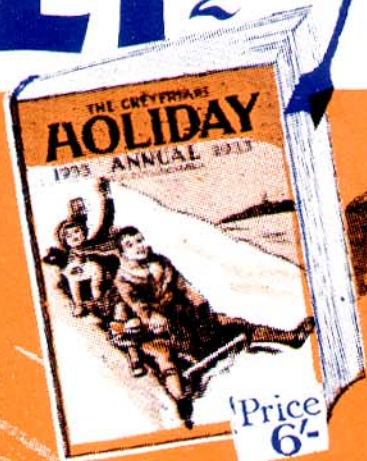


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(They're All Inside, Chums.)

The MAGNET^{2D}

NOW ON SALE



DON'T STAY OUTSIDE—



Come Into The Office, Boys!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. A stamped addressed envelope will ensure a reply.



WHAT do you think of the first instalment of "Nobby, the Shooting Star," which appears in this issue? It's "the goods," isn't it, chums? Hedley Scott has certainly given us one of the best yarns which have ever come from his pen, and I feel sure that I will receive lots of letters from loyal readers congratulating me on having picked such a "top-notch" serial. Those of you who have written me asking when Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake were going to re-appear will find their answer in these pages—and I can assure you all that you're going to revel in the adventures of these two and their new friend, "Nobby from Nowhere."

Your collection of Free Gift Picture Stamps will be looking well worth while now, and you'll appreciate the set which is presented with this week's issue. The "Shake Hands" trick is one of the most effective of all ju-jutsu tricks. Get the attacker's hand, jerk it forward smartly, and pivot on your left heel. You'll send him sprawling!

Ever been down Romney Marsh way for your holidays? If you have, you'll have seen the snappy little miniature railway that serves that district. It is one of the smallest and most interesting in this country. But, despite the small size of the locos, they've got some pulling power, believe me, and they can haul along trucks loaded up to the limit with holiday-makers over a picturesque stretch of line.

The Bombay to Peshawar Express, which is also pictured this week, comes under a different category, of course. It is one of the "crack" trains of India, and the principal train which does this run is known as the "Frontier Mail." Punctuality is the watchword of the Frontier Mail. Her aim is to keep time, and so well does she succeed, that some business houses in Bombay have been known to set their clocks by her morning arrival. Though she maintains India's fastest daily long distance service, she does not achieve speed at the expense of comfort, for she boasts the comfort of a first-class hotel, including a free supply of daily newspapers, to say nothing of the train's private news Bulletin, telegraphed along the line direct from Reuters.

THE Fairey Long-Range Monoplane is a worthy addition to our series of aeroplanes. It first appeared in the winter of 1928-29, and a machine of this class will be used in an attempt on the world's record in a straight line. It has a Napier engine and a carburettor which is specially tuned for low fuel consumption.

The Ocean-Going Tramp Steamer is one of the most dependable ships in the world. Tramps don't go out for speed records, or anything like that. "Slow, but sure" is their motto; and while they mightn't look much alongside a crack liner,

they carry most of the commerce of the globe. Fair weather or foul—it's all the same to them, and you'll find them flying the old "Red Duster" in every out-of-the-way corner of the earth!

The Italian Cavalry number some extremely fine riders amongst them, as you will find if you ever visit an International horse show. These splendid eavalrymen have to undergo a most strenuous course of training, for the cavalry regiments of Italy are frequently "in action" in various Italian colonies.

Ready for a laugh? Right, here goes! This rickler comes from Handel Morley, 2, Charles Street, Ruddington, Nottingham, who gets a splendid Sheffield steel penknife for it.



Jimmy: "Please can I have a drum for a Christmas present, father?"



Father: "What on earth do you want a drum for?"
Jimmy: "Because Cousin Henry's mother gives him sixpence a week not to play with the one you gave him for his birthday!"

NOW for a few answers to various queries which my readers have sent along to me:

WHY ARE DOGS' TAILS CUT SHORT?

Harry Gibson, of Whitehaven, asks the above question. The practice of docking dogs' tails dates back to the time when badger baiting and similar "sports" were carried out in this country. Long tails and long ears offered a good grip for the enemy, and therefore the dog used in such "sports" had both ears and tails docked.

Ear-docking fell into disuse, but tail-docking is still carried on for certain dogs more or less out of tradition. Some people think that a dog's appearance is smartened by docking the tail, but that, of course, is a matter of opinion.

WHO INVENTED TATTOOING?

(J. H., of Leamington): Tattooing is nearly as old as the world! You'd have to go right back to the days of the cave man to discover the original inventor! It was first used as an ornament, then as a kind of uniform for warriors. They thought that if they tattooed their faces in horrible designs they would frighten their enemies! After that the tattoo became a tribe mark, and each family had its own special tattoo mark.

Perhaps you didn't know that tattooing was officially used in the British Army less than fifty years ago? A deserter or a bad character was tattooed with the letters "D" or "B.C." as a permanent sign of disgrace!

John Pinker, of Brighton, asks a query concerning

ANOTHER KIND OF TATTOO.

He wants to know why certain military spectacles are called "tattoos." This word has nothing to do with actual tattooing, but is derived from a Dutch word which means that the "taps," or taverns, are closed!

The British Army adopted the word in the days of the Dutch wars, and used it to mean closing time, or "lights out." It was the custom in garrison towns for the band to play "tattoo" round the streets as a meaning that night had come. Therefore a military procession at night-time came to be called a "tattoo."

HERE are a number of RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

What is the Difference between a Crocodile and an Alligator? ("Reader," of Margate): To begin with, the head and teeth are different, but the main point is that the crocodile's hind feet are completely webbed, while the alligator's are only half-webbed. The word "crocodile" was given by the Greeks to the crocodiles of the Nile, while "alligator" is Spanish for "the lizard."

What is the Meaning of "Davy Jones' Locker"? (B. N., of Newcastle): "Davy" is said to be a corruption of the West Indian word "Duffy," meaning an evil spirit. "Jones" is a corruption of "Jonah"—the name given to a man at sea who is supposed to bring bad luck. A locker, of course, is just a place for keeping things. So "Duffy Jonah's" locker is the place where the evil spirits of the sea are presumed to keep wrecked ships.

Which is the World's Greatest Water Tower? ("Magnetite," of Bournemouth): You will find it at Goole. It is 150 feet high, with a water tank at the top capable of holding 750,000 gallons. Both tower and tank are constructed of reinforced concrete.

I received

A MOST INTERESTING BOOK

A little while ago from Fred Oates, one of my Devonport readers. Fred is interested in the history of London, and he has completed an outline of London's history which is most useful. Starting off with his "outline," he goes on to give lists of the various Lord Mayors of London, then "Random Shots" of London, finishing with some useful local notes concerning the Eddystone Lighthouse. Fred has certainly put some work into his book, for he has written it all out by hand—no easy job, considering the number of pages it has! Good luck to you, Fred!

And now for next week's programme. Topping the bill is:

"THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOY!" By Frank Richards,

which tells of the further exciting adventures of the chums of Greyfriars and Jimmy Valentine, the boy from the underworld. You'll find it packed with humour and thrills—just the kind of yarn you'll want to read on a winter's evening.

Then comes a topical issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," and another first-class instalment of "Nobby, the Shooting Star!" Our shorter features, together with **SIX MORE FREE GIFT STAMPS** will complete this splendid issue. A word of warning—be sure and order your copy in good time!

YOUR EDITOR.

This FREE GIFT issue contains 6 WONDERFUL COLOURED PICTURE STAMPS!

THE BOY FROM THE UNDERWORLD!



Featuring Harry Wharton & Co., the Cheery Chums of Greyfriars.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Fellow Who Fleed!

LOOK out, Bunter!"
"Ow!"
"Look out!" shrieked Bob Cherry.

"Wow!"
There was snow on the Surrey downs, and snow on the road that ran past the gates of Wharton Lodge. Billy Bunter was only too unpleasantly aware of it. Bunter was sitting in the snow, and he found it cold and comfortless.

Harry Wharton & Co., in coats and scarves, with ruddy, cheery faces, had come out at the gates, and started up the road towards Wimford. Billy Bunter, rolling on behind, slipped in the snow, and sat down. Having sat down, Billy Bunter remained sitting, and spluttered. The road was slippery, and Bunter had a great deal of weight to lift.

"I say, you fellows!" he howled. "Come back and lend a fellow a hand!"
The Famous Five of Greyfriars stopped and looked round and grinned. But they ceased to grin at the sight of a motor-cycle coming up the road at a terrific burst of speed.

The snowy, slippery road was unsafe for anything on wheels. A motor-cyclist on that road would have done well to pick his way with the greatest care. Instead of which this rider was coming on at a speed more suitable to the race track than to any road.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at the cyclist as he came into sight. He was a mere lad, no older than themselves, but evidently he knew how to handle a machine. Snow was banked high on both sides of the country road, and half-frozen snow, cut up by wheel-ruts, churned under his flashing wheels.

Every instant the reckless rider might have been expected to skid and crash, and the schoolboys' hearts were almost in their mouths as they stared at him, coming on like the wind. They yelled to Bunter:

"Look out!"
"Quick!"
"Jump, you fathead!"

Billy Bunter did not even see the motor-cycle. His spectacles had slid down his fat little nose, and he blinked over them with an owlish blink.

Jimmy Valentine is done with the underworld, done with crooks and their lawless ways. But the "underworld" won't part with Jimmy! Wherever he goes sharp-eyed gangsters follow, determined to take him back to the life he has thrown aside!

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

The Famous Five rushed back towards Bunter, to drag him to the roadside. They grasped him, and dragged. There was a howl of protest from the Owl of the Remove.

"Wow! Leggo my neck! Leggo my ears, you beasts! Grooogh! Leggo my hair! Oh, you rotters! Whoop!"

Even as Bunter yelled, the whizzing motor-cycle swept down on them. On a clear road the rider could have avoided the group of schoolboys and swept safely by. But the swerve did it. The reckless rider avoided a collision, but

he could not save himself. Bunter was still yelling, with the juniors dragging at him, when the cycle and cyclist went headlong into the snowbank at the side of the road.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Johnny Bull. Crash!

The motor-bike, on its side, half-buried in snow, was spluttering and stuttering wildly. The rider, tossed from his saddle, lay in the snow a dozen feet from his mount.

The Famous Five let go Bunter at once, and ran towards him. For the moment they feared that he had been killed. But the soft snow into which he had been tossed had saved his neck and his bones. He sprawled, half-buried, panting for breath, staring dizzily at the chums of Greyfriars as they ran up.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. But the juniors did not heed Bunter. They gathered round the sprawling youth in the snow to lend first-aid.

"Hurt?" gasped Harry Wharton. "You silly ass!" was the unexpected answer.

"What?"
"You dummy!"

The youth in the snow struggled to a sitting posture, gasping for breath. Evidently he had not been hurt, but he was shaken and breathless, and he seemed rather excited, and not in a good temper.

He was a rather good-looking lad, of athletic build, with dark hazel eyes, that were now flashing with anger.

"Couldn't you keep out of the way?" he roared. "Did you want to break my neck, or what?"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him rather grimly. They could understand that such a spill was not calculated to

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improve any fellow's temper. But it was his own fault. A motorist who went all out, on a snowy and slippery road, was asking for it.

"Look here—" began Wharton. "Let's help you up, anyhow," said Frank Nugent mildly.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" The fellow scrambled to his feet, unaided, panting. He scrambled out of the snowbank and stood in the road, staring back the way he had come, with a pucker of anxiety in his boyish brow. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him, and looked at one another rather queerly. They had wondered why the fellow was driving his machine at such a wild and reckless speed, at the risk of life and limb. Now, as he cast that anxious glance backward, it occurred to them that he might have had a good reason. That sharp and anxious glance along the road told, as plainly as words, that he was in fear of pursuit.

But the road behind him was clear. If there was pursuit, it had been dropped out of sight.

Only for a moment he stood there, gazing. Then he ran to the fallen machine.

He dragged it from the snow in hot haste. It had ceased to sputter and stutter now.

Bob Cherry winked at his chums. "I rather fancy that that jolly old jigger won't jig again in a hurry," he murmured.

"The jigfulness will not be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

There was a fierce, angry exclamation from the owner of the "jigger." A very brief examination told him that the motor-bike was out of action.

"Oh, you fools!" he exclaimed. "Look here, chuck it, whoever you are!" said Johnny Bull. "It was your own fault, and you know it, or ought to know it. You can't do Brooklands stunts on a road like this."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped the boy savagely.

Johnny Bull's eyes gleamed, and he made a step towards him. Bob Cherry jerked him back.

"Go easy, old bean!" murmured Bob. "Let's be jolly old Good Samaritans, and lend a hand! Look here, kid, I know something about stink bikes, and I'll help you get it to rights."

"No time!" snapped the other.

He flung the machine over in the snow again—a proceeding that made the chums of Greyfriars stare. It was a handsome and valuable machine, and the strange lad flung it away from him as a thing of no value. Then, with puckered brows, he stared back along the road again. Under the wondering eyes of the juniors, he swept a swift glance round at the snow-ridged park walls of Wharton Lodge, and the frosty woodland on the other side of the way.

"They'll get me!" Unconsciously he muttered the words aloud. "The game's up! Nosey'll get me!"

He turned swiftly to the staring juniors.

"Look here!" His voice came swift and sharp. "You've wrecked my jigger—"

"You've wrecked it yourself," interrupted Johnny Bull.

"Well, never mind that!" The anger was gone from the handsome face, only keen anxiety showing there now.

"I'm wrecked, anyhow. And there's some fellows after me. Will you help me get clear? If they see the machine, they'll know I'm at hand. Shove some snow over it, and hide it. And if they question you, don't say a word. Will you do that?"

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Harry Wharton looked at him steadily.

"Who's after you?" he asked dryly.

"Never mind that!" "We must mind," answered the Greyfriars junior quietly. "You're running away from somebody, and if it is the police—I don't see why any fellow should run away from anybody else—we can't help you."

The boy started violently, and stared at Wharton. Then he laughed, a rather hard laugh.

"It's not the police! It's a gang! They're in a car—they may be in sight any minute! When you see them you'll see that they have nothing to do with the law! If you can't take my word, you can trust your eyes! I tell you they're crooks—and they're after me! Will you do as I ask?"

"Blessed if I understand—"

The boy panted.

"Never mind about understanding! Do as I ask—when you see that crowd you'll know—"

"Right-ho! Leave it at that," said Harry.

"Thanks!"

The boy gave another swift glance round. He made a step to cross the road towards the woodland. But he stopped; the leafless trees gave little cover, and it was evidently cover that he wanted. He swung back and scrambled through the bank of snow towards the park wall. With swift agility he clambered up, and was astride of the wall of Wharton Lodge.

READERS PLEASE NOTE
that the next issue of the
MAGNET will be on sale
Friday, December 23rd.

"Get that bike hidden!" he panted.

"Right-ho!" The next moment the boy had dropped out of sight on the inner side of the park wall, and the Famous Five of Greyfriars were left staring at one another in blank amazement.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Man with the Beak Nose!

HARRY WHARTON drew a deep breath.

"Well, no hat!" he ejaculated.

"What the jolly old dickens—" said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!"

"Look here," hooted Bunter, "we shall be late for the pictures at Wimford at this rate! Look here—"

"Bow-wow! Lend a hand, you men," said Harry Wharton. "We told that kid we would hide his bike for him, and it's up to us."

"But what the Jooce does it all mean?" gasped Bob.

"Goodness knows!"

"I don't like the look of it," announced Johnny Bull, with a shake of the head. "Looks jolly fishy to me!"

"The fishiness is rather terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And if the esteemed and ridiculous bobbies are after that absurd merchant—"

"In that case, we shall tell them where to find him," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We're bound to. But if

it's as the fellow said we can help him out. Get that jigger out of sight."

"I say, you fellows, you're wasting time—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" "Beast!"

The Famous Five were utterly perplexed by the strange affair. The boy who had clambered over the park wall had vanished in flight from his unknown pursuers. The motor-bike lay where he had flung it aside, half-buried in the snowbank. The chums of Greyfriars proceeded to throw snow over it, and in a few minutes it was completely hidden. Only a bulge in the bank of snow indicated where it lay.

Billy Bunter watched them through his big spectacles without lending a hand, but snorting with impatience. The Christmas party at Wharton Lodge had come out to walk to Wimford and visit the pictures there. Billy Bunter wanted to get to the pictures, and he was not in the least interested in the mysterious stranger.

"Now come on," grunted Bunter, when the motor-bike was hidden from sight at last. "You've wasted enough time!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"We're not going till we've seen who are after that chap," he answered. "We've got to make sure that we're not helping some rogue to get away from the police."

"We shall be late for the pictures!" bawled Bunter.

"Oh, blow the pictures!" growled Bob.

