bounder's place was vacant at the table. When they came out afterwards nothing was seen of him.

That he had left the school was now certain. That he had done so, intending to run away from Greyfriars, seemed improbable; the Bounder was reckless, but he was too hard-headed to be guilty of such folly.

But if he had not run away from school, where was he gone, and what was he up to? Billy Bunter made the brilliant suggestion that he had run away to sea to become a pirate; a suggestion that furnished a little comic relief. Up and down and round about Greyfriars the question was asked, "Where was the Bounder?" And nobody could guess the answer.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Going It!

INSPECTOR CARTER looked at Herbert Vernon-Smith with eyes as sharp as pinpoints. The inspector was a portly, plump, red-faced gentleman; his face was podgy, and his eyes almost disappeared in circles of fat. Nevertheless, they were exceedingly keen in their glance; and they had never looked more keenly at any object than they were looking at the present moment.

Mr. Carter, in his room at Lantham Police Station, had probably listened to many strange things in his time; but never, it was likely, to a story stranger than this.

Fellows at Greyfriars who wondered and surmised where the Bounder was certainly did not dream of guessing that he was in the inspector's room at Lantham Police Station. But that was where the Bounder was, and he had been there some time—giving Mr. Carter information.

Having decided on what he realised to be a desperate course of action, the Bounder was a fellow to carry it through with an iron nerve. He had taken a taxi to Lantham—the fare presenting no difficulties to Smithy, who had plenty of money. He had lunched at the Pagoda, with a good appetite, keeping the taxi waiting, regardless of the "clock," and then driven to the police station, and asked for the inspector; waited till he could see him, and now he was seeing him. And, with perfect coolness, a good memory, and bitter distinctness, he told Mr. Carter the story of Richard Steele, so far as he knew it.

Sharp indeed were the eyes of the plump Lantham inspector as he watched the schoolboy's face.

Smithy knew quite well that Mr. Carter suspected that this was some unusually reckless schoolboy practical joke—that his official leg was to be pulled by getting him to Greyfriars on a fool's errand. Indeed, the strange story could hardly give Mr. Carter any other impression at first. But the Bounder succeeded in disabusing Mr. Carter's mind of that.

Indeed, on reflection, the inspector had to dismiss the idea, for a schoolboy who played such a trick was so certain of the most condign punishment, that even the most unthinking practical joker must have baulked at it.

The boy believed what he was saying—Mr. Carter had to concede that. And he had to make up his mind whether the fact that Vernon-Smith believed it was of any weight.

That Smithy's animosity against his Form master was deep and bitter leaped to the eye. The most casual glance would have observed that.

That animosity would not have made him invent such a story; but it might very easily have made him believe such a story on flimsy evidence.

But Mr. Carter listened patiently to the evidence. It was not Mr. Carter's busy day, though he would gladly have been getting busy on the track of the cracksman who had robbed Lantham Chase. But that nocturnal gentleman had inconsiderately left no clue behind him; and Mr. Carter could only wait, like the celebrated Mr. Micawber, for something to turn up.

His extreme keenness to get on the track of the Lantham Chase thief made him all the more inclined to give ear to the Bounder.

But the Bounder's tale was hard to swallow, with all the suspicious circumstances that the schoolboy carefully enumerated. The plump inspector listened, but he shook his head. He shook it regretfully, for he would have given three months' salary for the tale to be true. But he shook it.

"You have had trouble with this Form master of yours, I suppose?" he remarked—a remark which showed the trend of his reflections.

"Yes; but only because of this," the Bounder pointed out. "I had no trouble with him till it came out that he was a skulking criminal."

"Then you were cheeky to him?"

The Bounder started. It had hardly occurred to him; but really it did amount to that.

"And he punished you," went on Mr. Carter dryly, "and after that you were prepared to believe anything—what?"

The Bounder coloured uncomfortably.

"I'm not the only fellow who believes it," he said; "and fellows who stick to him can't explain what he's up to. Wharton—the head of my Form—actually saw him one night climbing the wall of the park at a house that was burgled the same night. What does that mean, Mr. Carter?"

"But is it certain?"

"Quite. Quelch, our last Form master, sent Wharton to the police station at Courtfield to report what he saw."

Mr. Carter rubbed his plump nose.

"Is it certain that this Mr. Steele is the same man?"

"He has admitted it himself, in our hearing."

"That does not look as if he had anything to fear."

"Well, he knew that we knew; and he was brazening it out," said the Bounder. "Trying to make light of it. But that isn't all. In the Christmas holidays Wharton saw him hanging about in Surrey, close by a place that had been burgled."

"After the burglary?"

"Yes."

"Cracksmen do not generally hang about the crib they have cracked," said Mr. Carter. "They generally travel as fast as they can when they're through."

"The idea is that he was looking for another chance," said Smithy. "As he supposed himself unknown, it would be safe. There may have been more burglaries near Wharton Lodge, for all I know. There have certainly been two about here, since Steele came to Greyfriars—at Lantham Chase, and at the Three Fishers, up the river."

"But this series of robberies began a couple of months before Christmas; and you say this Mr. Steele did not come to the school till this term."

"He was in the neighbourhood before. Wharton saw him, as I've said, at Hogben Grange the night of the burglary there, and he saw him again in Courtfield the day the school broke up. He used to speak of him as 'the man with the square jaw,' and everybody believed that it was the burglar; then when we came back this term, and Steele came to Greyfriars, Wharton and Bunter both recognised him as the man."

The inspector drummed on his desk.

"Your headmaster must be well acquainted with any man to whom he gives a post as a master in the school," he said.

"He has deceived the Head somehow. Not so jolly hard!" said the Bounder. "Dr. Locke knows all there is to be known of Greek, but he's like a baby in matters outside the school."

Mr. Carter smiled.

"Possibly. But——"

"He's the man," said Vernon-Smith. "I tell you, two nights in three he's out of the House half the night. Every fellow in the Remove knows it; it's the talk of the Lower School."

"Odd!" said Mr. Carter. "But a man might be up to all sorts of things without being a burglar."

"He locks his door at night, and gets out by french windows on a balcony. Nobody's supposed to know—though we jolly well do know, all the same!"

There was a silence. The Bounder watched the Lantham inspector anxiously.

He had staked all on this; and if the inspector failed him, he did not like to think of the consequences.

Mr. Carter looked very thoughtful, but extremely dubious. He wanted very much to take advantage of the slightest chance of putting his official hand on the Courtfield cracksman; but——

"I'm not suggesting that you should run the man in on my information sir," said the Bounder. "I'm asking you to come to the school and see him. Surely there's enough to go upon to do that. I've got a taxi waiting outside; it's not a long run. I'm absolutely certain that if his room at Greyfriars was searched by the police, plenty of evidence would be found there to convict him. It's a cert!"

"I could not apply for a search-warrant on what you have told me, Mr. Vernon-Smith," said the inspector dryly.

"Perhaps not! But you can see the man and form your own judgment,

(*Continued on page* 12.)

"Old Ref." Calling All "Footer" Fans!

INSIDE INFORMATION!

By The "OLD REF."

Our "Wizard of the Whistle" has been engaged especially for the benefit of MAGNET readers. Catch him napping with a knotty "footer" problem if you can!

LETTERS from readers which raise interesting football points continue to arrive, and I am glad to get them. One of the latest comes from a reader at Birmingham, who is concerned on the point of which particular player should be credited with a goal in certain circumstances.

He quotes a case of a match which took place some seasons back between Aston Villa and Birmingham—those close rivals. In the course of the game Joe Bradford, that clever Birmingham forward, sent in a shot which was stopped by Spiers, who was then keeping goal for the Villa. After Spiers seemed to have stopped the ball completely, and was preparing to kick clear, the leather seemed to "worm itself out of his hands," as my correspondent puts it, and went into the net. Now the question at issue is this: Did Joe Bradford score that goal, or should it have been put on record that Spiers scored against his own side?

My correspondent points out that at the time the newspapers expressed different views, and that nobody seems to be quite certain as to the correct answer. Now, as a matter of fact, there cannot be any certainty as to the correct answer to that question for the simple reason that there is no guidance at all in the rule-books, and therefore an answer must merely be a matter of opinion, and not necessarily a matter of fact.

There are some occasions, of course, when, in spite of the fact that a home player puts the ball into his own net, a player of the opposing side can be credited with it.

Suppose, for instance, that a centre-forward takes a hard shot. The full-back dashes across goal, makes a desperate effort to kick the ball clear, but only succeeds in helping it into the net. It would be other than justice to say that the full-back scored against his own side, and it would be other than justice not to credit the forward with a goal, because his shot was obviously a good one.

BUT there are other occasions when the decision is not so easy to make. You may remember one such—a most important goal in a Cup Final. Cardiff City were playing Arsenal at Wembley in 1927. Ferguson, the Cardiff forward, sent in a shot which must have been very similar to that described by my reader friend from Birmingham. Lewis, the Arsenal goalkeeper, stopped the ball, seemed to pick it up even, and then, when everybody expected him to clear easily the ball slipped out of his hands into the net.

Did Lewis score against his own side, or should the goal be credited to Ferguson? This was a question which the newspaper writers had to decide. Lewis' explanation of the incident was that the ball finally twisted out of his hands, and if this is accepted then Ferguson was deserving of the credit for a shot which was too difficult for the goalkeeper to hold. On the other hand, if, as some people thought, Lewis made a mistake, and threw the ball over the line when he meant to throw it round the post, then the reasonable verdict should surely have been that Lewis scored against his own side.

But I repeat that there can be no such thing as a final and definite decision; such incidents must rest on a personal opinion.

The obvious reason why the football officials would give no lead on such a case is that it doesn't really matter who scored the goal; the only fact of importance is that a goal was properly scored.

I know that a lot of followers of football love records, and they love these records to be accurate, particularly on the question of the number of goals scored by this or that player during a season. I often think, however, that it would be better for the game if no such records were kept or no attempt made to keep them. There is always the possibility that such records may lead to selfish play, and that alternatively a member of a team who does fine work in helping others to score goals may get disgruntled because the actual scorer of the goals gets more praise than he does.

SOME of the finest footballers the game has ever known—forwards that is—have never been high in the lists of goal scorers. One of the best schemers of our time was Clem Stephenson, who recently became manager of Huddersfield Town. Yet there were whole seasons in which he only scored two or three goals. His big job was to make goal-scoring openings for others.

Another query comes from Leicester and concerns a last-minute penalty kick in a recent game between Leicester City and Grimsby Town. Grimsby were awarded the penalty kick when time was almost up. Robson, the Grimsby centre, took the kick; the ball was stopped by the goalkeeper, and the whistle immediately sounded for "time."

In an earlier article I told my readers that the referee must, according to rule, extend the time of a match if necessary in order to allow a penalty kick to be taken, but the question now put by my Leicester reader is how much additional time should be allowed, and at what stage can a penalty kick be said to have been completed?

The case is put thus: Suppose extra time is allowed for a penalty kick to be taken, and the ball is sent at the goalkeeper, who punches it back to the taker of the kick for the player to bang it into the net again. Is it a goal? The answer is "No."

When the ball has been stopped or pushed out by the goalkeeper at the taking of a penalty kick for which time has been extended, the time is up automatically, and a goal should not be allowed if one is scored from the rebound.

The same reply is the proper one in the event of the ball hitting the bar or post, coming back and being put into the net by another attacker. On the other hand, if the ball strikes the post or cross-bar, and goes thence right into the net from an extended time penalty kick a goal would be allowed.

The delicate part of this problem of when the game should be called off arises over what can best be described as a partial save by the goalkeeper. The man between the posts may get his hands to the ball, but not stopping it completely, it travels on into the net. Would that be allowed in the cases where time has been extended for the taking of the penalty kick? It is my opinion that a goal should be allowed in these circumstances, because the ball has not actually been stopped by the goalkeeper. Or to put it in another way, the man taking the kick has virtually scored direct from the kick.

On the other hand, if the ball has been definitely stopped by the goalkeeper or by the posts, a second and quite separate action is demanded before it can be put into the net, and the official ruling is to the effect that the referee should not go on extending the time.

SOME PERSON UNKNOWN.....

(*Continued from page* 10.)

sir! He can spoof a simple old schoolmaster; but he would cringe fast enough under a police-inspector's eye."

Mr. Carter smiled, and then looked very thoughtful again. He seemed to be considering the matter from all angles.

"At all events, I might see your headmaster, and ask him a few questions concerning this Mr. Steele," he remarked at last. "But you must bear in mind that if this turns out to be a mare's nest, as I have very little doubt it will, it will get you into rather serious trouble at your school."

"I'm risking that," said Vernon-Smith. "If I'm wrong, I shall be sacked from Greyfriars. I know that. But I'm not wrong."

"A rather serious prospect for you, surely."

"I'm ready to risk it. I've risked it already by coming to you. I know he's the man—know it as well as if he'd owned up."

There was another silence.

"I will, at any rate, come to the school," said Mr. Carter at last. "That can do no harm."

The Bounder's face lighted up.

"Good!" he exclaimed.

Five minutes later the taxi was bearing the Bounder back to Greyfriars School; and by his side, in the car, sat Inspector Carter of Lantham. The die was cast now, with a vengeance!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

No Arrest!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter almost shrieked.

A number of Remove men were in the Rag, discussing the mysterious absence of the Bounder, when Billy Bunter burst in, his fat face aglow with excitement, his little round eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

"I say!" he gasped. "I say, you fellows! Smithy——"

He spluttered with excitement.

"He's come back?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes," gasped Bunter, "and he's got a bobby with him!"

"What?"

There was a roar from the Removites. Billy Bunter liked to make the fellows jump with startling news. There was no doubt that he had made them jump now.

"A bobby?" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Gammon!"

"Rot!"

"He's in a bobby with a taxi——" gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"I—I mean, he's in a taxi with a bobby——"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a rush out of the Rag. Wild excitement reigned now. If the Bounder had come back with a "bobby," matters were coming to a head. For there could be no doubt that he had brought the bobby to deal with Richard Steele.

If Richard Steele was indeed the Courtfield cracksman, his game at Greyfriars was up now!

A taxi had stopped outside the House. The Bounder had alighted from it, and following him came a plump gentleman in uniform.

"It's true, then!" gasped Bob Cherry. "That johnny's a police inspector!"

"Great pip!"

"The game's up for Steele!" said Snoop.

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now!" grinned Skinner. "We're going to see our beloved Form master led away, like jolly old Eugene Aram, with giddy gyves on his wrists."

"Bosh!" said Peter Todd. "Smithy's making an ass of himself."

"Wait and see!" chuckled Skinner.

