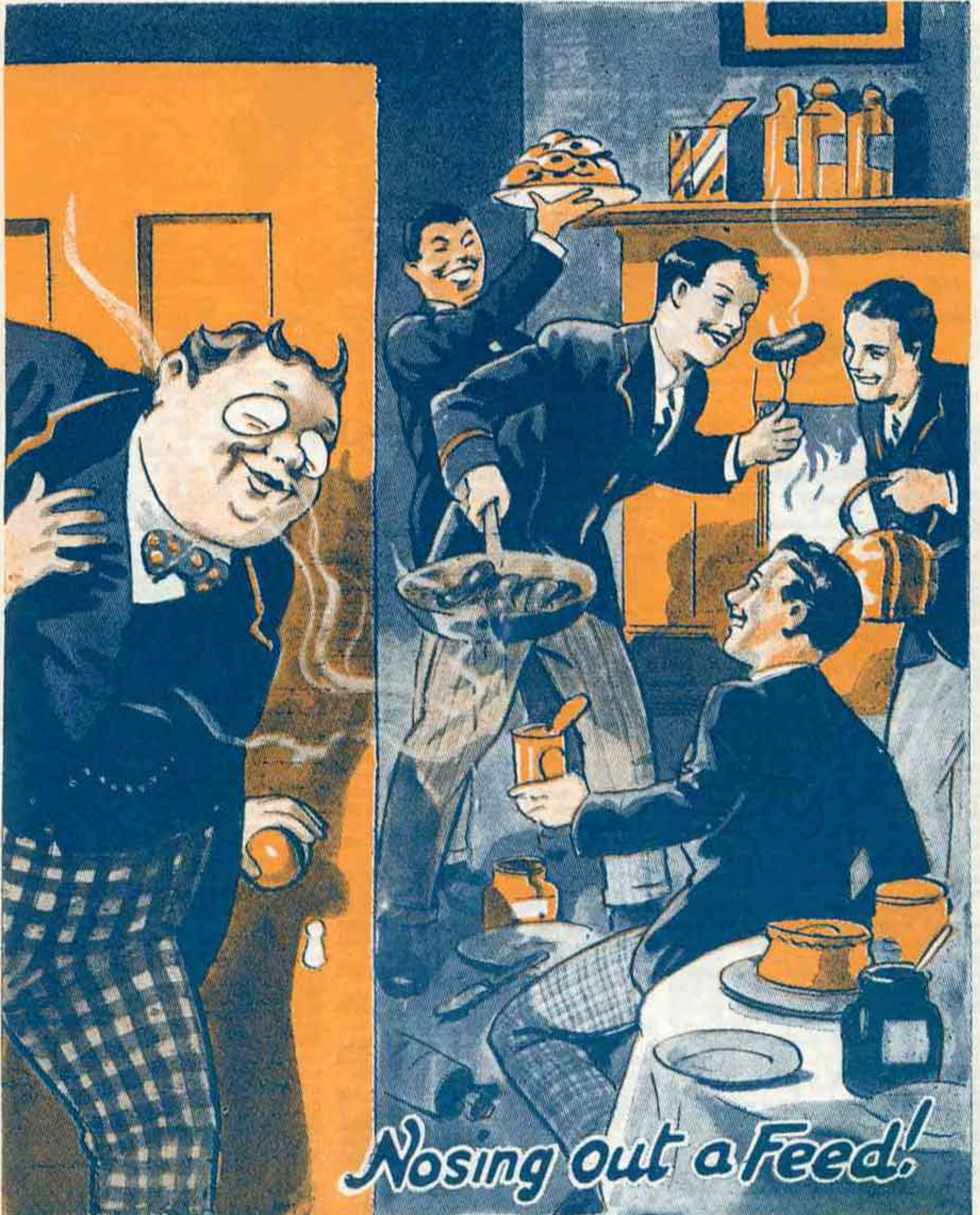


"THE COMPLETE OUTSIDER!" Extra-Special yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars—inside.

The **MAGNET** 2^D



Nosing out a Feed!

THE COMPLETE OUTSIDER!



By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Borrows a Bike!

SKINNER of the Remove grinned. Skinner seemed amused. He was loafing in the doorway of the bikeshed at Greyfriars School. From the direction of the House, Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, was coming along at a trot. Evidently Wharton was coming down for his machine, and he seemed to be in haste, which, for some reason, amused Harold Skinner.

Half an hour ago the other members of the famous Co. had gone out on their jiggers to ride over to Cliff House. Harry Wharton was aware of that. He had had to stay in for lines, and he had told his friends not to hang about waiting for him. But he was not aware that only a few minutes ago Billy Bunter of the Remove had also gone out on a jigger. And Bunter's bike, being in its usual dilapidated state, the fat Owl had calmly helped himself to Wharton's machine.

Skinner was aware of it, as he had watched Bunter wheeling out the bike. But Wharton had yet to make the discovery.

Hence the cheery grin on Skinner's face. Skinner was one of those fellows who can derive entertainment from the troubles of others. Moreover, he did not like the captain of the Remove.

He glanced round in the direction Billy Bunter had taken with the machine. Bunter had got the bike out into the road and was out of sight. But Bunter's movements rather resembled those of a tortoise, and there was plenty of time for the purloined jigger to be recaptured if Skinner gave its owner

the tip. Which, however, Skinner had no intention of doing. His intention was quite the reverse.

"Hold on a minute, Wharton!" he exclaimed, as the captain of the Remove arrived, breathing rather hard after his rapid trot from the House.

Wharton stopped. "I'm in a hurry!" he said. "I won't keep you a minute."

It was Skinner's amiable intention to keep Wharton as many minutes as he could, to give Bunter time to escape with the jigger.

"Well, what is it?" asked Harry. "Buck up!"

"About games practice on Saturday," said Skinner. It was the first thing that came into his mind.

"What the dickens does that matter to-day?" said Wharton impatiently. "Look here, I want to get after my friends."

"Well, you're our jolly old Form captain, and it's no use speaking to anybody else about it, is it?" asked Skinner.

"I suppose not. Cut it short, then."

"I want to get out on Saturday afternoon," said Skinner. "You can let me off games practice if you like—"

"I can't. It's a compulsory day, and you know it. Is that all?"

"I think you might stretch a point for once."

"Can't be done! You can ask Wingate if you like. It's up to him as head of the games. Let a fellow pass!"

"I'll explain what I want to get out on Saturday for."

"You can tell Wingate. Look here, I'm in a hurry," exclaimed Wharton. "What the dickens are you blocking the doorway for? Get aside!"

"But I want to tell you—"

"Oh, rot!"

Wharton dropped a hand on Skinner's shoulder and twirled him aside. He strode into the bikeshed.

The next moment he made the discovery that his bike-stand was vacant and the machine gone.

"Where the thump's my jigger?" he exclaimed.

"Isn't it there?" asked Skinner cheerfully.

"No, it isn't! Some silly ass has taken it!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "Did you see him?"

"I've only just come here for my own jigger."

"That's rot!" snapped Wharton. "You were loafing in the doorway when I came along. You jolly well know who's got my jigger. Is that what you were grinning at?"

"Was I grinning?" asked Skinner blandly.

"Look here, Skinner, where's my jigger?"

"Ask me another!"

Harry Wharton's brow darkened. "Do you know, or don't you?" he demanded.

"Haven't the foggiest, dear man."

Wharton gave a glance round the bikeshed. It was a fine afternoon in early spring, and a half-holiday, and a good many fellows had taken their machines out. Billy Bunter's deplorable crock was on view, and Skinner's machine was on its stand, and two or three others. Wharton suspected for a moment that Skinner might have shifted his machine by way of pulling his leg, Skinner being as full of tricks as a monkey. But there was no sign of it in the shed.

He stepped out of the doorway, Skinner watching him, with a cheery

grin, and stared along the path to the gate. He was about to start at a run, in the hope of catching the borrower of his bike before he could get away with it, when Skinner called to him:

"Stop a minute!" Wharton stopped, and stared back impatiently.

"Now I come to think of it, I fancy Bunter's borrowed it," said Skinner. "I saw him wheeling out a bike, and it couldn't have been his own, as it wasn't falling to pieces."

"The fat chump! How long ago?" "Let's see," said Skinner reflectively. "Was it ten minutes? No, not quite ten minutes."

The captain of the Remove gave him a glare and turned and ran on towards the gate. It dawned on him that the raiding of his bike had been very recent, and that Skinner's object was to delay him.

He put on speed and came out into the road full pelt.

"Bunter!" he roared. At a little distance a fat figure had just heaved itself into the saddle of a handsome jigger.

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

He gave Harry Wharton one blink, and then drove at the pedals. The captain of the Remove rushed after him.

"Stop!" he yelled. Billy Bunter did not stop.

Perhaps the expression on Wharton's face did not encourage him to do so. Borrowing a bike without permission, when its owner wanted it, was very likely to earn the fat Owl a kicking. Bunter had often been kicked, but he had never liked it. Wharton's expression encouraged Bunter not to stop, but to accelerate. He plunged on.

"I'll whop you, you fat villain!" roared Wharton. "Bring back that bike!"

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter. He heard Wharton's footsteps as the captain of the Remove raced after him. He drove frantically at the pedals.

Bunter was no cyclist, and Wharton was a good sprinter. But machinery will always beat muscle. The bike shot ahead, its owner racing after it with outstretched hand barely out of reach.

"Stop!" cried Wharton. "Beast!"

Bunter pedalled on, hard. The distance between the bike and its owner increased. Harry Wharton put on a desperate spurt, and his feet seemed hardly to touch the ground as he flew in pursuit. He grabbed at the bike, and his fingers touched the rear mud-guard, but it escaped his hold. The bike shot away, and Wharton, over-balanced by that desperate grab, pitched forward on his hands and knees in the road.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped. Bunter blinked back over a fat shoulder for a moment.

"He, he, he!" he gasped breathlessly, as he saw the captain of the Remove sprawling in the dust.

Then he pedalled on, his fat little legs fairly flashing. The bike whizzed away down the road as Harry Wharton, breathless and red with wrath, scrambled to his feet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not So Funny!

"O H o r u m b s!" ejaculated Skinner.

Harry Wharton came back to the bikeshed.

His face was flushed, and his eyes glittering with anger. The fall in the

road had damaged him a little. He was dusty; his knees were rather painfully jarred, and his hands scratched and raw.

Skinner was wheeling out his own machine. He stood it against the wall of the shed, and stared at Wharton, with a lurking grin on his face. Evidently the bike-borrower had had a narrow escape, but the few minutes Skinner had succeeding in wasting, had given him a chance; and Bunter had escaped capture. All Wharton had captured was a fall in the road; which had plainly had a bad effect on his temper.

"Taken a tumble, old bean?" asked Skinner, with smiling sympathy.

Wharton looked at him.

"Yes," he answered quietly, "I've taken a tumble. If I'd been a minute sooner I should have caught that fat idiot and got my jigger."

"Rotten luck!" said Skinner. "And you delayed me three or four minutes," said Harry, "and I know your reason now, Skinner. You wanted to know about games practice on Saturday because Bunter was still in reach with my bike, if I'd gone after him at once."

"Think so?" asked Skinner. "I know it," said the captain of the Remove curtly, "and I've a jolly good

He speaks with a drawl, dresses like a dandy, looks quite harmless, and answers to the name of Cecil Ponsonby. But if a prize were offered for the Complete Outsider, Cecil Ponsonby would win it hands down!

mind to bang your head against that wall."

Skinner backed away rather hurriedly. "Keep your temper, old bean," he said. "You seem to have damaged yourself a bit; but it's really not my fault that you're clumsy, you know."

"It's your fault that Bunter's got off with my bike."

"Dear me!" yawned Skinner. "And as I've got to get after my friends at Cliff House, I've got to have a bike!" continued Wharton.

"I hope you'll be able to borrow one, old thing," said Skinner amiably.

"Bunter's bike's in the shed. Take that—one good turn deserves another, you know."

"Bunter's bike isn't much use to anybody. But I shall be able to borrow quite a good one!" said Harry, taking Skinner's machine from the wall, "I'm borrowing yours."

"What?" roared Skinner, ceasing to smile all of a sudden.

"I'll lend you mine, if you want one," said Wharton.

Skinner glared at him.

"You silly ass! What's the good of your bike, when Bunter's got it?"

"That's your look-out."

The captain of the Remove wheeled Skinner's machine away to the gate. Harold Skinner had been greatly amused up to this point; but at this point the affair ceased altogether to be entertaining to Harold Skinner.

He rushed after Wharton, with a furious face.

"Give me my jigger!" he bawled.

"I'm going down to Friardale this afternoon on that jigger."

Harry Wharton laughed. "I don't see how," he answered. "I'm going over to Cliff House on it." "You're not!" yelled Skinner furiously. "I've got some friends waiting for me—"

"Let 'em wait!" "Look here, Pon and some Highcliffe chaps are going to meet me—"

"Not on this jigger."

"You—you—you cheeky rotter!" howled Skinner. "Give me that bike! I'll jolly well punch your head if you don't."

"Get on with it!"

Skinner did not get on with it. But if looks could have annihilated, the look he gave the captain of the Remove would have reduced him to dust on the spot. Skinner was almost stuttering with rage. His misdirected sense of humour was rather turning against himself—as had happened before not infrequently. It had seemed to him quite a merry jest to let the fat Owl get away with Wharton's jigger. But it was not at all a jest to let Wharton get away with his own.

He grabbed at Wharton's arm, as Harry wheeled the machine out at the gate.

"Give me that jigger!" he gasped.

"Go and eat coke!"

"I'll go to Quelch and complain!" roared Skinner.

"Please yourself."

"Look here—"

"Let go my arm!"

"I tell you I want my bike!" raved Skinner.

"You should have thought of that before you played tricks," answered Wharton coolly. "I should have caught Bunter, if you hadn't kept me back—you thought it funny to let him bag my jigger. Well, now you can think how funny it is for me to bag yours."

"You rotter—"

Wharton shook off Skinner's detaining hand, and wheeled the machine into the road.

Skinner gave him an almost homicidal glare.

No doubt Wharton's proceedings were a little high-handed; but he felt that he was quite justified, in the circumstances. A fellow who played malicious tricks, could not complain if his trickery came home to roost, as it were.

"Will you hand over my bike?" roared Skinner.

"No, I won't! You can have mine, if you can get it back from Bunter."

"You know I can't, you rotter. He's out of sight."

"He wouldn't be if you hadn't pulled my leg."

"I tell you I'm meeting some Highcliffe men near Friardale—we're going for a spin—"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"I fancy your spin wouldn't take you farther than the Cross Keys," he answered. "You'll be spotted there some day with your precious Highcliffe pals—and it might happen to-day. I may be saving you from the sack by borrowing your bike."

"You—you—you cheeky rotter! It's no bizney of yours where I go on a half-holiday! Give me my bike."

"Rats!"

Wharton threw a leg over the machine.

Skinner, crimson with rage, jumped at him as he mounted. Skinner was no fighting-man; but even Skinner was not going to take this quietly. He grabbed

at the captain of the Remove, and dragged at him.

"Come off that jigger!" he panted.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wharton.

He came off the jigger—that could not be helped, as he was mounted, and Skinner was dragging him sideways. But it was rather unfortunate for Skinner.

The bike wobbled wildly, as Wharton was dragged over. He fell on Skinner, who sprawled under him.

Skinner gave a gasping howl, as he collapsed on the road, with Wharton sprawling over his face. The next moment the bicycle crashed down on his legs, eliciting a fiendish yell from Skinner.

"Yaroooooooh!"

"Oh, my hat!" panted Wharton.

"Yow-ow-ow! Gerroff!" gurgled Skinner.

Harry Wharton picked himself up. He picked up the bicycle. Skinner was not so quick in picking himself up. He lay gasping and gurgling.

"Ta-ta!" said Wharton cheerfully, as he put a leg over the machine again. "Thanks for the loan of the bike, Skinner."

"Oooooooh!"

Harry Wharton pedalled away. Skinner sat up.

He rubbed his legs, where the bike had crashed, and glared after the vanishing cyclist. Harry Wharton disappeared down Friardale Lane, and Skinner rose slowly and painfully to his feet. If Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe, were waiting for Skinner, they were likely to wait a considerable time before he joined them. Not for the first time Skinner realised that the way of the practical joker, like that of the transgressor, was hard.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Painful for Ponsonby!

CECIL PONSONBY, of the Highcliffe Fourth, smiled, and blew out a little stream of smoke from his cigarette. Gadsby and Monson chuckled and followed his example. Vavasour took the cigarette from his mouth and held it behind him, having rather less nerve and impudence than his comrades.

The four Highcliffians were sitting in a row on the stile in Friardale Lane. Their bikes were leaning on the fence. They were smoking cigarettes, as a lean and angular gentleman came up the lane, going towards the village. It was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Greyfriars Remove. He glanced at the four, and a deep frown came over his brow—which seemed to amuse Pon.

Had it been a Highcliffe master that passed, the cigarettes would have disappeared fast enough. Highcliffe was a slack school; but this sort of thing would not have done, even for Highcliffe. But as Mr. Quelch was a Greyfriars master it amused Ponsonby to shock him, and he quite enjoyed the expression that came over the severe countenance of Henry Samuel Quelch.

"Chuck it, Pon!" murmured Vavasour. "The man's a beak."

"Not one of our beaks, fathead!" answered Ponsonby. "Stick your smoke in your silly mouth, you ass! Who cares for Greyfriars beaks?"

"He might report a man—"

"Think Mobby would listen to him if he did?"

"No jolly fear!" chuckled Gadsby.

Vavasour nodded, brought his cigarette into view again, and replaced it

in his mouth. The four young rascals smoked, with an air of enjoyment, as Mr. Quelch drew abreast of the stile.

Frowning, the Greyfriars master passed a moment, as if to speak. But it was no business of his to correct the manners and customs of boys belonging to another school. Frowning, he marched on.

Ponsonby winked at his friends. Pon & Co. were up against Greyfriars School, though they were on pally terms with a few fellows there, such as Skinner and his set. Pon's idea was to derive a little harmless and necessary amusement by "drawing" the old bean!

"Mr. Quelch!" he exclaimed. "Good-afternoon, sir! May I speak to you for a moment?"

Mr. Quelch halted. He gave the cheery Pon his grimmest look.

"What is it, Ponsonby?" he rapped.

"I've heard that you've been ill lately, sir!" said Pon. "I hope you've quite recovered, sir."

"Thank you, yes!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I'm so glad to hear it, sir!" said Ponsonby. "It must be so nice for the Remove to have you back, sir! I suppose they're fairly enjoying life now, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

For a moment he had been deceived by Pon's bland manner, and had really supposed that the Highcliffe fellow had stopped him to make a polite inquiry after his health. But he was very quickly undeceived.

"They must be fairly revelling in it," said Gadsby, taking his cue from Pon. "Now you're back with your Form, sir, I dare say you'll be making them wash of a mornin'!"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"They need it," said Monson, with a solemn nod. "I've seen some of them, and my belief is that they haven't washed at all, all the time you've been laid up, sir!"

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard and deep. Really, he could scarcely believe his ears. At Greyfriars, Remove fellows walked delicately, like Agag of old, under the severe eye of Henry Samuel Quelch. Sheer impudence like this was quite a new experience for the Remove master.

"Make 'em wash, sir!" said Ponsonby, taking up the tale, as it were. "After all, Greyfriars is a Public school—of sorts! Set 'em an example yourself, sir—what?"

"What—what did you say?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"My dear chap, Mr. Quelch washes!" said Gadsby. "Appearances are deceptive; I am sure he does. Don't you, sir?"

Mr. Quelch's face was crimson.

"Upon my word!" he gasped. "If you young rascals were Greyfriars boys I would see you all soundly flogged! I have a great mind to report your insolence to your headmaster at Highcliffe!"

"Don't mind us, sir!" said Ponsonby. "May I offer you a smoke, sir?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"A smoke, sir!" said Pon, extending his case. "They're rather good—you'd hardly get anything as good at Greyfriars, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pon's friends, quite overcome by the expression on Mr. Quelch's face as Pon offered him a smoke.

"You—you—you impudent young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "I will not report you at Highcliffe; I am quite aware that it would be useless. But, in

the circumstances, I shall take the matter into my own hands!"

Smack!

"Whooooop!" roared Ponsonby, as the exasperated Greyfriars master boxed his ears.

Pon had not seemed to expect that; though really he might have expected it.

Ponsonby went spinning backwards, and dropped into the grass, yelling as he landed there.

Mr. Quelch, with a thunderous brow, marched on towards Friardale, leaving him yelling.

Pon scrambled up, spluttering with rage.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour were grinning. They had been quite amused by Pon's insolence to the Remove master of Greyfriars, but they seemed still more amused by Pon's sudden crashing to the grass under the smiting hand of Henry Samuel Quelch.