"Beast! I'd jolly well start without you, only—"

"Only you want Wharton to take your ticket!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Here's a bob, you fat boulder—take it and cut!"

Billy Bunter took the "bob." But he did not cut.

"That will do for chocs," he agreed. "But I shall want half-a-crown for my seat. If you fellows think I'm going into the bob seats—"

Bob Cherry glanced along the road. "That car's not in sight yet," he said.

"We've got to wait. What about snow-balling Bunter while we wait?"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Frank Nugent heartily.

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—Beast!" roared Bunter, as the first snowball flew.

"I say—Yarooooh! Oh, you rotters! Stop it, you beasts! Look here, Wharton, if this is how you allow a guest to be treated you can't expect me to come here for the vac again! I can jolly well say—Whoop! Yooop! Yarooooh!"

Billy Bunter fled up the road, with snowballs whizzing after him to accelerate his flight.

"Hold on, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "We're not done with you yet!"

But William George Bunter did not hold on. He proceeded to hit the horizon at his best speed. The fat junior disappeared up the road towards Wimford, leaving the chums of the Remove chortling.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as a horn honked on the road.

"Here comes the car!"

From the direction of the village of Wharton Magnus, the direction from which the boy motor-cyclist had come hardly ten minutes ago, a car came sweeping into sight.

It was moving swiftly, though by no means so swiftly as the motor-cycle had been moving before the disaster.

The juniors watched it approaching,

wondering if it contained the "gang" in which the fugitive had alluded, one of whom apparently went by the curious name of "Nosey."

It was a saloon car, with two men in it. One of them was bent over the wheel, giving all his attention to driving. The juniors could see little of him, except that he had a stubbly red moustache. The other man was watching the road, and they saw his face clearly—a thin, hard cold face, with a prominent nose like a vulture's beak, and black glinting eyes. Remembering the words that had dropped from the fugitive, the juniors could guess that this was Nosey. The man's face was hard and hawkish, and far from prepossessing.

"Not bobbies, anyhow, if that's the crowd!" remarked Bob.

answered Bob Cherry cheerily. "Are you looking for one?"

"Yes. A boy—a lad about your own age. We were told in the village that he had taken this road. Have you seen him?"

"A kid of about fifteen?" asked Bob.

"Yes, yes! You've seen him?"

"Yes, rather! We saw him come along—going like billy-ho!" said Bob innocently. "If he kept on the same speed he would be in Wimford in about five minutes."

"How long ago?" rapped the vulture-nosed man.

"More than ten minutes since we saw him—"

"Get on, Barney!" snapped the gentleman with the nose; and the car shot into speed again.

It rushed on up the road to Wimford

lane on the other side; they'll never sight him again. But what about his jigger? It's worth a lot of money."

"I dare say he'll come back for it, when the coast's clear," said Bob. "It's safe enough where it is." He glanced at the hillock of snow that concealed the motor-bike from sight. "Anyhow, it's his bizney. Let's get going."

"But what the dickens does it all mean?" asked Frank Nugent, as the chums of the Remove started for Wimford.

"Goodness knows!"

And the juniors had to dismiss it as an insoluble problem. After the sight of the vulture-nosed man, however, they were glad that they had helped the boy to keep clear of him. As for the youthful fugitive, they did not sup-



Johnny Bull gave a mighty shove, expecting the door to open under that propulsion. But it did not open, and Johnny, shoving not wisely but too well, tapped his nose rather hard on the immovable door. "Ow!" he gasped. "Wooough!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

The sharp, hawkish eyes of the nosey man fell on the group of schoolboys standing a few yards from the gateway of Wharton Lodge. He muttered a word to the driver, and the car slowed down and came to a stop close by the group. The vulture-nosed man called to the Greyfriars fellows.

"Has a motor-cyclist passed here?"

The juniors exchanged glances. Evidently, beyond doubt, this was the "gang," though there were only two of them. Equally evidently, it was not from the law that the boy had been fleeing. Judging by his looks, the vulture-nosed man was the kind of fellow who was not on the best of terms with the law. Satisfied on that point, the Famous Five had no intention whatever of giving the fugitive away to his pursuers.

"Lots of motor-cyclists pass here,"

in a cloud of flying snow Bob Cherry grinned at his chums.

"Do you think that beaky chap fancied, from what I said, that the kid had gone on to Wimford?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! Sort of!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Well, I never said so! I said that he would have got to Wimford in five minutes if he'd kept on the same speed. So he would have!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that it's ten minutes since we saw him. That's the truth. Well, we can get on now to the pictures," said Bob. "I don't like that nosey man's looks, you fellows. I can't imagine what the trouble is, but that nosey man is the sort of man to keep away from, I fancy. I hope that kid will keep clear."

"He's all right now," said Harry. "He can dodge across the park to the

pose that they would ever see him again—little dreaming of what the future held in store.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Unknown!

"QUELCH!" Billy Bunter uttered that name in tones that fairly thrilled with indignation.

It was the following morning, and Bunter had come down to breakfast at Wharton Lodge.

Billy Bunter did not always come down to breakfast. Generally he preferred to take that meal in bed, and take a little extra nap afterwards.

At Greyfriars School life on these easy lines was not possible; neither, probably, was it at Bunter Court, when William George was at home.

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But as a guest at Wharton Lodge, Billy Bunter considered that he was at liberty to do as he jolly well liked, and he jolly well did!

Not that the other fellows minded. The longer Bunter stayed in bed the less they saw of him during the day; which was so much to the good.

However, on this particular morning Bunter was down early—it was only half-past ten. That was quite early for Bunter in holiday time.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been out in the frosty morning, and they came in to find Bunter at breakfast. As they had breakfasted early, they gathered round for hot coffee and toast. Except for Robert, the youngest footman, who was waiting on him, Bunter had the breakfast-room to himself, the colonel and Miss Wharton having breakfasted long ago. Bunter was busy—and Robert was busy. When Billy Bunter had anybody to wait on him, he needed a lot of waiting on. The Famous Five stood about, dealing with coffee and toast, and chatting cheerily. Bunter's fat jaws being too busy for conversation. But as he caught the name of Quelch, which was the name of his Form master at Greyfriars, Billy Bunter paused at his tenth kidney, and butted in.

"Quelch!" he repeated. "I say, you Quelch, did you say Quelch?" "Q-U-E-L-C-H!" spelt out Bob Cherry. "Quelch! Just that! Merely Quelch!"

"Coming here!" said Bunter. "The herfulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Bunter laid down knife and fork. Bunter's fat brow wore a portentous frown. Obviously Bunter regarded this matter as serious. He had left off eating. And as he had eaten only enough for three or four fellows, so far, he was still hungry.

"Now, look here, Wharton," he said severely, "let's have this plain. Have you asked a blinking schoolmaster here?"

"My uncle has," answered Harry. "That's rot! He wouldn't ask him if you didn't want him. He would wash it out if you told him you couldn't stand Quelch."

"Possibly," assented Wharton. "Well, the best thing you can do, is to go straight to the old fossil—"

"Who?"

"I mean Colonel Wharton—"

"If you mean Colonel Wharton, Bunter, you had better say Colonel Wharton," remarked Harry quietly. "Otherwise you may get that dish of bacon and kidneys down the back of your neck."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Now Bunter's finished—" said Bob Cherry.

"I haven't finished!" roared Bunter. "You'd better go straight to the old—to Colonel Wharton, and tell him to wash it out. See? I have enough of Quelch in term time. I can't stand him in vac. And I'm jolly well not going to, see?"

"Is that the lot?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Asking a blinking schoolmaster here!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "Why, almost the last thing Quelch did last term, was to give me a whopping."

"Glad he didn't forget that!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Why, all last term, you were up against Quelch, Wharton, pulling his leg, ragging him, and asking for the sack. He said you

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were the worst boy at Greyfriars—and so you jolly well were."

Wharton coloured a little.

Last term at Greyfriars had been rather an unlucky term for Harry Wharton; though, fortunately, it had ended well, and not in disaster, as seemed only too probable at one time.

Wharton was rather anxious to forget all about that, and his friends were careful to make no reference to it. It was like William George Bunter to make it a topic.

"Shut up, you fat, gabbling ass!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! You know jolly well that Quelch was down on Wharton like a ton of bricks, and jolly nearly got him sacked from Greyfriars. Now he's asking him here. Well, I'm not standing it."

"Quelch is coming to-day," said Harry. "He's staying a few days. If you really think you won't like it, Bunter—"

"I don't think—I know!" snorted Bunter.

"Then I'll look out a train for you."

"Eh?"

"Quelch won't be here till rather late in the day. Will you stay for lunch?"

asked Harry.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, with a speechless and devastating blink.

Certainly, if Bunter did not like the company of the expected guest, the difficulty was easily solved by Bunter taking his departure before the expected guest arrived. But that was not a solution of the difficulty that appealed to Billy Bunter in the least. That magnificent residence, Bunter Court, seemed to have very little attraction for the heir of the line of Bunter. Often and often Billy Bunter pointed out the shortcomings of Wharton Lodge, as compared with Bunter Court. Yet for some reason best known to himself, he remained at Wharton Lodge, and gave the palatial mansion of the Bunter tribe the go-by.

"There's a good train at three!" remarked Nugent.

"We'll walk down to the station and see Bunter off, before Quelch gets here," said Bob. "It will be a pleasure, old chap!"

"The pleasurefulness will be terrific," declared Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"That's settled, then," said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I think it's rather thick to ask a beastly schoolmaster here; but if you can stand Quelch, I suppose I can stand him," said Bunter. "I was really thinking of you, old chap. I'm not one of those chaps who's always thinking of himself, like some fellows I could name. But look here, I suppose Quelch will be civil! He won't come the back, I suppose, while he's staying here."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Probably not," he answered. "I don't suppose he will bring his cane with him. But if you'd rather clear—"

"I'm not a fellow to turn a fellow down," said Bunter. "I've promised to stay with you for the vac, and I'm a fellow of my word."

"My dear man don't worry about that. I'll let you off."

"Here, Robert, bring me some more kidneys—these are cold!" said Bunter, apparently desirous of changing the conversation.

Harry Wharton & Co. finished their coffee and toast, and Billy Bunter continued busy. But there was a frown on his fat brow as he demolished the foodstuffs. Form masters, at school, were a necessary evil; but in holiday

time they were a quite unnecessary evil. Certainly, Bunter had no intention of shaking the dust of Wharton Lodge from his feet—not even if Mr. Quelch had brought the rest of the Greyfriars staff with him, including the Head himself. Still, Bunter did not like it. He was offended, angry, and indignant. Fortunately, this mixture of wrathful feelings did not affect his appetite. The foodstuffs continued to disappear at a great rate, and Robert was kept as active and busy as ever.

"What about skating, you men?" asked Bob Cherry. "The lake's frozen as hard as steel—"

"Good egg!" said Harry. "Coming down to skate, Bunter?"

"I haven't finished brekker. May give you a look in afterwards," said the fat Owl. "Robert! Toast!"

The Famous Five strolled out, with their skates. Their faces were bright and cheery, as they walked down into the frosty park towards the lake. Harry Wharton & Co. had had a merry Christmas together, and they were enjoying every day, and every hour, of the holidays. The late trouble in the Co. had blown over, and every member was anxious that the healed breach should remain healed; and after the troubles of last term, Harry Wharton and his friends found one another's company more agreeable than ever. Bunter was the only fly in the ointment; but even Billy Bunter could not dash their cheery spirits.

They were not, perhaps, looking forward to the visit from their Form master with keen enjoyment. But they intended to be very good and very polite while Henry Samuel Quelch was at Wharton Lodge. The fact that Mr. Quelch had consented to come, showed that he had quite forgiven the "scapegrace of Greyfriars" for all his offences of the last term; it was, in fact, a gracious act on the part of the Remove master. And Wharton, on his side, was anxious to play up, and show Mr. Quelch that he was no longer the reckless scapegrace who had given him so much trouble at school.

The lake in the park was a sheet of solid ice. Leafless trees and frozen rushes surrounded it. There was a dressing-hut on the bank, used for changing in the summer, and the juniors headed for it, to sit down there and put on their skates. The door was closed, and Harry Wharton turned the handle to throw it open. But it did not stir.

"Jammed!" said Johnny Bull. "Wood swells in the damp weather, you know. Let me try."

"It seems to be locked," said Harry, in surprise.

"Well, it can't be locked—nobody can be inside! Let me try!"

Johnny Bull took hold of the door handle, turned it and shoved. He gave a mighty shove, expecting the door to open under that propulsion—which certainly it would have done had it been jammed. But the door did not open, and Johnny, shoving not wisely but too well, tapped his nose rather hard on the immovable door.

"Ow!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

He let go the door handle and clasped his hands to his nose.

"Woough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear man, you'll never butt it open with your nose!" said Bob Cherry.

"Simply no good!"

"You silly—ow—ass!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Wow! You funny idiot—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton took the door handle again. Johnny Bull was busy with his

Ho shoved and rattled. But it was clear that the door was not jammed—it was locked on the inside.

"What he thump!" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment. "Somebody must be in there! Who the dickens—"

"Nobody's come down here to change for a swim, I suppose!" grinned Bob.

"The swiftness is not probable," chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But there is some esteemed and idiotic person inside."

Wharton rapped on the door with his knuckles.

"Here! Who's there?" he called out. There was no answer from within. Obviously, someone was in the hut or the door could not have been locked. Anyone belonging to Wharton Lodge would have answered, naturally, so it appeared that it was some unknown intruder who had taken possession.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "Some tramp camped there for the night, perhaps!"

"He would be gone by this time, I should think," said Harry. "But I suppose it may be a tramp. It's somebody, anyhow!" He rapped again, loudly. "Who the dickens is there? Can't you answer?"

Either the occupant of the hut couldn't—or wouldn't! At all events, he didn't! There was silence.

"Look in the window," suggested Nugent.

Wharton moved along to the window of the hut. It was fastened, and the blind was drawn within. It was impossible to see into the interior.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We can sit down here to put our skates on, but you'd better find out who's camped here, Wharton!"

"I mean to," answered Harry. "If he won't open the door, whoever he is, I'll cut off and call Jessop to break it in! It's somebody who has no business here. You fellows stay here and collar him if he tries to cut before I get back—"

There was a grating of the key in the lock. Evidently the unknown person in the hut had heard what Wharton said. A voice called from within as the key grated in the lock.

"All serene! You needn't bust in the door."

It was a cool and rather pleasant, hoarse voice that called. The juniors started.

"I've heard that toot before," said Bob. "It sounds sort of familiar."

The same thought had occurred to the other fellows.

They watched curiously as the door was thrown open from within.

In the doorway a slim figure and a handsome face, with dark, hazel eyes, appeared. There was a glimmer of amusement in those handsome eyes as the stranger looked at the astonished juniors. They knew him at once.

"You!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Little me!" assented the stranger.

It was the boy who had ridden the motor-bike the day before, and had so narrowly escaped the pursuit of the venture-nosed man. The Famous Five of Greyfriars stared at him in blank amazement.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Jim Valentine!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stared. They had never expected to see him again—indeed, by that time they had almost forgotten him. But there he

was—perfectly cool and self-possessed, and with a glimmer of amusement in his dark eyes as he looked at their astonished faces. Whoever he was, and whatever he was up to, he was evidently a cool customer.

"You!" repeated Wharton. "What the thump are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same question," was the cool answer. "What the thump are you doing here?"

"You're trespassing!"

"So are you!"

"Well, not quite," said Harry, his face breaking into a smile. "You see, I happen to live here, and these fellows are my friends staying with me for the hols!"

"Oh, my mistake!" said the cool youth. "In that case, I apologise! You've a right to ask me questions if this is your show. Still, I'm doing no harm! I've borrowed a lodging for the night; but if there's any charge you can send in your bill!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Harry

it in my waistcoat pocket. Take my word for that!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Wharton.

"Look here, who are you?"

"Just myself!"

"You have a name, I suppose?"

"Your supposition is perfectly well founded," answered the boy, with a whimsical gravity that made the Co. grin. "You've guessed it in one! They must be rather proud of you at your school."

Wharton set his lips a little.

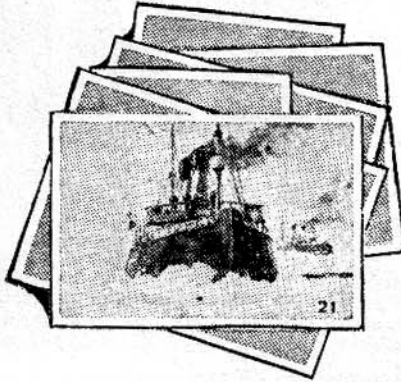
"Will you tell me who you are?" he demanded.

"I'd rather not."

"Please yourself! But you've no right here, and you can't be up to any good. So the sooner you clear off, the better."