Fellows gathered from far and near to stare, fellows of all Forms, in swarming numbers. It was rather fortunate—from the point of view of the Geryfriars fellows—that this had happened before classes recommenced. It would have been simply awful to have been in the Form-rooms missing it!

A hundred pairs of eyes were on Herbert Vernon-Smith; but that concentrated attention did not disconcert the Bounder. He was perfectly cool; indeed, the glimmer in his eyes told of elation, of enjoyment of the sensation he was creating. He loved the limelight; and he was getting it in generous measure now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "Here comes Steele!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I say, you fellows, he's walking fairly into the bobby's hands!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"Shut up, you ass!"

"Shan't! I'm not afraid of Steele now!" sniggered Bunter. "I say, you fellows, let's hiss him when the bobby marches him off."

"You fat idiot," said Bob. "You'd better make sure he's going to be marched off before you let him hear that."

Even Bunter realised that that was sage advice, and he said no more as Richard Steele came out of the House on the crowded steps.

Steele had a puzzled look, and had apparently come out to see what all the excitement was about.

He started a little at the sight of the Lantham inspector, and Herbert Vernon-Smith with him.

The crowd fell silent.

In the sudden silence Steele's voice sounded very clearly as he called to the Bounder.

"So you have returned, Vernon-Smith! Come into the House at once."

The Bounder gave him an insolent grin.

"Yes, I've returned," he answered. "I'm coming into the House, and I'm not coming alone! This way, Mr. Carter! That's the man."

The Lantham inspector came ponderously up the steps. The little sharp eyes in his fat face were fixed on Richard Steele.

"Mr. Steele?" he asked.

"Certainly. You have called to see me?"

To the amazement of the staring crowd, Steele's manner was perfectly calm; indeed, casual. Billy Bunter wondered breathlessly whether he was going to whip out an automatic and shoot the Lantham inspector dead on the steps of the House.

"Yes, Mr. Steele! If you would kindly grant me an interview for a few minutes——"

The inspector was very civil, rather to the disappointment of many of the onlookers. Some of them would have preferred to see him drop a heavy hand on Steele's shoulder and announce in a thunderous voice, "You are my prisoner!" But that did not seem to be Mr. Carter's intention—yet, at all events.

"With pleasure," said Steele. "Vernon-Smith, you will wait till I am disengaged. Mr.—er——"

"Carter, sir—Inspector Carter of Lantham."

"Please step to my study, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you, sir."

The inspector walked away to Masters' passage with the Remove master. The door of Mr. Quelch's old study closed on them.

The crowd was left buzzing.

"I say, you fellows, suppose he shoots him!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Fathead!"

"Smithy, you ass——" exclaimed Redwing anxiously.

"All serene, Reddy!" said the Bounder coolly. "I've got the police in at last to deal with that rascal. Steele can explain to Inspector Carter what he was doing at Hogben Grange on the night of the burglary."

"And what he does of a night when he sneaks out of his room by the window!" grinned Skinner.

"You've put your foot in it, Smithy," said Harry Wharton, shaking his head. "It's a mare's nest."

"You'll see!" answered the Bounder.

"Then that's where you've been—fetching the inspector here!" said Tom Redwing.

"Yes—from Lantham. Steele may not find it so easy to fool him as he did with old Grimes at Courtfield."

Redwing shook his head.

"He's got nothing to fear," he said. "You can tell by his look that he's got nothing to fear."

"Sheer nerve," said the Bounder. "He will brazen it out if he can. What's the bettin' that he doesn't come out of that study with handcuffs on his wrists?"

"I'm afraid he will come out and take you to the Head," said Redwing dismally. "What on earth do you expect to happen after this, Smithy?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"The sack, if I'm wrong," he said. "I mean, if that rogue fools Mr. Carter as he's fooled Grimes. But it ain't likely."

"The sackfulness will be terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Smithy," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I'm not afraid!" said the Bounder contemptuously.

At the corner of Master's passage there was an excited crowd. Mr. Prout came along and frowned at them; Mr. Capper passed them and blinked at them; Mr. Hacker looked out of his study, frowned, and went in again. But for once the fellows did not heed the masters. They were on tenterhooks to know what was going on in the Remove master's study.

Every moment they expected to see the door open, and many of them expected to see Richard Steele emerge, with handcuffs clinking on his wrists, and the inspector's hand on his shoulder. Which would have been a sight to thrill the Remove and last them as a topic for the rest of the term.

The Bounder looked cool—indeed, smiling; but perhaps there was a shade of anxiety in his eyes. He did not believe that it could turn out that he was wrong, but he felt that there was a chance that Steele might satisfy Carter, as he had satisfied Grimes. If that should happen——

There was a buzz of excitement as the Remove master's door opened.

"Here they come!" breathed Bob Cherry.

Inspector Carter stepped out into the broad corridor.

There was a smile on his face.

Mr. Steele stepped out, also.

He, too, was smiling a little.

"Well, good-bye, sir!" said the Lantham inspector, and there was a note of deep respect in his voice. "I've not wasted your time, I hope."

"That's the Courtfield cracksman, Mr. Carter!" said Vernon-Smith, dramatically pointing towards Mr. Steele.

"Not at all, Mr. Carter!" said Steele. "I've been very pleased to meet you. Good-bye!"

He shook hands with the Lantham inspector.

A crowd of eyes watched him. The Bounder felt a cold chill. This did not look like the arrest of a suspected master!

Inspector Carter shook hands with him, with the manner of a man who was honoured thereby. He might have been dealing with a superior officer, by his looks.

Then he came ponderously down the passage. Mr. Steele went back into his study.

The Bounder stood rooted. All his hopes, all his calculations, had been dashed to the ground, like a castle of cards!

But as the plump inspector came ponderously by, the Bounder sprang forward and caught him by the sleeve. Mr. Carter glanced at him. He seemed to have forgotten him for the moment.

Reminded of him, Mr. Carter smiled.

"You young donkey!" he said.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You have wasted my time with your nonsense, and your Form master's time," said Mr. Carter.

The juniors looked at one another. Some of them grinned. It was, after all, a mare's nest, apparently.

"You—you—you've let him fool you!" hissed the Bounder, too enraged to care what he said. "You've let that thief——"

Mr. Carter shook a fat finger at him.

"That's enough!" he said. "The best thing you can do is to go and beg your Form master's pardon at once, and get off the best you can. That's my advice to you."

And Mr. Carter walked out of the House and disappeared from the staring eyes of the Removites.

The Bounder stood like one stunned.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"DEEP!" said Skinner.

That was Harold Skinner's opinion.

The Remove men were in the Rag, discussing the startling occurrence, while they waited for the bell for classes.

The Bounder was not there. He had gone tramping away by himself in the quad, with a look on his face that warned the fellows to let him alone. Even Redwing had not joined him.

"Deep!" repeated Skinner. "They won't nail that man Steele very easily. He's deep as a well."

"Rubbish!" said Harry Wharton curtly. "He's straight as a die; that's why Carter acted as he did."

"Plain enough," said Bob Cherry. "Carter must feel rather an ass for coming here."

"Fathead to come!" said Toddy.

"Well, I suppose the Bounder pitched it to him hot and strong," grinned Johnny Bull. "And there's a lot of queer circumstances connected with Steele that might make a policeman sit up and take notice."

"He's satisfied Carter, at all events," said Squiff.

"Of course! He's right as rain."

"The rightfulness of the esteemed rain is preposterous!"

"Deep!" repeated Skinner. "He's got the man fooled. Not a difficult thing—these rural bobbies are rather dense. I fancy he wouldn't have got off so well with a Scotland Yard man."

"Smithy had better ring up Scotland Yard next!" chortled Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The papers say that there was a Scotland Yard man put on the case," remarked Snoop. "If Smithy could get in touch with him——"

"Smithy's going to get in touch with the Head's birch," said Hazeldene.

"Poor old Smithy!"

"It won't be a flogging; it will be the sack," said Nugent. "The Head will be in a frightful wax over this."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I'm afraid so. Bringing a police-inspector to Greyfriars, after one of the masters—my hat! Smithy must really have been off his rocker!"

"It's the sack," said Bob. "Poor old Smithy! He hasn't an earthly now."

"Where is he?" asked Tom Brown.

"Gone off sulking somewhere," said Russell, with a laugh. "He looked as if he'd bite me when I spoke to him. This is rather a facer for poor old Smithy!"

"I'm sorry," said Wharton, with a troubled face. "I—I wonder if it would be any good speaking to Steele? After all, there's some excuse for Smithy, though he has played the goat awfully."

"I say, you fellows, do you think he will be sacked in Hall, with the whole bag of tricks, or sent away quietly?" asked Billy Bunter. "I think they ought to have it in Hall, you know. It will be worth seeing, you see. What do you think, Redwing?"

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(*Continued from page* 13.)

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" growled Redwing.

"Oh, really, you know——"

"It mayn't come to the sack," said Harry. "Hallo! Want anything, Wingate?"

The Greyfriars captain looked into the Rag.

"Vernon-Smith here?" he asked.

"No."

"Know where he is?"

"He went out in the quad."

Wingate of the Sixth glanced over the crowded room, and then went away. From the window of the Rag he was seen going across the quad, evidently in search of the Bounder.

"Smithy's wanted!" said Squiff.

"So's Steele, if they only knew!" said Skinner. "Hard cheese on poor old Smithy, to be sacked for showing up a burglar. Burglars really ain't the sort of merchants to be encouraged like this."

Some of the fellows laughed. But though Skinner and a few others persisted in keeping their opinion of the new master of the Remove, most of the fellows agreed with Wharton, by this time, that it was all "rot." The Bounder had declared that Steele had pulled the wool over the eyes of Inspector Grimes, at Courtfield. Now, no doubt, he would declare that the wool had been pulled over the Lantham inspector's eyes also. But that was rather too "thick" for most of the fellows. A Form master might, conceivably, be a secret crook, but a crook could hardly be on such excellent terms with the police.

Wingate was seen to come back into the House alone. Loder and Carne, of the Sixth, were observed to be going about with inquiring looks. Apparently, the prefects had been told to find the Bounder; but it did not seem that they had found him.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Has Smithy cleared out of the school again? Looks like it!"

"What's his game this time, then?" asked Nugent.

Bob chuckled.

"Perhaps he's gone to look for another Bobby. Some fellows never know when they've had enough."

When the bell rang for classes the Bounder was not with the Remove as they went to their Form-room.

Apparently, he was absent again, though with what object in view this time, it was hard to guess.

"Dodging the sack!" said Toddy. "He's not anxious to interview the Beak. Can't wonder at it, really."

"The wonderfulness is not terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed chopper must come down soonfully or latefully."

"Shouldn't wonder if he's gone home," remarked Ogilvy. "His pater thinks no end of him—no accounting for tastes, you know. The old man would stand by Smithy, whatever he did. And he may fix it with the Head to let him stay."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Bunter knows, of course," said Bob Cherry. "If Smithy's anywhere where there's a keyhole, Bunter knows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, where is he—and what's he up to, Bunter?"

"I don't know where he is, but I know what he's up to," said the Owl of the Remove, blinking round at the Removites, who were gathered outside the Form-room waiting for Steele to arrive.

"Well, what?" asked several voices.

"He's having a feed," said Bunter.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"You silly ass!"

"I say, you fellows, I know it! You see, I've been to the tuckshop," explained Bunter. "When you want to find a fellow, that's the most natural place to look, if he's got any money and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he wasn't there, but I asked Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter, "and she told me he had been there and bought a lot of stuff, and taken it away with him in a parcel."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bob. "I shouldn't think Smithy would be thinking of a spread just now. Even you wouldn't in his shoes, Bunter."

"Well, that's his game," said Bunter. "He's bought a lot of stuff at the school shop, and taken it away with him. Rather mean, don't you think? He might have asked a fellow——"

"Something to eat in the train, and he's gone home," said Toddy.

"That's it!" said Bob.

"I hope they'll let him come back, then," remarked Wharton. "Smithy's got his faults. But we should jolly well miss him from Greyfriars!"

"The missfulness would be terrific."

Mr. Steele came along the passage, and opened the door of the Form-room. The Removites went to their places.

The Form master's face was a little grim. The juniors could guess that he was troubled in his mind about Vernon-Smith.

He made no reference to the subject, however, and lessons went on as usual in the Form-room. Nothing was seen of the Bounder during classes. And the thoughts of the Removites were much more with him than with their lessons, so long as classes lasted. They came out of the Form-room eager for news; but there was no news.

After tea the captain of the Remove ventured to call on Mr. Steele in his study.

"If you'll excuse me, sir, we should like to know about Vernon-Smith," said Wharton.

"I can tell you nothing, Wharton. Vernon-Smith has absented himself from the school, for the second time today," said Mr. Steele. "If he does not return to-night, his father will be communicated with. That is all."

Wharton lingered at the door.

"If he's gone home, sir——"

"It is probable."

"I—I hope he will be allowed to come back, sir."

Richard Steele fixed his keen, grey eyes on Wharton. He did not seem to be in his usual urbane temper. No doubt the disturbing events of the day accounted for that.

"I hope, Wharton, that that does not mean that you, the head boy of my Form, unhold Vernon-Smith's conduct," he said sternly.

"No, sir," said Harry. "I think Smithy's played the giddy ox. I—I mean he's been rather foolish. But——"

"But what?" rapped out Steele sharply.

"But there's some excuse for him, sir," ventured Harry.

"I shall be glad to hear. What is it?" snapped Mr. Steele.

Wharton breathed rather hard. But he had something to say, and he intended to say it.

"I mean, sir——" He paused.

"Well, what do you mean?" asked the Remove master, in the same sharp tone.

"I suppose the Head will be in a wax, sir."

"Dr. Locke is naturally very angry, if that is what you mean."

"Yes, sir. But I thought you might speak a word for Smithy to the Head, sir," ventured Wharton.

"Indeed! And why?"

"Because, sir," said Harry, taking the plunge, as it were, "though Smithy's made a fool of himself, it's partly caused by—by——"

"By what?"

"By a lot of circumstances, sir, that have made talk in the Form," said Harry steadily. "Smithy really believes what, I suppose, he told that officer from Lantham. And it's not Smithy's fault that the story got round the school. Other fellows believe it as well as Smithy. I hope you will make some allowances for Smithy, sir, because it was your own actions that caused all this talk in the first place."

The captain of the Remove had got it out now. Steele stared at him, his face growing grimmer and grimmer.

Wharton waited for the storm to burst. But he did not regret having spoken out. Whatever happened to himself, he wanted Steel to understand the point of view of the Remove, and, as captain of the Form, he felt it his duty to speak out. Smithy had played the goat; but he was entitled to fair play.