"The cheeky rotter!" panted Pon. "I—I—I'll—"

He groped for a stone, with the evident intention of hurling it after Mr. Quelch.

"Stop that, you ass!" exclaimed Gadsby, as he slipped from the stile and caught Pon's arm. "Don't be a fool!"

Ponsonby glared at him for a moment. But he dropped the stone again and rubbed his ear. That ear was burning where Mr. Quelch's smack had landed. It was crimson and it had a pain in it.

"Dash it all, you did rather cheek the man, you know," said Vavasour. "After all, he's a Beak!"

Ponsonby gritted his teeth savagely. It was not uncommon for Pon's impudence to have unpleasant results for himself, and undoubtedly he had cheeked Mr. Quelch not wisely, but too well. His head was singing, and his eyes glittered with rage and malice. He leaned on the stile, rubbing his ear, and his friends, exchanging winks, resumed their cigarettes. But Pon was in no mood for smoking now. He gave his attention to his damaged ear instead of to his cigarette.

There was a whir of a bike on the road.

"Here comes Skinner!" said Gadsby. "Lucky he never came up while old Quelch was in the offing—what? Quelch mightn't have liked to see him meetin' nice fellows like us! Hallo, 'tain't Skinner—it's Wharton!"

Pon's head turned quickly towards the approaching cyclist.

The four Highcliffians were waiting there for Skinner to join them. Skinner, as it happened, was delayed, and was not likely to come along yet. It was Harry Wharton who came whizzing up Friardale Lane towards the stile, where he had to turn into the footpath to reach Cliff House through the wood.

Pon set his teeth, with a deadly glitter in his eyes.

"Wharton!" he said. "He's alone—the other cads ain't with him! By gad, this is a chance for us!"

"Oh, don't let's rag!" said Vavasour, uneasily.

"You silly ass! I've just had my head smacked by his dashed Form master! I'll make Wharton squirm for it! What are you afraid of?" sneered Ponsonby. "There's only one of him and four of us. Stop him as he passes."

Gadsby and Monson nodded assent. Ragging a fellow, four to one, was rather in their line. Ponsonby fairly gloated as he watched the cyclist coming up.

After his painful experience at the hands of Mr. Quelch he was yearning

to "take it out" of some Greyfriars fellow, and Wharton had come along in the nick of time. The Highcliffians stepped from the stile, their eyes fixed on Harry Wharton, ready to stop him as he passed.

As it happened, he was not intending to pass. He jumped off his machine, and wheeled it to the stile, to lift it over into the footpath. And as he did so, Ponsonby & Co. rushed at him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Highcliffe Rag!

HARRY WHARTON let go Skinner's bike, jumped back a pace, and put up his hands swiftly. He had more than half expected

good fighting-man as the Remove captain was. He was driven farther back, pressed hard by the three, and it was only the dislike of the Highcliffians for taking punishment that prevented them from rushing him over. They gave more attention to dodging his blows than to getting in their own, and, though he was pressed hard, he kept them at arm's length.

"You rotten funks!" panted Wharton, "Come on, one at a time—or two at a time, if you like!"

"Sock it to him!" snarled Monson. "Ow! Wow! Yaroooooh!" A jolt on the chin made Monson yell.

Ponsonby ceased to caress his damaged nose. But he did not rejoin his friends in the attack. Wharton had been

be Wharton's, as Wharton had been riding it. Certainly it did not occur to him that he was smashing his pal Skinner's machine.

It was rather "thick," even for Ponsonby. Even the cad of Highcliffe had some sort of a limit, as a rule; and would hardly have gone to the length of smashing a fellow's property. But Pon was in his worst temper, with his head singing from Mr. Quelch's smack, and his nose streaming crimson from Wharton's hefty punch. Under his elegant exterior, Cecil Ponsonby was little better than a hooligan; and his hooliganism had full play now.

After crashing the machine on the stile, he proceeded to trample on it. Not content with that, he opened a



"Come off that jigger!" panted Skinner, making a grab at Wharton. The bike wobbled wildly, and Skinner gave a gasping howl as he collapsed in the road, with the junior captain sprawling over him.

trouble as soon as he saw the Highcliffe fellows, and he was not taken off his guard. With his hands up, he faced the rush of the four, his lips set and his eyes gleaming. Four to one was heavy odds; but there was nothing like fear in the face of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Collar the cad!" hissed Ponsonby.

"Sock it to him!" grinned Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" chirped Vavasour.

But it was not easy, even for four, to collar the captain of the Remove, or to "sock" it to him. He backed away from the rush; but he hit out as he backed, and there was a yell from Pon as he caught a hard set of knuckles on his aristocratic nose.

Pon staggered back, clasping his nose with both hands, in anguish, leaving Wharton with only three to deal with.

But three to one was rather too much,

driven six or seven yards back; and the machine he had been riding lay on the ground near Ponsonby. Pon turned his attention to the bicycle.

"Keep him busy, you men!" he called out.

And he stooped over the machine, and dragged it up. Lifting it in the air with both hands, he brought it down on the stile with a terrific crash.

Crash! Clang! Clink! Crash! Clatter!

"Oh gad!" gasped Monson, "Pon, old man—"

"You rotten hooligan!" roared Wharton.

It was impossible for Wharton to intervene; the three Highcliffians barred him off from Ponsonby. Pon, grinning savagely, devoted his attention to Wharton's bicycle—the bike, at all events, which he naturally supposed to

ponknife and jabbed it into the tyres, and slashed the saddle recklessly. The mudguards were wrenched off, the pedals twisted out of shape. Skinner's had been quite a good jigger, but it looked now as if it would want a lot of repairs before it was ridden again.

Finally, Pon dragged it to the side of the lane and pitched it bodily into the ditch, which was nearly full of water and oozy mud. The bike almost disappeared from sight.

Meanwhile, Wharton was fighting hard, barely holding his own against the three Highcliffians. Having finished with the machine, Ponsonby joined in the scrap again, and the enemy were now four to one.

Harry Wharton was panting for breath, crimson trickled from his nose, and he showed many signs of damage.

He disdained to run from the enemy, but it was clear that if he did not run, he was booked for a terrific thrashing, for the odds were overwhelming.

With set teeth and gleaming eyes, he faced the odds, fighting hard. Every one of the Highcliffians had received some hard knocks, and they pressed him harder and harder. He was driven back against a big oak by the roadside, and there he stood his ground, but it could not have lasted many minutes longer. But as the Highcliffians pressed on him, the captain of the Remove caught sight of two fellows coming along from the direction of Friardale, and recognised Vernon-Smith and Redwing of the Remove.

"Rescue, Greyfriars!" he yelled.

Smithy and Redwing caught sight of the scrap at the same moment. They came on at a run to the rescue.

"Pile in, Reddy!" shouted the Boulder.

Ponsonby & Co. stared round in alarm. Had they waited for the reinforcements to come up, they would still have been four to three. But that was not quite good enough for Pon & Co.

"Hook it!" muttered Pon.

The Highcliffians rushed for their bicycles. Wharton staggered against the oak, exhausted. In hot haste the Highcliffians clambered on their machines, and went whizzing away up the lane towards Greyfriars before Smithy and Redwing could arrive.

"Stop, you rotten funks!" yelled the Boulder.

Pon looked back, and grinned. He was not likely to stop. The four young rascals put on speed, and as Smithy and his chum were on foot, there was no possibility of pursuit. They stopped as they reached Wharton under the oak,

and Pon & Co. swept up the lane and disappeared.

"We're well out of that!" gasped Monson. "That beast Smithy is a regular prize-fighter! Jolly glad we got clear."

"Absolutely!" panted Vavasour.

Pon released one hand from his handle-bars to dab his nose.

"We've made that oad sit up!" he remarked. "He won't ride his jigger again in a hurry."

"I say, that was rather thick, though," said Gadsby, doubtfully. "Smashing a fellow's bike—"

"Might be a row about that," said Monson uneasily. "It was over the limit, Pon! He won't get that jigger put to rights under five pounds."

Ponsonby laughed.

"That's what I wanted!" he answered. "I mean, supposing he claims damages for it?" said Gadsby. "He could if he liked—dash it all, it's against the law, Pon—you can't do things like that—and he could come on to you for damages and—"

"How's he goin' to prove anythin'!" asked Pon coolly. "If he's fool enough to come complainin' at Highcliffe, I never touched the bike."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Never touched it," said Pon, "and you fellows bein' with me, are witnesses that I never did."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Wharton's welcome to all the jolly damages he can get out of me!" said Ponsonby. "Think I'd have smashed his jigger if there'd been any risk of havin' to pay for my own game? Don't be an ass!"

"Look here, there's a limit—"

"Oh, rats!"

The four rode on in silence for some minutes. Pon was evidently satisfied with himself, and in no fear of consequences at his own school. Hard lying was Pon's way out of a scrape.

"What about Skinner?" asked Gadsby at last. "We were waitin' at the stile for him, you know."

"We shall meet him comin' along from Greyfriars, the way we're goin'. He must have started before this."

"Yes, that's so."

A few minutes later the Highcliffians sighted Skinner of the Remove. He was coming along on foot. They had slowed down and dismounted, being at quite a safe distance from the scene of the ragging by this time.

Skinner looked at them curiously.

"Oh, here you are!" he said. "My hat! You men look a. if you'd been in the wars."

"You'll find Wharton lookin' still more so, when you see him again," grinned Ponsonby. "What we've got is a joke to what he's had."

"Oh crumbs! Have you been ragging Wharton?"

"The dear man walked right into our hands—and we gave him too," chuckled Gadsby. "You needn't mind—he's no friend of yours."

Skinner laughed.

"My dear chap, the more you give him, the better I like it!" he answered. "I'd give him some myself if I could handle him."

"Well, we've given him some!" said Monson. "Some, and a little over!"

Skinner chuckled.

"And I've jolly well smashed up his bike!" added Ponsonby.

Skinner ceased to chuckle.

"You've—what?" he ejaculated.

"Smashed his bike—ragged it nearly to bits—and left it stuck in the ditch!" said Ponsonby, venomously. "He will have to carry it home if he gets it home at all. I'm pretty certain it's past wheeling home."

Skinner's face was a study.

"His bike—my bike!" he gasped.

"Why, you silly owl, it was my jigger that Wharton was riding! Bunter got away with his machine, and he took mine, like the high-handed rotter he is! Have you smashed my bike, you blithering idiot!"

"Oh gad! Your bike!" gasped Ponsonby, staring at him.

"My bike!" yelled Skinner. "Wharton was riding my bike, you fathead."

"Phew! Well, I never knew—"

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Gadsby. "You silly owl, what did you lend Wharton your bike for?"

"I tell you he took it!" raved Skinner. "If you've smashed the jigger he was riding, it's mine. What the thump did you want to touch the bike for, you dashed hooligans? That isn't a rag—that's just beastly hooliganism!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Ponsonby. "How the thump were we to know it was your bike? Wharton was riding it—"

"Where is it?" howled Skinner.

"I've told you we left it in the ditch. I'm sorry if it was your bike—but how was a fellow to know?"

"I'll jolly well make you pay for it, I know that!" hooted Skinner. "If you've smashed my jigger, you'll get the bill for repairs."

The Highcliffians exchanged glances. This was rather an unexpected outcome of the "rag." Skinner, in his concern for his bike, had quite forgotten his intended expedition out of school bounds with the Highcliffe nuts. Indeed, he seemed to have forgotten that he was on



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friendly terms with the young rascals at all. His face was furious. He glared at Ponsonby as if he could have bitten him.

"Well, it jolly well can't be helped now!" said Ponsonby, shrugging his shoulders. "It was your own fault for letting Wharton have your bike."

"How could I help it, when he took it?" roared Skinner. "You dashed hooligan, what did you touch the bike for? I'll make you pay for it."

"Will you?" said Pon unpleasantly. "You'll have your work cut out to do it. Go an' eat coke!"

"You rotter—"

"That's enough from you," said Ponsonby. "I don't take that sort of thing from Greyfriars! Shut up, before I shut you up!"

"You rotten ruffian—" yelled Skinner. "You— Oh, my hat!"

Thump!

Skinner sat down suddenly as Ponsonby landed a thump on his chest.

"Ow!" he roared. "Wow!"

"Come on, you men," said Ponsonby. "We don't want that Greyfriars cad. Let's get out of this."

Pon & Co. remounted their machines and rode away, leaving Skinner spluttering with rage. Skinner's friendship with his nutty pals of Highcliffe seemed to have come to a rather sudden end.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Comes to Tea!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Bunter!"

Billy Bunter grinned as he blinked at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles.

He had dismounted from a bicycle—a very handsome bicycle—at the gates of Cliff House School and wheeled it in. There was tea at Cliff House School that afternoon, Miss Penelope Primrose having given permission to Marjorie Hazeldene and her friends to entertain their schoolboy chums in the school-room.

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent, Johnny Buil and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had strolled down the path to the gates to see whether Wharton was coming, while Marjorie and Clara were giving the finishing touches to the tea-table. They sighted Wharton's bike—but not Wharton! It was a fat and podgy rider in a large pair of spectacles who arrived at Cliff House on Wharton's jigger.

They did not give Billy Bunter welcoming looks. Billy Bunter was not included in the list of invitations to tea. That, to William George Bunter, was a mere trifle that he could afford to disregard. To the other fellows it did not seem such a trifle.

Bunter grinned, but he eyed the chums of the Remove rather warily through his big spectacles. Had Marjorie & Co. been in sight, the fat Owl of the Remove would have felt safer. In the presence of the Cliff House girls the juniors could hardly have kicked him out. Now, Bunter realised, there was danger of kicking, and he was wary.

"I say, you fellows, I hope I'm not late!" he said. "I had to go rather a long way round—I caught sight of those Highcliffe cads in Friardale Lane and came another way, see? Not that I'm afraid of them, of course. But there were four of them, and I could hardly have handled more than three at a time."

"Hardly!" grinned Bob Cherry

"The hardliness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, I thought I'd keep clear, as I was coming over here to tea with the girls," explained Bunter. "I didn't want to show up looking dusty and untidy, and all that. I'm rather more particular than you fellows, you know. If I'm not late for tea, it's all right."

"And what have you come here at all for?" demanded Johnny Bull gruffly.

"Tea, old chap!"

"You fat villain! Who asked you?"

"When a fellow knows that he's welcome, it's hardly necessary to bother about formalities," said Bunter, with dignity. "You fellows know that Marjorie is always glad to see us. Dash it all, be candid! You know jolly well that she only asks you because she thinks I may come with you."

Bob Cherry glanced round.

IF YOU KNOW A GOOD
YARN SHARE THE LAUGH
WITH YOUR PALS AND WIN
A SHEFFIELD STEEL PEN-
KNIFE!



Harry: "How do you like the Navy, Bill?"

Bill: "Don't talk about it, Harry. They tell you to join the Navy and see the world; then the idiots go and dump you in a bloomin' submarine!"

Ed. Perrin, of 38, Lyndhurst Road, Highams Park, E.4, who submitted the above winning ribticker, is now in possession of one of these splendid prizes.

STEP IN AND WIN ONE,
CHUM!

Obviously he was glancing round to ascertain that none of the Cliff House girls were in sight before he kicked Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove backed away rather hastily.

"I say, you fellows, no larks!" he exclaimed. "You're not in the Remove passage now, you know! Even you fellows ought to behave yourselves a bit at a girls' school, I think. Besides, I've come instead of Wharton! You can see that he's lent me his bike."

"Isn't Wharton coming?" asked Nugent.

Bunter shook his head. As he had bagged Wharton's bike he considered it very probable that Wharton was not coming; at least, not in time for tea. But he did not think of mentioning that detail.

"You see, he had to stay in for lines," said Bunter, "so—so I came over instead."

"His lines weren't going to keep him more than half an hour!" said Bob.

"Queloh made him do them over again," said Bunter cheerfully, "so he—he asked me to take his bike and come over. He—he thought Marjorie might be waiting tea for him, or something."

"Oh!" said Bob. "Rotten hard luck! I suppose he'll be coming over before we leave?"

"Eh? I hope not!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I—I hope so!" amended Bunter hastily. "I say, you fellows, what time are you having tea? Wharton said specially I was to tell Marjorie not to think of waiting for him."

"Well, here she comes, and you can tell her," said Bob, as Marjorie Hazeldene came down the path.

Billy Bunter turned his most fascinating smirk upon Miss Marjorie Hazeldene. The young lady showed no sign of being fascinated; she only looked quietly and inquiringly at Bunter. Even William George Bunter could not fancy that Marjorie looked delighted to see him. If this was coyness, it was very well done indeed.

"Wharton can't come, old thing," said Bunter. "He asked me to come in his place. Rather an improvement, what?"

"I'm sorry Harry can't come," said Marjorie, still blind to the fascinating smirk. "Tea's ready. Shall we go in?"

She addressed the Co., but it was Billy Bunter who answered.

"Yes, rather! I'm quite ready for tea!"

And he rolled on to the house with the chums of the Remove. Marjorie's face was expressionless—more coyness, Bunter concluded. Still, Bunter did not really need an enthusiastic welcome. What he needed was a good tea—and that, apparently, he was going to get. So Bunter was satisfied, only hoping that the captain of the Remove would not arrive till he had safely disposed of the tea. Bunter had a feeling that Wharton would be annoyed about the borrowing of his bike, and he was anxious not to meet him till the meeting could no longer be avoided.

Miss Clara Trevlyn and Barbara and Mabel and several of the other Cliff House girls were at the tea-table in the school-room, and the juniors joined them—Billy Bunter bestowing fat smirks all round in the happy delusion that spirits rose on all sides at the sight of him. Certainly his own spirits rose at the sight of a large cake and a dish of clairs, and two kinds of jam and several other good things. If that bagging of Wharton's bike earned him a kicking, he felt that he would be kicked in a good cause.

It was Bunter's intention to charm the tea-party with a genial flow of easy and witty conversation, but the edibles claimed his attention, and he almost forgot to wag his fat chin. The tea-party, however, did not seem to feel the loss very greatly. Cheery conversation was accompanied by a sound of steady champing from Bunter. So far from missing his brilliant talk, the Cliff House girls and the Remove fellows seemed to forget that he was there.

Bunter was happy and shiny and sticky—only troubled by a lurking uneasiness that Wharton might butt in before tea was over. But Wharton did not arrive.

He had still not put in an appearance when the time came to depart. Marjorie and Clara walked down to the gates with their schoolboy chums, and the juniors wheeled out their bicycles.

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Marjorie's coyness still persisted; she was blind to a series of killing smirks that Bunter bestowed on her, and which made the other fellows yearn to kick him.

"Tell Harry we're very sorry he couldn't come, Bob," said Marjorie, when they said good-bye at the gates, and the juniors mounted and rode on their homeward way.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly, as the cyclists turned a corner at a distance from Cliff House School.

A Greyfriars junior was leaning against a tree by the side of the lane. It was Harry Wharton, and he was evidently waiting there for them. They stared at him as they dismounted. He had a rather rumpled look, and his nose was swollen, and there was a dark shade under one of his eyes.

Billy Bunter gave him an alarmed blink, and did not dismount. He essayed to ride on, and Wharton, stepping into the road, grasped the bicycle before he could pass. A shake of the machine, and Billy Bunter was deposited in the road in a yelling heap.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

"Yaroooh!"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Bob.

"You've been scrapping, old bean," said Johnny Bull, staring at the damaged countenance of the captain of the Remove.

Wharton nodded, with a rueful grin.

"Yes; I ran into the Highcliffe cads in Friardale Lane. There were four of them, and I should have been knocked out if Smithy and Redwing hadn't come along in time. I was on Skinner's bike, and they smashed it up. I got old Joyce, the woodcutter, to take it back to Greyfriars on his cart, as he was passing, and walked over. I thought I'd keep out of sight, though, with a chivvy like this. I didn't want to take a black eye into Cliff House. Now I'm going to kick that fat villain—"

"Yaroooh!"

"What's Bunter done?" asked Bob. "Didn't you send him over to tell Marjorie not to wait tea, as you couldn't come?"

"Oh, my hat! Did he say so?" gaped Wharton. "The fat scoundrel bagged my bike, and got away with it, and I'm going to kick him—"

"Yow-ow! Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter. "I—I never took your bike! I mean, I took it by mistake! I—I thought it was mine! You can ask Skinner—he was there, and saw me wheeling it out. Besides, you could have had mine! It only wanted some punctures mending, and— Yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast! Yoooop!"

Bunter rolled and roared.

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Let us all kick the esteemed and execrable Bunter togetherfully—"

"Yaroooh!"

"Any chance of getting at those Highcliffe cads before we go in?" asked Bob Cherry hopefully.

"Fraid not! They cleared off fast enough when Smithy and Reddy came up," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "Pon will keep! Let's get home."