"Those sportsmen who were after you yesterday cleared right off, kid," said Bob Cherry lindy. "They never knew you'd stopped, and they went on through Winford."

"Thanks!" The boy's manner became more serious. "You saw them, then!"



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"Mean to say that you slept in this hut last night?"

"Just that!"

"It must have been frightfully cold," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, it wasn't warm," agreed the strange lad. "But I had a thick coat, luckily. I've been taking a little exercise since, but I hurried cover when I saw you coming. You're going to skate?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Mind if I sit here and watch you? I'm not going to steal the hut, or walk off with any of your trees."

The chums of Greyfriars looked at him in silence. They had supposed that the fugitive had fled across the park, and quitted it the previous day. Obviously, however, he had remained within the walls and camped there. It was clear enough, from his appearance, that he was no tramp. He was well dressed—in fact, expensively dressed. He wore a wrist-watch that was worth at least a good many pounds, and he had carelessly abandoned a motor-bike that was rather costly.

From his looks and proceedings it might have been supposed that he was well supplied with money—too well supplied with it to be careful of it. Why he should have camped out for the night in a hut by a frozen lake, in the bitter winter weather was a mystery. It could not have been for lack of means to obtain better accommodation.

"I'm doing no harm here, old bean," went on the pleasant voice. "I assure you that I haven't damaged your hut, and had no intention of walking off with

One of them—a johnny with a beak—"

"Yes, some beak!" grinned Bob.

"That was Nosey, and the others—"

"Only one other—the driver of the car—I heard the nosey man call him Barney—"

"A stocky man with a red moustache?"

"Yes."

"And you think they went right on, and never knew I'd stopped?"

"Sure of it!"

"Good! They may be back in London by this time, then. But Nosey's pretty keen." The boy's manner was uneasy.

"They never saw the jigger?"

"No; it was under the snow! My hat! Have you left it there all this time?"

"It can stay there till the cows come home, for all I care." The boy shrugged his shoulders. "Bother the jigger!"

"Was it yours?" asked Harry Wharton, rather dryly.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob.

"Yes, it was mine!" said the boy coolly. "I wasn't bolting on a stolen jigger, with the owner after me."

"Well, it looks—"

"Yes, it looks fishy!" agreed the boy. "Well, if you don't want me here, I'll cut, and chance Nosey and his gang."

"They've cleared off all right," said Bob Cherry.

"You don't know Nosey. He will have asked half the population of Winford whether they saw me going through. Ten to one he will find out that I didn't—and he will try back! That's why I camped here for the night—not because it was so jolly warm and comfy."

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"Is the man a relation of yours?" asked Harry.

The boy chuckled.

"No, only a dear friend who can't bear to part with me."

"You said yesterday that they were crooks after you!" said Wharton abruptly.

"That's right."

"Then why not go to the nearest police station?"

"Why not, indeed?" said the strange lad, laughing. "There might be lots of reasons!"

The handsome face became grave again.

"Look here, you fellows! I want to keep in cover. If Nosey and Barney are rooting about this neighbourhood for me, they're not likely to guess that I've dodged into a gentleman's park. You can see for yourselves I'm doing no harm here. What's the matter with my sitting here and watching you skate?"

The Co. looked at Harry Wharton. It was for Colonel Wharton's nephew to decide that.

Wharton paused.

There was something utterly mysterious about the strange lad, and his flight from a gang whom he described as "crooks." His association with them obviously needed explaining.

At the same time, all the Co. fully believed that his description of them was correct; they had seldom, or never, seen a "harder case" than the man with the vulture beak.

Whoever the boy was, whatever he was, it seemed to be plain that he was trying to keep clear of crooks—and if that was so the Greyfriars fellows were the men to help him.

With all his carelessness, they could read a shade of anxiety in the boy's handsome face; and there was a curious, hunted watchfulness in his eyes that rather touched them.

"Well, what's the verdict?" he asked. "If I'm going, I'll go, and chance it. You may be doing more harm than you imagine, if you chuck me back to Nosey Clark. He's not a nice man."

"I don't see why you shouldn't hang on here if you want to," said Harry Wharton at last. "You've picked a rather cold spot—"

"Yes, I missed the central heating," agreed the boy. "But it's a case of any port in a storm."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"More than a trifle; but I can stand that. So long as miss Nosey, I don't mind missing a few meals."

"That's rot!" said Harry. "Look here, I don't know who you are, or what your game is, or why you can't apply to the police to protect you from a gang of crooks. But if you're trying to keep out of bad company, you're doing right, and we're ready to help you all we can. Stay here if you want to—but you can't stay without food. I'll get you something."

"Don't trouble—"

"Rot! You fellows get on your skates, while I walk back to the house," said Harry.

The anxiety in the boy's face deepened.

"Look here, if you mention to your people that I am here, I shall have to go, so I may as well cut now," he said.

"I won't mention it," said Harry. "I can get you a bundle of sandwiches and a thermos of hot coffee, without questions asked."

"Good!" That the boy, after his night in Wharton Park was hungry, in fact, famished, was plain by the way his face lighted up at the mention of

sandwiches and coffee. "My hat, I'm jolly hungry, and I own up! Look here"—he paused a moment, and then went on "You asked me my name a few minutes ago. I'll tell you—only don't repeat it. If Nosey got to hear of it, he would know where to drop on me. My name's Jim Valentine. If you give me leave, I'll hang on here till dark, and then clear." He smiled. "I've come from nowhere—and I'll go back there."

"Hang on as long as you like, Jim Valentine!" answered Wharton, with a smile; and leaving the boy in the hut, and the other fellows putting on their skates, he walked away to Wharton Lodge.

A quarter of an hour later he returned with a bag.

Jim Valentine's eyes glistened as the bag was opened in the hut, and a bundle of sandwiches, a cake and a thermos flask turned out. His handsome face softened, and he gave Harry Wharton a look of gratitude.

"This is awfully decent of you!" he said. "I'm a stranger to you, and you don't know anything about me. But I hope you'll believe me when I tell you that you're doing a real good action in helping me to keep clear of that gang."

Wharton smiled.

"I can quite believe that—judging by Mr. Nosey's looks," he answered.

"I'd like to know your name," Jim Valentine smiled. "I've given mine."

"Harry Wharton!"

"I'll remember it—though I'm not likely ever to meet you again. My hat! These sandwiches are good!"

Leaving the strange lad in the hut to the sandwiches, cake, and coffee, Wharton put on his skates and joined the Co. on the ice.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Surprising Visitor!

COLONEL WHARTON glanced at the card brought in by Wells, the butler.

On that card he read: "Mr. Compton Clark." The name of Mr. Compton Clark was unknown to the old military gentleman, and a glance at Wells' impassive face revealed that the Wharton Lodge butler did not think much of Mr. Compton Clark.

However, Colonel Wharton was at leisure till lunch, and he bade Wells show Mr. Compton Clark into the library, where he was, at the present moment, engaged in the happy—or otherwise—occupation of looking through his Income Tax paper.

Whoever Mr. Compton Clark was, and little as Wells apparently thought of him, he could not possibly be more disagreeable than an Income Tax paper. And it seemed that he wanted to see Colonel Wharton.

Wells showed him in.

He was a rather thin, almost gaunt, man, with a hard face, and a prominent nose that curved like the beak of a bird of prey. His eyes were very keen and very penetrating, and a deep black. He was quite well-dressed, and might have been a well-to-do man of business, by his clothes and his looks. But there was a shifty and furtive expression about his sharp, black eyes, a wary watchfulness that the old military gentleman did not fail to observe.

Colonel Wharton decided on the spot that he did not like the looks of Mr. Compton Clark. But he was a polite old military gentleman, and he inclined his head courteously to the stranger.

"Mr—er—" The colonel referred to the card. "Mr. Clark? What—"

"I must apologise for troubling you, sir," said Mr. Clark, in a voice that was hard and rusty in tone. "I will state my business in a very few words. I am looking for my ward—a boy named Jim Valentine, who has run away from home."

"Indeed!" said Colonel Wharton, in blank astonishment. "I fail to see how I can help you in such a matter."

"He is not here, then?"

"Here!" repeated the colonel blankly. "Certainly not! As I have never heard of the boy, he is not likely to be here, I presume."

The black, shifty eyes narrowed, reading and searching the bronzed old face.

Colonel Wharton coloured with vexation. Seldom, or never, did the old colonel come into contact with any person who would have dreamed of doubting a statement he made. Such a thing really seemed impossible. But Mr. Compton Clark, it was clear, was scanning his face to read there whether he was telling the truth or not. Mr. Clark was evidently a man who did not believe all that was told him, and who was no respecter of persons in such matters.

But the scrutiny seemed to satisfy Mr. Clark. He could see that the master of Wharton Lodge had never heard of Jim Valentine.

"Please excuse me, sir," said Mr. Clark smoothly. "The boy is certainly in this vicinity. He left home yesterday on his motor-cycle, and I followed him in the car. I lost trace of him between this house and the town of Winford, a mile or two away."

"Exhaustive inquiry proved that he never passed Winford. His motor-cycle has been found within a few yards of your gates. It was buried in snow by the roadside, evidently deliberately hidden from sight."

"It was, however, found by some village boy early this morning, and the fact came to my knowledge. I have identified the machine. It had sustained injury, which was the reason why the—why my ward abandoned it. On foot he could never have escaped the search that has been made for him. And—"

"This scarcely interests me, sir," said Colonel Wharton. "I have said that I know nothing whatever of the boy—"

"Quite so, sir. But members of your household may know something," suggested Mr. Clark. "Close by the spot where, as it has transpired, the motor-cycle was concealed, I questioned some boys in passing yesterday. I did not doubt the good faith at the time, having no reason to do so; but it is clear, since that they must have known that the motor-cycle was there, as they were standing quite close by its hiding-place. One of them answered my inquiries, and deluded me into driving on to Winford. These boys, I learned, belong to your establishment, sir."

"Absurd!" said the colonel. "If you inquired of my nephew and his friends, I have no doubt that they answered in good faith."

"It proves that they did not, sir," said Mr. Clark calmly. "They were on the very spot where my—my ward abandoned his cycle, and they admitted that they had seen him. They know, I imagine, where he is. The boy is somewhat plausible, and may have imposed upon them with some tale or other, and enlisted their assistance in eluding his guardian. Boys are thoughtless. But you, sir, would naturally not approve of anything of the kind."

"Certainly not!" snapped Colonel Wharton.



In the grasp of many hands Nosey Clark was sent hurtling into the snow. "Now pelt him," said Wharton, "he'll get a move on, then!" "What-ho!" said Bob Cherry. The next moment the Famous Five got busy, and snowballs began to whiz. They crashed on Mr. Clark's prominent nose, they filled his eyes and ears and mouth. "Yaroooh!" gurgled the nosey man. "Whoooh!"

"I am very anxious to find this wilful boy and take him home," said Mr. Clark. "If I may see the young gentleman whom I spoke with yesterday—"

Colonel Wharton knitted his brows. "I cannot suppose for a moment that my nephew knows anything of the matter!" he said curtly. "But I will ask him the question, certainly." He touched the bell, and Wells reappeared. "Wells, is my nephew in the house?"

"The young gentlemen have gone out to skate, sir," said Wells, "except Master Bunter."

"Please ask him to come here."

Wells retired. A minute or two later Billy Bunter rolled into the library and blinked inquisitively at the nosey gentleman through his big spectacles. The black eyes flashed at him searchingly.

"This is not one of the five boys, Colonel Wharton," said Mr. Clark. "But I remember seeing him: my car passed him on the Wimford road yesterday afternoon, immediately after I had spoken to them. Possibly, he was on the spot."

"Bunter, have you any knowledge of a boy who appears to have had some accident with a motor-cycle near the gates yesterday afternoon?" asked Colonel Wharton.

"Eh—yes, rather!" answered Bunter. "The silly idiot nearly ran into me when I slipped over in the snow! He bumped over and wrecked his jigger, and serve him jolly well right!"

"You were present, then?" exclaimed Mr. Clark. "What became of the boy?"

Bunter blinked at him. As he had left the Famous Five to walk on to Wimford the previous afternoon, before the car had reached the spot, he had not seen Mr. Nosey Clark, and his back had been to the car when it passed him later

on the road. So the gentleman with the vulture's beak was a stranger to his eyes. He could guess, however, that this man had something to do with the pursuers the boy had spoken of, and he remembered Jim Valentino's reference to Nosey. The vulture's beak gave him the clue. He grinned.

"Oh! You're Nosey?" he asked.

"Bunter!" said Colonel Wharton in a deep voice.

"I mean, the kid said somebody he called Nosey was after him," explained Bunter, "and, from this chap's boko, I thought—"

"That will do, Bunter," said Colonel Wharton. Mr. Clark was flushing with anger. "Tell this gentleman anything you know of the boy of whom he is in search."

"Oh, certainly!" said Bunter cheerfully. "He said Nosey and the gang were after him, and asked the fellows to hide his jigger under the snow, so that they wouldn't spot it when they came up in a car."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the colonel. "And did my nephew and his friends accede to this request from a perfect stranger?"

"They jolly well did!" answered Bunter. "They seemed rather to like the kid. I thought him cheeky myself."

"What became of him?" asked Mr. Clark sharply.

"He got over the park wall and bunked."

"Over my wall?" exclaimed Colonel Wharton. "He entered my grounds?"

"Yes. I fancy he was going to cut across the park and get clear on the other side," answered Bunter. "I never saw any more of him. I left the fellows waiting for the car to come up; I

started for Wimford. The beasts were snowballing me—"

"Did the other boys join him in the park?" asked Mr. Clark.

"No fear! They followed me to Wimford—caught me up long before I got there," answered Bunter. "We went to the pictures."

"Do you know whether they have seen him since and befriended him?" asked Mr. Clark.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I'm jolly sure they haven't," he answered. "I fancy he bunked across the park and cleared off. Miles away long ago, I fancy."

"It is a very odd affair," said Colonel Wharton. "The boys seem to have acted very thoughtlessly. But, obviously, they can know nothing of your ward's movements since his flight, Mr. Clark."

Mr. Clark's thin lips set unpleasantly. "It appears beyond doubt that the boy—my ward—took refuge within your walls, sir," he said. "A number of—of friends of mine have been helping in my search for him, and no trace of him has been found. I am persuaded that he is still in this vicinity."

"He could scarcely have passed a winter's night in the open park, sir," said Colonel Wharton dryly. "But if you desire to search the park, you are very welcome to do so. It is somewhat extensive—"

"I desire to see the boys I saw yesterday and question them, sir."

"There is no objection to that. If my nephew knows anything of your ward he certainly will tell you all he knows. The boys are now skating on the lake in the park. If you desire to see them, Bunter will take you there."

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"I am much obliged to you, sir, and I accept your offer," said Mr. Compton Clark.

"Bunter, please take this gentleman to my nephew."

"Oh, certainly!" said Bunter. "I was going down to join them, anyhow."

And Mr. Clark, once more apologising for having troubled the master of Wharton Lodge, and having received a stiff bow in return, followed Billy Bunter from the library and the house. A car was standing on the drive, with a red-moustached, stocky man at the wheel, who glanced at Mr. Clark as he came out. The gentleman with the vulture's beak made a sign to him in passing, and he continued to wait, while Mr. Clark walked on into the frosty park with Billy Bunter.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Handling Mr. Clark!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Who the dickens—"

"The esteemed and ludicrous noscy merchant!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had finished skating, and were sitting in the hut, taking off their skates, when they sighted Billy Bunter and his companion coming down to the frozen lake. Bob Cherry, who was sitting in the doorway, saw him first, and then the other fellows looked out and saw him.

There was a sharp exclamation from Jim Valentine. A sudden paleness came over his handsome face.

"Noscy—is Noscy coming?" he exclaimed.

He did not approach the doorway of the hut to look.

"It's the beaky blighter we saw in

the car yesterday," answered Bob. "Bunter's bringing him here—goodness knows why! Bunter doesn't know you're here. Keep close, and he won't see you."

Mr. Clark, from the distance, sighted the Greyfriars fellows in the doorway of the hut and hastened his steps. Harry Wharton cast a curious glance at the hunted boy.

"Lock the door, and keep mum!" he said. "We're standing by you, kid!"

Valentine nodded.

The juniors left the hut, and Wharton drew the door shut. The key turned in the lock inside. Taking their skates, the chums of the Greyfriars Remove walked away up the path by which Mr. Clark and Bunter were approaching.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "You're too late to skate, Bunter! You stayed for one brekker too many, old fat bean!"

"You've finished brekker just in time for lunch, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I haven't come to skate!" said Bunter. "Too jolly parky! The old geezer asked me to bring this chap here—Mr. Clark, I think he said his name was. He wants that kid!"

"What kid?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

"My ward!" cut in Mr. Compton Clark. "I have the permission of Colonel Wharton to come here and question you. Are you his nephew?"

"I am," said Harry.