There was a long silence; but the storm did not burst. Richard Steele's frowning brow cleared.

"You mean to imply, Wharton, that it is partly my own fault that Vernon-Smith has acted as he has done?"

"I—I suppose it amounts to that, sir," said Harry.

"And you feel entitled to tell me so?"

"I think so, sir. Smithy wouldn't have acted as he's done if—if—if there wasn't something to go upon. I know it's all rot, but Smithy doesn't think so, and so—so——"

"That will do, Wharton. There is something in what you say," said Mr. Steele, rather unexpectedly. "And I will tell you that no effort of mine shall be spared to save Vernon-Smith from expulsion."

Wharton's face brightened with relief.

"I hoped you'd take that view, sir," he said. "All the fellows know you're a sportsman, sir—if you'll excuse me saying——"

Mr. Steele smiled.

"Well, if the Remove think me a sportsman, I must try to live up to my reputation," he said. "Vernon-Smith has acted in a very foolish, obstinate, and wrong-headed manner. But if I can help it, he will not be expelled from Greyfriars. I am not here for long, Wharton. I shall leave when Mr. Quelch returns, which may be in a few weeks—perhaps sooner—and I should be very sorry indeed that he should miss a member of his Form when he returned. Vernon-Smith will not be expelled, unless by his own conduct he should leave the Head no other possible course."

He made a sign of dismissal, and the captain of the Remove left the study.

"He's a sportsman," said Bob Cherry, when Wharton told of the interview in

the Remove passage. "The real genuine article. But if Smithy goes on begging for it—what's the man to do?"

"If he'd only come back," said Redwing. "I can't imagine why he's gone out of the school. If he'd only come back——"

"He'll come back for dorm," said Bob.

But Bob did not turn out to be a true prophet. The Bounder did not come back for dorm. And when the Remove went to bed that night he was still missing.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Shadowed!

MIDNIGHT, dark and gloomy. The last light had been extinguished at Greyfriars. And in the shadowy old quadrangle only a faint glimmer fell from the stars in a misty sky. A chill wind from the sea stirred and rustled the leafless branches of the old trees. All Greyfriars, or almost all, slept soundly. But there was at least one wakeful—perhaps more than one. The Bounder, as he stood in the deep shadow of an elm, waiting and watching, thought it very likely that there was at least one other awake.

The Remove men had wondered where the Bounder was, and whether he had gone home. They did not dream how near he was to them all the time.

Vernon-Smith had not been far away. The Bounder was obstinate and determined. And he had yet, or thought that he had, a card to play.

After his failure, and the departure of the Lantham inspector, the Bounder expected nothing but the sack, short and sharp, if he remained, and he had promptly disappeared. But he had not gone far. He had camped in an upper room of the old tower of Greyfriars—a rather unsafe place that was out of bounds, and seldom or never entered. There the Bounder waited with grim patience.

He had supplied himself with food by a visit to the school shop. The solitude of the place, after darkness fell, did not worry Smithy. He was not troubled with nerves. It was cold, in spite of his thick coat, too cold for sleep; but Vernon-Smith was not thinking of sleep. He was thinking, bitterly, of the man he believed to be the Courtfield cracksman, and of his determination to show him up.

Only that, the Bounder realised, could save him, after what he had done. Unless he proved his accusation against the Remove master, he was done for at Greyfriars. And there was a card to play yet.

It was at a late hour, after the school slept, that Vernon-Smith crept quietly out of his hiding-place.

Under the tree, at a short distance from Steele's window, he took up his position to wait and to watch.

He had learned much of the strange ways of the Remove master. Two nights in three, at least, Richard Steele left the House quietly, and vanished into the night, returning in the same surreptitious way in the small hours of the morning.

Unless he was engaged upon some nefarious work, it was hard to explain such ways, and the Bounder had not the slightest doubt on the subject. Under the shadowy tree he was watching for Steele to emerge. If he watched in vain that night, he was prepared to spend another day in hiding, and watch again the following night.

All the bitter obstinacy in the Bounder's nature was roused now, and he felt that it was a duel between him and the man he suspected. And Smithy was not going to be the loser if he could help it.

Midnight passed, and there was no sound or movement at the french window of Richard Steele's room over the little, railed balcony. But the Bounder was patient. He did not expect the secret cracksman to make a move till all was safe.

The half-hour chimed in the misty night.

Following the last stroke, the Bounder gave a start, and a glint came into his eyes.

From where he stood he could see the faint glimmer of the stars on the window over the balcony. There was a shifting of the starry reflection. It told Smithy that the french window was opening, though not the faintest sound came to his ears.

On the dark balcony a shadowy figure moved.

Vernon-Smith felt his heart throbbing. He heard a faint sound now, as an athletic man swung himself easily over the iron rail, held for a moment, and then dropped lightly to the ground.

Steele was bound on one of his mysterious nocturnal excursions that night. There was no doubt of it now.

The Bounder suppressed his breathing. A shadow flitted past within six or seven feet of him, and vanished.

Then Smithy moved.

He hardly needed to keep the man in sight; he knew that he would be leaving by the little gate to which all the masters had a key.

He followed silently.

Under the deep shadow of the school wall he heard a faint click of a key. There was a soft sound of a gate closing cautiously.

Steele was gone.

A moment more, and the Bounder was clambering up a tree a short distance along the wall, of which one stout branch extended over the coping. His plans were already laid. He had thought it all out carefully. He swung himself along the branch, reached the wall, and straddled it, looking down into the road.

A tall figure, in a dark coat and hat, was visible for a moment or two on the road, and then disappeared. That glimpse was enough to tell the Bounder the direction in which Steele had gone.

Waiting a few moments to make sure that the man would not hear him, the Bounder dropped from the wall.

Without a pause, he followed in the direction Steele had taken.

To follow Steele, to keep close on his track, to see where he went, and what he did, was the Bounder's intention. Either a robbery, or scouting on the scene of an intended robbery, was Steele's aim. Smithy did not doubt that for a moment. In either case, he would have tangible evidence against the man if he succeeded in keeping him under observation without being discovered.

And there was a good chance, at least, for obviously Steele had not the faintest idea that Vernon-Smith was on the watch. And on that lonely road, after midnight, there was not likely to be anyone else abroad—only the Bounder and his quarry.

Steele had vanished; but he had taken the direction of Courtfield Common. Treading softly, the Bounder followed on, hoping to glimpse the man again in the glimmer of the stars.

The night was dark, the road shadowed by trees. Smithy realised that he had set himself a difficult task, but that did not deter him.

Twice again he glimpsed a dark figure on the road in patches of starlight among the trees. And again he sighted it at the corner where a lane turned off, along the edge of the common, from the main Courtfield road.

The lane was deep and dark, thick with the shadows of branches. The Bounder plunged into it as into a pit of darkness.

But his man was ahead of him, he knew that, though he could neither see nor hear him.

The lane led to the tow-path on the Sark, at a considerable distance, passing the park wall of Popper Court. Smithy wondered whether the latter place was the cracksman's destination.

Popper Court had been the scene of a robbery the term before, one of the earliest exploits of the Courtfield cracksman. On that occasion a sum of money had been taken from the safe; but Smithy remembered having read in the papers that the burglar had missed many valuable things, of which apparently he had no knowledge.

The cracksman, if he read the newspapers, as undoubtedly he did, would know better next time, if he paid another visit to Sir Hilton Popper's house. And the Bounder, as he crept on in the darkness, felt that it was almost certain that the man was going to Popper Court. He could scarcely be going to the river, or intending to turn off across the bleak common, lonely, and swept by the winter wind.

The schoolboy came at last along by the park palings. Here a glimmer of star-shine fell into the lane, and the Bounder hugged the shadow of the wall.

In one place, he knew, the palings were broken. Many Greyfriars fellows, the Bounder among them, had dodged through the gap at times, trespassing on Popper Court grounds as a short cut

to the tow-path. That was the place, if the cracksman was going there. As he drew near to the spot, the Bounder listened and watched with painful intentness.

But there was no sound, nothing to be seen. He came to the gap in the palings and stopped.

Shadowing a cracksman at night was not an easy task, and the Bounder wondered what a policeman would have done in his place.

If Steele had gone into the park, he was on his way to commit the robbery, and the Bounder had only to follow him in. But if Popper Court was not his destination, if he was bound for some other spot, the Bounder was certain to lose him completely if he left the lane and entered the park.

Smithy was at a loss.

He waited, watched, and listened, but only the sough of the wind in the creaking branches rewarded him.

He gritted his teeth.

So far he had been successful; he had traced Steele as far as Popper Court. But that was an end to his success.

Had the man gone through that gap in the palings? It was impossible to tell, and whatever step the Bounder decided upon, he was as likely as not to lose him.

The minutes passed, while Smithy stood in deep shadow, thinking it out, with a moody brow and an angry glint in his eyes.

He had hoped for too much. The Courtfield cracksman, who had baffled the police for months, was not likely to be cornered easily by a schoolboy. If the man had gone on by the lane he was getting farther and farther away every moment, and there remained little chance of picking up his traces again. If he had gone into the park——

If he had gone in, he would come back the same way, after he had done his work, whether a robbery, or spying out the ground for a robbery. The Bounder had to take a chance, and he resolved to remain where he was, and watch.

Long, slow minutes passed.

In spite of his thick coat and scarf the Bounder shivered with cold, in the bitter wind that swept along from the sea.

But he cared little for discomfort. In the shadow of branches that overhung the palings, only a few feet from the gap, he waited grimly, and watched, and listened.

He was rewarded at last. There was a sound within the palings. A quick, hurried breath—the snapping of a twig.

The Bounder's heart jumped.

The man was there—he had gone into the park; whatever he had aimed to do was done, and he was returning. Unconsciously the Bounder drew a little closer to the gap, his eyes burning. From the ragged opening in the tall palings, a head and shoulders emerged; a head that was almost completely hidden by a dark cap drawn low.

Only the head and shoulders showed, the man had stopped there, and was watching the shadowy lane, and listening; the Bounder heard his suppressed breathing. The face was turned this way and that, as keen glances swept the road. The dim starlight fell on it, as it was turned in Smithy's direction, but all he saw was the peak of the cap pulled low over the forehead, and a dark muffler tied across the face, leaving only the eyes visible between the muffler and the peak of the cap.

A thrill ran through Vernon-Smith—something like terror. For he saw the flash that leaped into the watchful eyes, and knew that he was seen. He had no time to act—no time to think.

Even as it rushed into his mind that the man had seen him, the dark figure leaped from the gap in the palings, and flung itself on the startled schoolboy.

An inarticulate cry broke from Vernon-Smith as he was crushed down to the earth in a grasp that seemed like iron. A grip fell on his throat, and in the strong fear of death the Bounder made a frantic effort, tore the grasp away with both hands, and shrieked.

"Help!"

A clenched hand was lifted for a blow that would have dashed the hapless schoolboy into insensibility.

Smithy closed his eyes involuntarily.

In that dreadful second there was a light, running footstep on the road, and Smithy heard a sharp exclamation and felt himself relieved of the weight that had crushed him down.

He opened his eyes, amazed.

The man was no longer holding him; no longer touching him. He sat up dizzily.

Sounds of a desperate struggle came to him. Two dark figures, locked in a furious fight, rolled in the shadows a few feet from him.

He heard the panting breath, the short, sharp gasps, the brushing of the struggling forms on the frosty road. He stared on with dizzy eyes.

Who could have heard his cry and come to his aid on that lonely road at such an hour? As the desperate combatants rolled and struggled he glimpsed the disguised face of the man who had attacked him, the tied muffler still screening it. He glimpsed the face of the other—the man who had come to his rescue. And he told himself that he was dreaming

For the face of the man who was struggling in the grasp of the desperate thief of the night was the face of Richard Steele, the Remove master of Greyfriars.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Thickens!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH staggered to his feet, his hand against the park paling. He was feeling sick and dizzy, and like a fellow in a dream. The struggle within a few feet of him was going on savagely, fiercely, desperately. The Bounder's brain was in a whirl. Steele—it was Steele who had come to his help—Steele who was fighting as if for his life, in desperate hands, and up to that moment Smithy had not doubted that the man creeping from the park with the muffler tied across his face to hide it was Steele.

He had followed Steele—but it was another man who had emerged from the gap in the palings where he had watched. Steele must have been close at hand, or he could not have come speeding to the rescue so rapidly in answer to that one faint cry the Bounder had given. Steele had never gone into the park of Popper Court; that was clear now. The night-thief had been already there when Steele had passed the wall, and the Bounder, shadowing him, had stopped at the gap.

The discovery was too much for the Bounder to grasp at once; he was utterly confounded.

He leaned on the wall for a few moments, trying to get his breath, to recover his balance a little.

His dazed eyes were on the struggling forms on the ground. Steele seemed to be getting the upper hand, but a twist of the man with the hidden face rolled him aside, and the other scrambled over him, and it seemed to the Bounder that he was fumbling for a weapon. The Bounder, pulling himself together, leaped forward and struck at the man, and his hard, clenched knuckles rattled on a cheek-bone under the muffler.

The man reeled over and almost fell; and at the same moment Richard Steele made an effort and pitched him off.

Steele was on his feet in a moment more; but the man with the hidden face, as he, too, leaped up, leaped away.

He did not turn back.

As if the Bounder's blow had reminded him that he had more than one enemy at hand, he gave up the struggle on the spot, or perhaps he had only been seeking to loosen himself from Steele's grasp in order to take to flight. At all events, he made a sudden spring away, and took to his heels.

Steele, without a word or a look to the Bounder, leaped after him like a hound after a stag.

His sweeping hand almost touched the man, but a few inches saved the man who was running.

The Bounder watched them breathlessly.

With a desperate spring the man with the hidden face cleared a hedge on the other side of the road and vanished into a dark field.

Steele was over the hedge a moment later.

"My hat!" murmured the Bounder. "Oh, my hat!"

He staggered across the road to the hedge.

But the leap would have been far beyond his powers, if he had thought of making it. He stopped and listened.

Faint sounds came from the darkness of the field, which skirted one of the loneliest sections of Courtfield Common.

The desperate fugitive was making for the open common; and once in that shadowy, trackless expanse he was not likely to be seen again. But Steele was evidently doing his best to run him down.

The faint sounds died in the distance.

"My hat!" repeated the Bounder.

He stood where he was while the long minutes passed. He wondered whether Steele would come back.

What did it all mean?

It seemed to Smithy that his brain was turning round and round, as he tried to think it out.