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter, as Wharton put a leg over his machine. "I say, how am I to get back? I say, gimme that bike, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton laughed, but gave the fat Owl no other head.

"I can't walk miles, can I?" yelled

Bunter, in alarm. "I say, after lending me that bike, you know—"

"Kick him again!" said Bob.

"I mean, I had the bike by mistake—I thought it was mine, you know! Besides, I should have taken mine if it hadn't been punctured; and I've asked all you fellows, one after another, to mend those punctures, as you jolly well know. Look here, Wharton! If you're going to be a selfish beast—"

"Good-bye, fatty!"

"Look here! One of you give me a lift behind, then!" howled Bunter. "I can't walk back to Greyfriars. You jolly well know that! I—I'll stand behind you, Wharton, and—"

"I fancy not!" chuckled Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, stop!" roared Bunter. The prospect of a walk back to Greyfriars was quite alarming to the fat Owl. There were drawbacks to borrowing a fellow's bike without leave, as Bunter realised rather late. "I say, Bob, old chap, you're not such a selfish beast as Wharton. Will you give me a lift behind, old fellow?"

"Certainly!" answered Bob cheerily. "Turn round."

"Eh? What am I to turn round for, you ass?"

"So that I can give you a lift behind, answered Bob, drawing back his foot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass! I don't mean that sort—"

"I do!" answered Bob.

"Look here!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Leggo my collar! Wow! Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter was slewed round, and a rather heavy boot was planted on his tight trousers. It was a lift for Bunter, though not the lift he wanted.

"Yow-ow-whoop!" roared Bunter, as he rolled once more.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Five rode away in a cheery bunch, leaving Bunter to roar.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Question of Damages!

"LOOK here, Wharton—"

"Well?" rapped Harry.

Skinner of the Remove gave him a glare.

Wharton was not in the best of tempers that evening, as he came into the Rag after prep.

He had been severely handled by the Highcliffians, and he showed many signs of that severe handling. His nose was swollen and painful, and his eye, if not exactly black, was very darkly shaded. He was strong and sturdy, but that terrific scrap against heavy odds had told on him, and he was tired, and not by any means in a cheery mood.

At call-over, Mr. Quelch had given his damaged countenance a severe glance, and had called him into his study later to account for it. Fortunately, after Mr. Quelch's own experience with Ponsonby & Co., he was willing to believe that his head boy was not to blame for the encounter. Still, he evidently did not approve of his head boy showing up in such a state, and Wharton was only too conscious that he had rather the look of a damaged prizefighter. Altogether, he was feeling neither merry nor bright, and in no humour to take much in the way of slanging from Harold Skinner.

Skinner was in a state of suppressed fury. He had seen his bike since Joyce, the woodcutter, had brought it to the school in his cart. It was the mere wreck of a bike, and looked as if it was scarcely worth picking off a dustheap.

Skinner was not a wealthy fellow, and

it was scarcely possible for that jigger to be renovated equal to new under five pounds. And he had not the faintest hope of being able to make Ponsonby pay for the damage, even had he been prepared to make an enemy of his Highcliffe pal by trying it on. But somebody had to pay for the bike. Skinner was resolved on that. He had told his tale of woe up and down the Remove, and some of the fellows, at least, sympathised with him.

According to Skinner, Wharton had collared his bike in the most high-handed way, and it had been returned to him a mere wreck. He took the view that Wharton was responsible, and he wanted to make that clear. That it was his own fault in the beginning Skinner preferred to forget.

Snoop and Stott and two or three other fellows were with Skinner, all of them in a more or less indignant state on Skinner's account—though the truth probably was that they were up against the captain of the Form, and regarded any stick as good enough to beat him with.

Skinner stamped across the room as Wharton came into the Rag with his friends, and his manner indicated plainly that he was going to "have it out," as he had told nearly all the Remove that he was going to do.

Wharton's contemptuous look added fuel to the flame of Skinner's wrath.

"About my bike—" bawled Skinner.

"Well, what about your bike?"

"It's smashed!" roared Skinner.

"Quite!" agreed Wharton. "If you don't know who smashed it, I can tell you. It was your Highcliffe pal, Ponsonby."

"You had it!" howled Skinner. "You can spin a yarn about Ponsonby, if you like. You had it, and you're responsible!"

"I should not have had it, if you hadn't tricked me into letting Bunter get away with my jigger," answered Wharton.

"Do you think you can take a fellow's bike without leave, and hand it back to him smashed to pieces?" hooted Skinner. "I've taken it down to the cycle-shop at Courtfield, and they say it will cost five pounds. Think I'm going to pay five pounds because you collar my bike and get it smashed up? You've got to pay for it!"

"Yes, rather!" declared Snoop.

"I guess so!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"I calculate it's up to you, Wharton."

"I should jolly well think so!" exclaimed Bolsover major. "I'd like to see a fellow bag my bike, and refuse to pay for it if he got it crocked!"

"What-ho!" chimed in Stott.

"If you jolly well think you're going to diddle me—" resumed Skinner.

Harry Wharton's brow darkened.

"You'll get your bill from the cycle-shop!" he said. "When you get it, send it to Ponsonby at Highcliffe. I'm a witness that he did the damage, if you want one!"

"Fat lot of good that will be!" sneered Bolsover major. "If it was really Ponsonby—"

Wharton's eyes flashed.

"If!" he repeated. "What do you mean by 'if,' Bolsover? I've said it was Ponsonby."

"And I say, if it was Ponsonby, he will jolly well deny it, if a fellow goes over to Highcliffe about it," said Bolsover major. "Pon and his friends will swear black and blue that they were miles from the place. Skinner won't get any change out of Pon."

"I don't care two straws whether it was Pon or not!" hooted Skinner. "I

know Wharton had it, and that's enough for me."

"Wharton's responsible," said Snoop. "Skinner never even lent him the bike. He took it by force."

"If Wharton doesn't pay, I'm going to Quelch about it!" howled Skinner.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders. "Go to Quelch, and be blowed!" he answered.

And he turned his back on Skinner, and walked across to the fire, leaving Harold Skinner almost foaming.

Wharton threw himself into a chair. He was tired and aching, and in a

"Likely enough. But—" "Pon did the damage!" snapped Wharton.

"Yes. But can you prove it?" Wharton gave his chum a rather dark look.

"What do you mean, Frank? I nearly punched Bolsover's head for saying something like that."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Nugent, rather sharply. "I mean what I say! It's your word against the word of four Highcliffe fellows. For it's quite certain that Pon will deny the whole thing. His own headmaster would give him a flogging if it was proved, and Pon won't face that, if he can dodge it. He wouldn't have done it, if he hadn't felt sure of being able to lie himself out of the consequences. Was there anybody about when Pon did the smashing?"

"Of course there wasn't," answered Wharton irritably. "Do you think even that cad would have done it, with a crowd looking on?"

at last. "Five pounds, if it comes to that, is a big sum for a chap in the Lower Fourth, I know. But your uncle has always treated you generously. Colonel Wharton would send you a fiver if you told him you wanted it badly."

Wharton breathed rather hard. "I'm unwilling to ask my uncle for anything extra this term," he said, in a low voice. "He's kind and generous, as you say. I've nothing of my own till I come of age; and then it won't be a lot. My uncle's been as good as a father to me, ever since I was a little kid. But he's not a rich man, and he's been hit hard, like everybody else. I know he had a fearful scrape to get his Income Tax together in January, like everybody else. I hate asking him for anything extra now."

Nugent was silent, in his turn. He quite understood his chum's feelings. But that, after all, did not alter the right of the matter. If Wharton was responsible, he was responsible. And Nugent believed that he was.



"You insolent young rascals!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "I've a great mind to report you to your headmaster at Highcliffe." "Don't mind us, sir!" said Ponsonby, extending his case to the Greyfriars master. "Have a smoke!" "Wha-a-t?" barked Mr. Quelch furiously.

troubled mood. His comrades were silent, exchanging rather uneasy glances. Little as they liked Skinner and his ways, they could not help feeling that the cad of the Remove had a good case. Bob and Johnny Bull and the nabob strolled away, but Frank Nugent sat down by his chum.

Wharton glanced at his worried face rather sarcastically.

"You think I ought to pay for that jigger, Frank?" he asked.

Nugent hesitated. "Skinner's an unpleasant worm, and he makes himself offensive for nothing," he said. "But—"

"What do you think?" snapped Wharton.

"Well, old chap, you took the bike, and—"

"I've told you why."

"Yes, I know that; and I don't blame you, of course. Still, you had the jigger when it was smashed up—"

"It was his own pal that did it. Pon & Co. wouldn't have been there at all, if they hadn't been waiting for Skinner to join them on some blackguardly stunt."

"Well, then, you'll never pin Pon down to it. He knew you couldn't, and you can't."

"So you think I ought to pay for the damage done to Skinner's bike by Skinner's own pal?"

"I'm afraid that the fellow who had the bike is responsible to the owner for what happened to it," said Frank. "I think you're bound to stand it, and get it out of Pon afterwards, if you can."

Wharton made no answer.

"I think you'd think so; too, if Skinner had put it civilly, like a decent chap," added Frank. "But Skinner's bad manners and rotten temper don't alter the rights of the matter."

Still the captain of the Remove did not speak. His brow was growing darker and darker.

"Dash it all, old man!" said Nugent,

"My uncle's had to sell his car, and sack his chauffeur," went on Harry. "The man's wages go in taxes. And I suppose he'll get some of it back in the shape of a dole, poor chap. You know my place was shut up over Christmas, Frank, and we had the holiday with old Mauleverer. Colonel Wharton has had to draw in on all sides. I don't know whether a fiver is a matter of any importance to him, but I hate the idea of asking for it."

"I understand," said Nugent softly. "And why should I bother him for money?" muttered Wharton savagely. "A rotten rascal—Skinner's own pal—smashed his bike! Let him go to his rotten pal for the damages."

"But—" said Frank.

"It's no good talking. I'm not going

to dun my uncle for money, now he's hard pressed, on that cad's account."

"I wish you hadn't taken Skinner's bike."

"Well, I wish I hadn't now," grunted Wharton. "But the cad asked for it. Lot of good wishing!"

"Look here, old chap, you've got plenty of friends to help. If we have a whip round in the Co., it's only a quid each."

Wharton coloured. "I haven't come down to charity yet," he growled.

"Don't be a silly ass!" exclaimed Frank angrily. "We've always stood by one another, haven't we? What's the good of having friends, if—"

"If you can't sponge on them—what?" snapped Wharton.

"That's utter rot, and you know it."

"It isn't rot, and I don't know it! I'm not going to stick my pals for money for that measly cad! And I'm not going to dun my uncle. He stands my fees here, and my allowance, and that's enough for a man who's up against it financially. A precious sort of worm he would think me if I began sticking him for extra tips, when he knows that I know how he stands. He hasn't said anything about it, but I jolly well know! I'm no fool! I've got a bob left out of my last allowance, and Skinner can have that if he likes."

"My dear old chap—"
"Oh, let it drop, for goodness' sake! I'm fed-up!"

Frank gave his chum a look, and left him. It was useless to prolong an argument that might lead to bitterness. And Nugent had faith in Wharton's own good sense and rectitude.

That faith was well-founded.

Harry Wharton remained in the arm-chair staring at the fire in a mood of deep and troubled thought, taking no part in the usual cheery buzz of talk in the rag. Skinner's attitude in the matter offended him sorely, and he disliked the idea of giving in to the fellow. Still more did he dislike the idea of asking Colonel Wharton to send him money in the old gentleman's present troubled circumstances. But reflection showed him that these were not really adequate reasons for refusing to face a responsibility that was, after all, his.

Whether he could get the money from Ponsonby afterwards, or not, it was really clear that he was bound to make good the damage Skinner's bike had suffered while in his possession. And as soon as reflection made that clear to Wharton, he made up his mind.

There was a faint smile on his disfigured face when he rose from the chair at last and joined his chums, who were talking football in a group with the Bounder and Peter Todd and Squiff and some other fellows.

"Frank, old man, you're right," he said. "I shall have to pay for that jigger." He looked round. "Skinner!"

"Well, you cheeky rotter!" growled Skinner, with an inimical glare.

"You can let me have the bill for that bike when you get it."

"Oh, you've found out that you can't dodge it, have you?" asked Skinner unpleasantly.

"Who's going to kick Skinner?" asked Bob Cherry. "Hold on, Skinner, old bean! Don't hurry away! I'm just going to kick you!"

Skinner strolled rather hastily out of the Rag.

"Look here! What about a whip round?" asked Johnny Bull.

Wharton shook his head.

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"Thanks, old chap; but it's all right!" he said. "I don't often ask my jolly old uncle for a tip; and he will play up all right. I'm going to write to him to-night and ask him."

And the captain of the Remove sat down at the table in the Rag to write that letter to Colonel Wharton at Wharton Lodge. It was not a pleasant task, but it had to be done, and he did it, and the letter was dropped into the post before the Remove went up to their dormitory.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Pure Gammon!

BILLY BUNTER blinked into Study No. 1 in the Remove. Harry Wharton was alone there.

It was a couple of days since the scrap with the Highcliffians, but the signs of that scrap were still very visible on the face of the captain of the Removes.

More noticeable than the traces of that hefty conflict, however, was the dark, glum, sombre expression on Wharton's face.

He was seated by the window, reading a letter.

Even Billy Bunter, short-sighted as he was, observed the peculiar expression on Wharton's face, and wondered what was in the letter to disturb him so.

As it was not Billy Bunter's business he was, of course, very curious about it, and he would have been still more curious, but for the circumstance that it was tea-time. But even inquisitiveness took a second place when Bunter was hungry.

Wharton, his eyes fixed on the letter he was reading, did not see the fat junior in the doorway. He did not look up. Bunter blinked at him, and blinked round the study for signs of tea. There were no signs of it to be seen, and Bunter grunted discontentedly.

Bunter had tea'd in Hall. He had made sure of that before it was too late. Now he was prowling about the Remove passage in search of another tea. In his own study, No. 7, the table was a very frugal one, and Bunter was in hopes of finding something better. He had found something better in Study No. 4, but, unluckily, he had found the Bounder's boot also, and so he had not stopped in Study No. 4 to tea.

He seemed to be having no better luck in Study No. 1. Generally the Famous Five forgathered there at tea-time. But the Co. were not there now, and Wharton was alone, reading a letter, and the table, like Mrs. Hubbard's celebrated cupboard, was bare. Billy Bunter's discontented grunt was loud and emphatic enough to make the captain of the Remove look up.

"Had your tea, old chap?" asked Bunter.

Wharton shook his head.

"Going to have it?" asked Bunter.

"No—yes. Don't bother!"

Bunter blinked at him in astonishment. Wharton's reply seemed to indicate that he did not care whether he had his tea or not. That, to Billy Bunter's mind, was simply inexplicable, and seemed to border on lunacy. If a fellow did not care about meals, Bunter would have liked to know what there was in the wide world for him to care about.

"Shut the door after you," added Wharton.

"Where's Nugent?" grunted Bunter.

"Isn't he coming in to tea?"

"Don't bother!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"
"Nugent's in Study No. 13," snapped Wharton impatiently. "Now get out!"

"Oh, if you're having tea with Bob Cherry—"

"Get out!" roared Wharton. And Bunter jumped, blinked, and got out. He slammed the door of Study No. 1 after him.

The fat junior rolled up the Remove passage to Study No. 13. The door of that study was partly open, and a cheery buzz of voices could be heard from within. Also there was a welcome aroma from the study—an appetising scent which hinted of cookery and solid food. Billy Bunter sniffed appreciatively. Somebody in Study No. 13 was frying rashers of bacon for tea. Bunter felt that he had arrived at the right spot.

He pushed the door farther open and blinked in.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Mark Linley, and little Wun Lung were all there, and with them were Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull. The fellows were gathered round the tea-table, with the exception of Linley, who was frying additional rashers over the study fire. It was a cold, frosty day, and there had been games practice after class, and the fellows in Study No. 13 were hungry. So a rather solid tea was grateful and comforting.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here you are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Trickle in, old bean! You're late!"

"Better late than never, old chap!" said Bunter, as he trickled in.

"Eh? You silly ass, I thought it was Wharton! Roll off!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Buzz!"

"The buffulness is the proper caper, my esteemed idiotic Bunter!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

There was a vacant chair at the table. Apparently it had been placed ready for Harry Wharton, who had not yet come along. Billy Bunter prepared to seat himself.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

"Oh, my hat! Whoop! Yaroooh!"

Bunter did not see who looked away a leg of the chair, but he knew that somebody had. The chair suddenly travelled from under him, and his ample weight was deposited on the floor with a bump that shook the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Wow! Beast!" roared Bunter.

He scrambled up, pink with wrath.

"That's Wharton's chair!" grinned Bob. "Roll away, barrel!"

"Look here, Wharton can't come," said Bunter. "In fact, he asked me to tell you so."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. "That's the yarn you spun at Cliff House on Wednesday! Do you think that chicken will fight twice?"

"The twicefulness will not be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, if you don't want a fellow to tea—"

"Right on the nail!" agreed Bob.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter rolled to the door. Johnny Bull had risen to his feet, apparently with the intention of helping him on his way. The Owl of the Remove did not want any help. He reached the doorway quite quickly. There he turned and blinked back at the juniors.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hook it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say my postal order hasn't come," said Bunter. "Did I tell you fellows I was expecting a postal order?"

"Oh, my hat! Did he, you men?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on page 12.)

"OLD REF" KNOWS ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR—

FOOTBALL FAVOURITES!

No. 19.

MARK HOOPER

the midget outside-right, and a popular idol of the fans of

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY F.C.



Whatever the Opportunity, Seize It!

AT TENDING football matches all over the country, travelling in trains, talking to and playing solo with footballers, I have heard some strange stories concerning the careers of our stars. And these I am passing on to you one by one. From some points of view the tale I have to tell you this week is one of the strangest I have heard. It concerns Mark Hooper, the little outside-right of Sheffield Wednesday.

I expect you know something about the success of this player as an outside-right. In any case, I shall tell you a bit about the things he has done, later on. But the big and the strangest thing about Mark Hooper is that sometimes during the day he still says: "I am not an outside-right." And when he is sleeping, so I am told, he occasionally dreams. His mind goes back automatically, and when he talks he can, if you happen to be there, be overheard saying: "I am not an outside-right; I don't want to be an outside-right, and I won't be an outside-right!"

Funny that, isn't it? And yet when you see Sheffield Wednesday playing you will see Hooper of the twinkling feet playing at outside-right, and playing jolly well, too.

Now, let us get down to the strange story of the career of this great little player. Mark Hooper was born at Darlington, and there were several other brothers in the family. Indeed, four of them have played for big football clubs. When Mark was still a small boy—always small for his age—he had an uncle who was famous in big football: Charlie Roberts, who years ago played for England as a centre-half, and a player who, in the opinion of many people, never had a superior in his particular position on the field.

With his brothers playing football, and with his Uncle Charlie famous in the game, it is not surprising that Mark was fired with ambition to play the game, too.

Hooper went to a school at Darlington, where they had a football team, and whatever the lad's abilities as regards "lessons," he certainly had his wits about him in regard to games. One day the teacher responsible for the football team belonging to the school asked Mark if he would like to have a trial in the school team.

Of course, Mark said he would, and the next natural question from the teacher was: "Where would you like to play?" Now, those quick, twinkling eyes of Hooper had not been idle since his arrival at the school. His ears had also been attuned to the gossip. Because of these things he knew that the teacher was really looking for a goalkeeper to play in the school side. There was a vacancy there—the only vacancy. So little Mark, looking up into the face of the teacher, said: "I'd like to play in goal, sir."

The teacher must have thought it a remarkable coincidence that just at the moment that he was looking for a goalkeeper here was a boy who wanted to keep goal. Actually—the story, as Mark tells it, and as I have passed it on to you, shows this—it was much more than a coincidence. Opportunity had knocked at Mark's door, and he took special pains to be "in."

Tricking the Trickster!

WHILE Mark was goalkeeping for that schoolboy team they carried everything before them, winning seventeen out of eighteen matches in a season, and scoring 153 goals with only fifteen against them.

"Perhaps I ought to have stopped some of those fifteen," said Mark; "but an odd one or two in a match doesn't

matter when the forwards of the team are getting seven or eight."

Soon there came for Mark opportunities to play in other positions on the football field.

Starting his business career at a steel works, young Hooper played for the works' team. He was now a forward, particularly an outside-left. Gradually he climbed up the ladder, making moves in little steps to a higher quality of football. A spell with Willington, and then on to Cockfield, a Northern League team. By this time Mark had definitely settled down as an inside-left. He was scoring a lot of goals, too, and so convinced was he that inside-left was his best position, that when he received an invitation to play for his native town team of Darlington as an outside-right he refused point blank. "I'll play at inside-left if you want me to," he said; "but outside-right, not on your life!"