"Please tell me anything you know of my ward. The foolish boy has run away from home, and I am very anxious about him. I fear, too, that he may have been hurt in the accident to his motor-cycle."

"You needn't worry about that; he wasn't hurt."

"You know where he is?"

Harry Wharton did not answer that question. The black eyes gleamed at him. Mr. Clark's beaky face was full of suspicion now.

"Have you seen the boy since?" he demanded.

"I'm not sure that you have a right to ask," answered Harry Wharton. "All we know about the matter is that he was running away from you."

"I am his guardian!" snapped Mr. Clark. "Possibly Jim has spun you some yarn; he is a wilful and plausible young rascal. He may have deceived you; it is quite probable. I have Colonel Wharton's authority to question you—as this boy, Bunter, will tell you."

"That's so, you fellows," said Bunter. "I've told the chap all I know about the kid—"

"You babbling ass!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"It is perfectly clear to me that you have seen something of my ward since yesterday, Master Wharton," said Nosey Clark quietly. "Possibly he has told you some plausible story, and you may have befriended him. Now that you know that I am his guardian you are bound to acquaint me—"

"I know nothing of the sort!" answered Harry Wharton bluntly. "The kid said that the men after him were crooks. I know that."

Mr. Clark laughed—rather a forced laugh.

"No doubt he told you some fanciful story," he answered. "I have said that he is a plausible young rascal. Where is he?" His black eyes shot a glance towards the hut by the lake. "Have you given him shelter?"

The juniors looked at one another uncertainly. They had been rather taken with Jim Valentine, and they were the reverse of favourably impressed by the looks of Mr. Nosey Clark. Nevertheless, if the matter was as the man had stated, it was a rather serious proceeding to help a fellow who had run away from his lawful guardian and his home. And if, as Jim Valentine had said, Nosey & Co. were crooks, they could see no need for him to hide in Wharton Park. There was safety for him at any police station. It was rather a difficult position for the chums of Greyfriars.

"Will you answer me?" snapped Mr. Clark.

"No," said Harry at last, "I won't! If you like, I will see you in the presence of my uncle, Colonel Wharton, and tell him all that the kid has said, and leave it to him to decide."

"You are breaking the law, young gentleman!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"If you are the kid's lawful guardian—"

"I have said so."

"Well, then, the law is on your side," said Harry. "All you have to do is to come here with a constable, and I shall be bound to answer an officer of the law. I'll leave it at that."

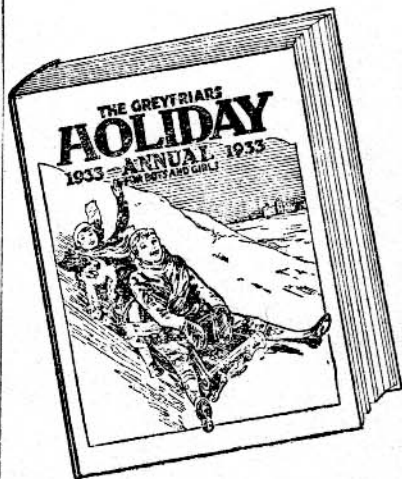
"That's cricket!" said Bob Cherry. "Trot along your bobby, Mr. Clark."

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Right as rain," he said.

Mr. Compton Clark's black eyes glittered, his cheeks reddened, and his long nose glowed purple. It was evident that Mr. Clark had a temper, and that it was rising. And it was equally evident that he had no intention whatever of appealing to the law. If he was, as Jim Valentine had said, a crook, no doubt he had ample reason for not desiring to bring an officer of the law into the matter. It was hard to imagine any

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either reason he could have had for not coming so.

He gave the juniors a long, hard, bitter look. Then, suddenly leaving them, he strode on towards the hut on the margin of the lake. It was clear that he suspected that his quarry was there.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob. "He jolly well knows—"

"The door's locked!" said Harry.

Mr. Clark quickly made that discovery for himself. He wrenched at the door-handle, and muttered an oath. Harry Wharton walked back to the hut, followed by his friends, and Billy Bunter, lost in wonder, rolled after them.

"I say, you fellows, is the kid there?" exclaimed Bunter.

Nobody answered Bunter. The Famous Five hurried on to the hut, where Mr. Compton Clark was hammering at the door. He ceased to hammer, as there was no reply from within, and the juniors heard him speak.

"Jim! I know you're there! Open the door! I will make you suffer for it if you give me any more trouble. Will you let me in?"

There was no answer from within the hut.

"Then I will break in the window!" snarled Nosey Clark.

He tramped round savagely to the little window. A moment more and his elbow would have dashed it in. Harry Wharton grasped his arm and dragged him back just in time.

"Cluck that, Mr. Clark," said Wharton coolly. "You can't damage property here, my man!"

"Stand back!" roared Nosey Clark.

"Rats to you!" answered Wharton coolly.

The man with the vulture's beak gave him a sudden, savage shove on the chest that sent him reeling. Wharton staggered and fell.

Compton Clark turned to the window again. But the Co. leaped on him like one man. Four pairs of hands grasped him, and he was dragged away from the hut.

He struggled savagely, yelling with rage.

"Hands off! You fools! You young scoundrels! Hands off!" he yelled.

Wharton staggered to his feet, his eyes ablaze.

"Hold him!" he gasped.

"We've got him, old bean," grinned Bob Cherry.

"The gottfulness is terrific!"

"Hands off!" screamed Nosey Clark.

"Bump him in the snow!" panted Wharton.

"Hear, hear!"

Nosey Clark struggled like a wildcat. But there were five pairs of hands on him now, and he was powerless.

He went with a crash into the snow, and the juniors rolled him over and over in it. He gasped and gurgled wildly as he rolled.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Billy Bunter, watching the scene with great amusement through his big spectacles.

A torrent of lurid language came from Mr. Clark. Bob Cherry crammed a handful of snow into his mouth, and cut short the flow of his eloquence.

"Groogh! Ogggh! Urggh!" spluttered Mr. Clark.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He sat spluttering in the snow.

"Now cut, you cheeky rotter!" said Harry Wharton. "You won't be allowed to force an entrance into that hut, Mr. Clark! You won't be allowed to stay here! Cut, and be quick about it!"

Mr. Compton Clark staggered to his feet.

"You young hound—2

"Better language, please!" said Wharton.

"I know he is there. I will not stir one step without him!"

"Won't you? You'll be snowballed till you do, then. Pelt him, you men! He will get a move on, I fancy."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five gathered up snow. Billy Bunter, chortling, followed their example. Mr. Clark eyed them rather like a tiger, panting for breath. Snowballs began to whiz. They crashed on his prominent nose, and burst all over his hard face; they filled his eyes and ears and mouth with powdery snow. Mr. Clark had stated that he would not stir one step. But as the snowballs rained on him he changed his mind. He stirred his steps very promptly.

He dodged and twisted, and ran back towards the house. After him rushed the juniors, hurling snowballs thick and fast.

They crashed on Mr. Clark as he fled. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Give him jip! Give him beans! That's one for your nob, Clarke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The nosy man put on a frantic burst of speed. He was smothered from head

"Colonel Wharton, I have been assaulted by these young rascals! My ward is here, here on your estate, and they are keeping him from me."

"Is that the fact, Harry?"

"Well, you see—," stammered Wharton. He had told the refugee that he would not mention his presence, but evidently it was useless to attempt to keep it dark now.

"The boy is there!" panted Mr. Clark. "He is locked in a hut in your grounds, sir, and these boys—"

"This man was going to smash in the window at the hut, uncle, and he shoved me over when I stopped him," said Harry. "I don't believe he has any right to take the chap away—"

"Is the boy there?"

"I know he is there!" hooted Mr. Clark, before Wharton could speak. "I demand that he be handed over to me at once!"

Colonel Wharton looked at the nosy man grimly and searchingly.

"If the boy is there, and if you are his lawful guardian, he shall most certainly be handed over to you," he said curtly. "I will ascertain at once whether he is there, and you may be present, if you choose."

With that the colonel strode away to the park.

Mr. Clark, still panting for breath, hurried after him.

The juniors looked at one another. "I say, you fellows, you're booked for a row now," remarked Billy Bunter cheerfully. "The old geezer is awfully shirty, ain't he?"

Unheeding Bunter, the Famous Five followed Mr. Clark and the colonel. Harry hurried on to join his uncle.

The colonel's face was very grim. It was obvious that he was deeply displeased by the whole occurrence.

"Uncle, you'll hear what the kid has to say before you let that man take him away?" exclaimed Wharton. "He's told us that the man is a crook, and that he's trying to keep clear of him. I believe it's the truth."

"Certainly I shall hear what the boy has to say, Harry," answered the colonel. "It is a very strange affair, and if the boy has anything to say for himself I shall certainly not hand him over to Mr. Clark without proof that the man has a right to take him."

"The boy is my ward, sir!" gasped Mr. Clark.

"If that is the case, sir, you will be able to prove it easily enough, and the lad will be given into your charge!" said Colonel Wharton curtly.

The nosy man set his teeth.

But he did not speak again, and they tramped the half-mile back to the lake in silence. Harry Wharton & Co. followed, fairly well satisfied with the turn the affair was taking. The affair was mysterious and puzzling, and they were quite willing to let it be decided by a head older than their own.

They reached the hut by the lake. Harry Wharton reached it first, and tapped on the door.

"Let us in, kid," he called out. "My uncle is here, and he will see fair play." There was no answer from the hut.

Wharton started a little as it occurred to him that the fugitive might be no longer there. He had had plenty of time to clear off, if he desired to do so, while the juniors were chasing Mr. Compton Clark back to the house.

Wharton turned the handle, and the door opened; it was no longer locked. He looked in; the hut was empty.

He grinned as he turned back. The matter, after all, was not to be settled

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to foot with snow as he came panting up the drive towards his car. The man with the red moustache stared at him blankly as he came, with the laughing juniors behind him.

"Give him a few more!"

"Give him beans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, here comes the old geezer!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Oh, my hat! Chuck it!" gasped Harry, as Colonel Wharton, with a frowning brow, came striding from the house.

And the snowballs ceased to whiz, and Mr. Compton Clark, breathless, winded, leaned on his car and gasped.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Gone!

COLONEL WHARTON gave the juniors a grim, stern look. Mr. Clark, panting and gasping for breath, was unable to speak for the moment.

"Harry, what does this mean?" exclaimed the colonel sharply.

"Well, he asked for it, uncle," said Harry Wharton.

"Begged for it, sir," said Bob.

"The begfulness was terrific, esteemed sahib!" murmured Hurree Jarnset Ram Singh.

Mr. Clark found his voice.

by Colonel Wharton; Jim Valentine had settled it for himself.

"Where is the boy?" rapped the colonel.

"Gone!" answered Harry.

"Gone?" It was a savage exclamation from Mr. Clark. He dashed past Wharton and glared into the hut.

He ground his teeth as he saw that the building was empty.

"The boy was here, Harry?" grunted the colonel.

"Yes—he's gone now. He must have cut while we were after Mr. Clark," said Harry.

Another grunt from the colonel.

"That does not look as if he had much to say for himself!"

"I believe what he told us, uncle. I believe that he had good reasons for wanting to keep clear of that man!" said Harry.

"Where is he?" said Nosey Clark between his teeth. "You young scoundrel, where is he now?"

Wharton looked at him coldly and contemptuously, and did not take the trouble to answer.

"Mr. Clark," rapped the colonel, "you will be kind enough to moderate your language. I can understand your annoyance, but if you repeat such expressions here I will have you turned off my land, sir."

Nosey Clark choked back his rage.

"Colonel Wharton, the boy is my ward! He is a willful young rascal, and has given me a great deal of trouble. He has imposed on your nephew with a lying tale. He must be handed over to me."

"You can see for yourself that he is not here," said the colonel gruffly.

"Your nephew has befriended him—sheltered him! They drove me away from this spot while the young rascal escaped! I have no doubt—none whatever—that he is not far away. Order your nephew to tell me where he is hiding now."

"Harry, if you know where the boy is you will tell me at once!" exclaimed Colonel Wharton.

"I know nothing about him, uncle! I did not even know he was gone till I looked into the hut."

"It is false!" yelled Nosey Clark, his rage breaking out again. "You have hidden the young villain somewhere—"

"Silence, sir!" boomed the colonel. "How dare you accuse my nephew of speaking falsely? He knows nothing of the boy, as he has said."

"I tell you that the boy is here, and that your nephew knows it!" yelled Mr. Clark. "And I will not go without him!"

The colonel stared at him.

"You may remain in this park, sir, as long as you like!" he rapped. "It is not a public place, but if you choose to remain and look for the boy, you are at liberty to do so."

Mr. Clark gave a glance round at the extensive park and the endless frosty trees. Looking for the missing boy there was rather like looking for a needle in a haystack. It was probable enough that Jim Valentine was hidden in some obscure corner, waiting for nightfall to cover his escape; but if that was so, the nosey gentleman was not likely to unearth him. His black eyes glittered at the smiling juniors. Evidently he suspected that they knew where Jim Valentine was.

"Well, sir?" rapped the colonel.

"These boys could tell me where to find him, if they chose!" snarled Mr. Clark.

"They can tell you nothing, sir!" snapped the colonel.

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"The knowfulness is not terrific, esteemed and disgusting Mr. Clark," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I don't know where he is, Mr. Clark," said Harry quietly, "but I hope that he's somewhere safe from you."

"You young scoundrel—"

"That is enough!" broke in Colonel Wharton. "I withdraw my permission for you to remain here—you will go, and at once! I am far from satisfied with your bona fides, Mr. Clark—and the sooner you go the better. I will walk back to your car with you."

The black eyes glinted at him, but Mr. Clark evidently realised that there was nothing doing. He turned and tramped away, with a savage face. Colonel Wharton strode away with him. The juniors, following more slowly, saw the nosey gentleman get into his car, and Barney drove it away down the drive to the gates. Colonel Wharton, still frowning, went into the house.

"Well, that's that!" said Bob Cherry. "I hope the kid will keep clear of that sportsman!"

"The hopefulness is terrific!"

Billy Bunter came panting up.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped, "you'll be late for lunch!"

"What?"

"Lunch!" said Bunter. "Have you forgotten lunch?"

"Fathead!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went in to lunch. That important function filled Billy Bunter's mind, to the exclusion of all less serious matters. But the chums of the Remove were thinking of the fugitive boy, and as the winter day closed in mist and darkness they wondered where he was and whether he had succeeded in making his escape.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Crash in the Fog!

HERE was mist rolling over the Surrey downs and spreading like a blanket over the frosty trees in Wharton Park.

Dimly, spectre-like, the gaunt leafless trees loomed in the mist. The park wall was ridged with snow, and dislodged fragments of it fell as Jim Valentine climbed from within, perched himself astride of the top, and peered down with cautious eyes into the road. Dark and silent, the country road stretched in the winter mist, with no sign of a vehicle or a gleam of a motor-lamp. For several long minutes the fugitive boy remained there, watching and listening, and at last he dropped on to the road, masses of snow falling with him as he dropped.

He picked himself up, his heart beating, and watched and listened again. But all was silent and still, and he moved away, hurrying swiftly through the shadows. That the road was watched by Nosey Clark and the gang he was sure, but in the mist and gloom he hoped to get clear. He could see hardly a yard before him, and the keenest eyes were not likely to spot him as he flitted through the winter gloom.

He stopped suddenly, with a startled exclamation, barely escaping a collision with a dark, dim object at the roadside. The next moment he knew that it was a halted car without lights. And as he backed away from it a shadow moved, and a hand grasped his shoulder. He had a glimpse of a rough face with a stubbly red moustache.

"Nosey!" There was a shout. "Here he is—got him!"

A voice called back from the mist.

"Barney, you rotter—let go!" panted Valentine.

Barney grinned, and tightened his grasp as the boy struggled desperately. Jim Valentine was strong and sturdy; but the chauffeur was a powerful man, and he held the resisting boy easily enough. There was a tramping footstep in the snow, and a light gleamed out from an electric torch. It dazzled and blinded the boy as it flashed in his face.

"Jim!" He heard the hard, sharp, bitter voice of the man with the vulture's beak. "You young hound! It's you."

"Got him, governor!" grinned Barney.

"Keep him safe!"

"You bet!"

"Let me go!" panted Jim. "I won't come back—I tell you I won't come back, Nosey Clark!"

"We'll see! Get him in the car, Barney."

Nosey Clark opened the door of the car, and the boy was tossed in like a bundle. He sprawled gasping on the floor.

Mr. Compton Clark followed him in, and Barney slammed the door shut. The hook-nosed man grasped Jim by the collar and dragged him up to a seat.

"You're coming back, Jim!" he said, in a low, menacing voice. "I knew you were hiding in the park yonder, and we've been on the watch—you hadn't much chance of getting clear—there's five or six others on the watch. I knew that we'd get you."