Was it a cracksman who had come to his help and entered into a desperate struggle with another of the same kidney for his sake? That was improbable. It was, in fact, absurd. Steele was not a cracksman—whatever his strange nightly excursions meant they did not mean that. The Bounder knew it now.

But the man with the hidden face—who was he? A thief, evidently—a burglar—and there was little doubt that he was the Courtfield cracksman; the man who had robbed Popper Court before, and returned there this night for another raid.

Steele was not the Courtfield cracksman; he was not a cracksman at all.

But who and what was he? A Form master at Greyfriars—but it was not the business of a Form master of Greyfriars to be patrolling the roads in the small hours of the morning, like a police-constable. Steele had come along the wall of Popper Court—but he had not gone far beyond the spot where the Bounder had halted. All the time Smithy had been waiting there Steele must have been in the vicinity—not far away. Why?

Smithy hardly knew whether he was pleased or disappointed, to make the discovery—which he no longer doubted

—that Steele was not the man he had thought him

Certainly, if Steele was not a secret crook, his strange ways were stranger and more mysterious than ever, for the Bounder had only been able to account for them on the theory that he was the Courtfield cracksman. What was he doing there? Harry Wharton had seen him last term, on the scene of a burglary—now the Bounder had done the same—though with proof, this time, that Steele was not concerned in the burglary. What did it mean—what could it mean?

There was no sign of Steele coming back. And the Bounder was not sure that he wanted to see him, if he did.

He moved from the spot at last and started for the school.

His feelings were very mixed as he went. Steele was not the man he had believed him to be. His theory was shattered to fragments. His justification depended on proving Steele a guilty man, and now he knew that he was not a guilty man.

It came clearly into the Bounder's mind that he had placed himself in a desperate position by following his own headstrong counsels. What was to become of him now?

What had he to say to the Head to prevent his headmaster from sending him away from Greyfriars? What had happened that night had destroyed any possibility of justification.

And Steele had saved him from serious hurt. He shivered as he recalled that savage, clenched hand raised for a blow that would have stunned him, if it had not done worse. Steele, the man he had suspected, defied, maligned, spied upon! The colour came into Smithy's face as he thought of that.

Well, it would be the "sack," and he might as well go back and take his medicine.

He reached the school, and stopped at the Masters' gate. There, he looked round, peering in the dim starlight. It was impossible for Smithy to get in that way, unless Steele came. There were other ways of getting in, but only Steele could let him into the House, and the Bounder had no desire to go back to the old Tower for the remainder of the night. His game was up. The whole thing had gone to pieces. He might as well finish the night in his bed in the Remove dormitory, if he was going to be bunked in the morning. And with that thought in his mind the Bounder waited for Steele.

It was nearly half an hour later that there was a footstep on the road, and an athletic figure came from the direction of Courtfield Common. It came direct towards the gate in the high wall, where Vernon-Smith stood, and he knew that it was Steele.

In the deep shadow of the wall the Bounder stood invisible, and Steele did not see him till he was quite close at hand.

"Who—what?" The master of the Remove peered at him. "Vernon-Smith! What are you doing here?"

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THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The End of His Tether!

RICHARD STEELE dropped his hand on the Bounder's shoulder, and drew him from the shadow of the wall into the starlight.

There he fixed his eyes on Smithy's face.

"It is you, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you have not gone home?"

"No, sir."

"But why are you here?"

"I followed you, sir, when you left the school," said the Bounder quietly.

Richard Steele gave a start.

"You followed me—where?"

"As far as Popper Court."

"Was it you?"

Steele rapped out the words.

"It was."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Steele.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the Bounder quietly. "I followed you, believing that you were——" He paused, and stammered a little. "You know what I thought, sir, so I needn't say it. I—I fancied you'd gone in through that gap in the palings, and watched for you to come out."

Vernon-Smith's clenched knuckles rattled on a cheekbone and the man reeled over.

"But what does this mean? Where have you been all this time?"

Vernon-Smith stared at him. It came into his mind that Steele did not know that it was he whom he had rescued from the man with the hidden face. probably the master had not even given a glance at him, when he seized the cracksman and dragged him off his victim.

"Answer me, Vernon-Smith!" said the Remove master sternly. "This is no hour for a boy to be out on the roads."

"I know, sir."

There was none of the usual insolence in the Bounder's voice or manner. His tone was respectful. Probably Steele noted the difference, for his stern brow relaxed a little.

"Where have you been, Vernon-Smith?"

"I was hiding in the old tower till about midnight, sir."

"You foolish, reckless boy! The tower is far from safe. You might have met with some accident there. Your obstinate folly might have very serious results for you, Vernon-Smith."

"I know, sir," said the Bounder, with unusual humility.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"I shouldn't be saying this, sir, only I know now that I was mistaken. When that man, whose face I couldn't see, came out, I thought it was you. I thought it was you attacking me. I thought——" The Bounder paused again. "Then you came to my help——"

"I am glad that I came to your help, Vernon-Smith—that I heard you cry and was able to help you. I did not see who it was in the dark, and had no idea that it was you. You placed yourself in great danger by your recklessness."

"I—I suppose that man was the Courtfield cracksman, sir?"

"There is no doubt of it."

"Did—did you get him, sir?" asked the Bounder eagerly.

"He escaped in the darkness of the common," said Steele briefly. "But we must not stand talking here at this hour."

"But, sir, he—he was up to something at Popper Court. There may have been a robbery."

"Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, is at Popper Court before this, Vernon-Smith.

Naturally, I gave word of what had happened before returning here."

Mr. Steele paused.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Vernon-Smith. But, at all events, this is not time or place to say it. Follow me in."

"Very well, sir."

The master unlocked the little gate in the high wall, and the Bounder followed him in. Steele closed the gate, and walked across to the House, the Bounder at his heels, silent.

Steele stopped when they reached the House.

"You must go back to your dormitory, Vernon-Smith. Fortunately, I have a key, and can let you in."

The Bounder grinned faintly.

"I can get in the way you got out, sir, if you like."

"I forgot. It would not be the first time you have entered my room by climbing over the balcony," said Mr. Steele, a stern note in his voice. "But you will not take such a risk with my knowledge. I will let you in with my key."

"Very well, sir."

"Follow me."

Steele unlocked a door on Masters' passage, and the Bounder followed him into the House.

There was a gleam of light as the master turned on an electric flash-lamp.

"Tread softly, Vernon-Smith," he said. "I desire no one to be awakened."

The Bounder made no sound as he followed his Form master.

In silence, lighted by the gleam of the lamp in Steele's hand, they reached the Remove dormitory.

Steele opened the door.

There was a glimmer of starlight at the high windows of the dormitory. From the gloom came the snore of Billy Bunter.

"I must turn off the light here, or the boys may be startled," said the Remove master. "Lose no time, Vernon-Smith."

"I—I should like to say, sir——" muttered the Bounder.

"Well, what?"

It was on the lips of Herbert Vernon-Smith to say that he was sorry, deeply sorry, and to ask pardon.

But it came into his mind that it would sound like begging off, that Steele would take it as a plea to escape punishment.

And the Bounder set his lips. He had been in the wrong—hopelessly in the wrong—and he knew it now. But nobody should be able to say that, whatever he had done, he feared to take the consequences.

"What is it, Vernon-Smith?" asked Steele impatiently.

"Nothing, sir," said the Bounder, with a deep breath.

Steele gave him a look, the light on his face. Perhaps he was able to read the thoughts in the Bounder's mind.

"You need say nothing now, Vernon-Smith. Come to my study to-morrow morning after prayers. Now go to bed."

He switched on the light in the dormitory.

"I shall return in five minutes to turn out the light, Vernon-Smith."

"Yes, sir.

The Bounder went into the dormitory, and Steele closed the door. In the light several of the juniors had awakened, and were rubbing their eyes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sleepy voice. "What's up?"

"Little me!" answered the Bounder coolly.

"Smithy!" Two or three voices uttered the name.

"Only me."

"You've come back?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Looks like it."

"What have you been up to?" asked Skinner.

"Playing the giddy ox!"

Bob Cherry gave a sleepy chuckle.

"Was that Steele with you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then he bagged you?"

"Yes, he bagged me."

The Bounder turned in. He was tired out, cold and sleepy, and was glad to get between the sheets.

His eyes were closing when Mr. Steele came back and turned off the light. After Steele was gone a dozen voices called out questions to the Bounder. But Smithy was in no mood to answer questions.

"Can't you tell us what you've been up to?" demanded Hazeldene.

"I'll tell you to-morrow, if you're interested—and if I have time," yawned the Bounder.

"If you have time?"

"Yes. I'm going to be sacked in the morning, and the Head may ask me to catch the early train. If he does, I shall let him have his way. No good arguing with the Beak."

"Sacked?" said Harry Wharton.

"I think so. I fancy I've got to the end of my tether here."

"Well, you've asked for it," remarked Toddy.

"Oh, quite!"

"You're taking it calmly," said Bob.

The Bounder yawned.

"What's the good of whining?" he answered. "I've asked for it, and I'm getting it; and it wouldn't make any difference if I set up a howl. Good-night! I'm going to sleep."

And the Bounder, declining to answer any further questions, went to sleep; and the other fellows followed his example.

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THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Sympathetic!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. turned out at the clang of the rising bell in the wintry morning. Every eye in the Remove dormitory turned on the Bounder.

He was perfectly cool and self-possessed.

No fellow in the Form doubted—the Bounder least of all—that he would be taken before the Head that morning and expelled.

A fellow who had given half as much offence as the Bounder could hardly have expected anything else.

The Bounder did not expect anything else. And coolly as he faced the consequences of his headstrong recklessness, it was certain that he felt his position. But the Bounder was not the fellow to show the white feather. What he had done, he had done; and he was the fellow to take what came to him with a stiff upper lip. Not to save himself from the sack, or anything else, would the Bounder have begged for mercy.

To his nature there was something gratifying in being the fellow on whom the breathless interest of the whole Form was concentrated; a fellow who was going to be sacked, and who was taking it with imperturbable coolness.

His chum, Tom Redwing, looked—and perhaps felt—more distressed than the Bounder. Tom had a long face that morning. Smithy was one of the first fellows down; and Redwing followed him quickly, and joined him in the quad till the bell for prayers. The Bounder gave him a mocking grin as he came up.

"You're looking as if you're going to your own funeral, old bean!" he remarked.

"It's rotten, Smithy."

"Brace up! It's my funeral—not yours you know."

"Can't anything be done?"

"Only me!" said the Bounder flippantly. "I'm going to be done—done to a turn! Done brown!"

"The Head might——"

"The Head will say good-bye to me with a lot of pleasure!" drawled the Bounder. "He's never looked on me as a credit to the school. The Beak knows a thing or two, you know."

"It depends a lot on what Steele says to him," said Tom.

"Very likely. Steele is likely to say a lot for a fellow who's accused him of being a burglar," said the Bounder, laughing. "The putrid part of it is that I know now that I was mistaken; and given the same over again I should act quite differently. That's where the shoe pinches. But it's all in the day's work."

"You've found out you were mistaken?" exclaimed Redwing.

"Yes."

"That's something, anyhow. If you put it to Steele, civilly, and tell him you're sorry——"

The Bounder's lip curled.

"Too late for that! It would sound like begging off! I'm not asking any man for mercy."

"You don't want to let a fat-headed pride get you bunked from the school, Smithy," said Redwing earnestly. "You've made one mistake—don't make another."

"I'm going to ask nothing of Steele," said the Bounder doggedly.

The bell rang for prayers, and they went in. When the fellows came out after prayers, Harry Wharton joined the Bounder. His face was very serious—much more serious than Smithy's.

"You're going to Steele now?" he asked.

"In a few minutes."

"I spoke to him yesterday, and said all I could," said the captain of the Remove. "I believe there's a chance for you, Smithy, if you're careful. For goodness' sake don't cheek Steele, and he may——"

"Well, I shan't cheek him," said the Bounder. "I don't really dislike the fellow."

"You don't?" ejaculated Wharton.

"No. So long as I thought him a secret crook it was rather different. He was fair game then. Now I know that I was making a fatheaded mistake, I can see that he's had a lot to stand from me—and he's gone easier than I had any right to expect."

Wharton stared at him.

"Then you don't believe now that he's the Courtfield cracksman?"

"Hardly."

"And why?"

"Because I met that gent last night while he was engaged in the way of business," yawned the Bounder, "and Steele butted in and prevented him from cracking my nut."

"My hat! Are you pulling my leg?" exclaimed Wharton, in amazement.

"Not in the least."

The Bounder walked away, leaving Wharton staring blankly.

"I say, Smithy——" squeaked Billy Bunter, bearing down on the Bounder as he was heading for Steele's study.

"Go it, old fat bean!" said the Bounder. "Feeling that you're going to miss me a frightful lot?"

"Well, yes," said Bunter, blinking at him through his big glasses. "I'm awfully sorry, you know——"

"Thanks! And I never cashed a postal-order for you, either!" remarked the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"And only a couple of days ago I kicked you out of my study when you were trying to pinch a cake——"

"Beast!"

"So your sympathy does you credit, Bunter," said the Bounder gravely. "You've got a feeling heart."

"The fact is, I'm frightfully sorry for you," said Bunter. "I shall miss you a lot. I'm feeling awfully sad—in fact, quite cut up. I've never been so fearfully miserable in all my life—all through thinking of you, Smithy. I say, can I have the armchair?"

"Eh?"

"The armchair in your study. It's hardly worth while having it taken away, you know; and as you're going to be bunked, you won't have time for a leaving sale, or anything like that. Well, I don't see that chap Redwing having it—he's your study-mate, but he's never been such a friend to you as I've been. I've always liked you, you know."

"Go on, Bunter," said the Bounder, with an air of deep interest. "You don't know what a pleasure it is to listen to you."

"Well, you see, in my study the armchair belongs to Toddy," Bunter proceeded to explain. "Toddy's frightfully selfish. I usually have the armchair when I'm there, but Toddy takes it at times, though he knows I like it. I get fed-up, arguing with Toddy about his selfishness—he's practically stony-hearted. There's room in Study No. 7 for two armchairs—so if I have yours it will be all right. See?"

"I see."

"As you're going to be sacked you won't want it. But the fact is I'll buy it if you like—not cash down, as I've been disappointed about a postal-order—but I'll send on the money. I'm expecting several postal-orders shortly."

"Is that the lot?" asked Smithy.

"Yes, old chap! I'm sure you'd like a chap who's really sympathetic to have the armchair. I—I feel like crying, you know, to think that I shall never see you again," said Bunter pathetically. "So, in these circumstances, I really think you might let me have the armchair."

"Well, I'm not giving you my study furniture," said Vernon-Smith thoughtfully, "but I'm going to give you something to remember me by."