The manager of Darlington was very keen to get the young player, however, especially as there was another member of the Hooper family, William, playing at inside-right in the team. So eventually Mark was given an inside-left berth with Darlington reserves. And the bright day came when the manager thought that Mark was ready for promotion to the premier eleven.

"Will you play for the first team on Saturday?" asked the manager. Mark was elated; ready to reply with the old question: "Can a duck swim?"

"Right you are," retorted the manager. "And now that you have given me your promise to play, I'll tell you where I want you to play—at outside-right." Exactly what Mark said then I can't tell you, but he had given his word to play, and, perhaps remembering that he had been a goalkeeper for the school team by a trick, he acceded to the request to play outside-right in the Darlington side, in which his brother was inside-right. Whether he liked it or not, he did sufficiently well to be signed on immediately after the game as a professional. And that is the full story of how Mark Hooper, who didn't want to become an outside-right, fell into the position as a regular thing. He saw the Darlington team rise from the Third to the Second Division, and then in the 1926-27 season he left his home town, transferred to Sheffield Wednesday.

Elusive as an Eel!

BY this time I think he has overcome his aversion to playing as an outside-right, for if ever I saw a footballer who most obviously enjoys his football, then that footballer's name is Mark Hooper. He has never grown more than five feet six inches, but his tricks and his speed enable him to beat the best of opposing full-backs. And the next time you see him play I think you will recall the story of him as I have now told it. You will see him pull the ball back with his right foot, turn round, and lift it into the middle with his left foot. And when Sheffield Wednesday are granted a corner-kick on the right wing, you will see Mark taking it—with his left foot.

So it might almost be said that Mark has had the last laugh; that while playing on the right wing he still insists, from time to time, in being a left-winger, or, at any rate, in doing things in the way a left-winger would do them. And if he looks back on his career with Sheffield Wednesday he will probably be thankful that he did not persist in remaining an inside-left, for such a small fellow, playing in that position, would have been much more likely to receive injuries when trying to hustle big backs off the ball.

And the Hooper who can make rings round opponents has been remarkably free from serious hurt. In the past three seasons he has never missed a League match for the Wednesday; and, of course, in two or three seasons the Sheffield club won the championship, Mark helping them with plenty of goals from the wing, his total last season being the quite remarkable one of twenty-two.

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THE COMPLETE OUTSIDER!

(Continued from page 10.)

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. It hasn't come yet," said Bunter sorrowfully. "If one of you fellows has a half-crown he doesn't want—"

"Shut the door after you."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Hold on, though," said Bob, with a cheery glimmer in his eyes. "If you're really stony, Bunter—"

"Frightfully, old chap!" said Bunter. "Absolutely on the beach! It's not often such a thing happens, as you know—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But there it is," said the fat Owl. "I'm expecting a postal order—several postal orders, in fact—from some of my titled relations. But—"

"But the jolly old nobility have forgotten all about it, I suppose," said Bob sympathetically. "They seem to have rotten memories in the House of Lords!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, we can't offer you a mouthful, because we've only got enough for seven fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But if you'd care for a gammon rasher—"

Bunter's fat face brightened.

"What-ho!" he said emphatically.

"If you'll take it away to your own study—"

"Certainly, old chap. In fact, I'd prefer to cook it myself," said Bunter. "You fellows can't cook. I say, hand it over!"

"Just a gammon rasher," said Bob, rising from his chair. "You're welcome to it if you want it."

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter.

Bob Cherry went to the study cupboard. His friends eyed him rather curiously. The total supply of bacon in Study No. 13 was either on the table or in the frying-pan. So they did not quite see how Bob was going to hand over a gammon rasher to Bunter. So far as foodstuffs were concerned, the study cupboard was quite empty.

Bunter, not being aware of that, blinked eagerly at Bob as he fumbled in the cupboard. Bunter liked bacon for tea, and he was particularly addicted to a good, solid gammon rasher. It was a thing that a fellow could eat and feel that he really was eating something. And Bunter, whatever else he couldn't do, could cook. He fairly gloated over the prospect of carrying off a handsome gammon rasher to his study, cooking it there, and devouring it at his leisure.

Bob Cherry was at the cupboard a few minutes. There was a rustling of paper as he wrapped up the gift for Bunter.

He turned from the cupboard at last with the parcel in his hand.

"Here you are, old fat man!" he said.

Bunter's fat hand shot out for the parcel! His little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. From the size of the packet, it seemed that that gammon rasher was a large one—as large as any gammon rasher was ever likely to be.

"Thanks, old chap!" he gasped.

"Not at all, old bean! Roll off and enjoy yourself!" said Bob kindly.

Bunter rolled off promptly.

As he progressed down the Remove passage to his own study, he heard a sound of laughter from Study No. 13. What the fellows there were laughing at, he did not know, and did not care.

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His fat thoughts were concentrated on his prize.

He rolled into Study No. 7.

Tom Dutton was out to tea, but Peter Todd was there, finishing a rather frugal meal. Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, you here!" he grunted. "Ain't you going down, Toddy?"

Peter looked at him.

"When I've finished tea," he answered. "Don't you like my company, fatty?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't," admitted Bunter.

"Just how I feel about yours, old fat bean! It's a case of two souls with but a single thought; two jolly old hearts that beat as one!"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

Toddy chuckled.

"You fat chump! What have you got there?"

It did not take Peter long to guess that Bunter had brought in something for tea which he did not want to "whack out."

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily.

"Nothing at all! If I had anything for tea, Toddy, I should whack it out, of course. The fact is, I haven't anything!"

"Nothing in that parcel?" grinned Toddy.

"No, old fellow! Only—only some old newspapers," said Bunter. "I say, where's the frying-pan?"

"In the cupboard? You want the frying-pan to cook the old newspapers in?" inquired Peter.

"Yes! No! I—I mean—look here, Toddy, I wish you'd buck up and clear! You might let a fellow have the study to himself every now and then!"

"You fat, frowsy, frabjous snail!" said Peter. "Get on with it, and don't mind me. I'm not a cormorant!"

"I've got nothing here—only—only a shoe that I'm going to have mended. But—but I think you might leave a fellow alone—"

"Fathead!"

Peter went on with his tea in quite a leisurely manner. Billy Bunter eyed him peevishly. One gammon rasher, though a solid article of diet, was not enough to whack out, in Bunter's opinion, at least. At the same time, even Bunter felt that he could not produce supplies at tea-time, and scoff them all on his own. He was anxious for Peter to go.

Toddy, however, seemed in no hurry to go. Perhaps the anxiety in Billy Bunter's fat face entertained him. Having finished his frugal tea, Peter picked up a book.

"I—I say, Peter, ain't you going down?" asked Bunter anxiously. He felt that he could not hold out much longer.

"Not yet, old fat bean! Can't a man sit in his own study?"

"I—I think I heard Wharton call you, Peter!"

"Think again!" suggested Peter.

"I—I mean, it was Loder—Loder of the Sixth! You'd better not keep a prefect waiting, Toddy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Toddy.

"Well, look here, you beast, if you're going to stick here, stick here—and be blown!" grunted Bunter. "I've got only one gammon rasher, and it's not enough for me, really, and you can go and eat coke!"

And Bunter sorted out the frying-pan, greased it, and set it ready on the study fire. Then he proceeded to unwrap the parcel he had brought from Bob Cherry's study. He was too hungry to wait any longer.

One wrapping of paper came off, and then another. Then, to Bunter's

surprise, a third, and then a fourth. He had had an impression, from the size of the parcel, that that gammon rasher was a particularly large gammon rasher. That impression, evidently, was ill-founded. There seemed to be more wrapping-paper than anything else.

Another wrapping came off. Still another remained, but it was the last, and inside it Bunter could feel the article of which he was in search. His fat fingers peeled off the final wrapping, and revealed—

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter Todd. "Is that a gammon rasher?"

Bunter gazed at it.

He was for the moment bereft of speech.

After the numerous wrappings had been removed, the ancient and disused sole of a shoe met his astonished eyes.

Billy Bunter could eat almost anything! But even Billy Bunter was not an ostrich. He could not eat that.

"Why, the—the beast!" Bunter found his voice at last. "That beast Cherry said it was a gammon rasher—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Peter. "So it is! Pure gammon!"

"Wha-a-at? It's the sole of an old boot!" shrieked Bunter. "That beast was pulling my leg! I—I—"

"Pure gammon!" yelled Peter.

"There's more than one kind of gammon, fatty! You ought to know—you're always gammoning!"

"Wh-a-a-t?" gasped Bunter.

It dawned upon his fat mind at last that this was indeed a "gammon" rasher. Certainly it was not a genuine one, so obviously it was "gammon!" It was not the gammon Bunter wanted, but it was undoubtedly gammon!

The expression on Billy Bunter's fat face made Toddy howl.

"The—the beast—" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gammoning a fellow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's what they were laughing at, I suppose! I heard them laughing when I came away—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd, still yelling, strolled out of the study. Billy Bunter was left gazing at his gammon rasher. He glared at it, with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. Finally he hurred it across the study. Even Billy Bunter could not devour that rasher—there was altogether too much gammon about it.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

No Cash!

HARRY WHARTON joined the tea-party in Study No. 13 rather late. His face was very grave, and he was very silent.

The other fellows had almost finished when he came, and tea was soon over. Wharton was not the fellow to wear his heart upon his sleeve, but all the fellows in Study No. 13 could see that he was troubled about something, and Frank Nugent gave him a rather anxious glance. When tea was over, Frank left the study with his chum, and they went down the Remove passage together.

"Something up, old chap?" asked Frank when they were outside the study. "Well, yes! Come into the study!" said Harry; and they went into Study No. 1 together.

Frank eyed his chum uneasily. Not only was Wharton's face unusually grave, but his lips were set, and he had a rather hard look. It was clear enough that something was wrong.



Having wrecked Wharton's bicycle almost beyond recognition, Ponsonby dragged it to the side of the lane and pitched it into the ditch. "You rotten hooligan!" roared Wharton, struggling in vain to pass the three Highellmans who barred his path.

"There was a letter for you this afternoon, I know," said Frank. "Was it—"

"From my uncle," said Harry, with a nod.

"He's sent you the fiver?"

"No!"

"Oh!" said Nugent.

Wharton's lips closed harder, and a spot of colour came into either cheek. His pride had received a wound, and there was, perhaps, just a trifle too much pride in Wharton's nature. Seldom or never did he ask a favour, even of the kind uncle whom he loved and trusted like a father. All the more because he found it hard to ask a favour, the refusal of one was bitter to him.

Nugent quite understood his feelings. But that was all he understood. He could not understand Colonel Wharton having, for probably the first time, refused what was asked by his nephew. He sensed Wharton's unspoken resentment, and fully shared it. It was true that, in the beginning, Harry's claim on his uncle was no more and no less than that of any other nephew on any other uncle. It was the Colonel's own strong sense of duty to his dead brother's son that had caused him to take that brother's place, so far as his

orphan nephew was concerned. But he had done it of his own free will, and having done it, he was bound to play up. A man could not take on responsibilities, and then throw them aside.

"There must be some reason," said Frank, at last.

"Read that letter," said Harry.

"You—you want me to—" Frank hesitated.

"I've asked you to."

Nugent took the letter and read it. It was brief, like all the old military gentleman's communications. Colonel Wharton was a man of few words.

"Dear Harry,—I shall come to the school to see you on Saturday afternoon. If the sum you mention is really essential to you, you shall have it.

Your affectionate uncle,
"JAMES WHARTON."

Nugent whistled softly.

"You told me your uncle had asked you to keep within your allowance this term," he said.

"That's right."

"I—I suppose he expected you to; and—"

Wharton breathed hard.

"You know I'm not the fellow to

ask for things," he said. "My uncle's often sent me tips, and I've been grateful, I hope. But I've never asked—or hardly ever. If I've ever asked, he's encouraged me to do so, and I've never been snubbed before." His voice trembled a little. "I think he might have taken it for granted that the money was essential—if I asked."

Nugent nodded slowly.

"I know he's been hard hit—like everybody else in these times," went on Wharton, in a low voice. "A lot of his money was locked up, years ago, in rubber shares. It will all come back some day—but at present, of course, it's as good as lost. Taxes are too high these days to be paid out of income—people have to sell things to meet them. My uncle's had to do that, like other people. But—but—"

"Is it possible, old chap, that he's been hit harder than you ever imagined?" asked Nugent softly. "If it's that—as bad as that—"

"A fiver can't matter to him—it can't!"

"But if it did—"

"You think it's possible, Frank?"

Wharton looked at his chum almost eagerly. If Colonel Wharton's circumstances were so straitened that such a sum of five pounds was of importance to him, it would be a blow—a heavy blow! But that, or anything, was better than believing that he had rebuffed his nephew, as a fellow like Billy Bunter was rebuffed when he wrote cadging letters home.

"I think it's not only possible, but fairly certain, old chap," said Frank. "Any other time your uncle would have sent the fiver without even asking you what you wanted it for. He knows that you're to be trusted with money, and that you wouldn't ask without a good reason. He would take your reason for granted. He's a good man, and a just man—the last man in the world, I think, to let a fellow down. I—I think you ought to trust him, Harry, and—"

Nugent hesitated.

(Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

"Give it a name, Frank."

"Well, I think you ought to be careful how you feel about it. If things are in a bad way, it's up to you to make it as easy for him as you can—if you were resentful or sulky, it would cut him rather hard—he's been a good man to you, Harry—you don't want to hurt him."

Wharton stood for a few moments silent.

"If it's that," he said at last.

"It must be that."

Wharton drew a deep breath. His face was still very grave; but the hint of sulky resentment had passed from it. If the kind old gentleman was in deep waters, and if his nephew knew it, Wharton was the fellow to forget himself entirely, and think only of proving his gratitude and affection to the man who had stood by him like a father.

"I'm glad I showed you the letter, Frank. I know you must be right," he said at last. "Good heavens, if the old man's in trouble, and I made it worse by beastly selfishness—" He broke off. "I'm bound to take it for granted that his actions are as good and kind and just as they have always been! That's that!"

He shoved the letter into his pocket. His face was brighter.

"That's that!" he repeated. "But I shall have to manage without the fiver now. If the poor old bean's really short of money to that extent, I'm not going to stick him, even if he offers it, as I'm jolly certain he would if I told him all about it. I—"

He broke off again, as there was a step outside Study No. 1.

Harold Skinner's unpleasant face looked in.

Snoop and Stott and Bolsover major were behind Skinner. They were grinning. Skinner was looking sour, and he had a paper in his hand.

Wharton gave him a dark look.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

Skinner held out the paper.

"Your bill," he said.

"My what?"

"Forgotten?" sneered Skinner.

"Well, if you've forgotten, I'll remind you. They've repaired my bike, and sent it home, and there's the bill. The man's waiting to be paid."

"Dub up, Wharton!" grinned Snoop.

Harry Wharton stood very still.

"Dubbing up," as Sidney James Snoop expressed it, was impossible just then. Wharton had a few coppers in his pocket.

A flush came over his face, and there was a throb of deep anger in his heart. Ponsonby and Skinner, between them, had landed him in this. But it was too late for argument; he had given his word now that he would pay the bill, and that was that. Unwilling as he had been to ask his uncle for the money, it had never even crossed his mind that the money would be refused.

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But it had been refused—and such a sum as five pounds was not to be saved out of a junior schoolboy's pocket-money.

Skinner's lip curled in a sneer.

"You've said you'll pay! You jolly well know you've got to pay. Get it back from Pon if you can—if Pon did what you say he did. That's got nothing to do with me. You took out my bike and got it smashed up—"

"That's enough!" said Wharton contemptuously. "I've said that I'll pay—and I shall keep my word."

"Well, the man's waiting."

"Tell him not to wait," said Wharton indifferently. "I suppose the people know their money's safe at Greyfriars. Tell the man I'll call in and pay the bill in a day or two. You can leave it with me."

"That's not good enough! They'll be dunning me—"

"It will have to be good enough," answered Wharton coolly. "Do you fancy that five-pound notes grow in Remove studies? How long would it take you to pay a bill for five quids?"

"That's not the point. You—"

"Leave the bill with me, and I'll see to it. If that's not good enough, take it away, and be hanged to you!"

Skinner scowled and threw the bill on the study table. Then he tramped away with his friends.

Wharton picked up the bill and slipped it into his pocket. A few days more or less did not matter; but the bill had to be met—as yet the captain of the Remove did not know how. He was quite determined not to let his uncle give him the money now that he believed—was determined to believe—that the old gentleman could ill spare it. Neither could he borrow it from his friends, with a very doubtful prospect of repaying it within any reasonable time. It was rather a new position for Harry Wharton to be in, and a very uncomfortable one. The matter required thinking out.

"Look here, old man," said Frank.

"We're all in this—the Co. always sinks or swims together, you know."

Wharton shook his head.

"Let's get out a bit," he said. "I want some fresh air—after Skinner. It will be all right—I'm not quite on my uppers yet."

And they went down the Remove staircase together.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Trying It On!

"Oh lor'! This awful pain!"

Billy Bunter groaned.

It was after dinner, on Saturday afternoon. The Famous Five were chatting near the House steps when Bunter came along and delivered himself of sounds of woe.

Bunter apparently, was in a state of suffering. What was the matter with him was not so apparent. Certainly he had done very well at dinner, and the extra helpings he had packed away might have made any other fellow feel queer.

But extra helpings had never affected Bunter. He always bagged as many as he could, and, like Oliver Twist, asked for more.

"I say—ow—you fellows— Wow!" groaned Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced at him. It was games practice that afternoon—a compulsory practice—but for once the captain of the Remove was going to cut it. Colonel Wharton had stated in his

letter that he was coming to the school that afternoon, and Harry had to be free to see his uncle when he came. It was his intention to walk down to Friardale Station and meet the old gentleman, and walk with him to the school. Even the captain of the Remove was not free to cut a compulsory practice without leave; but he had asked Wingate, the Head of the games, and had, of course, received permission. Wharton was thinking of his coming interview with his uncle as he chatted with his friends. But the matter under discussion was the bill for Skinner's bike. Only Nugent had seen the colonel's letter; it was not a matter that Wharton cared to talk about, even among his intimate chums. But the Co. knew there had been no remittance, and that Harry had to raise the money on his own. And the consensus of opinion was that it should be somehow extracted from Ponsonby, who was the party responsible. And if Pon tried to wriggle out of it by lying and trickery, as it was pretty certain that he would, he had to be pinned down somehow.

Billy Bunter interrupted the discussion.

"I've got an awful pain, you fellows!" he said lugubriously. "I say, you fellows, I—I rather think it's appendicitis."

"Been eating that gammon rasher?" asked Bob sympathetically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It can't be your dinner, Bunter," remarked Johnny Bull. "I had my eye on you—you only ate enough for six or seven."

"I think you fellows might be sympathetic when a man's suffering awful pain from appendicitis in his back."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That roar of laughter did not sound sympathetic. Still, appendicitis in the back was rather a new and startling complaint.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "It may not be appendicitis. It may be plumbago—there's a lot of plumbago in our family. Or—or pneumonia! Anyhow, the pain's fearful, and I—I shan't be able to turn up for games practice this afternoon, Wharton."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The secret was out now! It was not the many helpings at dinner that troubled Bunter—it was the prospect of games practice in the afternoon.

Many and various were Bunter's wheezes for dodging practice. This was one more of them.

"Cackle!" said Bunter bitterly.

"Cackle, while a fellow's got a pain like a burning dagger in his leg! I think it was Wharton caused it, by dragging me off that bike the other day at Cliff House! I believe the spinal column of my leg is injured."

"Oh crikey!"

"I'm rather keen on games practice, as you know," continued Bunter. "But I shall have to cut it to-day. You—you're letting me off, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'm out to-day," he answered. "I've asked Bob to take charge. Ask Bob, old fat bean—I'm sure he will believe that you've got appendicitis in your back and a broken spinal column in your leg. It sounds so jolly probable."

"Bob, old fellow!" Bunter turned his big spectacles hopefully on Bob Cherry. "I say, old chap, I—I can't put one leg before the other! The pain in my back—I mean in my leg—is really awful! You'll let me off, won't

you, old fellow, and—and explain to Wingate if he misses me.”

“If you’re too ill to play, old fat man, I’ll let you off,” agreed Bob. “After all, it will be a pleasure to lose sight of you for a bit.”

“The pleasurefulness will be terrific!” chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Oh, really, Cherry!”

“Sure you can’t put one leg before the other?” asked Bob.

“Quite!” said Bunter. “I—I couldn’t run a yard now, old fellow, if the House was on fire! I—I should perish miserably in the flames! I—I think I’ll go and lie down a bit—lying down may do me good.”

“I don’t know whether lying will do you any good,” said Bob, with a shake of the head. “You do an awful lot of lying, but I don’t see the good.”