"I won't go back!" muttered the boy sullenly.

"You will! And you will toe the line when you get back," said Nosey Clark, in the same low, bitter tone of menace. "You're too useful for us to let you go, Jim. And if you'd got away from me, you young fool, I'd have set the police looking for you."

"You dared not!" panted Jim.

"They'd be glad to get hold of Dick the Penman!" said Nosey Clark. "They don't know his name is Jim Valentine—but if they were told—"

"They'd get you, too!" muttered the boy. "You dared not."

"What did you bolt for?" asked Nosey Clark, peering at the boy's white, set face in the darkness of the car. "Haven't I treated you well? You've had all the money you wanted, and—"

"Whose money?" said the boy bitterly.

"Plenty of money, the best of clothes, a motor-bike of your own—everything you could want—and nothing to do in return, but to use your gift—your gift with a pen—signing a name now and then to a paper—"

The boy shivered.

"Never again! Never again! I tell you—"

"Never's a long word," said Nosey Clark. "You've done a fool thing, Jim, running away from your best friends—from your guardian. I'm your guardian, remember, though that stiff old fool yonder did not quite believe it." He gave a harsh chuckle. "Where would you be now if I hadn't stood by you, Jim, when you were left on your uppers?"

"And why did you do it?" muttered the boy. "To make a crook of me—a thief like yourself—"

"You've been getting fool ideas into your head, Jim. You'll get over all that," said Nosey Clark. "I'll see that you do. You'll come back, and you'll toe the line—or you'll fare worse! Dick the Penman is wanted by the police—and a hint to them would be enough. If we lose you, Jim, they get



As Jim Valentine backed away from the halted car without lights, two powerful arms gripped him from the rear. The next moment the light from a torch shone full in his face. "Nosey!" he panted, recognising the man who held the torch. "You rotter—let me go! I won't come back, Nosey Clark!"

men, and pack you away behind stone walls—remember that, if you ever think of bolting again."

"I'd rather that—even that—"
"That's enough! Get going, Barney."

The headlights were gleaming from the car now. Barney took his seat, and the engine purred.

Jim Valentine sat beside the hawk-nosed man, panting, his face white and desperate. A grasp was on his arm, holding him secure, as if the nosy man feared that he might make some attempt to fling himself from the car.

The car moved along the snowy road in the direction of Wimford. There was half-frozen snow on the road, and hung like a blanket, hardly penetrated by the glare of the headlights. But the car ran swiftly on; the crooks were anxious to get away from the vicinity of Wharton Lodge. With flashing headlights and grinding wheels, the car shot along the road.

Nosey Clark peered from the window into the murky night.

"It's thick," he said. "All the better for us! We shall have a clear road!" He peered at the boy's dim face again. "Make up your mind to it, Jim."

"Never!"
"I'm willing to overlook what you've done, and all the trouble you've given me. I'm willing to take you back and let it pass! Isn't that good enough, Jim?"

"I won't go back!"
"You took me by surprise, bolting as you did yesterday—though I'd had some suspicion," said Nosey Clark. "I won't be far behind you, Jim—you'd never have dodged me, if those school-boys hadn't helped you—the young fools! I lay they never know they

were helping a young crook! You won't have another chance like that, Jim. Make up your mind to it, and I'm your friend—"

"Never!"
"You'll be taken care of then, till you come to your senses," said the hawk-nosed crook grimly. "And I'll make you safe now, Jim—no jumping from the car, my boy, if I let you loose. Give me your wrists."

He drew a cord from the pocket of his coat.

"You villain!" breathed the boy.

"I—"
"Give me your hands, you young fool!"

The boy resisted as the crook grasped his wrists and drew them together. But the crook was too strong for him. In another minute the boy's wrists would have been bound, and he would have been a helpless prisoner. But at that moment came an interruption—a startling one.

From the thick mist ahead gleamed the lights of a car. Only for a second those lights gleamed before the crash came. Reckless driving in the fog had brought disaster.

Crash! Crash!
A rending, rocking, grinding crash, and Jim Valentine and the crook were rolling over together. Jim rolled over, dazed and dizzy, and hardly knew what was happening. Yet he was on the alert; and as the car rocked into the snow piled by the road, and crashed down there, he scrambled up. His feet were planted on Nosey Clark, struggling and wriggling below him; standing on the panting crook he groped at the car door, which was almost horizontal over his head. He forced it open and scrambled out.

He had a glimpse of Barney struggling in the snow, and did not stop for another. With the swiftness of an arrow, he leaped away, and dashed into the frosty woodland beside the road. Before Barney could drag himself from the snow, long before the enraged and panting crook could clamber out of the overturned car, Jim Valentine was gone.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Mr. Quelch!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, the Remove master of Greyfriars School, fancied for a moment that the world's end had come, and that the universe was tumbling to pieces around him. Really, it seemed like that!

Mr. Quelch was seated in a taxicab, with a suitcase for company, coming from Wimford station, and heading for Wharton Lodge.

It was foggy in Wimford, and foggy when the taxicab ran out on the long country road. Mr. Quelch glanced from the windows and saw only dim, dappled, clinging mist, with hardly a glimpse of the trees along the road, and never a glimpse of any other vehicle. The driver, like a wise man, was going slow, and sounding his horn at intervals. Any driver, except perhaps a reckless crook in a hurry, would have gone slowly and carefully on such a winter's evening. There being nothing to see from the windows, excepting mist, Mr. Quelch sat and looked straight before him, pulling his coat closer against the cold, and hoped that the drive would

(Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

soon be over—though he did not think of urging the driver to greater speed in the fog.

He was thinking, as he sat in the jolting taxi, of his coming visit to Wharton Lodge, which he anticipated with a good deal of pleasure. Last term there had been serious trouble with Harry Wharton—and Mr. Quelch was not, on reflection, blind to the fact that there had been faults on both sides. It was all over now, and Mr. Quelch's visit to Harry Wharton's home during the Christmas vacation was a sign that the past was forgiven and forgotten. Mr. Quelch's thoughts were dwelling on this quite pleasantly when the crash came.

It came with startling suddenness. Headlights flashed out of the mist, the cars struck almost as soon as they were seen.

Had the taxi been going fast like the saloon car, the collision might have knocked both vehicles to fragments, and reduced their passengers to fragments also. Fortunately the taxi had been almost crawling. But it was a fearful crash all the same.

Both drivers jammed on brakes, too late, though it saved some of the shock. Both cars went hurtling.

To Mr. Quelch it was like the crack of doom, or rather more so. He did not know what was happening. One moment he was sitting calmly and sedately, thinking chiefly of a warm fire at Wharton Lodge; the next he was rolling and tumbling in a rolling and tumbling car. When he began to realise what was going on, the taxi lay half on its side on the high bank of snow beside the road—which had saved it from the worst. He heard the voice of his driver, shouting expressive words, apparently to another driver.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch. He tried to rise.

He found that he was sitting on his suitcase, which had slipped down against the door, which was almost underneath him.

The other door was dragged open from without.

"Hurt, sir?" came the husky voice of the taxi-driver.

"I—I—I hardly know!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "What—what—"

"A blooming collision, sir—a blooming road 'og doing about sixty, in this blinking mist!" said the taximan savagely. "I'll talk to him! Let me help you out first, sir! No bones broke, I hope?"

Mr. Quelch was so severely shaken that he hardly knew whether any bones were broken or not. In a dizzy state he allowed the driver to help him out, and then he stood leaning on the half-turned taxi, gasping for breath.

At a little distance the saloon car lay jammed in the snow, on the other side of the road. The lights had gone out, but an electric torch gleamed, held by the chauffeur. Voices came through the mist.

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"He's gone!"

"The young rip! Gone?"

"He jumped out and cut! Look for him—show the light—" Nosey Clark was almost raving with rage.

The light of the torch flashed to and fro.

Mr. Quelch's driver strode across to the other car. He was rather excited, as was natural in the circumstances. A careful driver, feeling his way on a misty road, could hardly help being exasperated by getting a crash from a reckless motorist.

"Here, you!" roared the taximan. "This is going to cost you something, this is!"

Neither Nosey Clark nor Barney heeded him. Each with an electric torch in hand, heedless of the wrecked car, heedless even of their own terribly narrow escape from fearful injury, they were searching in the mist for the vanished boy. They hardly expected to find him. He might have been within a dozen feet, and they would have seen nothing of him.

"Here, you!" shouted the taximan, groping towards them. "Look at my car! Smashed! Wrecked! How many was you doing? Sixty? Or seventy? Hi! Deaf? I ask you!"

Nosey Clark and Barney seemed deaf! They did not heed. They were groping towards the roadside in the mist; and the Wimford taximan almost wondered whether he had a pair of lunatics to deal with.

Nosey Clark dropped on one knee, his torch gleaming on the snow. He pointed to a bootmark—the mark of a boy's boot.

"Here—look—"

"He cut across into the wood!" muttered Barney.

"Follow me."

"The car—"

"Hang the car—"

"You'll never find him now, Nosey, he's—"

"Follow me, you fool!"

"Hi!" The Wimford taximan fairly belowed. "You walking off, after what you've done! Hi! Stop! Don't I want your names and addresses? I ask you!"

Heedless, deaf to the voice of the charmer, as it were, Nosey and Barney scrambled through the piled snow by the roadside and disappeared among the frosty trees and frozen brambles.

The taximan stood almost petrified, staring after them, and at the two points of light that winked in the wood for a few moments, and then were lost in the misty darkness.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the taximan forcibly. "Hooking it! I tell you, sir, I'm blowed!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch; which was the Remove master's way, perhaps, of saying that he, also, was "blowed."

"Hooked it!" gasped the taximan. "Hooked it! Mizzled! Left their car and slid! You believe me?"

Mr. Quelch pulled himself together a little. He was shaken, but he was not hurt, and he was deeply thankful to find that matters were no worse. He came across to the taximan, who was staring at the abandoned car.

"Motor bandits, p'r'aps," said the Wimford man. "Stolen car, as likely as not! Honest folk don't walk off and leave their car, sir! Ten to one that's a stolen car! But what about my taxi? My eye!"

"Do you think you will be able to proceed?" asked Mr. Quelch.

The taximan looked at him. Mr. Quelch knew a lot of things, but not a lot about cars. But even a gentleman who knew very little about cars might

have known that that taxi was not able to proceed.

"Proceed?" said the Wimford man. "No, sir! I think not! Not unless you and me, sir, can pick up that bus and carry it in our 'ands, sir."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch. "What is to be done, then, my good man?"

It was rather a superfluous question, and elicited only a grunt from the Wimford driver. Obviously a gentleman who was deprived of his only means of transport, had to walk.

"How far aro we from Wharton Lodge now?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Something under a mile, sir."

"How far from Wimford?"

"Jest about a mile."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch again. "It seems that there is nothing to be done, but to walk! I may as well walk forward as back."

"Jest as well," said the Wimford man, who was thinking more about his taxi than his passenger. "I got to get back and report this at the police station. They got to get after them covcys. The insurance people will want to know! You're more'n half-way to the Lodge, sir, you've only got to keep on, and don't miss the road."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch once more.

"Here's your suitcase, sir! If you can't carry it, I'll take it back to Wimford with me."

"I think I can carry it, thank you," said Mr. Quelch. "I will start at once. If you require my evidence concerning this matter, my address will be Wharton Lodge for some days. It is very singular that those persons should have run away and abandoned their car—very singular indeed."

"Motor thieves, I'll bet you," said the Wimford man. "Sorry I can't take you on, sir—but my old bus will have to go home on a lorry, from the look of things. I got to fix up a light, or somebody will be piling up on it next! You ain't a mile from Colonel Wharton's place, sir—you keep right on."

"Thank you! Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Leaving the taximan groping about the wrecked taxi, the Remove master of Greyfriars took his suitcase in hand and walked on, and in a few moments vanished into the mist.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Lost!

"B LESS my soul!" murmured Mr. Quelch faintly. He halted.

For some time, Mr. Quelch had doubted whether he was on the right road.

Now he no longer doubted.

He knew!

Halting, he peered about him in the foggy mist. The taxi-driver had said that it was about a mile on to Wharton Lodge; and Mr. Quelch was convinced that he had walked two miles at least. It was more than an hour since the collision, and the winter darkness was deeper, the mist settling down more thickly. When Mr. Quelch had started to walk, he could see hardly a yard before him. Now he could see hardly a foot. Not a light had gleamed through the dimness; not a footstep had broken the silence, save the dull echoes of his own. Only by keeping close to the edge of the road had Mr. Quelch been able to pick his way—but for the road-edge as a guide, he might have wandered perpetually in the mist in circles. Now a doubt was in his mind whether, keeping closely to the edge, he

had unconsciously taken an unseen turning.

The ground was covered with snow, and he could not discern whether he was on a metalled road, or an earthen track. Every now and then leafless, frosty branches loomed in the dim darkness. Mr. Quelch struck several matches, but the dim flickering gave him no help. He stood and peered about him.

It was borne in upon his mind, at last, that he was no longer on the highroad. Unconsciously, in the mist, he had turned from it. Where was he now? The dim branches on both sides indicated that he was on a path in the woodland. The Greyfriars master felt a chill.

Where was he? Somewhere in the woodland that bordered the Wimford road—a woodland traversed by many paths. He might be a mile, or many miles, from the nearest human habitation. Light flakes of snow were falling,

feathery in the mist. He had been fortunate in escaping injury in the motor collision. But it dawned on him now that he was in a serious plight. Unless he found his way, he was booked for a night out—a wild and bitter winter's night. At Mr. Quelch's age, that was an alarming prospect.

"I must find the way!" said Mr. Quelch resolutely.

It was more easily said than done, however. He turned to retrace his steps, groping and feeling his way, in the hope of finding the high road again. How far he was off it he could not guess.

Neither could he tell whether he was keeping to the same path, or winding round unseen turnings in the misty gloom.

He could only tramp on, and hope for the best.

The path dwindled at last, narrowing and narrowing, till it was a mere track

among the frosty trees and brambles. Branches brushed him on either side as he tramped.

He halted again, almost in despair. Evidently this was not the way back to the high road.

He drove from his mind the thought that he was hopelessly lost. It was too terrible to contemplate. Yet he knew it.

The thought of the blazing fire, the cheery welcome at Wharton Lodge, was in his mind, like the torture of Tantalus of old.

They would be expecting him before this; they would be wondering what had happened to him. Even if they learned what had happened they could not search for him—they could never dream where he was. He did not even know himself.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Quelch. He was getting tired. It was heavy
(Continued on next page.)

OVER THE LINE?

HERE are several letters in my post-bag this week which raise points the replies to which will, I think, prove of general interest to "Magnetite."

One of them, for instance, concerns a rule which thousands of people who regularly watch big football matches do not appear to know.

In a recent match watched by one of my readers from a place close to one of the goalposts, there was a scrimmage right on the goal-line. The ball went half-way over the line, but at that stage it was scooped out by the goalkeeper. The referee awarded a goal, and in the argument which followed declared that the ball went just a little more than half-way over the goal-line, and that consequently it was a goal. Was the referee correct? I am sorry to say that he was not. In the book of rules there is this decision.

"The whole of the ball must have passed over the goal-line or touch-line before it is out of play."

Obviously that decision means that the whole of the ball must have passed over the line under the bar before a goal can be counted. It is not sufficient that the ball goes more than half-way over the line.

Yet how often, when watching a match, there are loud appeals that the ball has gone out of play when the middle of it has only just crossed one of the touch-lines. "I saw the line appear clearly and the ball was over it," is a phrase frequently heard. Yet you will appreciate the fact that it is quite possible for the line to appear without the whole of the ball having actually passed over it.

There was a lot of argument concerning a goal scored by Newcastle United against Arsenal in last season's Cup Final. Possibly my readers will remember the circumstances. The ball was alleged to have gone out of play over the Arsenal goal-line before it was retrieved by a Newcastle player who crossed it back into the goal-mouth and another Newcastle man put it into the net. The goal was allowed.

After the match photographs were produced which certainly showed that the line was clear, and that at least a part of the ball was over that line. But did the whole of the ball go over? I am not saying that it did or it did not, but certainly a point to be remembered is that the ball was still in play if the whole of it had not passed over the line.

POSITIONAL PLAY!

A PLAYER of a club in the Manchester district occupies the inside-left position. The club happens to possess an expert coach, and apparently my inside-left

OUR SOCCER FANS' CORNER!

"LINESMAN CALLING!"



Come on, you footer enthusiasts, old "flag-wagger" is waiting to settle those intricate Soccer problems for you. Fire in your queries right away to: "Linesman," c/o MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.O.4.

friend has had arguments with the coach concerning his positional play, and the question raised in these arguments is sent on to me: "Should I attack with the other forwards, or should I remain more on the defence with the half-backs?"