Bunter blinked at him hopefully.

"Good! What is it, Smithy?"

"This!" said the Bounder.

Taking a sudden grasp on Bunter's collar he spun him round. Bunter, guessing what was coming next, yelled and struggled.

Smithy's foot fairly thudded on a pair of tight trousers. William George Bunter flew.

"Yaroooooh!"

Bunter landed on his hands and knees. He squirmed round and glared ferociously at the grinning Bounder.

"Ow! Wow! Beast! I'm jolly glad you're going to be sacked!" he yelled. "Jolly glad! Do you hear? I 'ope they'll jolly well give you a flogging before you're kicked out, you beast! Ow!"

The Bounder, with a chuckle, went on his way to Steele's study, leaving William George Bunter wriggling most uncomfortably, and no longer sympathetic in the very least.

Another "Magnetite"

WINS A USEFUL PRIZE

for the following clever Greyfriars Limerick:

Said Skinner to Stott one day:
"On Cherry a joke let us play."
But Bob Cherry caught 'em,
And jolly soon taught 'em,
That jokes on him didn't pay!

A leather pocket wallet has been forwarded to Harry Yates, of 18, Beechwood Avenue, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester, who sent in the above winning effort.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

MR. RICHARD STEELE was standing by the study window, looking out into the quadrangle, when the Bounder tapped and entered. He turned from the window and fixed his eyes on Herbert Vernon-Smith.

His brow was stern, and his square jaw had never looked squarer. The Bounder, with all his coolness and nerve, had a peculiar feeling of being a culprit, and at a loss. It was not like the Bounder to feel like that in the presence of a master; he was accustomed to facing the music when trouble came with cool hardihood and a more or less subdued impudence. For once, however, Smithy had an uncomfortable feeling of being rather ashamed of himself, and his eyes dropped before Steele's steady glance. He could have kicked himself as he felt the colour rushing into his cheeks; but it came there, all the same.

Steele did not speak immediately, and the silence added to Smithy's discomfort. He broke the silence himself at last resentfully.

"You told me to come here, sir."

"Quite so, Vernon-Smith."

"If you don't want me——" began the Bounder, with a touch of his old impudence.

Steele made a gesture.

"The fact is, Vernon-Smith, I hardly know how to deal with you," he said. "You have given very great offence, and I have had great difficulty in persuading Dr. Locke to leave the matter in my hands to be dealt with."

The Bounder drew a deep, hard breath. His eyes sought the Form master's face. If the Head had left the matter in a Form master's hands, that, of course, meant that there was to be no expulsion. For anything else the Bounder cared hardly a straw.

"Dr. Locke has, however, very kindly consented to leave the mattter to me," went on Steele.

"Oh, sir!" gasped the Bounder. "That means——"

"That means, Vernon-Smith, that you will not be expelled, though you can hardly say that you do not deserve it."

"I—I suppose I do, sir," said the Bounder. "I can't quite see why you're letting me off that. I know I've been a beast to you."

Mr. Steele smiled.

"If you realise that, Vernon-Smith, we are getting on," he said. "I must tell you my boy, that before Dr. Locke consented to leave this matter in my hands I had to give him my assurance that there would be no repetition of your lawless and rebellious conduct. I gave him my word that you could be trusted so far."

The Bounder could not speak; he could only stare at Richard Steele.

"Your punishment, therefore, remains for me to decide," said Mr. Steele, "and I hardly know what to decide. You acted foolishly, disrespectfully, obstinately, but you were acting under the influence of a belief that now, I imagine, you have discarded."

"Of course, sir," stammered the Bounder.

"This alters the case," said Mr. Steele. "I am disposed, Vernon-Smith, to trust you to behave more sensibly in the future. As I find it difficult to decide what punishment to inflict, I shall inflict none, but shall leave it to

you to make amends for your folly. The matter is, therefore, now at an end."

The Bounder stared blankly.

He had come there fully expecting to be taken into the Head's presence, and to hear from Dr. Locke's lips the sentence of expulsion. At the very best, he had hoped to get off with a flogging.

And he was pardoned. The matter was at an end. For some moments he could not speak.

"You're really letting me off, sir?" he gasped at last.

"Precisely—on the understanding that you make amends, so far as lies in your power."

"You can rely on me for that, sir," said the Bounder earnestly. "I—I——" He stammered. "I'm sorry, sir—sorry for all the rotten things I've done—really sorry sir. It's awfully decent of you to treat me like this, sir. I—I thought I should be sacked. I know I asked for it. Only, I shouldn't have done what I did only I—I thought——"

He broke off.

"You thought something that you no longer think?" said Steele.

"Yes, sir. I—I was sure of it—and I don't understand now. But I know, of course, that I was wrong. I'm really sorry."

"I am sure of it, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Steele. "Now let us dismiss the matter and let us try to forget all about it."

He fell into silence, but did not dismiss the Bounder. Smithy saw that he had something more to say. He waited.

"I must ask you a few questions about last night's happenings," said Mr. Steele. "I was not aware at the time that it was you, as you know. Had you been long on that spot where I found you?"

"More than half an hour, sir."

"You did not see the man enter the grounds of Popper Court?"

"No, sir."

"You saw him coming out of the gap in the palings?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you see of him?"

"Very little, sir. His face was covered by a muffler, and his cap was pulled down. I saw only his eyes."

"You would not have recognised him if he had been a man known to you by sight?"

"I think not, sir, as I saw hardly anything but his eyes——"

"You did not note their colour?"

The Bounder reflected.

"There was no time to note anything, sir. A few seconds and he was jumping at me. But they were dark eyes—I'm sure of that. If I made a guess I should say they were brown."

"That was my own impression," said Mr. Steele, with a nod, "though he kept me much too busy for observation." He smiled. "While I was struggling with him, Vernon-Smith, you made an attempt to help me—I think you struck the man."

"I did, sir," said the Bounder. "I got in one, and it was a pretty good one, too." He held up his right hand and showed a barked knuckle. "My fist hit his cheekbone, sir, and it must have hurt him."

"You are sure that it struck his cheekbone?"

"Perfectly sure, sir."

"Let me see your knuckles."

Steele looked attentively at the Bounder's hand. It was obvious from the look of it that Smithy had hit hard. There was a glimmer of satisfaction in the master's eyes.

"Very good!" he said. "It is a certainty that the fellow will bear the mark of that blow. I think his left side was towards you."

"Yes, sir; his left cheek got it."

"This may be of material assistance to—to the police, Vernon-Smith. It is a practical certainty that the Courtfield cracksman has at the present time a mark on his left cheek where you struck him. It is probably quite a prominent mark, judging by the appearance of your knuckles. Your extraordinary adventure last night is, therefore, not wholly to be regretted. You have nothing more to tell me with regard to the man's appearance?"

The Bounder reflected again, but he shook his head.

"No, sir."

"Very well; you may go, Vernon-Smith."

"Thank you, sir."

The Bounder left the study; and Richard Steele turned to the telephone and rang up the police station at Courtfield. For the next five minutes the mysterious Form master was in conversation with Inspector Grimes.

Vernon-Smith went down Masters' passage as if he were walking on air. A crowd of fellows greeted him when he came out into the quad.

"Sacked?" asked Skinner.

"Bunked?" inquired Bolsover major.

"What's the verdict, Smithy?"

"Give it a name."

Tom Redwing's eyes were fixed hopefully on his chum. The Bounder did not look like a fellow who was going to be sacked.

Smithy laughed.

"All serene," he said.

"Not bunked?" asked Squiff.

"Thanks—no!"

"Are they going to pipe all hands for a flogging?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No."

"My hat! You don't mean to say you're let off with a gating or lines?" exclaimed Bob in astonishment.

"No."

"Then what have you got?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" yelled the juniors.

"Just that!" The Bounder grinned at the amazed faces. "I'm let off—on the understanding that I chuck playing the giddy ox and make amends."

"Oh crumbs!" said Skinner. "Steele must be soft!"

"Soft as putty!" remarked Snoop.

"Thank goodness!" said Redwing, with a deep breath. "You've had a lucky escape, Smithy."

"Think I don't know it?" grinned the Bounder.

"Gratters!" said Bob Cherry.

"Thanks!"

"But what's his game?" asked Skinner, puzzled. "He could have got you sacked if he'd liked, Smithy."

"No doubt about that," agreed the Bounder. "I fancy he had a lot of trouble to prevent it, in fact."

"Well, why? He knows you know what he is."

"He knows now that I know what he isn't," said the Bounder quietly. "That's all rot, Skinner, and it's all over, so far as I'm concerned. I don't understand Steele and the way he carries on, but he's as straight as a die. And after this I'm backing him up."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

Skinner sneered.

"So that's it, is it?" he said. "He's frightened you, and you're going to be a good little boy, and say 'Yes, sir,' and 'Oh, sir!' and 'Please, sir,' and 'No, sir'? What a come-down!"

"I suppose that's how you'd look at it," said the Bounder contemptuously. "You're welcome to your opinion."

And he turned his back on Skinner and walked away with Tom Redwing.

Evidently the Bounder's feud with the new master of the Remove was a thing of the past.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Little Joke!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled up to the Famous Five in break that morning with excitement in his fat face. There was a newspaper in Bunter's hand.

"I say, you fellows! It's in the papers!"

"What and which?" asked Bob Cherry. "Report of our match with Redclyffe?"

"You silly ass! No! The burglary at——"

"Oh, my hat! More burglaries!" exclaimed Bob. "Who's the happy victim this time?"

"Old Popper," said Bunter. "It's in the paper! I say, it must have been true what Smithy was telling us. There was a burglary at Popper Court last night."

"Let's look."

Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round the newspaper and read the latest report together of the exploits of that mysterious marauder, the Courtfield cracksman.

The report was brief, stating only that there had been a robbery at Popper Court the previous night, and that some articles of great value that had been missed by the cracksman on his visit a few weeks before had been taken.

There was no mention of the incident by the park palings which had so nearly led to the capture of the cracksman. No hint of the presence of Mr. Steele or the Bounder on the scene.

"Steele's keeping his bit dark," remarked Frank Nugent. "I suppose the Head wouldn't like a Greyfriars master's name to get into the papers."

"Smithy would like it all right," grinned Bob. "But they've left him out, too."

"I say, you fellows, do you think it was true what Smithy told us happened last night?" asked Bunter.

"Of course it was, fathead!"

"Well, I don't believe all I hear," said Bunter, shaking his head. "Some fellows don't stick to the truth, you know. Lots of fellows exaggerate. It's not a thing I'd do myself——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But lots of fellows ain't so particular about the truth as I am," said Bunter sagely. "I fancy Smithy must have been gammoning. You see, if that man he spoke of was the Courtfield cracksman, who's Steele?"

"Steele's master of the Remove, ass!"

"But he's a cracksman, too," said Bunter. "I'm pretty certain he's a shady character. Look at the evidence. Perhaps there's two cracksmen at work. See? Perhaps Steele was down on this chap because he was a rival in business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

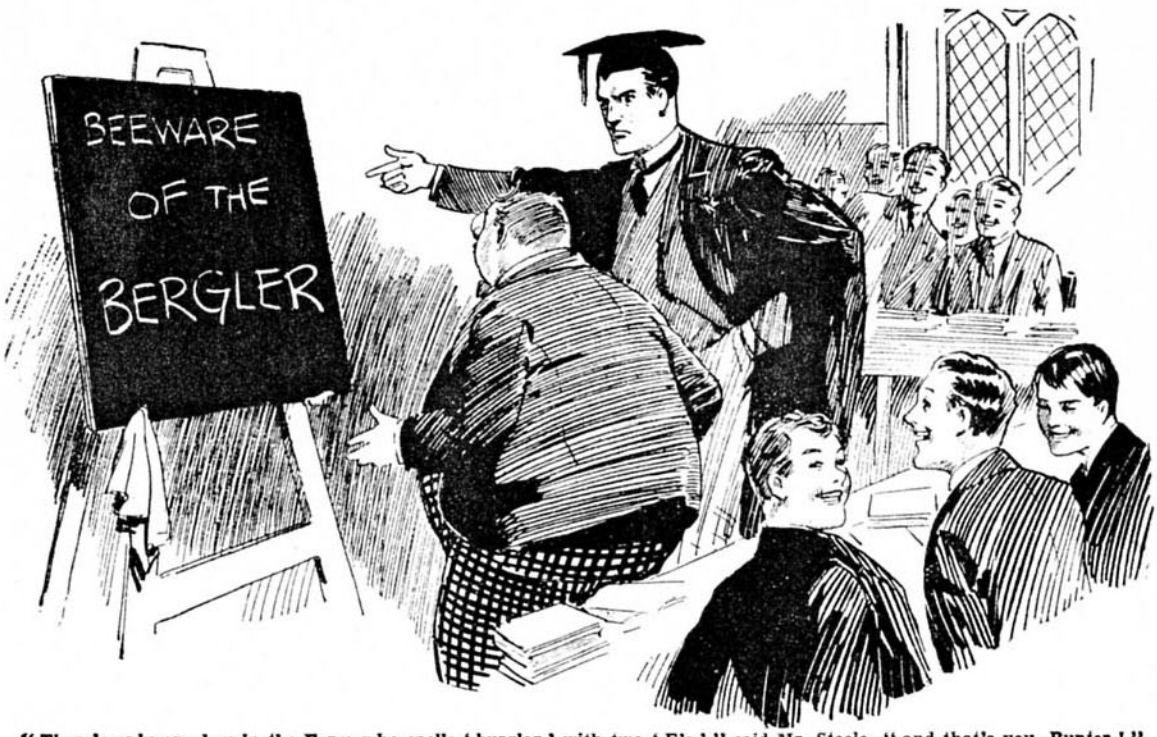
"Well, he's not stuffing me!" said Bunter. "He may stuff you fellows. But I'm rather wider than you are. He can't stuff me! The beast gave me lines this morning. He's always giving me lines—and he asks for them, too, if a fellow forgets to hand them in!"

"Which proves conclusively that he's a cracksman!" said Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Yes, exactly, old chap! He's a beast, anyway, and he's jolly well not going to stuff me! Besides, Smithy was very likely pulling our leg, you know. Smithy's not truthful——"

"Isn't he?" said a quiet voice behind Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove spun round.



"There's only one boy in the Form who spells 'burglar' with two 'E's,'" said Mr. Steele, "and that's you, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I didn't see you, old chap. I was just telling these fellows what a truthful chap you are——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder took the newspaper and read the report. He was keenly interested.