“Beast!” roared Bunter. “I—I mean, is it all right, old chap! You’re letting me off games practice, as I’ve got this fearful agony—”

“If you can’t put one leg before the other, it’s no good your turning up on Little Side!” agreed Bob. “But let’s see! Turn round.”

“Eh?”

“Turn him round, you men!” said Bob.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I—I say, you fellows— Leggo, I say—”

Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh grasped Billy Bunter and slewed him round. Bob Cherry drew back a foot.

“I—I say!” yelled Bunter. “D-d-don’t you kick me, you beast! I say—”

“Stand steady!” said Bob cheerily. “If you can’t put one leg before the other you’re let off. But try!”

Thud!

“Yarooooooh!” roared Bunter.

A rather heavy boot landed on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter’s yell woke most of the echoes of the old quadrangle. He flew.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob. “You can put one leg before the other all right, Bunter! Quite a mistake of yours, old fat bean.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

There was no doubt that Bunter had found himself suddenly quite able to put one leg before the other—and at a good rate of speed, too. His fat little legs fairly twinkled as he fled. Even such an extraordinary combination of complaints as appendicitis in the back, a damaged spinal column in the leg, and plumbago—by which Bunter perhaps meant lumbago—did not seem to incapacitate him. One kick was enough for Bunter—and he vanished into the House at a speed he never displayed on Little Side.

“I rather think Bunter’s all right for games practice, after all!” chuckled Bob.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I’ll jolly well root the fat bouncer out if he tries slacking,” said Bob. “You can leave it to me, Wharton—I’ll make ‘em hop! Here comes Skinner—I wonder if he’s got a pain!”

Skinner came up with a rather sullen face. He scowled at the Co. and fixed his eyes on Wharton.

“I’ve got something rather important on this afternoon,” he said. “I suppose I can cut games?”

The captain of the Remove waved his hand to Bob.

“Bob Cherry’s in charge to-day,” he answered. “Put it to him.”

“What is it, Skinner? Appendicitis?” asked Bob.

“Eh? No, you ass!”

“Broken your spinal column?”

“You silly chump!”

“Or is there plumbago in your family?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, don’t be a silly ass!” growled Skinner. “The—the fact is, I’ve got to see a relation—an uncle of mine is at Lantham this afternoon, and he’s asked me to run across to see him.”

“Is your uncle named Ponsonby?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Skinner scowled.

“I’m awfully sorry, you can’t go over to see your uncle,” said Bob. “Wharton’s leaving games practice in my hands, and I should have to explain to Wingate—”

“Well, you can tell him about my uncle—”

“Your Uncle Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Look here, can I go over or not?” snarled Skinner.

“Certainly! I’ll help you over.”

Bob Cherry seemed to be in a playful mood that afternoon; and it was certain that the energetic Bob had little mercy on slackers and frowsters. Harold Skinner gave a yell as a pair of powerful hands suddenly grasped him.

“Leggo!” he yelled. “What the thump do you think you’re up to?”

“Didn’t you say you wanted to go over. Well, there you go!”

And Skinner went over!

Bump!

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the Co.

Skinner certainly had said that he wanted to go over—though he meant that he wanted to go over to Lantham. Bob chose to misunderstand. It was in the Greyfriars quad that Skinner went over—and he went over rather hard.

He roared as he landed.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked away, leaving Skinner gasping and glaring. It was clear that games practice could be safely left in Bob’s strenuous hands; Bob Cherry’s methods with slackers did not encourage slacking. There was quite a full attendance on Little Side that afternoon; only Billy Bunter being conspicuous by his absence. The fat Owl was still, apparently, “trying it on.” And Bob went to look for Bunter, with the cheery intention of helping him down to the football ground by the liberal application of a large size in football boots.

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difficulties were greater than he had suspected before. If that was the case, Wharton was the fellow to play up like a man; certainly not the fellow to add to burdens already heavy. Yet, perhaps, at the back of his mind, there was some faint shadow of a lingering doubt. Anyhow, the talk with his uncle would clear the air, and he was anxious for the meeting.

As he knew that Colonel Wharton had sold his car, the old gentleman could not be coming down by road, and if money was so very “tight,” he was not likely to get out at Courthfield and take a taxi to the school; so Wharton had no doubt that he would find him at Friar-dale Station, which was the station for Greyfriars, and he did not mind if he had to wait.

He was thinking of anything but the cad of Highcliffe, and did not even see the cyclist in advance. But Ponsonby’s eyes fixed on him in alarm, and he slowed down and glanced to left and right, as if seeking a way of escape.

Ponsonby was alone, and alone he did not want to meet the captain of the Remove. It was only too probable that, man to man, he would be called to account for the ragging of a few days ago.

But there was no escape for Pon, unless he turned and rode back to the village the way he had come; for he was nowhere near a turning. That he decided very quickly to do, and he whirled round his machine. It was at that moment, as he turned, that Wharton became aware of him.

A gleam came into the Greyfriars junior’s eyes at the sight of his old enemy. He gave a scornful laugh, as he noted that Pon was obviously seeking to escape a meeting, and ran forward. As a matter of fact, his intentions were not hostile; he was too worried and troubled about his own affairs to be thinking of giving the cad of Highcliffe the thrashing he deserved. But it was an opportunity of speaking to Pon about the affair of the bike; a matter that had to be settled. He ran quickly on, and called to Ponsonby to stop.

Instead of stopping, Ponsonby drove hard at his pedals, whirling the bike round to run for it. It was a case of more haste and less speed, for the lane was narrow, and instead of getting clear, Ponsonby ran his machine into the high grassy bank at the roadside. The bike toppled over, and Ponsonby bumped into the grass with a yelp.

By the time he was on his feet Wharton had reached him.

The Highcliffe fellow backed behind the machine, keeping it between him and Wharton, and scowling savagely across it.

(Continued on next page.)

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Pon Pays the Penalty!

“OH gad!” ejaculated Cecil Ponsonby. He jammed on his brakes in alarm.

Harry Wharton, swinging along Friar-dale Lane towards the village, did not observe, for a moment, the cyclist ahead of him, who was approaching from Friardale.

Wharton was deep in thought as he went. He was thinking of his coming interview with his uncle. Frank Nugent, like a true pal, had poured oil on the troubled waters, and more and more Wharton took his chum’s view that his uncle’s financial

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"Keep off, you Greyfriars cad!" he muttered.

Wharton's lip curled.

"I'm not going to touch you, you cringing funk, unless you ask for it," he answered. "But I've got to speak to you. The bike you smashed up the other day was not mine, but Skinner's—though I dare say Skinner's told you that already. I've got the bill for the repairs in my pocket."

"Keep it there!" suggested Ponsonby.

"Skinner holds me responsible, as I had the machine," said Harry. "I hold you responsible for having damaged it. Are you going to pay the bill?"

Ponsonby laughed.

"I suppose you know that it's up to you," said Harry quietly. "You smashed the jigger—"

"What jigger?" asked Pon coolly.

"You haven't forgotten, I suppose?"

"If I ever smashed a jigger I've forgotten—and I'm goin' on forgettin'," grinned Ponsonby. "When did it happen?"

Wharton's eyes glinted.

"You know that it happened on Wednesday afternoon, in this lane."

Ponsonby shook his head.

"I remember scrappin' with you on Wednesday afternoon," he said, in a reflective sort of way. "I don't remember anythin' about a bike. Were you on a bike?"

"So that's the line you're taking?" said Harry.

"If you can prove any bike-smashin', all you've got to do is to get on with it," answered Ponsonby cheerfully. "I had three friends with me that day, and they're three witnesses that I never touched your bike, if you had a bike with you. More likely you bunged it into a tree, or into a lorry, and you're makin' up this yarn to stick me for the damage. If you borrowed another fellow's bike, and got it crocked, it's your own funeral. You're more than welcome to anythin' you can get out of me."

"You're going to deny wrecking the bike, if I take the matter up with your headmaster at Highcliffe?"

"You get me—exactly."

"I suppose a few lies more or less don't cost you much," said the captain of the Remove contemptuously, "and I suppose your precious pals will back you up. But you're going to pay, all the same, if I can make you."

"Get on with it; make me, if you can," grinned Ponsonby. "As I've said, you're welcome to all you can get."

Wharton stood silent, looking at him.

He had guessed the attitude that Ponsonby would take up; indeed, it was certain that the cad of Highcliffe never would have done the damage, but for his assurance that he could not be called to account for it. It was not much use for Wharton to go to Dr. Voysey, at Highcliffe School, and make a statement that would be denied by four Highcliffe fellows in a bunch. The Highcliffe headmaster would naturally take the side of the Highcliffians in a dispute in which it was word against word. Pon's utter unscrupulousness gave him the advantage, and it was as clear as daylight that not one penny would be extracted from Pon.

"Is that the lot?" asked Ponsonby. "If so, I'll get on. I don't quite like bein' seen talkin' to Greyfriars cads."

"And suppose," said Harry quietly, "suppose I took your bike, now, and served it as you served Skinner's. You couldn't stop me."

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Ponsonby breathed rather hard.

"I'd make you pay for it!" he muttered.

"Yes—you could make me pay for it, because I couldn't stand up and tell a bushel of lies about it, as you could," said Wharton contemptuously. "Well, I won't touch your bike—hooliganism isn't in my line. But I'm going to touch you—hard! You've asked for it, and you're getting it. Put that bike against the hedge, and put up your hands, you cur!"

"I'm not goin' to scrap with you!" muttered Ponsonby huskily. "Keep off, you dashed ruffian."

"You were keen enough on scrapping four to one. You'd be keen enough now, if your friends came along to help. Put up your hands!"

Ponsonby had no intention of putting up his hands if he could help it. He made a desperate rush with the bike, to mount and escape.

Wharton's hand was on his collar at once.

The machine went clattering against the bank, and the Highcliffe junior came down in the road with a crash and a yell.

Wharton eyed him grimly.

He knew now that there was no satisfaction to be had from Pon, so far as the affair of Skinner's bike was concerned. Pon was getting away with that, and it could not be helped. But there was some satisfaction, at least, in giving the cad of Highcliffe what he had asked for.

"I'm waiting!" said Wharton.

Ponsonby scrambled up, panting.

Wharton stepped between him and his machine. The Highcliffe junior backed away across the lane.

"You rotten funk!" said Wharton. "Put up your hands! I'd have let the matter drop if you'd have done the decent thing. Now—"

"Keep off!" yelled Ponsonby.

The Greyfriars junior followed him up. A tap on the nose brought a yell from Pon, and in sheer desperation he put up his hands.

The next moment they were fighting.

Pon was not a fighting-man; but he could put up a scrap when he was driven to it. He was, as a matter of fact, a little taller than Wharton, and looked like a match for him; if pluck had not been wanting. Desperation supplied the place of courage, and the dandy of Highcliffe put up the fight of his life.

For full five minutes the two adversaries stood face to face, foot to foot, fighting hard; and for those minutes Wharton had his hands full, and plenty to do. He gave and received punishment on a liberal scale; but Wharton took his punishment with grim endurance, while Pon yelped, and backed and dodged and weakened under it.

The Highcliffe fellow was driven across the lane to the very edge of the deep, flowing ditch, and there he rallied for another effort.

But the grim face and driving fists were too much for him. He dropped his hands suddenly, turned, and ran.

Wharton's foot shot out, catching the elegant trousers of the dandy of Highcliffe as he ran. Pon staggered forward, slipped on the edge of the ditch, and plunged headlong in.

Splash!

"Wrrrrggh!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oooooogh!"

A draggled, muddy, streaming, oozy figure rose in the ditch. A wet, muddy,

furious face glared at the Greyfriars junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

"Ugh! Oooooh! Gug-gug-gug! Oooooh!" spluttered Ponsonby.

Harry Wharton, laughing, turned away and walked on towards the village. The hapless Highcliffian crawled out of the ditch, streaming water and squelching mud.

It was a muddy, draggled, dishevelled, and infuriated Ponsonby that crawled to the bicycle and pedalled away. Not for the first time, Pon found it extremely unpleasant to receive that for which he had so earnestly asked.

Harry Wharton gave him no further thought as he went on to Friardale. He reached the village station, and went on the platform. The train was in from Courtfield; but Colonel Wharton had not arrived by it; and the captain of the Remove paced the platform while he waited for the next train to come in.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Uncle!

"H E, he, he!"

Billy Bunter chuckled.

The fat junior was loafing about the House steps, keeping his eyes—and his spectacles—on the alert. It was time for games practice, and Billy Bunter—who only wanted to be left alone to loaf and frowst—had to be wary. He had a feeling that Bob Cherry might start looking for him when he missed him on Little Side; and he did not want to be found. Very much indeed he did not want to be found.

He was prepared to cut and run at the sight of Bob's sturdy figure and ruddy face in the offing.

Certainly a fellow who dodged games practice on compulsory days had to be reported to the captain of the school. But Bunter felt that he could rely on Bob's good nature to that extent; he was not afraid of being reported to Wingate. But he was very much afraid of being spotted, and kicked all the way to the football ground. Hence his watchfulness.

His fat cachinnation was evoked by the sight of a tall, erect, military-looking gentleman coming up to the House. It was Colonel Wharton, the uncle and guardian of the captain of the Remove. Bunter was aware that Harry Wharton had gone down to Friardale Station to meet his visitor. As the colonel came in alone, it was obvious that he had missed his nephew. That, to Bunter's fat and fatuous mind, seemed rather amusing. And he chuckled. It seemed quite funny—to Bunter—if the old gentleman had got out at Courtfield, while his nephew was waiting for him to get out at Friardale.

Colonel Wharton glanced at the grinning fat Owl as he came up. His bronzed face was grave, and a little stern, and Bunter ceased to grin. The colonel was a governor of Greyfriars, and Bunter "capped" him as he came up, and suppressed the outward signs of his inward merriment.

"Is my nephew in the House, Bunter?" asked Colonel Wharton, stopping.

"No fear!" answered Bunter. "He's gone down to Friardale to meet your train, sir."

"Oh!" ejaculated the colonel.

"I suppose you got out at Courtfield, sir," said Bunter. "Just like Wharton to wait at the wrong station! He's rather an ass."

"What?" hooted the colonel,



"Better late than never, you fellows," said Bunter, as he made to sit down in the vacant chair. "Ob, my hat! Whooop! Yaroooh!" The chair suddenly travelled from under the fat junior, and his ample weight was deposited on the floor, with a bump that shook the study.

"I—I—I mean—" stammered Bunter.

"No doubt Harry supposed that I should get out at Friardale," said the colonel. "As a matter of fact, I have walked from Courtfield."

The colonel frowned a little.

It was a natural misapprehension on Wharton's part, for he certainly could not have guessed that the old gentleman would alight at Courtfield and walk three miles to the school.

He was aware that his uncle was now practising a rather severe economy; but he assuredly was not aware that the economy was being carried to that length.

Billy Bunter watched the frowning face, with a lurking glimmer behind his big spectacles.

"Well, after all, I am not pressed for time. I can wait," said the colonel at last. "No doubt Harry will come back at once."

"More likely to wait for the next train," said Bunter cheerfully; "and there's only one every half-hour."

"Well, it cannot be helped. If you see him, Bunter, please tell him that I am here."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Colonel Wharton passed into the House. Billy Bunter winked into space.

Mr. Quelch had seen the colonel, from his window, and he came out of his study to greet his head boy's uncle. Visits from governors of the school were not, as a rule, either grateful or comforting to the Head and his staff; but the Remove master had a great respect for the bronzed old gentleman who had once been Jim Wharton of the Remove, and who had been through the terrible days in France and Flanders.

"I understand that my nephew has

gone to Friardale, thinking that I should come by the local train," said the colonel, after a few minutes' chat with the Remove master. "I shall have to await his return."

"If you would care to wait in my study, sir—"

Colonel Wharton was aware that Mr. Quelch was a busy gentleman, and he did not accept the polite offer.

"Thank you! I think I will go to my nephew's study," he said—"my own study once upon a time, Mr. Quelch!" he added, with a smile.

Mr. Quelch smiled, too.

"Then I will send word to Gosling to inform Wharton, immediately he returns, that you are here, sir, and he will come directly to the study," he said.

And the colonel ascended to the Remove passage—deserted now that all the Lower Fourth were at games practice.

He strode into Study No. 1 with his heavy tread.

There was a low fire in the study grate, and the armchair looked comfortable and inviting to a gentleman who had walked three miles.

But Colonel Wharton did not sit down.

He stood for some minutes looking round the study. In the long, long ago that room had been his own, when he had been a boy in the Greyfriars Remove.

Much water had passed under the bridges since then; the Great War had come and gone.

The gravity of the lined, bronzed face relaxed, as the colonel glanced about him, noting the signs of youthful occupation—a pair of football boots in a corner, a pair of boxing-gloves on the table, a book with open leaves flattened

on the floor, a half-finished Latin exercise adorned by several blots and a smudge.

He stepped to the window, and stood looking out.

Far in the distance he had a view of green playing fields, and his keen eyesight picked out the Remove fellows on Little Side, gathering there for games practice.

Then his glance fell on a fellow in shirt and shorts who was coming towards the House—a sturdy fellow with a ruddy face—and he smiled as he recognised Bob Cherry.

He turned from the window and sat down in the armchair.

For some minutes he sat staring at the low fire, a cloud of deep thought gathering on his face. He was anxious to see his nephew, and he was always glad to see him; but the coming interview was not to be of the old pleasant kind in all respects. Financial trouble, which had reached most homes in the kingdom, had reached Wharton Lodge, and it made a difference.

It irked the kind old gentleman even to appear to hesitate in acceding to any request made by his nephew; and in his pocket-book was a five-pound note, to be handed over to Harry if he really was in need of it. But he felt that in the present circumstances, it was only judicious to be quite frank; and he felt, too, that he could rely upon the good sense and understanding of his nephew.

Harry Wharton was not the fellow to weaken or whine; he was the fellow to take what was coming to him, standing up and facing it like a man.

He was sure of that.

But as he sat staring at the fire he was thinking, not only of Harry, but

of another nephew—the nephew of his old friend, Major Cherry—recalled to his mind by the glimpse of Bob in the quad below.

His brow darkened grimly as he thought of Bob Cherry's cousin—the wastrel and spendthrift, so utterly unlike the cheery Bob.

Had his own nephew been like that—Paul Tyrrell, waster and blackguard, pestering the old major continually for help, with one lying pretext after another! The colonel gave a grunt.

But his face cleared again. He had plenty of trouble on hand, but he was never likely to have that kind of trouble.

He took out his pocket-book and sat with it on his knee, sorting papers from it. Among them was a letter, written—but not yet posted—a letter to Major Cherry on a subject on which his old comrade-in-arms had asked his advice. On the subject of the major's scapegrace nephew Colonel Wharton's advice was likely to be uncompromising. He had no kindness to waste on slackers and blackguards.

But he doubted whether he might have put it a little too strongly, for which reason he had kept the letter for further consideration before posting it.

Now, while he waited for Harry, he read it through, his brow growing grim again as he read. And as he read there came a sound of gasping breath and scampering feet in the Remove passage.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Hunting Bunter!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Beast!"

Billy Bunter stayed only to utter that one ejaculation.

Bunter had been very wary.

He had spotted Bob Cherry coming towards the House, and he retired indoors at once. Up one passage and down another the grinning Bob had stalked the elusive owl. Three or four times Bunter had vanished from sight, but Bob had picked up the trail again. Now the fat and fatuous Owl was on the Remove staircase, listening in trepidation to footsteps below.

Bob Cherry's cheery face rose into view from the lower stairs.

He grabbed at Bunter.

Bunter fled.

"You silly owl!" roared Bob. "Come down!"

"Ow! Beast!"

"I'm going to kick you into the changing-room! Come and be kicked!"

That, really, was not the way to induce William George Bunter to check his flight. Billy Bunter did not want to be kicked, either into the changing-room or anywhere else. He barged on up the Remove staircase.

Bob Cherry scampered after him. He had wasted enough time on Bunter, and he grabbed at a fat leg.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he sprawled.

"Come on, old fat bean!" chuckled Bob. "Or would you like me to roll you down like a jolly old barrel?"

"Ow! Beast! Leggo! I've got a pain—"

"I'll give you another, old fat man! Where would you like it?"

"Look here, you beast—"

Smack!

A rather heavy open hand descended on Bunter's trousers as he sprawled, with a crack like a pistol shot.

"Whooop!" roared Bunter.

"Have another, old bean?" chuckled Bob. "You— Oh, my hat! Yooop! Great pip! Oh crikey!"

Bunter, in sheer desperation, kicked out.

Bob was not expecting it; indeed, if Bunter had stopped to think, he would not have done it. He did it without thinking.

His foot landed on Bob's chest as Bob bent over him on the stairs, and Bob Cherry went spinning.