This is not an easy question to answer, and I'll tell you why. The tactics employed by a football team should be considered as a whole, and I cannot answer the question of where my inside-left correspondent should play without knowing, for instance, the tactics adopted by the centre-half of the same team.

If it is agreed that the centre-half should be what is called a third-full-back—that is playing almost entirely in defence, then it is absolutely necessary that at least one of the inside forwards should play fairly well back. But if the centre-half is an attacker; does not play well back all the time, then the inside wing players can with advantage go up with the other forwards.

Different clubs, different tactical ideas. I find it impossible, therefore, to settle my correspondent's question. But I would just say this: if the coach of the team thinks that the best interests of his side can be served by the inside-left playing well back, then the inside-left must adopt these methods; play according to plan until such time as he can persuade the coach that the plan is wrong.

FULL-BACK PLAY!

NOW comes another "how to play" question from a Smethwick reader who is a right full-back, and wants some hints on playing in that position. In the hope of helping this player—and others who play at full-back—I had a talk on the subject of full-

back play with James Nelson, the right-back and captain of Newcastle United, who is also a Scottish International. I don't think I can do better than pass on one or two tips which he gave me, because Nelson knows.

"One of the first points to be remembered," said Nelson, "is that a full-back, by the very nature of his position, cannot afford to take risks. The first duty which lies before him is that of getting the ball away from the danger-zone. Don't dribble, and thereby run the risk of losing the ball; get it away."

"This first principle, however, should not be interpreted as an instruction to full-backs to bang the ball hard up the field on any and every occasion," Nelson continued. "There are plenty of occasions in the average match when the full-back gets the ball in such a way that he can start his own side on the attack by a discreet pass. This can be done by pushing the ball along to the half-back who is ahead. The ballooning of the ball is another phase of full-back play which should be avoided as far as possible."

As a last word, Nelson asked me to tell my readers that the full-back should remember that he has behind him a goalkeeper to help him out of difficulties.

Slip the ball back to the goalkeeper rather than bang it out of play, but in slipping it back, put it just a little wide of the goal, so that there is no risk of scoring against your own side.

In reply to a question from one of my Birmingham chums: The Football Association Cup competition was inaugurated in 1871, and in the first season there were only fifteen entries.

"LINESMAN."

going in the snow. He leaned on a frosty trunk, and tried to think it out.

He remembered that the two men in the other car had gone into the wood, and, suspicious as their conduct had been, he would have been glad to come across them. But they had lights, he remembered—and he had not caught a glimmer of a light. Probably they were miles away. Of the local inhabitants, nobody was likely to be abroad in the woodlands that bitter, foggy night. He knew that he had no help to expect. And he was lost! Mr. Quelch was a courageous gentleman, but his courage almost failed him now.

Darkness and mist surrounded him, ghostly forms of looming trees. It was useless to follow the dwindling track farther. He had to turn back. Chance, perhaps, might guide his steps in the right direction—but he had to realise now that only chance could save him.

He laid the suitcase down at last. He was unwilling to leave his property, with a very remote prospect of ever finding it again. But he was losing his strength, and the weight was too much for him in his fatigued state. He laid it at the foot of a tree and trudged on.

Whether he kept to the same path, whether he turned into others, he had no means of guessing. Darkness and mist still enshrouded him. His limbs were aching with fatigue, and he walked like a man in a dream. Sheer fatigue forced him to stop again at last.

He leaned on a tree, panting.

He knew now that there was no hope. Not till daylight glimmered down through the branches above had he a chance of finding his way out of that snowy, frosty wilderness. The long, bitter, winter's night was before him—and he shuddered as he thought of it. Those wretches, those villains, who had crashed into his car were responsible for this! But poor Mr. Quelch was feeling too dazed and exhausted now even for anger.

Suddenly from the blackness of the night came a twinkle of light—dancing in the darkness like a will-o'-the-wisp.

The Remove master started, and caught his breath.

He watched the distant light almost in agony. There was no mistake—it was not a fevered fancy—it was a light, and it was approaching him along the dim, misty path in the wood. It was the gleam of an electric torch, and Mr. Quelch breathed deep with thankfulness as he realised it. Someone was coming by that lonely, desolate path. It was help. It was at least human companionship in that terrifying solitude.

The light suddenly stopped. Mr. Quelch guessed that whoever was carrying it, invisible behind the light, had glimpsed him there, and was no doubt startled. He called out quickly:

"Help!"

The light was shut off.

Black darkness, blacker than before, wrapped the woodland path. Mr. Quelch stared into the blanket of black mist. He called again:

"Help! I am lost here! In Heaven's name, come this way!"

He heard a faint sound at a distance. It seemed to him that it was a sound of retreating footsteps, and he fairly shrieked:

"Help! If you are a Christian, come to my aid! I am lost here!"

A voice came back at last—a boy's voice:

"Who are you? If this is a trick to get hold of me, you won't get away with it! Who are you?"

"You need not be alarmed," called back Mr. Quelch. He understood that a lonely wayfarer might well be alarmed

at the sudden meeting in the desolate wood, not knowing whom he might have to deal with. Certainly it never crossed his mind that the speaker was a boy who had escaped from the crashing saloon car, and feared the pursuit of a pair of desperate crooks.

"I'm not alarmed," came back the cool, boyish voice. "You won't get me, if I don't choose! If you're straight, who are you?"

"My name is Quelch. I am a schoolmaster."

"A schoolmaster? My hat! Well, let me see you, and don't you take a step this way before I see you clear."

"Certainly, certainly! There is no occasion for alarm—none whatever! I am not a tramp or vagrant!"

"I wouldn't care if you were!" The answer came back with a laugh. "I'm afraid of meeting worse than that! But let me see you."

The light shone out again. Mr. Quelch stepped from the tree, and stood in the middle of the path, his face turned to the gleaming light.

It dazzled him as it shone on his face, and he winked and blinked. Behind the light, whoever carried it was perfectly invisible. But Mr. Quelch knew that unseen eyes were scanning his face in the gleam of the torch.

A moment or two more, and it advanced again, the boy evidently satisfied. He joined Mr. Quelch in the shadows of the trees.

"Sorry, sir," he said, in a very pleasant voice. "But I had to be careful. I can see you're all right, now I look at you, of course!"

Mr. Quelch smiled faintly.

"You are right to be on your guard in this solitary place," he said. "I am in a terrible difficulty, and I will gladly reward you if you can help me."

"Don't worry about that, sir," said the pleasant, boyish voice. "I'll help you all I can. But what's the trouble?"

"I have lost my way!"

The boy whistled.

"Lost yourself?" he asked.

"Yes—and if you can guide me—"

"Only wish I could, sir," said the boy ruefully. "But—"

"But what?"

"I'm lost, too!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

JIM VALENTINE shut off the light. Mr. Quelch suppressed a groan as the boy spoke. He had taken it for granted that the newcomer was someone belonging to the vicinity. It was a terrible blow to learn that he was only another lost wayfarer, like himself. When the torch was shut off he could not see the boy, near as he was.

"Better save the light, sir, till we get going!" said the boy. "It won't last much longer. I used it a lot last night, camping out."

"Camping out?" repeated Mr. Quelch, startled. "In this weather?"

The boy chuckled softly.

"I've got a shelter sir—a hut in a gentleman's park. Wish I knew where to find it now, by gum! I'd be glad to be in it again! But it may be ten miles off, for all I know!"

"You do not belong to this neighbourhood?"

"No fear! I'm from London."

Mr. Quelch peered at him. He was almost sinking with fatigue, and hopelessly lost. But he could not help being surprised and startled by the boy's words.

"But what are you doing here, then?" he exclaimed. "Why are you wandering in this dreadful wood at night?"

"Keeping clear of somebody I don't want to see, that's all, sir," answered Jim Valentine. "They were after me—I know that; but they hadn't an earthly. Only when I saw you, I thought—But that's all right! How did you get here, sir?"

"I must have stepped off the road—it only had a grass edge, and in the mist I—"

"How long ago?"

"I think it was about five o'clock that—"

The light gleamed for a moment on the boy's wrist-watch.

"Now, it's seven," he said. "You've been at it two hours, then. That means that you're lost, and no mistake. You don't know which way the road lies?"

"I have no idea."

"Same here," said Jim Valentine, and there was a cheery ring in his voice which surprised the Form master of Greyfriars. A night out, even in a frozen, frosty wood, was not so terrifying to Jim as to the elderly gentleman, and he was full of satisfaction at having escaped Nosey and Barney. "Well, sir, the sooner we find it, the better—if the light lasts, we'll make it sooner or later. Two's company, anyhow."

"That is very true," said Mr. Quelch. "I am more glad than I can say to hear a human voice in this dreadful wilderness. One might imagine oneself in a wild, unpeopled country, instead of an English countryside."

"Well, it isn't so crowded as the Strand or Oxford Street, and that's a fact," said the boy. "If you're ready to start, sir, I'll put on the light. 'Fraid it won't last much longer—that's the worst of it."

"Let us make the attempt," said Mr. Quelch.

The electric-torch gleamed out again. The light was still bright, but it wavered. As the boy lifted it, it shone for a moment on his face, and Mr. Quelch saw him for the first time. He saw a handsome, pleasant face, with dark hazel eyes—a face that he liked at once. Even in the stress of his present alarming situation he wondered who the boy was, and how he came to be wandering alone in the deserted woodland.

"You've been farther up this path, sir?"

"Yes, I was returning—"

"Then I'll try back!"

The boy led back the way he had come, and Mr. Quelch followed in his footsteps.

The glimmering torch gleamed eerily on shadowy trunks, frozen brambles, and falling flakes. Here and there it revealed footprints in the snow—probably those of the boy himself, or Mr. Quelch's. The boy tramped on quickly, but he soon became aware that the elderly man behind him was lagging, and he slowed down, to keep pace. They tramped on. Mr. Quelch growing wearier and wearier at every step, though comforted by the light and the companionship. Again and again they came to a branching path, but there was no clue for their guidance—only blind chance could direct their footsteps.

But at last the boy uttered an exclamation.

"This looks something like!"

He flashed the sinking light round. They had reached a wider track, evidently a main footpath.

"This leads to somewhere, sir, you can lay to that!" said the boy. "We've got to keep to this, and not lose it again."

He stared round at Mr. Quelch. That



There was a sudden crash as the two cars collided, and Mr. Quelch was pitched from his seat as the taxi in which he had been comfortably seated toppled half on its side on a high bank of snow beside the road. "Bless my soul!" he gasped. The next moment the door was flung open from outside. "Hurt, sir?" asked the taxi-driver, in a husky voice.

gentleman, overcome with fatigue, was propped against a tree.

"You had better go on, my boy," said Mr. Quelch faintly. "I am too exhausted to proceed."

Jim Valentine shook his head.

"No, sir—no fear! Sink or swim together," he said. "Look here, sir, you take a rest; then we'll try again. Sit down on this log—take a rest, sir, and I'll save the light."

Mr. Quelch sank wearily on the fallen trunk, and the boy shut off the torch. For some minutes, there was silence in the dense darkness. Then the Remove master of Greyfriars spoke again, in a quiet voice.

"My boy, I am unable to go on—I must take my chance here! But I cannot allow you to run the same risk, for the sake of a stranger. Do your best to find your way out of this dreadful wood."

"No fear!" answered the boy sturdily. "Why, sir, you'd be frozen stiff by morning."

"I fear so," said Mr. Quelch. "But you must not share the same fate, my dear boy. I cannot permit it."

"I'm sticking to you, sir," answered the boy cheerily. "Precious sort of a rotter I should be, to go on and leave you to it! No fear."

"You are a brave and kind-hearted lad," said Mr. Quelch, much moved. "What is your name, my boy?"

There was a moment's hesitation before the boy answered:

"Jim Valentine, sir."

"I shall remember you—if I live," said Mr. Quelch. "Now leave me, my boy—"

"Not likely!"

"My dear boy," said Mr. Quelch, "it may be death to stay here—we shall both be frozen before dawn. You can do nothing for me now—leave me! You are brave and kind—not to think of yourself—but your father."

"I have no father, sir."

"You have a mother?"

"No, sir!"

"At all events, there is someone to whom your life must be precious."

"Nobody in the jolly old world, sir—except some folk who may be looking for me at this very minute, that I don't want ever to see again," said Jim Valentine.

"My dear boy! Have you no one—"

"Nobody in the world to miss me, sir, if I was missing. So don't you worry about that."

"You have friends, at least—"

"Wrong again! I haven't."

"If I survive this dreadful night,"

said the Remove master of Greyfriars,

"you will have a friend in me, at least.

If you are, indeed, utterly alone in the world, you must need a friend—you are but a lad! But—once more I urge you to leave me, and save yourself if you can."

"Save your breath, sir," answered Jim Valentine. "I'm sticking to you! You'll be able to move again soon—and, I tell you, this path must lead somewhere."

Mr. Quelch said no more.

For long, long minutes he sat and rested. But he dragged himself to his feet again at last.

"Ready, sir?" came the boy's cheery voice.

"Yes," said Mr. Quelch faintly.

The light gleamed on again.

Mr. Quelch tottered after the sturdy lad. The light wavered more and more, glimmering low. It was soon casting only the faintest of glimmers. Still the dreary path seemed to stretch endlessly. Suddenly the light went out.

Jim Valentine slipped the torch into his pocket.

"That's done!" he said. "Rotten luck, sir! But we'll get out yet."

"I—I cannot—"

"Lean on my arm, sir."

Mr. Quelch was in a dazed state now. He tottered on, with help from the boy's strong arm. He was falling into a kind of waking dream when an exclamation from the boy startled him back into consciousness.

"By gum! That's a light."

"A light!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Look, sir!"

Far in the distance, twinkling through mist and darkness, a light gleamed. It was ruddy and stationary, and evidently came from a window. The exhausted schoolmaster felt hope revive in his breast.

"A farmhouse, perhaps—" he muttered.

"This is a cart-track we're on now," said Jim Valentine. "I fancy it leads to a farm! Hark!"

The barking of a dog came through the night. It was a rather savage bark, but it was a glad sound to the ears of Mr. Quelch. It told of a human habitation close at hand.

He realised that the wood had been left behind. He was stumbling over deep ruts, choked with snow—ruts left by heavy farm vehicles. It was the window of a farmhouse that glimmered ruddy and hopeful through the mist. Tottering, only able to proceed by the help of a sturdy young arm that supported him, Mr. Quelch moved on slowly, painfully. He heard the sound of an opening gate.

"Stick it out, sir!" came the cheery, boyish voice. "We're nearly there."

"Heaven be praised!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

He heard the furious barking of the dog, and the rattle of a chain, and a voice calling to the animal. Then he found himself in a trellised porch, and the boy was hammering at a door. The door opened, and a blaze of light came from within—and a stout, ruddy-cheeked farmer stared at them in

amazement—and then caught the hapless schoolmaster as he reeled and fell.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Missing Guest!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Oh, don't bother, Bunter!"
"Well, cheer up, for goodness' sake!" said Billy Bunter.
"What are you looking like a lot of moulting owls for?"

"Fathead!"
"If anything's happened to Quelch, I—"

"Dry up!"
"If that's what you call being civil to a guest, Wharton, I can only say—you beast!" Bob Cherry, if you chuck that cushion at me—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"
Bunter saw no reason for shutting up. He seldom did. Besides, what was there to worry about, Bunter wanted to know?

Quelch had been expected at Wharton Lodge in ample time for dinner, which was at seven. He had not come; and dinner had been dined, so to speak, without him. So far, Harry Wharton & Co. had not been unduly perturbed. It was a great honour and distinction, of course, to dine with a beak; but it was one of those privileges that a fellow could do without quite cheerfully. Colonel Wharton concluded that the fog had delayed Mr. Quelch's arrival—as, indeed, it had.

But when Mr. Quelch did not arrive at eight o'clock, there was a little anxiety on his account. The colonel rang up the railway station, and after some delay learned that a gentleman who had arrived at Wimford had taken a taxicab to Wharton Lodge, that the cab driver had returned to Wimford and reported an accident, and that he had stated that his passenger had walked on to the Lodge. As the colonel learned that all this had happened about five in the afternoon, and it was now past eight, he was naturally a little alarmed for his expected guest.

Even going slow in the fog, the Remove master should have reached the Lodge before six. There was only one explanation of his non-arrival; he had

lost his way in the mist. And for an elderly gentleman to be lost on a winter's evening in a thick mist was a serious matter, especially as search for him was impossible. If he had missed the right road he might have taken any of half a dozen.

At nine o'clock the colonel was deeply anxious. Every moment he hoped, and expected, that Mr. Quelch would come along; but he did not come along.

Harry Wharton & Co. shared the anxiety. It could hardly be said that they yearned for the rather grim and frosty company of a beak; but they were deeply concerned by the thought that Quelch had come to some harm. Bob Cherry proposed going out with lanterns to look for him. But obviously that was futile; nobody could even guess where to look. A man was already posted at the gates with a lighted lantern, and it was impracticable to do more.