"They don't put everything in the papers," he remarked. "We know more here than they're giving out to the public. I shouldn't wonder if they get the man this time; and if they do, I shan't be sorry I played the giddy ox as I did. They're looking now for a man with a bruise on his left cheek."

The Bounder showed his barked knuckles.

"My hat!" said Bob. "You must have put some beef into it, Smithy! That must have left a mark!"

"I'm quite sure it did. I've still got a twinge in my knuckles, and I fancy he's got more than a twinge in his cheek-bone," said the Bounder, with satisfaction. "I got in only one drive, but it was straight from the shoulder, and it caught him fair and square. Now they want to find a man with his left cheek marked. It's something to go on, anyhow."

"He, he, he!"

The juniors looked at Bunter as he emitted that cachinnation.

"What are you cackling at, you fat ass?" demanded the Bounder gruffly.

"He, he, he! I can jolly well put my finger on a man with his left cheek marked if I like!" chuckled Bunter.

"You can?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Yes, rather! He, he, he!"

"What the thump do you mean?" demanded Vernon-Smith. "You haven't been outside the school this morning!"

"He, he, he!"

"Oh, dry up, you cackling ass!" snapped the Bounder, turning away impatiently.

"Hold on!" said Bob Cherry. "If Bunter's really seen a man with a bruise on the port side of his chivvy——"

"He, he, he! 'Tain't a burglar!" chuckled Bunter. "But I've seen him all right! He, he, he!"

"Near the school?" asked Harry, puzzled.

"Oh, quite! He, he, he!"

The Bounder turned back again. If Billy Bunter had seen a man with his his left cheek bruised, it was at least a coincidence, and Smithy thought it worth looking into.

"Where did you see him?" he asked.

"Quite near here," said Bunter, grinning. "At the garage, in fact."

"Hanging about the garage?" asked Smithy, perplexed.

"Well, sort of hanging about," agreed Bunter. "Anyhow, he was there, in the yard. You see, that cheeky beast, Bolsover major, chucked my cap over the wall, and I went into the garage yard to ask Barnes to give it to me. That's how I saw him."

"Is he still there?"

"I fancy so. He, he, he!"

"Then Barnes must have seen him."

"He, he, he! Must have," said Bunter. "Oh, yes, Barnes saw him all right! He, he, he!"

Evidently Bunter was enjoying a joke, though what the joke was was a mystery to the juniors.

"You've seen the man before?" asked Vernon-Smith. He was getting quite keen on the matter now.

"Lots of times."

"Hanging about the school?"

"Yes, rather! He, he, he!"

"How long since you saw him at the garage?"

"About ten minutes. He, he, he!"

"Blessed if I can make the fat fool out!" said Vernon-Smith. "But if there's a man hanging about the school with a bruise on his left cheek, I'm jolly well going to have a look at him. It looks suspicious, at least."

"Frightfully suspicious!" chortled Bunter. "He, he, he! You'll find him there all right. He, he, he!"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Smithy.

He walked away quickly towards the garage, and the Famous Five followed him. Bunter blinked after them through his big spectacles, and chuckled loud and long. Then he rushed away in search of other fellows to whom to impart the joke.

Harry Wharton & Co. reached the garage and went into the yard. The grunting of an engine told that Barnes was busy there with the Head's car. He was stooping over his work, and did not look up as the juniors arrived.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Good-morning, Barnes!"

"Good-morning, sir!" said Barnes, still without looking up. "Excuse me, sir, you young gentlemen are not allowed here. Please go away at once."

"We're looking for somebody, Barnes," said Vernon-Smith.

"There is no one here but myself, sir."

"Bunter says he saw a man here."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Nobody been here?"

"Nobody, sir." Barnes rose at last from the bonnet of the car, and looked round at the juniors. "I must ask you to go away at once, please."

The usually quiet and good-tempered chauffeur seemed to be in a less amiable mood than usual that morning.

"Barnes!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, staring at the chauffeur.

On Barnes' left cheek was a dark bruise.

The juniors stared at it.

"Had an accident, Barnes?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes, sir. I fell on the stair this morning," answered Barnes. "My cheek struck the corner of the banister. It is nothing. Please go away. Your headmaster would not like you coming here."

"Right-ho!" said Bob. "That fat villain, Bunter, has been pulling our leg! Keep your wool on, Barnes."

And the juniors left the garage; the Famous Five grinning, and Vernon-Smith scowling.

When they came back into the quad they found Billy Bunter the centre of a circle of grinning juniors. Bunter was telling his little joke, with a series of fat chuckles.

"Smithy's looking for a man with a bruise on his chivvy! He, he, he! He thinks it's a burglar! He, he, he! So

I told him where to find one! He, he, he! You see, Barnes toppled down his staircase this morning and banged his chivvy, and got a bruise! He, he, he! I say, you fellows! Smithy's so jolly keen on running in burglars, perhaps he'll fetch a policeman to see Barnes next! He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bunter's auditors.

"I say, you fellows, Smithy cut off to the garage like anything to find that man with a bump on his dial! I dare say he's found him now! He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared the Bounder.

Bunter blinked round.

"Have you found him, Smithy?" he chortled. "I say, are you going to fetch a bobby from Lantham to run him in? He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, I say, you fellows, keep him off!" roared Bunter.

All the fellows were laughing, except-ing Vernon-Smith, who did not seem to be enjoying the joke. He made a jump at Bunter, and Bunter fled for his life. There was a roar of merriment.

"Smithy's getting on!" chuckled Peter Todd. "Smithy ought to be a detective! First the Form master, then the Head's chauffeur! He will be tracking the Head next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder strode angrily away, leaving the juniors yelling. Mr. Steele, coming along by the path under the elms, paused to regard the merry group, with a smile on his face.

"You boys seem to be enjoying life," he remarked, in his pleasant voice. "May your Form master share the joke?"

Three or four chuckling voices told Mr. Steele the joke. The master of the Remove laughed heartily, and walked on.

The bell rang for third school, and the Remove fellows trooped away towards the House. But Mr. Steele did not take that direction. When the juniors were gone, the master of the Remove changed the direction of his stroll and walked to the garage.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Bunter!

"GREAT pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Every man in the Remove roared.

Billy Bunter blinked round the Form-room complacently.

The Remove were in for third school, but Mr. Steele had not yet arrived. It was not usual for him to be late; but he was late now, and the juniors had the Form-room to themselves. And Billy Bunter had had a brain-wave.

Bunter was feeling sore. He had bagged a hundred lines that morning for neglecting prep. This convinced Bunter, if he had had any doubts before, that Steele was a villain of the deepest dye.

And the Form-master being late, Bunter had his chance. He took the chalk and wrote on the blackboard in large capital letters.

Bunter was deeply astute. But writing in block capitals, he disguised the identity of the writer; even a detective could scarcely have traced out the writer of a chalked message in block capitals.

As he stepped back from the black-board and the other fellows saw what he had written, there was a roar.

Bunter felt quite flattered by that yell of mirth.

On the blackboard appeared the re-markable inscription, in large capitals:

"BEEWARE OF THE BERGLER!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, that will make him waxy!" said Bunter, rolling to his place. "What?"

"You benighted ass!" roared Bob Cherry. "Rub it out before Steele comes in."

"Shan't!"

"You'll get licked, fathead!"

"The lickfulness will be terrific!"

"How's he going to guess who did it?" demanded Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton made a step towards the duster, to save Bunter from him-self, as it were. But it was too late! There was a footstep at the door, and Mr. Steele came in. Wharton dropped into his place.

There was a breathless hush in the Form-room. All eyes were fixed on Richard Steele.

His glance fell on the blackboard.

Billy Bunter grinned.

He saw Mr. Steele give a slight start, and then he was puzzled to see a smile break out over the Form master's face. That was surprising—to Bunter. He expected the fellows to laugh; but he did not expect Steele to be amused.

Steele turned round to the Form.

"Bunter!"

The fat junior jumped.

"Eh? Yes, sir!"

"Why have you done this, Bunter?"

"Wha-a-t, sir?" gasped Bunter.

His little round eyes dilated behind his big spectacles.

The beast was going to pick on him—after Bunter had been so careful to leave no evidence!

"Why did you write this absurdity on the blackboard, Bunter?"

"I—I didn't, sir," gasped Bunter, in dismay. "I—I haven't been near the blackboard, sir!"

"What?" rapped out Mr. Steele.

"Ask any of the fellows, sir," gasped Bunter. "They'll all tell you I was nowhere near the blackboard, sir. They all saw me—I mean, they didn't see me there!"

"I think, Bunter, that I am safe in attributing this to you," said Mr. Steele quietly. "Step out before the class."

Bunter crawled out before the class.

"I—I assure you I—I never did it, sir," he groaned. "It wasn't me! I—I think a Fourth-Form chap came in and did it, sir. In fact, I'm practically certain it was a Fourth Form man, sir."

"I hardly think, Bunter, that there is any boy in the Fourth Form who spells 'burglar' with two E's," said Mr. Steele, "and I think there is only one in the Remove."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must learn better, Bunter! Your spelling is a disgrace to the Form," said Mr. Steele genially. "Such words as 'beware,' and 'burglar' are not often required in this Form, but since you desire to use them, you must learn how to spell them correctly. Take the duster and wipe the blackboard clean."

"Oh dear!"

Bunter wiped the blackboard.

"Now take the chalk and write 'B-E-W-A-R-E,' beware."

Bunter obeyed.

"Now write 'B-U-R-G-L-A-R, burglar."

It was written.

"Very good," said Mr. Steele. "After class, Bunter, you will remain in the Form-room, copying out those two words each a hundred times. Now you may go to your place."

Bunter crawled back to his place.

All the Remove were chuckling, and there was a smile on Mr. Steele's face. But there was no smile on Bunter's; and he did not chuckle.

When the Remove were dismissed that morning a doleful and dismal junior remained behind, wearily and drearily copying from the blackboard. And the other fellows grinned as they left him to it.

THE END.

(A ripping series of Greyfriars stories, chums, what? But the best yarn's yet to come! Note the title of it: "BILLY BUNTER'S BLUFF!" and then look out for it in next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET.)

STILL GOING GREAT GUNS . . . OUR POWERFUL SPORTING SERIAL!

PETER FRAZER—IRONMASTER!

By JOHN BREARLEY.

(Introduction on next page.)

"Untie Peter Frazer at once!" ordered Tim, levelling his revolver at the Spider. "Before I pull the trigger!"

Underground.

"DON'T move!"

The words, whispered in the pitch darkness with stinging ferocity, paralysed Murphy.

"Turn slowly!" whispered Tim Osborne. "Walk to where the others are. Make a sound, give a warning, and you'll never live to see the fun!"

For a moment Murphy's knees were too weak to allow him to move, but the sudden chill of a steel ring thrust behind his neck steadied him. He commenced to shuffle forward.

Tim counted the steps again. Four, then a corner. For the first time he saw a gleam of light in that underground darkness.

"Move to the door and stand still!"

The terrified gangster crawled forward. His trembling hand went out and began to drag aside the curtain.

Staring over the rigid man's shoulder, the first thing Tim saw in the dim light beyond was Peter Frazer, gagged and bound and lying still on the stone flags!

And the next instant became a nightmare to Granger's Gang, sitting moodily in their camp.

The rag curtain suddenly belched forth, a shrill, frightened squeal ripped the air, and Murphy, the sentry, hurtled across the room. Hard on the tail of the squeal there sounded the thump of a hearty kick.

Framed in the doorway stood a tall, slim lad. His lips curled bitterly, pale cold eyes blazed out of a white face, his whole attitude menacing. The blue gun in his hand seemed to cover all the gang at once.

They were all there—Granger, the Spider, and the others, the little man Charles oddly limp, and Murphy, eyes starting with terror, drooped over the table.

"I'm waiting for one of you to move," whispered Tim. The concentrated fury in his words congealed them into living statues.

Tim extended his left hand slowly and jerked it three times—hard. Then he pointed to the Spider.

"Untie Peter Frazer!"

Loyalty told. The Spider, even under the menace of that cold gun, glanced at his leader, seated stiffly at the table. Granger's lips curled.

"Do it, you fool!"

The Spider crawled sideways to obey.

"Do it quickly, Spider," drawled Tim; "and keep in sight!"

The members of Granger's Gang cowered back sheepishly from the menacing revolver held in the steady hand of Tim Osborne. Only Granger sat tense as a fiddle-string, arms asprawl on the table, staring unwinkingly at the figure in the doorway. It seemed years before the Spider rose to his feet; while slowly Peter Frazer began to pick himself up.

He had had twenty-four hours in tight bonds, and he had been gagged cruelly. For the next ten minutes he was too busy trying to restore the blood to his cramped limbs to worry about the present situation. And all that time Tim Osborne kept Granger's gang covered.

Now to the ears of everybody in the underground room came another sound, something like the roar of a distant waterfall. Granger's gang writhed and wriggled uneasily, and only Granger and Tim Osborne were still as stone.

Tim knew what the sound was. It was Peter's men rushing down the passage in answer to his signal. Granger guessed what it was, too.

Then, without a sound, the curtain at the other end of the room swung aside, and a man in an oilskin cape and hat stood petrified in the doorway.

"Peter, you idiot!"

It was Tim Osborne who yelled, and his voice rose to a screech. For it was the Scarred Man himself who stood paralysed by the curtain, and, seeing him, Peter Frazor had acted. Forgetting his stiff limbs, forgetting every-

thing, save that for the first time he could see his enemy squarely, he gave a shout, and went across the den in a single leap.

As he passed between Tim and Red Granger, the latter coolly pushed the lamp over and the whole place was plunged into utmost darkness, just as Frazer's team, with Moller and Baker at their head, slammed in through the doorway to the rescue.

A Fight in the Dark!

THEY burst into the underground den and stumbled about, bumping into other figures amid a loud din; and they were armed, grim men, prepared to give Granger's gang a rough time.

From the moment when, crouched over the trap-door above, Moller had given them Tim's signal they had quickly entered the passage, and, with the engineer at their head, raced for all they were worth through the underground maze.

The lad who had worked his way deep into their rough hearts was in danger. Enemies had threatened him for months, and now they had a chance to get at them.

"Into 'em, lads!"

Moller's voice rose, harsh and triumphant. He had been the first man to enter the den, just as Granger had pushed the lamp over. Instantly the engineer's torch flashed out and lighted the place; but with a furious curse Granger whirled up his chair and threw it at Moller. The engineer crashed over, and the torch fell to the ground, but Baker, following and shouting with anger, leapt over Moller's fallen body, and grappled with Granger.

The ironmen's irresistible rush had trapped the gang completely. As they closed in Spider Huggins dropped Haggerty in a heap; but little Mullins' hard body drove the Spider over the fallen table, and a spanner, descending from nowhere, knocked Granger's powerful lieutenant clean out.