Bump! Crash! Bump, bump, bump!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter in terror at what he had done, as he heard Bob rolling down the Remove staircase to the lower landing.

He scrambled up and blinked after Bob.

"Ow! Oh! Yaroooh!" roared Bob as he rolled.

He landed on the landing in a breathless heap. The expression on his face as

he picked himself up was enough for Bunter—more than enough.

The fat Owl fairly tore up the stairs to the landing above and fled into the Remove passage.

"You fat villain!" yelled Bob. "I'll burst you!"

Thundering footsteps came after Bunter.

"Oh lor'!" gurgled Bunter.

He charged into the Remove passage, tore open the door of the first study he came to, and barged in headlong. His one thought was to get into a study, and slam the door and lock it before Bob grabbed.

Billy Bunter did not see the bronzed-faced gentleman who started up from the armchair in amazement as he barged in. He had no eyes for Colonel Wharton.

He grasped the door and slammed it to.

Bob Cherry reached it from outside at the same moment. The door slammed on Bob and there was a roar.

The next instant it burst wide open again and Bob charged in.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He rushed round the table to escape.

Crash!

Bump!

"Good gad!"

Bunter had crashed into somebody! He did not even see whom! He rolled over from the shock and sprawled on the floor. Colonel Wharton, taken quite by surprise by that sudden terrific charge, staggered over and went full length, his pocket-book and papers flying far and wide.

"Oh! Good gad!" spluttered the colonel.

"Yaroooh!"

"Now, you fat scoundrel!" roared Bob. "Oh, my hat! You, sir! I—I didn't see you—"

Another second and Bob's grasp would have been on the fat Owl, and Bunter would have been getting the time of his life. But in that second Bob sighted his chum's uncle sprawling on the floor and stopped.

"Oh! What—what—" panted the colonel dizzily. "What—"

"Yaroooh! Keep off!"

"You—you—you benighted idiot, Bunter!" gasped Bob. "You—you—" He broke off and ran to the colonel's aid.

Billy Bunter scrambled up.

He blinked at the colonel through his big spectacles. He realised now what he had charged into.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Bob, forgetful for the moment of Bunter, gave his assistance to the colonel, helping him up. In a few moments he would have had eyes for Bunter again. But Billy Bunter made the most of those few moments. Generally Bunter's motions were not rapid. Now, a flash of lightning would have had nothing on Bunter! He fairly whizzed out of Study No. 1.

There was a pattering of feet in the Remove passage, the slamming of a door and the turning of a key. Bunter was safe in No. 7, while Bob was still helping a breathless and dizzy old gentleman to his feet.

"Upon my word!" gasped Colonel Wharton. "I—I—I—"

"So sorry, sir!" gasped Bob. "I'll whop that fat idiot! I—I hope you're not hurt, sir."

"On the contrary, I am very considerably hurt!" exclaimed Colonel Wharton, leaning on the study table and gasping for breath. "And my papers—they are scattered all over the room! Really, Cherry—"

HOW'S the RADIO?

Going well... everything all right... no trouble? That's how it *should* be. No wasting time twiddling knobs and investigating connections; no blaming of batteries which are doing their jobs and doing them well. Just perfect reception without any bother at all. That means a perfect set, of course. And why shouldn't yours be perfect? No reason at all if you read POPULAR WIRELESS. P.W. is more than a weekly paper. It's a dozen experts, and all at your service—for three-pence a week. Worth it? ... well, try it!

POPULAR WIRELESS

Every
Thursday

3D.

"That fat ass is dodging games practice, sir, and I was rounding him up," stammered Bob. "I'm awfully sorry. I'll pick up the papers, sir—"

"Please do so!" snapped the colonel. The old gentleman dropped rather limply into the armchair again. A charge with Billy Bunter's weight behind it was a serious matter, especially for a gentleman past the age for horse-play. Colonel Wharton sat and gasped for breath spasmodically.

Games practice was waiting for Bob, and Bunter was not yet rounded up. But Bob, for the moment, was more concerned about his chum's uncle than either. He picked up the pocket-book and rooted about the study for the scattered papers—among them a five-pound note. He crammed paper after paper into the pocket-book and handed it back to the colonel.

"I think that's the lot, sir! I'm awfully sorry—"

"You are a young donkey, sir!" gasped the colonel.

"I—I— You see—"

"Nonsense!" The old colonel was evidently not in the best of tempers—which really was not surprising. He thrust the pocket-book into his pocket and rubbed his knees and elbows in turn—all of which had established rather violent contact with the hard old oak of the study floor.

"You see, sir, I—I never knew you were here," stammered Bob. "Harry's gone down to Friardale, thinking—"

"I know that!"

"I—I'm sorry—"

"Huh!"

Bob Cherry discreetly left the study. Besides, he had Bunter and games practice to think of. He closed the door, and tramped along to Study No. 7. From that apartment there was a sound of breathless gasping.

"Bunter, you fat villain—"

"Ow! I'm not here!"

"Come out, you porpoise!"

"Beast!"

"Open this door!" roared Bob.

"Rotter!"

"I'll burst you—"

"Yah!"

Bob Cherry, breathing hard and deep, tramped away to the stairs. There was no dealing with Bunter through a locked door. Bunter had to be left over. Games practice that afternoon proceeded, after all, without the assistance of William George Bunter.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Colonel Wharton is Frank!

HARRY WHARTON watched the local train from Courtfield come in at Frisardale Station, and frowned. He had had no doubt that, as his uncle was certainly coming down by train, he would arrive at Friardale; but now he began to doubt.

However, as he was there, he decided to wait for the next train, and a rather dismal half-hour passed, loafing about the platform. But there was no sign of Colonel Wharton on the next local when it came in, and, with clouded brow, the junior left the station at last.

If his uncle had taken a taxi from Courtfield he must have been at the school long before this; he must have arrived, even if he had walked. The captain of the Remove broke into a trot in the lane, and kept it up all the way back to the school.

Games practice was going on on Little Side, and no Remove man was to be

GREYFRIARS HEROES.

No. 21.

Claude Hoskins' ideal hero is a pianist, whose identity is revealed in the rousing verses by the Greyfriars Rhymester below.

NOW Hoskins worships a pianist bold,
A pianist bold of the thunderous sort,
Who blazes away at sonatas untold
On a grand extra-powerful pianoforte.
Oh, he plays with a beautiful style, does he,
In the grand orchestral symphony,
And tickles the keys with a delicate air,
At a Saturday afternoon affair—
A master of music, in short.

The name of the master is Signor Dupree,
And Signor Dupree is an aristocrat;
He came to this country from over the sea,
He's not very tall, but amazingly fat;
His hair is quite long, but his temper is short;
He treats his poor, helpless pianoforte
In a manner so brutally outside the pale,
That really he ought to be flung into gaol
And given ten strokes with the cat.

He executes finely "The Rustle of Spring,"
With a highly professional grace;



With a tingetty-ting at the top of the thing,
And a rattle-te-bang in the bass;
He jumps from his seat at each thunderous chord,
As though he'd been suddenly stabbed with a sword,
He hits all the keys at one go—we suppose
That the keys he can't reach with his fingers and toes
He's ready to play with his face.

A crashing crescendo he really enjoys,
And makes such a hullabaloo
That even dull boys and the hobble-de-hoys
Are often compelled to say "Phew!"
Oh, he plays sonatas exceedingly vitally,
At every appearance or broadcast recital he
Lashes himself to a positive fury,
As though he would do himself some grave injury
(With the accent, of course, on the "ju"!)

But Hoskins admires the bold Signor Dupree,
For he's a musician as well;
In making appalling disturbances he
Is certainly hard to excel;
We venture to prophesy in this regard,
If he hits the keyboard sufficiently hard,
And knows how to charge an exorbitant fee,
One day he will rival brave Signor Dupree—
At any rate, no one can tell!

seen in the quad. But Wharton caught sight of Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Fourth lounging in the quad, and called to Temple.

"Know whether my uncle's come, Temple?"

"Yes. I saw the old scout comin' in," answered Temple, "nearly half an hour ago, I believe."

Gosling, the porter, put his ancient head out of his lodge.

"That you, Master Wharton? Which Mr. Quelch says Colonel Wharton's a-waiting for you in your study, sir!"

"Thanks, old bean!" said Harry.

He ran on towards the House. He came up the Remove staircase two stairs at a time, and almost ran into a fat junior who was peering down from the landing.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. "I thought it was that beast Cherry, for a minute!" he said.

"Why aren't you at games practice, you fat freak?" asked Wharton.

"You mind your own bizney!" retorted Bunter independently.

"What?"

"You told me that Cherry's in charge to-day!" said Bunter. "Well, Bob can let a pal off if he likes. See?"

"So Bob's let you off, you fat slacker?"

"Yes. I was ill, you know—fearful pains in my—my lungs—I mean, my legs! I never locked myself in my study!" added Bunter cautiously. "I'm not dodging that beast!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I say, your jolly old uncle's in Study No. 1," said Bunter. "Better be a bit tactful, old chap, and it may mean a tip! But be tactful! He's in rather a rotten temper."

"You silly fat Owl!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I'm only putting you wise!" said the fat Owl warmly. "The old jossler—"

"The what?"

"The old jossler's frightfully crusty because I barged into him and biffed him over," explained Bunter. "How was I to know he was in the study, I'd like to know, and that brute Cherry was after me like a wild Indian, you know and—"

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "What have you been up to?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all!" answered Bunter. "What I mean to say

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is, I didn't dodge into your study, old chap, and never barged the old idiot over—Whoop!"

Billy Bunter descended suddenly on the floor of the Remove passage. He landed there with a bump and a yell.

Leaving him yelling, Harry Wharton passed on, and hurried into Study No. 1.

"Uncle!"

Colonel Wharton rose from the armchair. He was still breathing rather hard, and was a little flushed. He had been busily engaged in rubbing a jarred knee when his nephew came in. The old gentleman had not yet quite recovered from the effects of Bunter's terrific charge and the fall on the floor. But he was not, as Bunter had stated, in a bad temper. His kind old face lit up with a smile at the sight of his nephew.

"Oh, here you are, Harry!"

He shook hands with the captain of the Remove.

"I'm sorry I was out of gates, uncle," said Harry. "I was sure you would come to Friardale, and—"

"I should have told you in my letter, my boy," answered his uncle. "It was my fault! I walked from Courtfield."

"That's a jolly long walk!" said Harry.

"Quite an enjoyable one!" said the colonel. "As the weather was fine, I thought I would walk it."

Wharton was silent. He wondered rather dismally whether the extra fare to Friardale mattered to his uncle. If so, there was no doubt that the old gentleman was in deep waters financially. Certainly he had never thought of imagining that things were so bad as that.

"Sit down, my boy." Colonel Wharton sat in the armchair again, and the junior perched himself on the edge of the study table. The colonel took out his cigar-case, as if from force of habit; but replaced it in his pocket without opening it, and smiled faintly.

Wharton felt a pang.

"Uncle," he said, in a low voice, "are things very bad? I'd like you to tell me. You know I'm not afraid to face the music."

"I know that, Harry. I think I had better be frank," said his uncle slowly. "Perhaps I should have spoken out before, but—but—" He paused. "It is only temporary trouble, Harry—of that I am assured, and you may be assured. Like most other people, I have my money locked up in investments on which nothing is being paid in these days of business depression, and which cannot be sold, except at rubbish prices.

"All will be well when business revives—and there is not the slightest doubt that this country is on the verge of a business revival, and a new era of prosperity as great as it has ever seen before—or greater. No man of judgment can doubt that. Bug—"

"But—" said the junior.

The colonel smiled.

"But, in the meantime, the pinch is very hard," he said. "Taxation has been carried to such reckless lengths that it is practically killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. The good time is coming, my boy—but until it is here, there are hard times for everybody. We can pull through by the strictest economy—but it must be very strict—for a time. Only for a time, Harry."

"I understand."

"I believe prosperity is so near at hand that even next term we shall be in our old easy circumstances," said his uncle. "But this term, my boy, I want you to play up, and I am sure you will do so without repining."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,255.

"What-ho!" said Harry, smiling. "Rely on me, uncle."

"You understand now, why I wrote to you as I did. I am not only your uncle and guardian, Harry, but your friend. Tell me frankly how you stand; and matters are not so bad that I cannot spare what you want, if it is really needed."

Wharton shook his head.

"It's all right, uncle. I had no idea—I mean; I can manage all right. Don't you bother about that."

"If you are sure, Harry—"

"Quite sure!" said Harry at once. Half a dozen half-formed plans were in his mind for meeting Skinner's little bill, and on one point he was quite determined—it was not to be landed on his uncle. If the old gentleman walked three miles to save a shilling on the railway, his nephew certainly was not going to "touch" him for five pounds.

Colonel Wharton seemed to hesitate; but it was easy for Harry to see that this came as a relief to him.

"It's nothing—really nothing!" said Wharton eagerly.

The colonel nodded. Probably he had an impression that his nephew had been contemplating some little extravagance, justifiable enough in his former circumstances, but which he could easily cut out, now that he knew how matters stood.

Wharton changed the subject as soon as he could. He could handle the difficulty himself—by selling his own bike, if it came to that. So far as his uncle was concerned, he was only anxious to wash the matter entirely out. And in that he succeeded.

He turned the talk to home; asked about Aunt Amy, and others at Wharton Lodge. And the colonel's rather troubled face cleared, and he chatted pleasantly with his nephew, and the minutes passed swiftly enough.

Colonel Wharton rose at last.

"You'll stay to tea, uncle?" asked Harry.

"I think I had better catch my train, my boy," answered his uncle. "If you would care to walk to the station—"

"Yes, rather."

They walked to Courtfield together. Harry Wharton's face was bright and cheerful—more bright and cheerful than his feelings, as a matter of fact. Of himself Harry was thinking little, or nothing. His concern was for his uncle, who was called on at an age when ease is almost a necessity to face unexpected privations and hardships. He was resolved that his uncle should see that he could face trouble without complaint. And his face was resolutely bright till he had said good-bye to the colonel in the train.

But it clouded as he walked back to the school across Courtfield Common. He was in a very thoughtful mood when he reached Greyfriars again.

— —

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Strange Discovery!

"I SAY, you fellows! Ow-ow-ow!"

"What the thump—"

"Wow!" groaned Billy Bunter.

It was a face of woe that blinked into the doorway of Study No. 1.

The Famous Five were gathered in that study. They stared at the woe-be-gone fat face, and grinned.

"Roll in, old barrel!" said Bob Cherry. "I've been saving up a kicking for you. Have you called for it?"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper,"

concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Roll in and turn roundfully, my esteemed idiotic Bunter."

"I say, you fellows, no larks!" groaned Bunter. "That beast Wingate has given me six! Wow!"

"Good!" said Bob.

"Beast! The brute makes out that I dodged games practice this afternoon!" groaned the fat Owl. "Those beastly prefects are always making some excuse to whop a man. Wow!"

"So you did dodge it, you fat ass!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Wow!"

"Well," said Bob considerably, "if you've had six, I'll let you off the kicking, old fat bean."

"You awful rotter!" answered Bunter ungratefully. "Fancy reporting a chap for cutting games practice, when you knew he was ill with—with plumbago."

"But I never reported you, old bean," grinned Bob. "Forgot all about you, in fact. Wingate came down to Little Side and missed you."

"Meddling boast; always butting in!" groaned Bunter. "Didn't you tell him I was frightfully ill, you rotter?"

"My dear ass, you can tell your own whoppers," said Bob, laughing.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Go and make that row in your own study," suggested Johnny Bull.

"That's what you call sympathetic, I suppose, after all I've done for you?" said Bunter bitterly. "Yow-ow-ow! I told Wingate I had an awful pain in my appendix, and he only laughed. Just laughed, and laid into me with the asphalt. Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, what about tea?" asked Bunter hopefully. "I was going to stand a spread in my study, but I've been disappointed about a postal order. I suppose your uncle squeezed out a tip, Wharton?"

"Not at all."

"Well, that's pretty thick," said Bunter, in disgust. "Butting in to bother a chap, and not tipping him. If I were you, I'd give him a jolly strong hint to keep away. That's just like these old fogeys—they never understand what a chap really wants to see them for."

"Fathead!"

"Well, what about tea?" asked Bunter. "I've only had tea in Hall, so far. That beast Toddy is tea-ing out; and when he's tea-ing out he never thinks of a pal in his own study. I offered to go to tea with him, and he was utterly ill-bred on the subject. Personal, in fact. If you fellows are having tea here, I'll lend a hand. Like me to light the fire, Wharton? I see you've let it out. Where's some wood?"

"Use your head!" suggested Bob.

"Beast!"

"I'll cut down to the tuckshop," said Nugent. "What about sosses and chips? If Bunter's going to stick us for tea, he may as well do the cooking. He can cook."

"That's a rather rotten way of putting it, Nugent. I wasn't thinking about tea, really; but I like to lend a hand to my old pals. Still, I'll stay if you like. I say, plenty of sosses, and a cake, and some jam! And—"

"Bow-wow!"

Nugent collected contributions from his comrades, and left the study to fetch supplies.

"Don't forget the jam!" Bunter bawled after him. "Mind you don't forget the cake! A big cake!"



Wharton's eyes seemed to start from his head, as he stared at the half-burnt letter in his uncle's handwriting. "My esteemed chum——" began Hurree Singh, in great concern. The junior captain heeded him not—his uncle had referred to him as a thoughtless, selfish, utterly ungrateful nephew!

Nugent disappeared. Billy Bunter proceeded to enconce his fat person in the study armchair. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him, and he looked at the Co.

"The fire's out, you men," remarked Bunter. "Better have it going when Franky brings in the grub. I'll cook. I can't trust you fellows to cook sosses. But get the fire going."

"You wouldn't like to get up and get it going?" asked Bob.

"Well, no. I think I'll take a bit of a rest. Yaroooh! Whoop!" roared Bunter, as Bob playfully tilted the armchair from behind, and he shot out on the hearthrug. "Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick the fat slacker out!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I'm going to light the fire! Didn't I say I would? Keep off, you beast!"

Billy Bunter proceeded to attend to the fire. He was in Study No. 1 to tea on rather precarious terms, and he realised that it would be wise to make himself useful, though, as a matter of choice, he would rather have reclined gracefully in the armchair, and watched some other fellow getting the fire going.

"I say, you fellows, where's some wood?" grunted Bunter. "Mind if I break a leg off this chair, Wharton?"

"You'll get broken yourself soon afterwards, if you do," answered the captain of the Remove.

"Well, I can't light a fire without wood. Oh, Here's some in the locker! Got an old newspaper? I suppose I can use this Latin exercise?"

"Not if you don't want to be kicked."

"Well, look here, a chap must have some paper to light a fire. Can I tear a few pages out of your Latin dictionary?"

"You can fetch your own, and tear out as many pages as you like."

"You silly ass! I shall want my die at prep."

"Well, shan't I want mine, Owl?"

"I wish you wouldn't keep on arguing," said Bunter peevishly. "You're wasting time, and Franky will be back with the sosses soon. You jolly well know I'm hungry! A lot you care!"

Bunter rooted about the study for paper to light the fire. He found an old exercise under the table, and a letter lying on the floor under the chair. The exercise was crammed into the grate, and flared up under a match. The letter was about to follow when Bob Cherry interposed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob. "Sure that letter isn't any good, fat-head?"

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter.

"Look here, it looks to me like Colonel Wharton's fist from here. Done with your uncle's letter, Harry?"

"My uncle's letter's in my pocket," answered Wharton. "Bunter, you fat idiot, give me that letter! I'll look at it before you burn it, you frabjous owl!"

"Well, it's on the fire now," said Bunter cheerfully, dropping it there. "Hand me some sticks! Ow-wow!"

Wharton, with an impatient exclamation, pushed the fat junior aside, and caught the letter from the fire. It was already burning; but he extinguished it quickly. Bunter, who was on his fat knees before the grate when he received

the push, rolled over on the floor with a roar. His bullet head rapped on a leg of the study table, and he gave another roar.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

"You silly ass!" roared Wharton. "Can't you let a fellow look at a letter before you burn it, you fat chump?"

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

"Might be something belonging to your uncle, old bean," said Bob. "I told you how that fat owl biffed him over. I thought I'd picked up all the papers, but——"

"It's my uncle's fist, anyhow," said Harry.

He glanced at the letter. There was not much of it remaining, but what was there was in the well-known, strongly marked handwriting of Colonel Wharton.

Evidently it was one of the papers that had been scattered when Billy Bunter charged the old gentleman over, and as it had slipped under the armchair it had escaped Bob's rather hurried search at the time.

Wharton glanced at it merely to ascertain whether it was of any consequence, and he recognised his uncle's handwriting, of course, immediately. At the same time he could hardly help reading the only legible sentence that remained.

His chums were startled by the sudden start he gave and the look that came over his face.