The Famous Five stood in a rather thoughtful and worried group by the fire in the hall, talking in low tones. Billy Bunter sat, or rather sprawled, in a deep and comfortable armchair, his toes to the fire, and a fat and contented expression on his face. A good dinner made Bunter feel that life was worth the trouble of living, and he was not worrying about Quelch. Quite a little trouble of his own would draw loud complaints from William George Bunter. But he could bear the troubles of others with unlimited fortitude.

He blinked rather scornfully at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. As there was nothing, so far as Bunter could see, to worry about, it was rather sickening to see the whole company looking like a lot of moulting owls, as the fat junior expressed it.

"I say, you fellows, let's have the gramophone on," suggested Bunter brightly.

"For goodness' sake shut up, Bunter!" said Frank Nugent.

"Well, what about the wireless?" asked Bunter.

"My esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, "the anxiety of our absurd selves for the ridiculous Quelch is terrific and preposterous. The idiotic wireless is not the proper caper."

"Oh, really, Inky! I dare say Quelch is all right," said Bunter. "If he's been run over in the fog—"

"You fat Owl!"

"Well, I'm sorry, of course; but if we have a new Form master next term, he could hardly be worse than Quelch," argued Bunter. "He jolly well whopped me almost last thing before we broke up at Greyfriars. I had two hundred lines for him, too, and if he hadn't been laid up with a cold he would have asked me for them. I'm not at all sure he won't ask for them next term. You know what a memory he's got. I can jolly well tell you fellows that a new Form master in the Remove would be a jolly good thing."

"Kick him, somebody!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I say, you fellows, there's something jolly on the wireless to-night. Let's have it on—what?"

The chums of the Remove glared at Bunter. Anxious as they were for the gentleman lost in the fog, they were not in the least in the mood for something jolly on the wireless.

Colonel Wharton, standing at the window, was staring out into the misty night. If Mr. Quelch did not arrive soon, the colonel intended to go out in search of him with a party with lanterns, futile as he knew it to be. But every moment he hoped that the Form master would arrive.

"I say, you fellows—" recommenced Bunter.

"Do shut up, Bunter!" said Harry. "Oh, rot!" grunted Bunter. "Quelch is all right. You needn't worry, anyhow. Why, only last term you were ragging him no end—making his life a regular burden, Wharton. You know it."

Wharton breathed hard. The possibility that some serious disaster had happened to Mr. Quelch brought back into his mind many of the happenings of last term, which he would have been glad enough to forget. Snow was falling through the dim mist outside the windows, and somewhere out in the cold and snow and foggy darkness, Henry Samuel Quelch was hopelessly lost. It was not a time for the former scapegrace of Greyfriars to be reminded of his feud with his Form master.

Bob Cherry picked up a cushion. "Are you going to shut up, Bunter?" he asked.

"Beast!"
"Look out for this cushion on your silly napper, if your silly jaw wags again!" snapped Bob.

"Yah!"
Billy Bunter was silent for a whole minute. He occupied that minute by munching nuts which he had thoughtfully stacked in his pocket at dessert. The nuts demolished, Bunter naturally began to talk again. Bunter's jaws were the most active part of him, and had been well developed by incessant exercise.

"I say, you fellows—"
"Br-r-r-r!"

"Think Quelch may have walked into the pond?"

"What?"
"There's a pond on the Wimford road. Man might walk into it in the fog," said Bunter cheerfully. "I think very likely that's it."

"Dry up, ass!"
"Well, I think it's very likely. I'm sorry for old Quelch if he's stuck in that pond. I say, what's the time, Wharton?"

"Half-past nine, fathead!"
"That jolly thing comes on the wireless at nine-thirty. Shove it on, old chap. I don't want to get out of this chair."



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"Nobody answered, and nobody 'shoved on' the wireless. Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at the five.

"Getting deaf, Wharton?" he asked. "If you're too jolly lazy to shove on the wireless, touch that bell for Wells. I can't reach it from here."

"Shut up!"

"Well, I think it's rather rotten to make a fellow get out of a comfortable chair, when you're standing up!" grumbled Bunter. "But I don't want to miss that thing on the wireless. It's really jolly, I believe."

And Bunter heaved his weight out of the armchair. He rose to his feet, but only for a moment. The cushion was ready in Bob Cherry's hand, and it flew.

Bump!

Bunter sat down again as the cushion landed on his well-filled waistcoat. He roared.

"Yaroooooh! Beast! Whoooooop!"

Colonel Wharton looked round sharply from the window with knitted brows. But at that moment the telephone bell rang in the cabinet adjoining the hall. With swift strides the old colonel went to the instrument.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched him anxiously, heedless of the fat Owl, spluttering with indignant wrath in the armchair. They hoped it was news of the expected guest. And they were glad to see that the cloud of anxiety had lifted from the colonel's brow when he came back into the hall.

"Thank goodness, Mr. Quelch is safe, my boys!" said the colonel. "The message was from Mr. Giles, of Shepoot Farm—five miles from here."

"Mr. Quelch is there?" asked Harry.

"Yes. It appears that he was lost in the woods, and some boy found him and guided him to the farmhouse. He is staying at Shepoot Farm for the night, and Mr. Giles has very kindly walked to a neighbour, who has a telephone, to let us know. Mr. Quelch is very much exhausted, but he is unharmed, and will be with us to-morrow."

"Oh, good!"

"The goodness is terrific."

Colonel Wharton went to tell the good news to Aunt Amy, and the relieved juniors exchanged looks of satisfaction.

"Poor old Quelch!" said Bob Cherry. "He must have had some walk, if he ended up at a place five miles away. Thank goodness it's no worse."

"The thankfulness is—"

"Terrific!" chuckled Bob. "Not to say preposterous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I think it's rather heartless to laugh at poor old Quelch getting lost in the snow and fog, and having to walk miles and miles," said Billy Bunter reprovingly. "I must say I'm rather shocked at you."

"You fat blighter!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull, I'm bound to say I'm shocked at you," said Bunter firmly. "Quelch is a beast, I know—an utter beast—but I jolly well think—"

Billy Bunter did not have time to state what he jolly well thought. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull grasped him together, and rolled him out of the armchair. And as he sprawled and roared on the floor, Hurree Janset Ram Singh up-ended the big chair over him.

Fearful yells came from underneath the up-ended chair. Harry Wharton & Co., quite cheerful now, strolled away, and left the Owl of the Remove to yell, and sort himself out at his leisure.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Meeting!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Snore!

"Wake up, Bunter, old bean!"

Snore!

The earliest glimmer of dawn was on the windows. The mist had gone with the night, and there was a frosty clearness in the air. Bob Cherry put a ruddy cheerful face in at Bunter's door, and roared.

Bunter was fast asleep. Bob Cherry's stentorian voice might have awakened Rip Van Winkle, or the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. But it did not awaken William George Bunter. He snored regardless.

"Come on, Bob!" called Harry Wharton. "Never mind Bunter."

"But we must mind Bunter," said Bob. "Didn't he tell us he was shocked at us last night? That shows that he's more anxious about Quelch than we are. So it stands to reason that he will be keen to turn out and walk over to Shepoot Farm before brekker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob strode into Bunters' room. Bunter's snore went on unchecked. But it was checked, all of a sudden, when Bob dipped a sponge into a jug of icy water, and squeezed the same over the sleeper's fat face. Billy Bunter woke up all of a sudden, then.

"Urrrrgh! Groogh! Whooogh!" spluttered Bunter. "What the thump— Ooogh! Beast! What rotter— What— Urrgh!"

"Wake up, old bean!" roared Bob.

"It's just daylight!"

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "Think I'm getting up at daylight! Rotter! Go and eat coke! Keep that sponge away, you rotter! Wow!"

"I've called you specially—"

"Rotter! Gerraway!"

"But there's something on—something special—and we couldn't leave you out!" urged Bob.

"Oh!" Billy Bunter sat up in bed, knuckled his sleepy eyes, and blinked at Bob's cheery face. "What's on, then?"

If there was "something special" on, Billy Bunter did not want to be left out, though he doubted whether anything in the wide world could possibly make it worth while to get up at dawn.

"We're going out before brekker."

"What utter rot!"

"To walk over to Shepoot Farm—"

"Eh?"

"And see Quelch, and see if he's all right."

"What?"

"It's only five miles—"

"You—you—you silly idiot!" gasped Bunter. "You lunatic! You dangerous maniac! Think I want to get up for that?"

"Well, don't you?" grinned Bob.

"No," roared Bunter. "I don't! Blow Quelch! Blow you! Blow everybody! Lemme alone! I'm not getting up! Fathead! Ass! Idiot! Freak! Clump! Lunatic! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the passage, and four grinning faces looked in at the door. All the Co. were up and dressed at that unearthly hour.

Billy Bunter blinked at them in almost speechless wrath. Bunter would hardly have turned out at dawn, to dig up a buried treasure. And to turn out on a bitter morning, at the first gleam of daylight, to walk five miles to see a Form master—before breakfast, too—no words in any known language could have expressed Bunter's opinion of such a stunt as that.

"Coming, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No!" yelled Bunter. "Get out! Leave a fellow alone! Beast!"

"Aren't you anxious about Quelch?" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Blow Quelch! Bless Quelch! Gerr-out!"

"Then you're not getting up?" asked Bob.

"No!" shrieked Bunter.

"Your mistake; you are!" said Bob Cherry. "Up with that window, Johnny, and we'll freeze him out!"

Bull promptly pushed up the sash, while Bob grabbed the bedclothes and swept them off to the floor.

Billy Bunter, clad only in his pyjamas, sat up on the bed, shivering in the frosty air of the early winter morning.

"Sure you won't come now, Bunter?" chuckled Nugent.

"Urrgh! Ooogh! It's c-c-c-cold! Beast! Rotter!" yelled Bunter. "Yah! R-r-rotter! B-b-beast! Woogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cheery five went on their way, leaving Billy Bunter still telling them at the top of his voice what he thought of them.

It was some minutes before Bunter was snugly tucked in bed again, and snoring. By that time the Famous Five had let themselves out of the house, and were walking cheerily down the dusky drive.

The cold was keen, and there was frozen snow on the road; but five faces were ruddy and bright as the juniors tramped away for Shepoot Farm. The frosty air of the early winter morning was invigorating—not that the cheery chums of the Remove needed much invigorating. Bob Cherry whistled as he walked—a whistle that was full of cheery spirits, though rather out of tune. The sun came up higher over snowy lanes and frosty woods.

Harry Wharton, who knew every foot of the ways about his home, led them by lanes and woodland paths, treading often in the tracks of Mr. Quelch the night before, if they had only known it. But the woodland paths in the clear winter sunlight, were very different from what they had been like in the black, foggy night. Five miles by snowy and icy ways was a good walk, but the chums of Greyfriars enjoyed it all the way.

They came in sight of Shepoot Farm at last, its roofs gleaming with snow in the sharp sunlight. They were following the rutty track by which Mr. Quelch's guide had led his tottering steps the night before. It led to the farm gate, and, sitting on the gate, with his hands in his pockets, was a lad who, even at a distance, had a familiar look to the eyes of the juniors.

"I've seen that chap before," said Bob Cherry.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Who the dickens—"

"It's that kid—the kid in the park—

Jim Valentine."

"Great pip!"

All the fellows knew him now, and they hurried their steps. They had wondered a good deal what had become of the mysterious fugitive, and whether they would ever see him again. It was amazing to see him sitting on the gate of the farm where Mr. Quelch had taken refuge the night before, looking as if he belonged to the place.

The boy saw them suddenly, and his eyes fixed on them. He jumped from the gate, and came to meet them.

"You here, old bean!" exclaimed Bob Cherry cordially. "You dodged the nosy gent all right, then?"

Jim Valentine grinned.

"Yes; I got away all right. I'm glad to see you fellows again. I've

wanted to thank you for standing by me like you did."

"Glad to see you," said Harry. "Are you staying here?"

"Well, I stayed here last night," said Valentine. "I should have cut before this, but there's an old gent wants to talk to me before I go. He's not down yet."

"The farmer?" asked Harry, rather puzzled.

"Oh, no! A jolly old schoolmaster!" The Famous Five stared.

"Quelch?" exclaimed Nugent.

"That's his name. You know him?" asked Valentine, in surprise.

"Well, just a few!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "You see, he happens to be our jolly old schoolmaster. He's our master at Greyfriars."

"We've come over to see him," explained Wharton.

"Well, my hat," said Jim Valentine, in astonishment. "I never imagined that—"

"He was coming to our place last night, when he got lost," said Harry.

"My uncle was told on the phone that a boy guided him here. I suppose you're the boy?"

Valentine nodded.

"Yes. He was lost, and I was lost, too, so we joined up, and got here together," he answered. "Not much guiding about it, though. I never knew the way any more than he did. We were jolly lucky to get out of that beastly wood, after the torch petered out, too."

"Quelch is all right?"

"Oh, right as rain! He seems a tough old bird," said Valentine. "Only tired. And he's your master at school. My hat!"

He whistled.

"He seems a decent sort of man," he remarked, after a pause.

"One of the best," answered Bob.

"Rather a stiff old gent, but all wool and a yard wide."

"We esteem him terrifically," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—a remark that made Jim Valentine stare for a moment.

"You—you what?" he ejaculated.

"We esteem him terrifically. He is ratherfully a stiff and severe codger, but the good qualities of his ridiculous character are absurd and preposterous," explained the nabob.

"Oh!" gasped Valentine. "My hat! I—I—I see."

The juniors chuckled.

"Inky learned English under the most wise and learned moonshoe in India," Bob Cherry explained. "It makes strangers jump sometimes."

Valentine stared again.

"Inky!" he repeated. "Your name can't be Inky, surely?"

"Not at all-fully," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "That is an esteemed and preposterous jest of my ridiculous friends."

"We call him Inky because of his pale, lily-white complexion," Bob further explained. "His full name is Hurree Bang Jampot Wallop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My esteemed and idiotic Bob—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Quelch!" exclaimed Bob

The tall and angular figure of the Remove master appeared in the doorway of the farmhouse, at a distance. Mr. Quelch looked a little pale, but otherwise none the worse for his trying experiences of the night. He caught sight of the juniors near the gate, and gave them a smile, and they capped him respectfully. Then he turned back into the house.

"Come on!" said Harry.

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"Hold on a minute!" said Jim Valentine. "I—I say—" He paused and coloured. "I—I never knew you knew anything of that old gent, of course, and—and—" He broke off again. "Look here. I've told you some things—"

He was silent, his cheeks crimson. The juniors glanced at him curiously.

"Cough it up," said Bob, in wonder. "What's biting you?"

"I've told you some things—about Nosey and the gang, and—and—" Jim Valentine stammered. "Of course, you won't repeat anything I've said—I wouldn't like that schoolmaster to know anything—"

"Of course not," said Harry. "Why should we?"

"Well, I'd rather you didn't," said the boy. "I—I—I'd rather that old gent never heard anything about it."

"He won't hear anything about it from us," said Bob. "We're not tattlers, old bean! It's your bisney, not ours."

"That's all right, then," said the boy, evidently greatly relieved; and the Famous Five walked on to the farmhouse, leaving Jim Valentine sitting on the gate again.

There was a strangely thoughtful expression on the boy's handsome face, and strange thoughts were in his mind—thoughts which would have surprised the chums of Greyfriars had they guessed them.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Jim Valentine's Luck!

MR. QUELCH was sitting down to breakfast in the farmhouse when the Famous Five presented themselves.

He rose again and shook hands very cordially with the juniors, evidently rather pleased that they had walked so far, at such an early hour, to see him. Harry Wharton was well known at Shep-cot Farm, and as Mrs. Giles learned that the juniors had not yet breakfasted the good dame insisted upon their breakfasting there—a kind offer which the juniors were only too pleased to accept after walking five miles on a frosty morning.

So they sat down to breakfast with their Form master. Jim Valentine had broken his fast long ago, and he did not come in. From the window the juniors could see him swinging on the farm gate.

Mr. Quelch was very genial—unbending very considerably—in fact, being hardly recognisable as the stern and severe "beak" of Greyfriars School. Over breakfast he told the juniors of his misadventures of the night before, and they learned how Jim Valentine had helped him. There was something like emotion in Mr. Quelch's voice as he spoke of the boy.

"A good lad, a brave lad," he said more than once. "It is quite possible that I may owe him my life! Both of us might have perished in the cold, yet, though I was a total stranger to him, he refused to leave me and look after himself. A very brave and generous lad!"

"He looks a decent sort," said Bob.

"Yes, I saw you speaking with him at the gate," said Mr. Quelch. "You do not happen to know the boy?"

Evidently Mr. Quelch's keen eyes had not failed to note that the Greyfriars fellows had greeted Jim Valentine, not exactly as a stranger.