Swept into the vortex of hard-hitting, plunging men, Tim Osborne was forced to struggle and fight his way clear.

His heart was full of disappointment and woe. Everything had gone wrong. Peter's reckless leap, and the foundrymen's wild charge had upset everything, and, instead of the neat stroke he had planned, there was this whirling, yelling rough-house. And of Peter and the Scarred Man there was not a sign.

"Oh, Peter, the goat!" he groused disconsolately, as the swaying fighters buffeted him about like a cork.

A heavy fist clumped into his face, and two big hands gripped him. He slammed upwards with the butt of his useless gun, and the hands sagged away. Then somebody bumped heavily into him, and he was hurled into a corner, bruised and furious.

Tim Osborne landed in a heap, his hand felt something on the floor that rolled as he touched it. It was Moller's torch, and he gripped it.

Scrambling to his feet Tim backed to the wall, and snapped the light on. Instantly a wild yell of triumph rose from the ironmen. Granger's gang were fighting like the dock rats they were; but they were up against scrapping demons. Granger was down, buried beneath Baker and Moller, and the Spider lay quietly against the wall. Back to back, white with fear and desperation, the rest of the gang fought to save themselves.

As Tim's torch lit the scene the foundrymen gathered themselves, and rushed at their enemies furiously.

Tim left them to it. Only two yards away the doorway leading out of the den stood open and unguarded. Snapping off his torch he went through it headlong. Somewhere beyond in the darkness was Peter Frazer, and the Scarred Man. So Tim stood not upon the order of his going, but went.

Meanwhile, Peter Frazer was at grips at last with his enemy. That first tigerish leap as the Scarred Man had stood in the doorway, bewildered and unnerved, had enabled Peter to get his hold. Together they burst through the hanging rug over the entrance.

Everything was pitch dark. They tripped, stumbled, and crashed to earth, Peter hanging on to his man like a leech. So far the Scarred Man had seemed paralysed with shock. The fall shook him up; and Peter realised he had a desperate man to deal with.

A shrill scream of rage rang out, and the slack form in Peter's grasp began suddenly to writhe and struggle with maniacal strength. Amid a babble of cries and curses, Peter's enemy slashed and fought in the darkness like a mad thing.

His oilskin cape came off, and they stumbled over it as they regained their feet. Peter lost his grip, and instantly a terrific blow took him full in the face. Only by instinct did he avoid a whistling swing, and then he jumped in himself, hitting out fiercely with both hands.

His enemy wilted under the stream of blows, and Peter dived at him with both arms. A vicious trip took Peter's legs from under him, but he frantically grabbed the Scarred Man's ankle, and brought him down with a crash.

They grappled once more, and, choked with dust and badly bruised they rolled down crumbling steps into an ancient crypt, fetching up at last against the damp stone floor with a jar that rattled Peter's teeth and shook the breath from his body.

But his enemy was still full of fight. He was desperate and beside himself with madness. On his feet, like a cat, followed quickly by Peter, he fought with hands, boots, and teeth. A fist landed on Peter's temple and sent him staggering. As he went his clutching fingers felt the Scarred Man spin round towards the steps. With strength born of desperation, Peter launched himself off the floor in a smashing tackle, and was relieved as he felt his arms wrap themselves round the other's knees.

Down came the Scarred Man, and Peter and his enemy fought with renewed vigour—on the ground, on their knees, reeling against corners, slipping on the crumbling floor, fighting by instinct, for the darkness was intense.

Once Peter lifted his man off the floor with a straight left, and a cry of rage from his enemy came as answer. But Peter was on top now. Moving like lightning, seeming to feel the other's movements with uncanny instinct, he forced his foe into a corner and slammed home a piledriver.

This was his enemy, this thing in the darkness—the man who had killed his uncle and who had tried to kill him!

His left crumpled the Scarred Man limply against the wall. Recovering, he forced Peter backwards and clutched at his throat. Peter tucked a stiff right over the outstretched arms. It landed on the other's jaw, the hands dropped away, and the Scarred Man stood in the dark, swaying. In came Peter, left and right, short and hard to the body, driving his foe across the vault.

The battle was over. Close in, head tucked into the other's heaving shoulder, he shot jolt after jolt into his man until he had him backed tight in the corner once more.

And then, as he drew back one step and the Scarred Man swayed before him, hands fluttering helplessly and head rolling, Tim Osborne came into the crypt. His torchlight snapped on, swung round the crumbling walls, and for one brief second lighted up the battered, distorted features of Peter's enemy.

But in that second Peter, beautifully poised, put all the accumulated fury of the past few months into one terrific drive that streaked its way through the Scarred Man's waving arms and smashed home on his slackening jaw!

"And I hope you're jolly well hurt, too, you bull-headed blighter!" observed Tim Osborne bitterly, as he and Peter stood staring down at the limp man in the corner. But Peter was past ragging. He had won, but it had been a terrific fight, and he swayed wearily against the old stone wall of the crypt.

It was ten minutes before he got his wind back, during which time Tim Osborne unburdened his mind—fully! Then a feeble twitch of the Scarred Man's hand showed that he was returning to life. Bending quickly, the two youngsters grabbed him and began to haul him out of the place. Tim's torch lit the way up the three or four broken steps, and they staggered up them together, and so along the passage above until they came to where Moller and his men, battered but victorious, had herded the wreckage of Granger's gang into a corner.

The victory was complete! The last gangster had been solidly hammered into defeat. As Peter and Tim, dragging their victim between them, entered the den a wild, deep cheer rang out.

Eager hands grasped Peter's, others thumped him on the back, and giant Hector Macpherson, throwing thick arms round his shoulders, hugged his tired body.

"A braw laddie—a braw laddie!" the Scotsman crooned.

INTRODUCTION.

Peter Frazer, a strapping youngster of eighteen, straight from a public school, arrives in the squalid industrial city of Maxport, to take over his strange legacy from his dead uncle—Frazer's Iron Foundry. Even before reaching his new home Peter falls into the hands of a gang of ruffians led by a scarred man, and barely escapes with his life. At the Works the youndster learns from his manager, Mr Dimmock, that this gang were responsible for his uncle's death. Their activities have brought Frazer's to the brink of ruin, and Peter sets out to smash them. It is a hard fight at first, but when once the young ironmaster has won his own men over to his side the Scarred Man and his followers are practically beaten.

But the gang are not finished with yet. All their previous attempts to "get" Peter have failed. One night, however, they make their last desperate effort, and Peter disappears—kidnapped. During the next twenty-four hours a frantic search is made throughout Maxport and the surrounding countryside, without a trace of the missing youngster being discovered. Just when hope is being given up, young Tim Osborne, late of the Canadian Secret Service but just now a foundry hand, hits upon a clue. The foundry has been built upon the site of an ancient abbey, and he decides to search the underground passages.

With half a dozen brawny iron-men at his back, including Moller, his father, Tim gropes his way along a pitch-black, winding passage. Suddenly he comes upon a sentry, and thrusts his automatic in the man's face.

(Now read on.)

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Peter's terrific drive smashed home on the Scarred Man's slackening jaw!

"Where's that prisoner?" snapped Moller briskly, thrusting through them.

"Where d'you think!" growled a voice tartly. They turned to where Tim stood grimly over Peter's captive. "I nearly lost him once through you thick-headed roughnecks! He won't get away again."

There was laughter again and rough banter. Little Mullins bent down and examined the Scarred Man critically.

"Ay, yon's Peter's work all right!" he chortled. "Even you could take care o' him now, Tim!"

"Rats!"

Moller came forward again, and on his knees beside the Scarred Man ran his hands quickly through each of his pockets. The man was wearing an old suit of grey flannel, and Moller's first find was a length of rubber tyre that brought a growl from the ironmen. They watched the engineer in absorbed silence as his busy hands darted here and there. He grunted something to Tim, and a tense silence followed.

"Light here, Tim!"

The white arc of the powerful torch shone squarely on the Scarred Man's head. His face was badly bruised from Peter's powerful hitting, but every eye in that dark circle of men was fixed on the white, bald head and the terrible scar that shone livid down the centre. Then Moller bent over him again, his burly shoulders hiding the view. They could see he was busy with something, and peering over, Peter saw that he was fitting what seemed to be a wig on the unconscious man's head.

Slowly Moller rolled back on his heels, his body still hiding the Scarred Man's face, while the ironmen shuffled in impatience.

A smile of fierce satisfaction lighted Tim Osborne's thin face, and there was a little grin, too, on Moller's dour features as he looked up at Peter. His hand moved significantly towards the man on the ground.

They bent forward, everyone. One glance was enough! Gone was the bald head, gone the awful, conspicuous scar. A neat wig of silvered brown hair covered the Scarred Man's brand.

Peter fell back as though a giant fist had landed squarely on his chest. For there on the floor was the Scarred Man at last, but in disguise he was no other than Dimmock, the manager!

A Tragic Tale!

"I RECKON this has been a shock to you, sir!"

It was a full minute before Peter Frazer lifted his head. His rugged face, bruised in the previous night's battle, looked white and haggard in the clear morning light that streamed through the window at Manston.

"You're right, Moller," he replied dully.

He felt sick and shaken. The Scarred Man, the terrible enemy, whose relentless vendetta had caused the hatred and trouble of the past two years was—Mr. Dimmock!

He could almost see the man sitting over there by the fireside, kindly, sympathetic, and worried, his neat wig of grey-brown hair hiding his terrible scar, just as his timid, gentle manner hid the maniacal depths of his hate.

The hearty voice of Inspector Button brought him out of his thoughts.

"Well, Mr. Frazer," he boomed, "we've got 'em all! Your troubles are over—thanks to our friends here!"

Peter grinned wryly at Moller and Tim.

"Tell us the story, Mr. Moller—all of it!"

The engineer lit his pipe gravely.

"It's a long one, Mr. Frazer——" he began.

"Peter!"

"Thank you, Peter! It's a long tale, and the beginning goes back thirty years—when Dimmock and your uncle were young men together."

With his pipe well alight, he settled comfortably back in his chair.

"Thirty years ago," he went on, "there weren't two greater pals in all England than your uncle Desmond and Dimmock. Dimmock's real name was Manston then!

"Well, at twenty, off they went to America together. What they did at first we haven't found out. But, anyway, a few years later found them working among the foundries out in Pittsburg.

"They were still great pals, firmer than ever. It seems that by that time your uncle had got fed-up with rolling round, and decided he was going to be an iron-man for good. And, from all accounts, whatever your uncle decided was good enough for Manston!

"So there they were, learning to be iron-men in Pittsburg. But they were a wildish couple, and they found some wild pals out there, too!

"Well, now we come to Dimmock—or Manston, rather—alone. He was a weaker sort of chap than your uncle, who knew his own mind even then, but he had a curious kink in his mind. He was given to fits of the most terrific temper — sometimes over absolutely nothing at all!

"During these fits he became an absolute maniac, and from all we can learn, folks used to get pretty scared whenever Manston went into one of them.

"There was only one chap who could handle him—your uncle. Well, one day the word went round that something had upset Manston and he was properly on the warpath! Things were going pretty prosperously at the time, and your uncle didn't want them spoiled by his rackety pal, so he rushed off to stop the row!"

The company in the long room sat motionless as Moller paused and relit his pipe. Then:

"This time it was a proper turn-up! Manston had gone clean off his head over something, and when your uncle came out into the yard there was Manston stamping round screeching

mad, with a whacking great fire shovel in his fist!

"One man lay flat across a dump, and backed up against the wall was a big tough Westerner, a fireman, simply stiff with fright.

"Your uncle put on a spurt, yelling as hard as he could, but he could see he wouldn't be in time. The fireman was trying to back clean through the wall, and Manston was creeping in towards him.

"And then the fireman's nerve broke. He gave a dickens of a wild yell, jumped in, and yanked the shovel clean out of Manston's hand. He whipped it up, and then brought it down on Manston's head with vicious force.

"After that—well, no one saw him go!

"Manston, of course, was just a crumpled heap. But he was still conscious—how, goodness knows! Anyway, as your uncle bent over him, he swears Manston recognised him; but even as they stared at each other Manston faded out.

"And now comes the tragic part. Manston recovered eventually after a long, long while; but he was mad, and a terror into the bargain! That blow with the fire-shovel had knocked all reason out of him.

"Your uncle behaved like the man he was, Peter! He stuck by his pal and did everything for him, but it was no good! There was only one thing for it—an asylum; and Desmond Frazer worked hard to put his chum there comfortably.

"And the terrible part of the business was that Manston was obsessed with the idea that your uncle was his enemy. His last sane vision had been of Desmond Frazer bending over him. In his madness he swore that it was he who had struck him down.

"And, to make it brief, that's how Manston's hatred against your family started."

Peter broke a tense silence.

"Poor chap!" he murmured simply.

"Well," continued Moller, "that went on for over two years. Then one day Manston escaped! They hunted him high and low, you bet, because, naturally, he was labelled dangerous. But they didn't find him; and that's where his little crook of a brother Charles comes in. He planned Manston's escape, and hid him afterwards.

"When at last the search died down and he had given up hope, your uncle came home. The loss of his friend and the sorrow of the past two years had changed him a lot.

"He started Frazer's Foundry here. He struggled and won, and got a hard name doing it. Then five years ago, Manston turned up—as Dimmock!

"You'll wonder, maybe, why your uncle didn't recognise him; but it isn't strange, really. He hadn't seen his chum for close on ten years, remember, and then only as a raving lunatic in a padded cell, with a terrible scar running across a shining bald head. Now he turned up—a quiet, reserved man, with his scar covered by a wig made by an expert.

"But he was still mad. And as cunning as a madman, too! Your uncle was obsessed in his foundry. He needed an assistant, and Manston got the job—as he meant to do! And there, trusted and liked as well as hard old Desmond Frazer could like a man outside his old friend, he killed him slowly.

"I came on the scene two years back. The men here had got wild—with Granger as their leader. I'd had experience of handling men before, Peter, but there was simply nothing I could do—no, nor ten like me!

"I'd have packed up pretty soon; but, somehow, it seemed to comfort your uncle to have me by, so I stayed on and learnt the trade. When he was dying he asked me to take care of you! Mind you, I had no suspicion that Manston, or Dimmock, as we'll call him now, was behind all the trouble; but he and I were the only ones with your uncle when he died; and if ever madness stalked right out of a man's eyes, it did then as Dimmock stared down at the man who had befriended him all his life.

"That made me think. And, later, when the will was read, leaving it all to you, I thought a lot more! And soon after you came here I wired for Tim and I went to the inspector."