Wharton stood quite still, as if petrified.

The colour drained from his face, leaving him white, and almost at once a hot flush of crimson came.

His eyes seemed to start from his head as he stared at the letter—dumb, stricken.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh made a step towards him.

"My esteemed chum—" exclaimed the nabob, in great concern.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull stared blankly. Even Billy Bunter realised that there was something amiss, and ceased to bellow.

Wharton did not heed.

His eyes were glued on what remained of the letter, more than half burnt, and charred all over. The words leaped to his eyes. They seemed to dance in letters of fire:

"Certainly no man can be expected to bear for ever the burden of a thoughtless, selfish, utterly ungrateful nephew—"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Taking the "Knock"!

HARRY WHARTON did not stir.

It seemed as if he was frozen.

The words under his eyes were written in his uncle's hand—a hand there was no mistaking. He knew that this was one of the papers that the colonel had dropped when Bunter barged him over. On that point there was no doubt, any more than there was that Colonel Wharton had written these bitter, crushing words.

Wharton was conscious first only of shock. Was it possible that that was what his uncle thought of him?

Then his thoughts raced.

Had his uncle written this, intending to send it to him, in reply to his letter asking for the five pounds, and afterwards relented and not posted it? That was one explanation. Or had he—more bitter still—had he discussed his nephew in this way with some other person? That looked more like it. The letter, obviously, had been written for posting. It could have been written with no other object.

"Thoughtless, selfish, utterly ungrateful," and a "burden"! A feeling of sickness came over the hapless junior.

A "burden"—a burden that the old man was tired of bearing! Wharton's eyes flamed.

Anger was rising now.

Yet he checked it. Was there some mistake? Could there be some mistake, some horrible mistake? How could there be? The letter was written in James Wharton's hand, and James Wharton had only one nephew—Harry Wharton, of the Greyfriars Remove. How could the letter possibly refer to any other nephew when he had no other nephew?

"Harry!"

Bob Cherry's startled voice seemed to Wharton to come from far off. He was not conscious of his chums; he was conscious of nothing, but the words that seemed to burn into his brain: "Selfish, ungrateful, and a burden!"

"My esteemed Wharton—"

"Harry, old chap—"

Harry Wharton became aware of his comrades' startled, dismayed faces, of the amazed stare from Billy Bunter's spectacles.

He tried to pull himself together. His hand closed over the charred fragment of paper.

No eyes but his should see that! The shame and bitterness of it were hard enough to bear while only himself knew.

"I say, you fellows, what's the matter?" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say, that fire isn't going—"

"Shut up, you fat fool!" hissed Johnny Bull, in a voice that made Bunter jump.

It seemed to Harry Wharton that whole ages had passed since his eyes had fallen on those searing words in his uncle's hand. As a matter of fact, it was only moments that had passed.

Bob Cherry caught his arm.

"Harry, old man, what's the row? What are you looking like that for? What—"

Wharton gulped for breath.

He had a feeling that tears would start to his eyes, and he fought against them savagely and drove them back. He had to keep cool, to pull himself together, to hide the wound that was penetrating to his very heart. He slid the charred paper into his pocket.

"It's all right—nothing. Get the fire going, Bunter!"

Wharton was amazed to hear himself speak in his old tone, as if nothing had happened, while in truth his whole world was falling in pieces round him. It seemed to him almost that it was another fellow speaking.

"Well, give a fellow a chance!" granted Bunter. "What am I going to light that beastly fire with, now it's gone out again, I'd like to know?"

LEATHER POCKET WALLETS FOR BUDDING POETS!

Compose a Greyfriars limerick, like the following, and win a USEFUL PRIZE!

Said Coker to Greene: "If you like,
We'll go for a spin on my bike.
Just you jump on the pillion."
Greene said: "Not for a million.
If I want to travel, I'll hike."

A pocket wallet is already in the post for Peter Jackson, of "Pendennis," 13, Wyatt Park Road, Streatham Hill, S.W.2, who sent in the above winning effort.

Harry Wharton laughed. The incongruousness of it struck him as funny—horribly funny. Bunter was anxious about tea—while he stood there with more than the bitterness of death in his heart.

"Look here, Wharton, what's up?" asked Johnny Bull quietly. "What was there in that to knock you over? You can tell your pals. I'll kick Bunter out, and—"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"My dear chap!" Wharton's voice came easily enough now; he had himself in hand. "It's all right! This is a bit of a letter that my—my—" He checked. He could not say "uncle" now—that Colonel Wharton dropped when that fat fool barged him over here. It is rather rotten that it should have got burnt. I—I shall have to explain to—to Colonel Wharton that it was an accident."

"Well, that's all right," said Bob, eyeing his friend rather strangely. "He won't mind a lot—he can write it again, I suppose. Can't be awfully important or it would have been posted."

"Yes, of course—it's all right! Accidents will happen—especially with a fat frog barging about the study."

Wharton's tone was quite casual.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"A pity you didn't pick up this letter, along with the others, Bob."

"Well, I was in rather a hurry, and it seems to have got under the armchair, and the old scout was a bit cross, and—"

"I'm not blaming you, old fellow—anyhow, it doesn't matter. I rather wonder my—Colonel Wharton didn't look round himself."

"That fat idiot had winded him"—Bob looked rueful—"and—and I thought I'd collected the lot—in fact, told him so."

"Well, it's all right. But—" Wharton felt that he could bear no more; he had to get away somehow. "Quelch told me he wanted to see me this afternoon—I think I'd better cut off. Head boy's time isn't all his own, you know."

Wharton smiled—a rather ghastly smile—and moved to the door.

"After tea will do for Quelch!" said Johnny Bull.

"I—I think I'll go! Don't wait tea for me."

Wharton left the study. He could not have kept it up much longer; his face changed even as he stepped out into the Remove passage. The Bouncer, coming along from the stairs, passed him, and started a little as he saw his face—paused for a second, and then walked quickly on. Wharton did not even see him.

In the study, Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry and the nabob looked at one another. They did not understand; but they had a sense of calamity. Wharton had only partly succeeded. Something had hit him—hit him hard. What it was they could not fathom, but they knew. He was hard hit, and he did not want them to know—he was the man to carry on undaunted, as his father, in other days, had carried on undaunted to the last moment, in a wild Indian ghaut, with the Pathan spears at his throat. If ever a fellow looked as if he had "taken the knock," Wharton had looked it—though he had carried it off so well. But what did it mean—what could it mean?

There was a deep, painful silence in the study—broken only by the grunting of Billy Bunter as he attended to the fire.

Frank Nugent came in, with a rather perplexed expression on his face, and slammed down a parcel on the study table.

He stared at three grave faces. "What's up?" he asked. "Nothing wrong with Wharton, is there? I passed him on the stairs, going down. He didn't stop, and he looked rather queer—"

"He—he said something about Quelch—" said Johnny Bull, in halting tones.

"He's not gone to Quelch—I looked after him and saw him go out into the quad," said Frank. "It's close on lock-up now, too. You fellows haven't been rowing, have you?"

"No, ass!"

"Thea what—"

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter had already opened the parcel. "I say, call that a spread!"

"Shut up!" shrieked Bob.

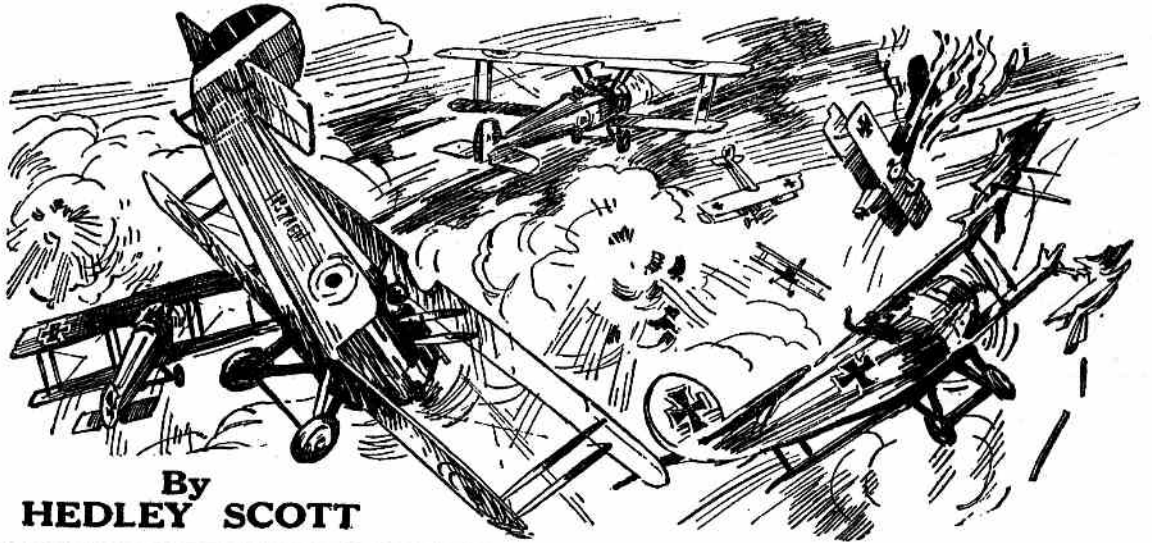
"Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, there's only six—seven sosses here!" exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "What are you fellows going to have?"

"Will you shut up?"

"Well, after asking a fellow to tea—yaroooh!" roared Bunter, suddenly finding himself sprawling in a corner of the study. "Ow! Beast! Wow! Rotter! Ow!"

(Continued on page 28.)

WINGS OF WAR!



By
HEDLEY SCOTT

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

FIRED WITH ENTHUSIASM TO SERVE THEIR COUNTRY IN THE GREAT WAR, JIM DANIELS, RON GLYNN, AND BRUCE THORBURN, STRAIGHT FROM SCHOOL, JOIN THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS AS CADETS. AFTER A COURSE OF TRAINING AT INGLESHTON AERODROME THEY ARE APPOINTED TO COMMISSIONED RANK AND ORDERED TO PROCEED OVERSEAS. THEY GET AN EARLY TASTE OF THE HORRORS OF WAR, FOR THE TROOPSHIP TAKING THEM TO FRANCE IS MINED IN THE CHANNEL. THE THREE CHUMS ARE RESCUED, HOWEVER, BY A "FERRY" PILOT IN A BIG BOMBING MACHINE AND LANDED AT ETAPLES. LATER THEY ARE APPOINTED TO 256 SQUADRON—A "BRISTOL FIGHTER" SQUADRON OF GREAT REPUTE—AND ARE WARMLY WELCOMED BY CAPTAIN DOUGLAS OAKLEY, ACTING COMMANDING-OFFICER OF THE SQUADRON. OWING TO HEAVY CASUALTIES, THE THREE CHUMS ARE DETAILED, IN COMPANY WITH SOME OLD STAGERS, TO ESCORT A BOMBING SQUADRON TO ARLEUX THE FOLLOWING DAWN. WITH CAPTAIN OAKLEY LEADING, THE BRISTOLS, IN V FORMATION, TURN THEIR NOSES TOWARDS THE FIRING-LINE.

At Grips With the Enemy!

RON and Thorburn waved their greetings to Jim repeatedly. Then a Very light flare signalled that the Bristols had sighted the bombing squadron of De Haviland two-seaters they were due to escort to Arleux.

Larger and larger grew the bombers until they were no more than two hundred yards away. Jim, eyeing them fascinatedly when he could take his eyes from the instruments and controls, suddenly felt his observer touch him on the shoulder.

"We're crossing the front line!" he bawled. "Look out for the jolly old Archie!"

Jim smiled and nodded, and then jumped in his strap as a dull boom sounded below him and a pall of snowy white smoke rose in a fleecy cloud just beneath his wing-tip.

The first anti-aircraft shell was the signal for a regular bombardment. Before Jim had recovered from the first shock of shell-fire the skies were dotted with bursting shrapnel—above him, below him, to his right and left.

Unscathed, the Bristols sailed majestically through the barrage and out into a peaceful zone again. Ron and Thorburn waved reassuring hands to their pal. So far all was well. Wheeling, the Bristol fighters waited for the slower-paced bombers to get through the barrage, and the three fledglings of 256 Squadron caught their first glimpse of the reality of aerial warfare when a bursting shell caught the last bombing plane fair and square. One minute the De Haviland, loaded with hundred-and-

twelve-pounds bombs and two hardy, keen-eyed flying-men, was sailing majestically through the blue. The next it was a splintered, unrecognisable tangle of wreckage, hurtling earthwards like a rocket.

Jim felt his heart turn sick within him. He understood then how the boyish faces of his own colleagues came to be so prematurely lined and grim.

The barrage was passed, the world aloft seemed peaceful again. Then, without warning, from a bank of cloud three hundred feet above the Bristols came a massed attack of German planes.

Ratatatatatat!

Synchronised guns belched leaden messengers of death as the Fokker planes whirled down upon the Bristols, bracing wires screaming in the first headlong dive of smashing speed.

Jim threw his plane into a steep bank and kicked on rudder as a crimson-hued Fokker singled him out.

Ratatatatatat!

In an unceasing rattle the guns of both planes spoke. Something zipped past Jim's head and smashed his instrument board to fragments. Bullets riddled his port wing as he went into a climbing turn with engine at full throttle. He wondered whether his observer had been hit, but the spiteful bark of the Lewis gun behind reassured him, and Jim, cool now after that first baptism, put all he knew into his first real air fight. How different it was, he told himself, from the "camera-gun" fighting he had practised in England! How different came home to him more forcibly still when a burst of tracer

flickered past his cockpit and well-nigh smashed a straining strut.

"Hold tight!" roared Jim above the howl of the rushing wind and the throbbing of his engine. "I'm going to loop!"

The loop was half over before the watchful observer, standing upright in the rear cockpit, fully realised it. But Jim's manoeuvre gave him fighting position. As he snorted out of the loop, the tail of his crimson foe came well within his Vickers sights.

Ratatatatatat!

Straight to their target sped a score of whining bullets, riddling the petrol tank like a sieve. Jim's murmur of exaltation died a sudden death as he caught a glimpse of a leather-clad pilot crumple suddenly over his controls, whilst his riddled crimson plane plunged towards the shell-scarred ground far below—a blazing comet of fire and billowing smoke.

Ratatatatatat!

The scream of bullets told Jim that another Fokker was after his blood. Wheeling sharply, Jim escaped the flaming vengeance that sought him by a matter of yards. But his new opponent was an old hand at the game. Of a sudden as Jim slashed by, working his gun feverishly, the Fokker pilot dipped his nose into a spin. Without thinking, Jim set the Bristol smashing after him, despite the warning bellow that came from the hardened observer in the back seat, who was well accustomed to the shamming tricks practised by all aerial fighters.

Before Jim pulled the Bristol out of the dive the Fokker steadied on to an even keel, described an acrobatic turn that completely reversed the positions of the two planes, and came at the hated Englander with belching guns from an entirely unexpected angle.

Ratatatatat!

Bullets hurtled in a stream at the Bristol, riddling the tail and elevators, and only missing its human cargo by inches. In the nick of time Jim banked steeply, almost standing on one wing, and cried aloud in vexation when Lieutenant Wallace, who had twenty Huns to his credit, took over the battle and dispatched the Fokker with a death-dealing burst of lead, sending it diving to the ground below, completely disabled and out of control.

Jim's observer smiled. He knew that Wallace had been specially told off by the captain to keep a "fatherly eye" on the "recruit." But the smile froze on his face when a Bristol plane plunged right across their bows, out of control, and a boyish, familiar face flashed an appealing glance up at them.

Jim's heart stood still. That was young Bruce—Thorburn—hurtling to his death.

"Good heavens!"

Hardly knowing why he did it, Jim pushed the Bristol into a roaring dive in the wake of his chum.

Close atop of him came another red-painted Fokker, bent on finishing off the plane whose controls he had already shot away. Jim caught Thorburn's plucky wave, shuddered as he saw the limp, huddled figure of Thorburn's observer half hanging out of the cockpit, and then, in a blaze of fury, turned to combat the Hun who had shot them down.

Rolling, banking, diving, the two fought out each pass and manoeuvre, Jim's observer getting in a burst of lead at every available moment. The thought of young Thorburn falling a victim seemed to unleash all the fighting passion of which Jim Daniels was capable.

Up aloft, Captain Douglas Oakley watched him critically, wondering whether to dive and snatch the fight away. But he had no cause to fear, for a moment later the Fokker canted menacingly, slid down on its tail, turned over into a roll, wallowed out of it, and then screamed earthwards, nose first, in a dive from which no mortal hand could safely pluck it out.

Grim-faced, Jim leaned over the cockpit.

"You're avenged, Bruce, old sport," he said huskily. "Ron—Ron—"

Jim's voice rose crescendo. In a panic he searched the skies for Ron Glyn's machine, and breathed a heart-felt sigh when he spotted it.

The battle was over. The Fokkers, three of their number lying huddled, useless wrecks thousands of feet below, had been put to rout. The Bristols, triumphant, wheeled in perfect formation on a south-westerly course for the return journey. Well ahead of them, their duty done, snaked the De Havilland bombers, passing through another barrage of vicious, whanging, bursting shrapnel, contemptuous of it, despite the fact that two of their number would never fly with them again.

Through the return barrage went the Bristols, and out into the peaceful skies again.

Three newcomers to the glorious band of the knights of the upper spaces had experienced their baptism of fire. Only

two, it seemed, had returned to benefit by the experience.

Two hearts, not quite so boyish now, were heavy; for war in its stark reality had been revealed to them.

A Friend in Need!

THE British observation balloon officer, cursing the inclemency of the weather, the War in general, and the incessant rocking and pitching of the car slung beneath the bulky envelope, was counting the minutes to the time when he would be relieved.

For three hours he had "sat" up aloft recording the enemy's movements—an inviting target for the German gunners and sundry raiding enemy planes. The sight of a squadron of British bombers, escorted by a patrol of Bristol Fighters crossing the line into enemy territory cheered him considerably. Through the broken patches of clouds he watched their progress—dim, vicious shapes, magnified many times over in the powerful lenses of his binoculars.

He laughed shortly as he saw the bombers release their load of "eggs" over their objective; felt his pulse thrill when a squadron of German planes, led by a crimson-hued triplane, suddenly swooped out of the clouds and engaged the escorting Bristols.

Thereafter the observation officer was busy reporting the fight that ensued when suddenly across his vision hurtled a British machine, rolling, diving and spinning in turn like a thing possessed. Even as the balloon officer made a mental note of the crippled plane's identification markings and numbers a black-suited, huddled shape detached itself from the rear cockpit and pitched headlong to the ground below.

"That's the observer!"

Fascinatedly the balloonist turned and kept his binoculars on that dropping object. Then he moistened his lips.

"Poor devil! He was cold meat, anyway, before he pitched out of that bus."

Once again the binoculars came up to a level with his eyes. The crippled plane had flattened out, and was now heading straight into the heart of enemy territory. It lurched and swayed and looked as if every second would be its last; but by some strange means the pilot held his own in a last desperate battle with death.

"Controls shot away," murmured the balloon observer. "No wonder he can't land on our side. Hope he makes it!"

The same thought, much more fervently expressed, was passing through young Thorburn's mind. He had dropped from fifteen thousand feet, his controls shot away, in a nightmare series of spins, nose-dives and sundry other evolutions hitherto unknown to practical flying. How he had managed to bring the crippled Bristol to an even keel he hardly knew. His altimeter needle flickered now at twelve hundred feet; the mirror in front of him which gave a view of the rear cockpit told him the grim news that his dead observer had been shot out in that headlong rush to earth.

Around him had hissed and spanged the tracer bullets of the attacking Fokkers. By a miracle, it seemed, the deadly hail of lead had missed him, although it had spattered a pretty picture in his wings and fuselage, and severed most of his controls.

Long since, Thorburn had realised that it was impossible to turn the plane. By careful flying and a large slice of luck, he might crash a landing that would perhaps result in nothing more serious than a few broken bones and bruises; but that thought hardly cheered him. If he survived, the prospect of being a prisoner in German hands for the rest of the War was all he could hope for.

Although the crippled Bristol did not respond to rudder or aileron control, the tail elevator functioned after a fashion, and by gentle nursing Thorburn brought the nose of the plane up a couple of degrees and ploughed on.

Miles behind him now lay the trenches. Ahead of him stretched a peaceful scene of wooded country and farm land. For five minutes more the Bristol plugged on, its youthful pilot scanning the country for a suitable landing-place. That a landing was imminent was told by the falling of the engine's revolutions; a stray bullet had pierced the oil feed, and the engine was already beginning to splutter.

About a mile away loomed a fairly flat expanse of farm land, skirted by two or three farm buildings. Towards the most level-looking meadow Thorburn eased the nose of the machine in a downward glide. With grim face he unbuckled his safety belt. The crash was not far distant; he might escape with his life—it was on the knees of the gods.

Nearer and nearer loomed the farm buildings. For one horrifying moment Thorburn thought that he would plough right through them. As it was he missed an outbuilding by nothing greater than a yard to spare, and ran full tilt into a haystack. At the moment of impact Thorburn shut his eyes. When he opened them again it was to find himself sitting on the ground twenty yards away from his wrecked machine, with the worst headache he had ever experienced in his life.

For a few moments he sat there, hardly able to realise that he was alive. At any moment he expected a squad of German soldiers to appear and arrest him, for his descent must have been reported.

With the thought Thorburn scrambled to his feet. Unsteadily he made his way to the piled-up Bristol and shook his head somewhat sadly. From the cockpit he withdrew a Very light pistol. Then backing about fifteen paces he fired shot after shot into the petrol tank.

A beacon of flame shot up from the plane, licked hungrily at the dry haystack, and before Thorburn had tossed the pistol away the haystack and aeroplane was a blazing beacon that could be seen for miles around.

"And that's that," muttered the youngster. "Old Jerry-hun won't make much out of the scraps of that bus."

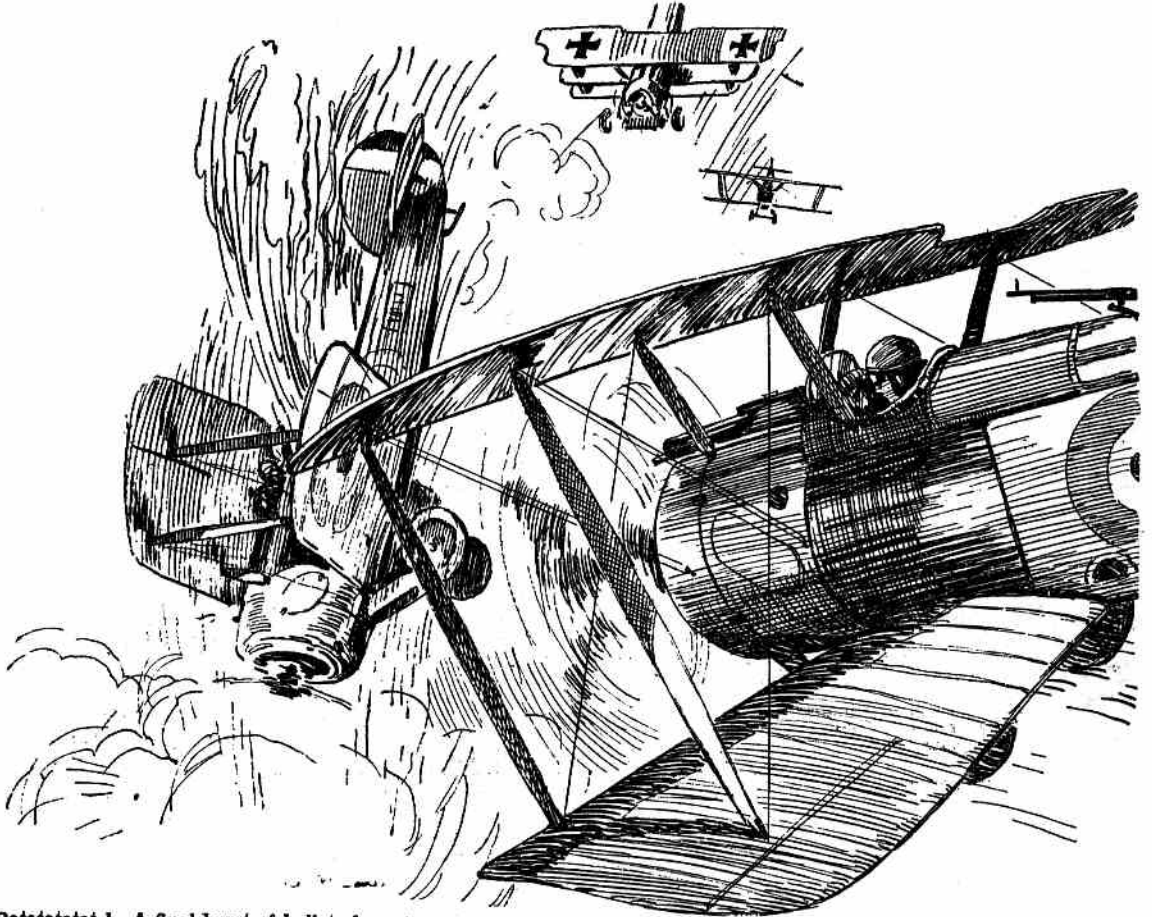
The youngster looked about him, saw a face at the window of the farm buildings, and wearily dragged his limbs in that direction. There was no need for him to knock, for a door was swung open for him, and an English voice that made him jump bade him enter.

"Good heavens!" gasped Thorburn.

"Have I landed behind my own lines?"

"You have not!" Again the English voice brought a bewildered frown to Thorburn's face. "You are exactly ten miles behind the German lines!"

"But—"



Ratatatat! A final burst of bullets from the Fokker sent the British plane reeling earthwards, out of control. And as it plunged across the bows of Jim's machine his heart stood still, for he recognised the boyish face of the pilot, turned appealingly on him, as that of his chum!

Thorburn found himself roughly seized by the middle-aged peasant who spoke such good English. Before he knew what was happening, his flying coat, goggles, and helmet were torn from him. Next moment the peasant had rushed to the blazing plane and thrown the flying kit into the cockpit. Whilst Thorburn, who was still dazed from his crash, wondered what this action meant, the peasant returned to him.

"Quickly!" Despite the outward and visible sign of a humble peasant there was an authoritative ring in his voice which set Thorburn's thoughts wondering afresh. "In here."

The pair had entered the kitchen which reeked of onions and garlic. At the far end of it was a large cupboard. Without wasting time in words, the peasant jerked open the door, treated Thorburn to a friendly and engaging smile, and at the same time thrust him into the opening. From outside the farm buildings now came the tread of heavy feet and guttural voices. That much Thorburn heard before the cupboard door slammed home against him, and the key was turned in the lock.

The key of the cupboard vanished in the voluminous blouse of the peasant. Then, in keeping with the age his grey locks suggested, the peasant tramped slowly and somewhat laboriously to the door of the farmhouse. His eyes blinked in well-feigned horror and astonishment at seeing the blazing plane and the squad of German infantrymen that had been hurriedly dispatched to the spot.

On seeing the old peasant a lieutenant in charge curtly beckoned him.

"Hurry! Pig of a Belgian! Hurry!" The peasant shambled into something like a run. Out of breath he pulled up in front of the officer and touched his forelock.

"You ask for me, mon capitaine?" The lieutenant scowled, and pointed to the burning wreck.

"Where is the pig Englander who crashed in this plane?" he demanded harshly. "Where were you when this machine came down?"

The peasant's eyes opened wide.

"I was asleep, mon capitaine. I heard the noise, and I came down to investigate. Most surely I do not know where the Englanders are—"

"There is only one!" snapped the lieutenant, then laughed harshly. "The other dog did not journey as far as here."

"Mon dieu!" exclaimed the peasant. "And my rick! It is gone! I am ruined!"

The soldiers were doing their best to quell the fire, and the scowling officer in charge urged them to greater efforts. The loss of that hay would bring down a censure from the commandant, for hay was scarce.

Buckets of water were swamped on the blaze; beaters half choked themselves to stamp it out, whilst the peasant shuffled backwards and forwards, tearfully lamenting his loss, cursing the war, the Allies, the enemy, but ever respectful to the officer in charge.

At last the flames were subdued, and

only stray wisps of smoke now drifted skywards where once had been that holocaust of fire. It would doubtless smoulder for some considerable time, but some portion of the hayrick had been salvaged at least.

The smoke-grimed infantrymen, perspiring profusely, poked amid the wreckage of the Bristol plane.

Suddenly one of them fastened on the remains of Thorburn's flying coat and helmet—only charred fragments, but they brought a grim, satisfied smile to the lieutenant when they were placed before him.

"Zo," he announced, "the pig Englander perished. Ach! It is well!" He turned on the horrified peasant. "See to it, son of a pig, that the commandant waits not when he requires more hay for his horses!"

"I hear, m-mon capitaine," stammered the peasant. "But where can I procure it?"

"Ach! 'Tis not my business, but it may be my pleasant business to dispatch you if it is not forthcoming!"

He marshalled his men together, barked an order which set them facing towards the village, and left them in charge of a corporal. Then he clanked noisily into the farm building, the peasant following him.

(Bruce Thorburn's certainly escaped capture by the narrowest of margins! But will his luck hold out? On no account miss next week's instalment of this powerful flying story, chums; there are hundreds of thrills in it!)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

A FORTNIGHT ago I talked to you on the subject of expeditions. Well, since then, I have been talking to a man who had accompanied many expeditions, and he told me of

A SNAKE FIGHT

he had witnessed in Brazil. Perhaps you don't know that there is a breed of snakes in Brazil who like human beings, and who prey upon poisonous reptiles? They are called Mussumura snakes, and will allow themselves to be handled by any human being. They show no signs of either nervousness or bad temper—until you put them near a poisonous snake! Then they immediately go for the other snake's head, and commence to chew hard! In a very short space of time the poisonous snake is killed, and the Mussumura calmly proceeds to swallow its victim. Even during the fight, and afterwards, it will allow human beings to pick it up!

THE BEST NEWS OF THE WEEK!

Have you heard the wonderful news, chums, about the NEW SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY? It's amazing! Listen to this: Starting with the March issues, on sale March 3rd, this popular school-story monthly has been PERMANENTLY enlarged from 64 to 96 PAGES. And you get this extra value at the same price of fourpence. But not only this, it is now to be printed in a new modern type—a type that is very easy to read and restful for the eyes. The quality and quantity the SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY now represents is exceptional, for the stories, many thousands of words longer than ever before, will remain at the very high standard set by those popular authors: Frank Richards, Martin Clifford, and Owen Conquest. No boy should miss the fine feast of fiction offered in the first two new-length numbers. "THE BRUISER OF GREYFRIARS!"—No. 167—is a magnificent extra-long complete yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., which features the amazing adventures at Greyfriars of a prizefighter. "THE

CARDEW CUP"—No. 168—is a grand extra-long complete story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's. Every boy will thoroughly enjoy this topping tale of cup-football. These two numbers of

THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY

will be on sale THURSDAY, MARCH 3rd, and every boy who wants to make certain of reading them should pop round to his newsagent and order them right away.

Readers of mine, when they have an argument and can't settle it, often write to me to settle it for them. One of my Durham readers has been arguing with a chum, and they have asked me to give a ruling. This is the question they ask:

IS THE COUNTY OF DURHAM AN ISLAND?

It is not marked as an island on any map, but the rivers Tyne and Tees both have their rise near Cross Fell, in Cumberland. Years ago, a number of workmen cut a narrow canal connecting the Tyne and Tees, so I suppose, technically speaking, the County of Durham (including a bit of Northumberland and Cumberland) is an island! But I suggest that my Durham reader goes to Cross Fell, and investigates for himself. Perhaps the canal—which was only a few feet wide—has run dry, or become choked with mud! In that case, he will win his bet that the County of Durham is not an island! But if the canal is still there, I think his chum wins!

Now for next week's bumper programme. First and foremost, of course, is the topping yarn of Greyfriars, entitled:

"DOWN ON HIS LUCK!"

the second story in a series which bids to be the finest Frank Richards has ever written—and this is saying something! Then comes another gripping instalment of our powerful flying serial. Following on this there's another screamingly funny issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," together with special contributions from the Greyfriars Rhymester and "Old Ref," not forgetting more winning jokes and limericks, and my usual cheery chat.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE COMPLETE OUTSIDER!

(Continued from page 24.)

Nugent drew a quick breath. "Is something up with Harry?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I—I'm afraid so—" muttered Bob.

"But—what?"

"Goodness knows! But he looked—"

Frank Nugent moved to the door. He was Wharton's best chum, and if some strange, unknown trouble had fallen on the captain of the Remove his chum was the fellow to share it. The other fellows had a feeling that Wharton wanted to be left alone, but they did not speak as Nugent left the study. They heard him running down the Remove staircase.

Then, after one more exchange of dismayed glances, they left the study, too, and went quietly away. Billy Bunter blinked after them.

"I say, you fellows!" he squeaked.

The juniors were gone.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Bunter.

"Mad, I suppose—a potty lot! Clearing off just before tea—and sosses and chips, too! Well, I jolly well know that they won't be wasted."

And they weren't! Billy Bunter tea'd on his own in Study No. 1, and enjoyed himself exceedingly.

In the dusky quad, where the shadows were falling thickly, Frank Nugent was seeking his chum. But he did not find him.

Darkness already lay on the shadowed old Cloisters, and in the darkest and most secluded spot Harry Wharton was pacing to and fro, thinking—thinking torturing thoughts. The world that had been so bright, in which he had been a happy and careless schoolboy, seemed to him to have changed into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the dark and dismal valley peopled only by dead men's bones. Pain and anger and bitter humiliation rankled in his breast, and he was glad of the darkness that hid him from all other eyes.

THE END.


(Be sure and read the next yarn in this grand new series. It's entitled: "DOWN ON HIS LUCK!" and you'll vote it one of Frank Richards' greatest school stories.)

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 Gentleman wishes to buy well-stocked bunshop or restaurant. Please state lowest deposit on which shop will be handed over. Urgent! Write in confidence, W. G. B., Study No. 7.

Greyfriars Herald

Edited by **HARRY WHARTON, F.G.R.**

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BUNTER THE ARTIST

WILL HE BE HUNG?

There was a sensation in Lower School circles yesterday when the news leaked out that W. G. Bunter, grammar-school ventriloquist, and wholesale postal order merchant, had suddenly blossomed out as an artist.

A Special Investigator from the "Greyfriars Herald" office was promptly sent to bring in the news. He found Bunter sitting on a stool near the tuckshop, with an easel in front of him and paints and brushes all around him.

"A delightful subject for a study in water-colours!" commented our Special Investigator. "So far, I see, you have not made much progress with the picture!" "Best!" was Bunter's surprising remark.



NURSERY RHYMES
New Craze at Greyfriars
 (EDITORIAL NOTE: Chuck it, you fellows! For utterly unknown reasons you've been bombarding us for a whole week with parodies on nursery rhymes! What the thump, happened to you all? Is it a conspiracy or merely a new form of madness? We're just printing three out of the hundreds submitted. The rest we're presenting to Mr. Prout as pipe-lighters!)

By HAROLD SKINNER:
 Hey diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
 Old Coker's all sorts of an ass.
 He fiddles and blunders
 And rages and thunders
 But never runs short of the gas!

By PETER TODD:
 Dicky-dicky-dock,
 Poor Temple's lost a sock,
 With legs on high
 He'll look some guy!
 Dicky-dicky-dock!

By OLIVER KIPPS:
 Sing a song o' sapphire,
 Socks full of dough;
 When Ogilvy lacks penic,
 All the world shall know;
 When he gets remittance,
 Ogilvy sings small—
 Murmurs: "Such a pittance
 Isn't any good at all!"

(And that's that! Kindly note that the next person calling at the Editorial Office with a nursery parody will be shot at dawn, keelhaunched, hung, drawn and quartered, and boiled in oil. Official!—Ed.)

GANG BUSTERS' GREAT VICTORY

Shoot-up at 50 m.p.h.

There was an exciting sequel last Wednesday afternoon to the disturbing raids on Greyfriars by Highlife gangsters reported in last week's number.

Following on a conference at the "Greyfriars Herald" office, a picked party of gang-busters in a Rolls-Royce kindly loaned by Mr. Manuoverer. Armed with automatic pea-shooters, ripe tomatoes, antique eggs, and pails containing a mixture of mud, soot and ink, they toured the district, keeping a wary eye out for the notorious "Two-gun" Ponsoby and his gang.

The gangsters were eventually located near Friarhale, in the very act of attacking a small party of Remove hikers. On sighting the Roll they promptly started up their pea-proof car all made off at top speed in the direction of Pegg's. The Greyfriars gang-busters gave chase, and

BEAR OR ELEPHANT?

BIG-GAME HUNTER'S DILEMMA

Mr. Prout, Fifth Form master, was sitting in the Masters' Common Room one day last week, dreaming of the good old days when he had hunted bears in the Rockies, when an excited fag poked his head round the door.

"Quick, sir!" he gasped. "There's a bear in the quad!"

Mr. Prout jumped. "Nonsense! Who told you?"



"I heard some Remove chaps talking about it, sir. They said he'd just come through the gates and that he was a bear!"

Mr. Prout set his pince-nez at a rakish angle and rolled out at express speed.

"In that case, I will load my gun and come down immediately," he said. "The beast must have escaped from a circus. I'll shoot him before he does any damage!"

Within two minutes the heroic big-game hunter was descending the school House steps, carrying a loaded sporting rifle.

SCENE IN STORE

COKER ACCUSED AT CHUNKLEY'S

Scene: Chunkley's, Men's Wear Department.
 Coker and a retired colonel both trying on spats.

Coker and Greenee looking on, with intense interest. (Conceded joke.)

COKER: Now these are what I call a really good fit.

POTTER & GREENE: What about tea?

COKER: They set off my feet to advantage. You notice my feet, you men?

POTTER & GREENE: Couldn't miss 'em if we tried!

What about tea?

COKER: I think I'll take those. I fancy I shall look rather nobby on Speech Day. Can't you fellows picture me walking through the crowds to receive my prizes, with all the girls saying to each other—yooop! Yaroooh!

COKER: Take that, sir—and that!

How dare you!

COKER: Whoop! What are you bashing me with your cane for, you doddering old buffer?

Coroner: Why, you disrespectful young jackanapes—are you aware that you are talking to Colonel Leopard?

Coker:—and that—and that!

Coker: Yarooohooop! You can be Colonel Leopard or Colonel Lion or Colonel Elephant for all I care, but you're not jolly well going to bash me for nothing! Take that!

Coroner: Ow-wow! Send for the police! I charge this youth with assault and battery following on the theft of my pair of spats!

Coker: Who-a-at! D-d-did you say THEFT OF YOUR PAIR OF SPATS?

Coroner: I did!

Coker: Taking them off his feet, you two boys, or I'll charge you with aiding and abetting!

DON'T PLAY GOLF

"MUCH TOO DANGEROUS"

—Say the Powers That Be at Greyfriars

We're all in favour of sport, even when it involves taking risks. Skiing and American "All-in" wrestling and Bull-fighting are quite all right in our opinion; there are risks, but they're comparatively slight.

But there is a hint. That's why we issue this special warning to our readers:

DON'T PLAY GOLF!

We used to imagine that golf was a comparatively harmless game.

Seeing Blundell playing on Courtfield Common has made us realise the terrible dangers to which golfers are exposed.

Wharton and one or two more of us from the Remove came across the Fifth Form snipper standing in the middle of the Common with a golf-club in his hand and a golf-ball at his feet.

"Just what I've always wanted to see!" Wharton remarked. "An exhibition

of golf by a fellow who understands the game! You understand it, I suppose, Blundell?"

Of course I understand it, you young ass!" Blundell retorted. "Stand clear!"

"Pleasure, old bean! Do you have to hit the ball?"

"Just that!" Blundell nodded.

"Now, watch me!"

We watched. What we saw really surprised us. We expected to see Blundell swing his club and send the ball sailing away to the horizon.

But that didn't happen. He swung the club all right; but the ball didn't sail. He did the swinging stunt quite half a dozen times. Still the ball didn't sail.

Blundell took a brief rest, breathing rather hard. He explained that what we had seen so far were merely practice swings. If we would watch closely next time, we would see how the game was played by professionals.

Blundell then squared his



shoulders, lifted his club, and brought it round with a fearful force. Somehow, at the same moment, he gave a sort of slip and shot forward on his face, the club leaving his hand and catching him a terrific clump on the ear.

We carried him back to Greyfriars between us. We were almost speechless with admiration. We had always known Blundell to be a brave chap; but none of us had imagined him to be brave enough to play a game that involved hitting himself on the ear with an iron club.

Well, there it is, anyway. And if that's how the professional game of golf is played, all we can say is we gladly leave it to them!

Golf is a bit too fierce for us!

SPORTING ITEM.

Last Tuesday morning rain threatened to spoil the afternoon's cadet corps parade. The Remove turned up to morning lessons with their rifles and shot many anxious glances out of the windows.

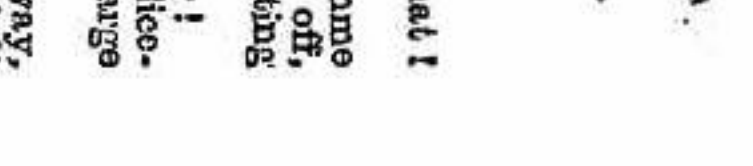
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