"That's so!" jerked Inspector Button.

(For the concluding chapters of this great sporting serial see next week's MAGNET*!)*

FAGGING FOR THE FIFTH.

(Continued from page 15.)

will still be fagging for the Fifth. In practiss, every member of the Fourth will hold an eggsemption certificate. See?"

The Fourth couldn't help larfing at the peculiar way in which Dr. Birchemall seemed to be able to sattisfy his conscience. But that was no bizziness of theirs, anyway. They were pleased enuff to receive the eggsemption cards which the Head proseeded to sine, without trubbling about the old fogey's conscience.

Five minnits later the Fourth quitted the Head's study, cheering like anything at their grate victory.

Passing the Fifth Form passidge, they herd Bowncer of the Fifth yelling out:

"Fa-a-ag!"

Jack Jolly pawsed and grinned.

"Let's all go!" he sujjested.

And the Fourth kaptin's sujjestion was carried out. The entire Fourth rushed into Bowncer's study, and Bowncer smiled with sattisfaction—for about half a second! At the end of that period he was upended, bumped, scragged, and painted with a mixture of soot and treckle. After which the Fourth left him lying in a heap, and wondering vaguely what had happened.

It was some time later when Bowncer managed to regain his feet. Then he rubbed his eyes, apparently in the hope of getting a clearer view of the situashon.

"What the blazes do those fags mean by this?" he asked himself, as he rubbed his akeing limms. "I'll make the little beggars sorry they ever tried to take a rise out of me. I'll make 'em fag until they drop exhausted!"

The eggsitement in the Skool House for the rest of that day was intense. For the time being, the Fifth were under the happy delusion that they had got the Fourth in the hollow of their hand. What would happen when the truth dawned on them remained to be seen! THE END.

(There's another feast of chuckles and exciting situations in next week's topping St. Sam's yarn, entitled: "DIDDLED BY THE FOURTH!" Mind you read it!)

1-2-30

FAGGING for the FIFTH!

By DICKY NUGENT.

Once more Dicky Nugent, our tame author of the Second Form at Greyfriars, "bursts into print." The result, says our office-boy, will make "Magnetites" weep with laughter.

I.

THE old quad at St. Sam's was covered with a mantle of snow. The picturesque seen reminded one of England in June, but as a matter of fact it was a bright morning in January.

Three Fifth-Formers were strutting across the quad, chucking their weight about as Fifth-Formers always do. They were Bowncer, the kaptin of the Fifth, and his pals, Swankleigh and Oldbuck.

Three cheery-looking juniors were proseeding in the opposite direction towards the tuckshop. They were Jolly and Merry and Bright, the heroes of the Fourth at St. Sam's.

Jack Jolly & Co. grinned as they reckernised Bowncer & Co., while Bowncer & Co. affected not to notiss the juniors. It was quite beneeth the dignity of these mitey seniors to notiss mere Fourth-Formers, of corse.

On this occasion our heroes didn't feel like being ignored. They therefore called attention to themselves in a very simple manner. In the space of two tix they had made half a duzzen deadly-looking snowballs. In less than three tix they had flung them with unerring aim at the swaggering leaders of the Fifth, and Bowncer & Co. were forced to notiss their insignificant eggsistence.

Crash! Bang! Wallop!

Bowncer & Co. collapsed, yelling feedishly, while Jack Jolly & Co. resumed their interrupted jerney to the tuckshop, grinning all over their diles.

So far as Jack Jolly & Co. were conserned, that was the end of the insident. But it wasn't the end from the point of view of Bowncer & Co.—oh dear, no! Those swaggering, swanky, lanky grate leaders of the Fifth didn't intend to take a snowballing from the Fourth lying down. So they stood up again, and adjerned to Bowncer's study for a council of war.

Bowncer did all the talking. He was rather fond of the sound of his own voice, was Bowncer, and he farely let it rip this time.

He began by asserting that the Fourth were getting a dashed sight too big for their boots, and that the soleless little beggars wanted bringing to heel. These cheeky young cubs, he declared in a vinegary voice, didn't seem to reckernise that the Fifth were the salt of the earth. They ought to be mustard together and told plainly that their sauce had got to stop.

Loud "Hear, hears!" from Swankleigh and Oldbuck encurridged the kaptin of the Fifth to go on laying down the law, and Bowncer indulged in yet more elloquence.

After all, he pointed out, the Fifth were seniors and the Fourth juniors. The Fourth were really nothing more than fags. It was tommy-rot and all my eye to say otherwise, and if they were to be kept in their place they ought to be reckernised as fags.

And then Bowncer came out with his Grate Idea.

"Jentlemen," he said sollumly, "the time has come when something has simply got to be done. I'll tell you in one sentence what I sujjest as a solution to the problem. Here it is—the Fourth must be made to fag for the Fifth!"

"Grate gad!" eggsclaimed Swankleigh and Oldbuck. These swanking Fifth Form louts, it should be mentioned, were in the habit of using weerd eggspressions like "grate gad!" instead of sensible Fourth Form phrases like "grate pip!"

"Well, what do you think of the idea?" asked Bowncer.

"Tophole wheeze, old fruit!" said Swankleigh. "The only drawback is that the Head won't agree."

Bowncer smiled a slitely sinnical smile.

"Won't he? I fansy he may if we offer him a financial inducement. You see, as it happens, I overheard the Head trying to tap old Justiss for a bob this morning, so he's obviously on the rox. Anyway, I'm willing to make him an offer and chance it. Coming along with me?"

"Yes, rather!"

And Swankleigh and Oldbuck linked arms with their leader and accompanied him to the Head's study with plezzure. The idea of the Fourth fagging for the Fifth made a grate appeal to these lazy, good-for-nothing old fogeys.

There was no response to Bowncer's first kick at the door of the Head's study, so he aimed two or three more—but with equal lack of suxxess.

"Must be out!" remarked Bowncer; and he opened the door to see.

But Dr. Birchemall was not out. He was sitting at his desk with a far-away look in his eyes and a blue County Court summons in his hand. Bowncer & Co. grinned and looked at each other meaningly. Evvidently the Head was suffering from financial troubles for the umpteenth time in his career.

As he still hadn't notissed the new arrivals, Bowncer strolled over and gave him a dig in the ribs which brought him round with a violent start.

"Yaroooo!" he roared indignantly. "Wharrer you doing, you silly ass?"

"Sorry, sir, but you were dreeming, you know," said Bowncer. "In trubble, mite I ask?"

Dr. Birchemall groaned.

"Trubble isn't the word for it, Bowncer. "Ruin stares me in the face unless I can rake up ten bob by tomorrow."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, indeed, Bowncer! This summons you see in my hand is for my last year's laundry bill."

"A laundry bill for ten bob, sir?" asked the kaptin of the Fifth, in surprise. "I didn't know you sent such a lot of linen to the wash!"

Dr. Birchemall shook his head sadly.

"I wish I hadn't sent so much now, Bowncer. But as headmaster of St. Sam's I have to keep up appearances, which means a clean collar every fortnight and a change of shirts once a month. Hence this terrific bill."

Bowncer coffed.

"Then I suppose you could do with a ten-bob loan, sir?"

The Head eyed the kaptin of the Fifth with eyes that had suddenly begun to gleem with hope.

"You don't mean you are offering to advance me this sum, Bowncer?" he cried, leaning forward eagerly.

"That is eggsactly what I do mean, sir. There is only one condition——"

"It is granted already. For ten bob I would do anything—or anybody," added Dr. Birchemall, as an afterthought. "Name your terms, my dear Bowncer."

Bowncer smiled.

"They are quite simple, sir. All I want is a decree from you orthorising the Fifth to fag the Fourth. Savvy?"

The Head nitted his brows.

"This is rather an eggstraordinary request, Bowncer."

"Not if you think it over, sir. Our idea is that the Fourth are getting altogether too cheeky. They want taking down a peg or two, and if we're allowed to fag them they'll jolly well get taken down a peg or two—won't they, chaps?"

"Oh, rather!" drawled Swankleigh and Oldbuck, in their langwid Fifth Form manner.

The Head scratched his nose and tugged his beard rather thoughtfully.

"Something in what you say, Bowncer," he admitted. "The Fourth really are getting a little out of hand. Only yesterday Jolly poked out his tung at me, and this morning Fearless caught me a nasty one on the kisser with a snowball. But still——"

"Ten bob, sir!" mermered Bowncer perswasively.

Dr. Birchemall shook his head.

"No, Bowncer. It would be unfair to the Fourth to make them into fags after years of liberty they have enjoyed. I can't do it, and I'm surprised at your attempting to bribe me. You ought to know that a jentleman of my carrickter and reputation is altogether above taking bribes."

"I'll make it fifteen bob, sir!" said Bowncer.

The Head grinned.

"Well, of corse, that's rather different. Consider it done!"

Five minutes after that, fifteen bob changed hands. And Bowncer & Co. of the Fifth quitted the Head's study in triumf, carrying a sined document which they proseeded to hang up on the notiss-board in the Hall.

II.

"HERD the latest, you chaps?" Yawnington, the slacker of the Fourth, burst into Jack Jolly's study wearing a sort of terrified aggernised look on his dile.

Jack Jolly & Co. stared at Yawnington in surprise. Usually Yawny spent his spare time snoozing in his study. For the slacker of the Fourth to be dashing about in this viggerous manner was simply amazing.

"Must be an earthquake at least!" grinned Jack Jolly, in reply to Yawny's question. "Nothing else would get you up from your faverite sofa, I know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Yawnington groaned.

"Don't larf, you fellows! It's worse than an earthquake. As you don't seem to know, I'll tell you. The Fifth have obtained the Head's permission to fag the Fourth!"

And Yawnington flung himself into an armchair and burst into a torrent of angwished tears.

Jack Jolly & Co. started to their feet and looked at each other with tense, stern looks. If Yawny had dropped a bomb in the study he could not have surprised them more.

"Can this be true?" demanded Jack Jolly.

"Surely not!" eggsclaimed Frank Fearless. "Of corse, we know the Head is sevveral sorts of a silly ass——"

"Hear, hear!"

"But he's not such a silly ass as to turn the most important Form at St. Sam's into a Form of wretched and despised fags!" said Frank Fearless. "That is, unless——"

"Unless he's hard up and some of those Fifth cadds have tempted him!" finished Jack Jolly, his eyes flashing fire. "In that case, we're going to have something to say about it. Britons never shall be slaves!"

"No fear!"

"Follow me!" wrapped out the kaptin of the Fourth, and he led the way out of the study. The rest followed, with the eggsception of Yawnington, whose unaccustomed eggsertions had by this time ended in his falling asleep.

Wearing grim, determined eggspressions on their diles, Jack Jolly & Co. tramped down the Fourth Form passidge. They were joined by numerous other Fourth-Formers on root, for the amazing news had spread rapidly, and the Skool House was already buzzing with eggsitement.

When they entered the Hall, a grate crowd had assembulled round the notiss-board. Everybody was larfing fit to bust at the idea of the proud, hawty Fourth being reduced to the rank of fags, but a few grim looks from the newcomers, accompanied by punches on the nose, et settera, soon silenced the larfter.

Jack Jolly read out the notiss, which was written in the Head's skollerly scrawl. This is what he read:

"NOTISS.

IT IS HEARBY ORDAYNED THAT THE FIFTH FORM SHALL BE ALLOWED TO FAG THE FOURTH FOURTHWITH. ANY OBJECTIONS SHOULD BE LODGED WITH THE UNDERSINED, WHO WILL REPLY TO THEM WITH THE AID OF A BIRCHROD.

(Sined). A BIRCHEMALL, M.A., D.D."

There was a yell of rage from the Fourth as Jack Jolly finished.

"Shame!"

"Down with tirrany!"

"Are we downharted?"

"NO!"

And so on and so fourth.

Evenchally, Jack Jolly held up his hand for silence.

"Jentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" he cried. "You see the Head's latest. With the suddenness of a snake in the grass, he has turned round and given us a backhander that deprives us of our ancient liberty."

"Shame!"

"Are we going to axxept it lying down, jentlemen? Not likely! My own opinion is that there is something suspishus in this bizziness. I guessed there was something fishy in it when a gang of Fifth-Formers interviewed the Head this morning, and now the scales have fallen from my eyes!"

(Loud cheers!)

"The fact is," said Jack Jolly darkly, "this notiss is the result of bribery and corruption. The Head has sold the Fourth into bondage for a pot of message! Jentlemen, are we going to be turned into slaves and chattels just because the Head happens to be hard up?"

"NO!" yelled the Fourth.

"Then follow your uncle, and we'll see what can be done!"

So saying, Jack Jolly led the way to the Head's study. He was followed by a cheering crowd of eggsited Fourth-Formers.

Dr. Birchemall, looking considerably happier than he had looked on the occasion of Bowncer's visit, was sitting at his desk, roaring with larfter over a commic paper, when they entered. His jaw dropped a little as the Fourth streamed in.

"What the thump——" he gasped.

Jack Jolly plunged right into his subject with tippical frankness.

"I suppose you've agreed to this fagging bizziness on the strength of a loan from Bowncer?" he sujjested.

Dr. Birchemall flushed to the roots of his scanty hair.

"Why, you cheeky young ass——" he began.

"No need to try to bluff it out, sir; I can see by the way you've cullered up that I'm right!" said Jack Jolly. "Now, the problem is—on what terms are you prepared to give us back our freedom?"

Dr. Birchemall larfed.

"I'm afraid that is impossibul, Jolly. I've given my word to Bowncer that the Fourth shall fag for the Fifth; and the word of a Birchemall is his bond."

"I suppose you can arrange for eggseptions to the rule, sir?"

The Head coffed.

"Well, of corse, if you made it worth my while, Jolly——"

"For eggsample, would you grant eggseption to all Fourth-Formers who paid over, say, sixpence?"

Dr. Birchemall rubbed his bony hands and grinned.

"That's a very sensible proposition, Jolly. I should be delited to do so."

Jack Jolly fished in his trowsis pocket and brought out a handful of silver.

"There are thirty fellows in the Fourth. At sixpence a time, that will make fifteen bob."

"Take your word for it, Jolly. I'm not so good at mental arithmetic as I used to be!"

"Then is it distinktly understood that if I pay you fifteen bob, you'll eggsempt us all from the skeem?" asked the kaptin of the Fourth.

"Plezzure, Jolly! Of corse, I mustn't break my word to the Fifth——"

Jack Jolly stared.

"How the merry dickens can you help breaking your word to the Fifth, sir?"

The Head grinned.

"Quite easily. In theory the Fourth

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