"We've met him, sir," answered Harry. "He had a spill on a motor-

bike near Wharton Lodge the day before yesterday. We rather liked him."

"The likefulness was terrific."

"I understand that he belongs to London," said Mr. Quelch. "It is rather odd that he should be wandering about the countryside alone. I must speak to him before I leave here."

Breakfast over, Mr. Quelch rose to his feet. "Perhaps you will ask Valentine to come in and see me. Then I will walk to Wharton Lodge with you."

The juniors, thus politely dismissed, left the farmhouse and went down to the gate with Mr. Quelch's message to the boy. Valentine nodded, and went slowly up to the farmhouse, still with that strangely thoughtful expression on his face. The Famous Five sat in a row on the gate to wait.

Mr. Quelch gave the boy a kind smile as he came in. Jim Valentine was not looking the cool, self-possessed fellow he had seemed before. His manner was a little hesitating, and his cheeks were flushed. His dark hazel eyes watched Mr. Quelch's face, curiously, almost a little furtively.

"Sit down, my boy, said the Remove master of Greyfriars. "I must have a little talk with you. After the great, the inestimable service you rendered me last night, you will understand that I take a very deep interest in you."

"You're very kind, sir," muttered the boy.

He sat down, with his face turned from the sunlight at the window.

"You have told me already," pursued Mr. Quelch, "that you have no parents, and no friends. You are alone in the world?"

There was a brief pause.

"But you have a home?"

"No, sir."

"You do not look like a homeless lad, my boy," said the Remove master gently. "You are well dressed, evidently cared for, and I should certainly suppose that you are supplied with money from your appearance."

"I haven't a single coin of any sort, sir." The colour deepened in the boy's face. "I—I had, but—but I threw it away."

"That is a very strange statement, Valentine." The gimlet eyes of the Remove master were fixed on the crimson face. "I told you last night, Valentine, in that dreadful wood, that you had found a friend. Surely you are in need of one?"

"Nobody ever needed one more, sir," faltered Valentine. "But—"

"I shall stand your friend," said Mr. Quelch, "and I urge you to confide your circumstances to me so that I may be of assistance to you."

The boy was silent.

"You trust me, surely?" said Mr. Quelch. "I am a schoolmaster—a Form master—at Greyfriars—the school to which those boys belong, whom, I understand, you have already met."

"Yes, sir. But—"

"You have been to school, of course?"

"Yes, sir. I left last year, when my uncle died. There was nobody to see me through after that."

"What have you done since?"

No answer.

"You may be sure, Valentine, that I am not questioning you from any motives of curiosity," said Mr. Quelch, in his most stately manner. "I cannot, in conscience, leave you without ascertaining whether I can be of assistance to you. A boy at your age ought not to be wandering about the country, at his own devices. Your statement that you threw away what money you had is so very odd—"



Supporting Mr. Quelch with one hand, Jim Valentine banged on the farmhouse door with the other. The door opened, and a ruddy-cheeked farmer stood in the blazing light, staring at the visitors in amazement!

"I couldn't keep it, sir," muttered the boy. "I ran away to make a clean break! I'd have starved rather—"

"Does that mean that you have been in bad hands?"

Valentine was silent again. What would this respectable, kind-hearted schoolmaster think if he was told of Nosey Clark and the gang? What would he think if he was told that the boy before him, no older than a Remove boy of Greyfriars, was known by another name to the police of London—known only by the slang name of "Dick the Penman"? Crime and crooks never came the way of a Greyfriars Form Master—the underworld was a world of which they knew nothing at Greyfriars.

What would he have thought if he had known that the mysterious, hunted penman, long wanted by the police, who could write any man's name so that the man himself could not tell it from his own signature—was before him? Not that Mr. Quelch had ever heard of "Dick the Penman," or was ever likely to hear of him.

But the unhappy boy could picture the horror that would grow in the kindly face, the instinctive shrinking of a man to whom dishonesty was a foul thing, if he knew.

"Surely you will confide in me, my boy," said Mr. Quelch, breaking the long silence at last. "I can help you—I will help—and I must help you! If you have been in bad hands, that is all the more reason why you should confide in me, and let me stand by you as a friend."

"You could help me, sir, if you liked," muttered Valentine. "I—I can't answer all your questions. I can tell you this much—I was in bad hands, and I ran away. It was thieves' money that was in my pockets, and I threw it away—plenty of it, too! I'd die rather than touch it again! I've got nothing but the clothes I stand up in. I should be starv-

ing now if they hadn't given me food here. And when I go I may be going to starve. I don't care much, so long as I keep clear of that lot. That's all I can tell you, sir."

"That is more than enough to make me determined to befriend you, my dear boy," answered the Remove master, deeply moved. "You have only to say how I can assist you, and you will not find me wanting."

"You mean that, sir?" said the boy eagerly.

Mr. Quelch's face grew grim for a moment. He was not accustomed to being asked if he meant what he said.

"You may rely upon it that I am speaking sincerely, Valentine," said the Remove master quietly. "I am not a man to speak idle words."

"Sorry, sir—of course, I know that; but—but—I haven't the cheek to ask you—" But as his voice faltered Jim Valentine's dark, handsome eyes watched the Form master's face eagerly, almost hungrily.

"Speak!" said Mr. Quelch.

"You're a schoolmaster, sir!" faltered Valentine. "If you could let me come to your school—"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

Evidently he was taken by surprise. Valentine, in silence, watched him. His heart seemed to be in his eyes as he watched. Mr. Quelch was silent for a few moments.

"I—I may not have made the matter quite clear," he said, hesitating, at last. "I am a Form master, not a headmaster. At a school like Greyfriars a boy's antecedents must be known. It is not merely a question of the school fees, which I would gladly provide, but—"

Jim Valentine rose.

"I knew it was asking too much, sir," he said quietly. "All you know of me is that I've been in bad hands. That's

not good enough! I oughtn't to have asked; but—but it seemed such a chance, if—if you could have done it! But, of course, you couldn't. Good-bye, sir!"

"Stop!"

"Let me go, sir!" said Jim. "I want to get clear of these parts, and I've got to foot it—"

"Stop!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Can you imagine, for one moment, that I shall allow you to go—penniless, friendless? Assuredly not!"

"I've got to get used to it, sir," said Valentine, with a faint grin. "I'm not taking any money from you, sir, if that's what you mean! I'm not going to be a rogue—nor a beggar, either!"

"What you asked me," said Mr. Quelch, "is a difficult matter—more difficult than you can guess. But your desire to go to school is very worthy—very worthy indeed. I was taken somewhat by surprise; I must consider the matter. I have some influence with the headmaster of Greyfriars. It is possible that the matter might be arranged. In such a case, Valentine, you understand that I should have to answer for you personally—to guarantee that you are a suitable boy to be admitted to the school. The responsibility would rest entirely on me. But—"

"You can't do it, sir! I oughtn't to have asked. But when you told me you were a schoolmaster, I thought—"

"Such a matter must be carefully considered," said Mr. Quelch. "While it is under consideration, Valentine, you will be in my care. I cannot permit you to wander into the world alone—indeed, I fear that want might drive you back into what, I am assured, you desire to avoid. No, my boy, when you leave here, you shall take the train from Wimford—I shall provide you with money for your journey—and you will

go to Greyfriars School, in Kent. I shall write you a letter to take to Mrs. Kebble, the housekeeper, who will receive you, and care for you in every way, till I return there, in a few days' time. You will await my return, and in the meantime I shall consider the matter and decide whether I can do as you wish."

"Oh, sir!" faltered Valentine.

"We must leave it at that," said Mr. Quelch kindly. "In any case, I shall certainly befriend you, and see that you do not want. Say no more, Valentine. I am taking responsibility for you now, and if I am any judge of character, you will not give me cause to regret it."

A quarter of an hour later Mr. Quelch joined the waiting juniors, and they walked away to Wharton Lodge. Jim Valentine watched them go, the letter Mr. Quelch had given him in his hand.

When they were out of sight the boy crossed to the fire and stood there, his hand raised with the letter in it. The kindness of the Greyfriars Form master opened a new prospect before him—school, a chance in life, safety from Nosey and the gang—the washing out of the past that was like a nightmare in his thoughts. And yet—If he had told that kindly man all! If he had told him that the boy Jim Valentine was "Dick the Penman," wanted by the police!

To throw the letter into the fire, to go his own desolate and dangerous way, was the thought in his mind now. He hesitated long. But at last, when he left the farmhouse, the letter was in his pocket. For good or for ill, the die was cast. And his spirits rose when the train was bearing him away swiftly through the snowy landscape.

Greyfriars School, in vacation time, was deserted and silent. It would have seemed dismal enough to any Greyfriars fellow. But to Jim Valentine it was a haven of refuge; and as, in the following days, he strolled in the silent old quad, and wandered over the deserted playing fields, he counted the hours till the return of the Remove master, when he was to know his fate.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Information Received!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. found Mr. Quelch quite an agreeable guest at Wharton Lodge.

Even Billy Bunter decided that he was not nearly such a beast as might naturally have been expected! Quelch, indeed, seemed hardly like a beak at all—he was, Bunter admitted, quite a human being!

The juniors had several long walks with Quelch, who was a great walker—Bunter not joining in them. On one such walk, through the frosty woods, they found Mr. Quelch's suitcase, and recovered it for him, much to the Remove master's satisfaction.

On those walks Mr. Quelch spoke several times of the strange lad who had come to his help, and always with a note of kindness in his voice. But of what the boy had asked of him he said nothing. That was a matter requiring deep cogitation and discussion with the headmaster of Greyfriars, and it was judicious to say nothing till the matter was settled.

And Harry Wharton & Co., though they thought many times of Jim Valentine, never dreamed where he was passing those very days, or that it was

possible that they might see him at Greyfriars when the new term began.

Mr. Quelch remained three days at Wharton Lodge, and the days seemed to pass pleasantly enough for him. Once he had to call at Wimford Police Station with reference to the motor collision.

The abandoned car had been left on the road; but it had since been claimed by a Mr. Barney Hayes, a gentleman with a red moustache. That gentleman met the Wimford taxi-man's claims for damages with unexpected readiness, and that matter was satisfactorily settled—Nosey Clarke & Co. probably being anxious to wind up with speed any matter in which the police was involved!

Mr. Quelch dismissed the affair from his mind, never dreaming of guessing that it was from Mr. Barney Hayes' wrecked car that the boy he had befriended had escaped, and that, but for the collision in the fog, he would never have met Jim Valentine.

On the morning when Mr. Quelch took his departure, Harry Wharton & Co. packed into the colonel's car with him, to see him off at the station—a little act of respectful attention that Quelch seemed rather to like.

There was no doubt that he was now on the very best terms with Harry Wharton, who had been the scapegrace of the school last term. The Remove master had no opportunity of saying good-bye to Bunter, who was not yet down—it was only ten o'clock when Mr. Quelch drove to the station! Perhaps he forgot Bunter—undoubtedly Bunter forgot him!

The fat Owl came rolling down about an hour later. He blinked at Wells, whom he found in the hall.

"Where are they?" he inquired.

"The young gentlemen have gone to the station with Mr. Quelch, sir!" answered Wells.

Snort from Bunter.

"What rot!" he said. "I should think they see enough of him at Greyfriars! I know I do! Thank goodness he's gone, anyhow!"

Wells coughed in reply to that.

"Is the old geezer gone, too?" asked Bunter.

"If you refer to Colonel Wharton, sir, the master has driven the car to the station," said Wells, with stately dignity.

"Are they coming straight back?"

"I believe, sir, that the master is going to take the young gentlemen for a drive till lunch," said Wells.

Another snort from Bunter.

"So I'm left on my own here!" he exclaimed warmly.

"It would appear so, sir!" assented Wells.

"Rotters!" said Bunter. "Just like them! This is what Wharton calls treating a guest decently, I suppose. It's not the way we treat guests at Bunter Court."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Leaving a fellow on his own! Just like Wharton, I must say! I was rather a fool not to go home with Lord Maul-ever for Christmas! Lord Maul-ever is my closest chum at Greyfriars, Wells."

"Dear me!" said Wells.

"We're like brothers," said Bunter affably. "He begged me with almost tears in his eyes to go home with him for Christmas. I stuck to Wharton. I felt that I couldn't let him down! This is how I am repaid! What the thump are you grinning at, Wells?"

Wells glided away without explaining

what he was grinning at. Perhaps Bunter guessed, however, for he blinked after the portly butler with a disapproving blink.

Left on his own, Bunter would have condescended to bestow his charming company and his entertaining conversation on Wells—if Wells had been taking any. Wells having disappeared, Bunter bestowed them on Robert, the manservant; but Robert was quickly called away by some duty or other. He looked for Miss Wharton, as a last resource, and found that Aunt Amy had gone out driving with some local acquaintance.

The fat junior at last went out for a walk, reflecting bitterly that this was a nice way to treat a fellow who was honouring a humble roof with his distinguished company. But Bunter, as a matter of fact, was destined to find company that morning—unexpected company. As he rolled along the Wimford Road, keeping an eye open for the returning car, he sighted a thin-faced man, with a beaky nose, and blinked at him. He remembered that nose—and the next moment he remembered the man himself. It was Mr. Compton Clark, who had called on Colonel Wharton concerning his vanished ward.

Mr. Clark glanced at Bunter and stopped.

Bunter grinned.

"Still hunting for him?" he inquired.

Billy Bunter was not bright; but he was bright enough to guess that if Mr. Clark was still hanging about the neighbourhood of Wharton Lodge it was because he had not found Jim Valentine, and was still hoping to pick up a clue to the boy who had disappeared.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Compton Clark and several friends of his had been watching Wharton Lodge for days, though they had been very careful about it, and the juniors had seen nothing of them.

"Good-morning, young sir!" said Mr. Clark pleasantly, though the steely gleam in his hawkish eyes belied the pleasant expression on his face. "Yes, I am still looking for my ward. No doubt you could tell me where to look for him if you wished."

Mr. Compton Clark glanced up the road and down the road. There was no one in sight. Mr. Clark and Billy Bunter had the country road to themselves, for the moment.

He dropped a hand on Bunter's fat arm.

"Step into the wood, please, Master Bunter," he said.

Bunter blinked at him in astonishment through his big spectacles.

"What on earth for?" he asked.

"Because," said Mr. Clark pleasantly, "I shall twist your arm—like that—until you do!"

"Ow!" squeaked Bunter.

It was quite a painful twist. The crook's fingers seemed like steel. Billy Bunter stepped off the road into the screening trees in a great hurry. He did not want another twist.

"I—I say, what's the game?" he asked in alarm. "I say—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Mr. Clark, still with a grip on Bunter's arm, led him deeper into the wood. Bunter had no choice about going; but his alarm grew greater and greater as he went. He remembered that the strange boy had said that this man was a crook; and his actions were undoubtedly alarming.

"I—I say, I've got no money," stammered Bunter, "and—and my watch is— is really rolled gold, you know."

"You fat fool!"

Mr. Clark stopped at last and

slammed the fat junior against a tree. He stood quite near him, his steely, hawkish eyes gleaming.

"Now, Master Bunter," he said, in a low, quiet voice, that had a tone of menace in it that made Bunter's fat flesh creep. "Now, listen to me. The boy of whom I am in search took refuge in Wharton Lodge a few days ago. He was befriended by your friends there and they gave him shelter. The countryside has been searched for him and no trace of him found. It is quite clear to me that he is still at Wharton Lodge, and that your friends are keeping him in hiding."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "You will tell me the truth," said Mr. Clark, in the same quiet, deadly tone. "I may tell you that I have been watching for an opportunity to find one of the boys alone, to question him. Where is Jim Valentine?"

"I—I don't know," stammered Bunter. The steely grip was laid on the fat arm again. His arm was twisted till he gurgled with pain.

"Will you tell me the truth now?" asked Mr. Clark, between his teeth. "I warn you that you will regret it if you do not."

Billy Bunter blinked at the ruffian in terror. He had told the truth, but evidently Mr. Clark had his own ideas about that. Jim Valentine had vanished from all knowledge after the collision in the fog, and the fact that the Greyfriars juniors had befriended him and sheltered him once made it seem extremely probable to Nosey Clark that the fugitive had found refuge with them again. As the truth was not good enough for Mr. Clark, Bunter was prepared to hand out the other thing. That, indeed, was his usual resource in a time of difficulty.

"I—I say, leggo my arm!" he gasped. "I—I'll tell you, if—if you like." "The boy is at Wharton Lodge?"

"No—yes," amended Bunter hastily as he caught the threatening glitter in the hawkish eyes.

"Does Colonel Wharton know?"

"No," gasped Bunter. That was the truth, at least.

"I thought that was it!" Mr. Clark nodded. "The young fools are hiding him somewhere. Is that it?"

"That's it!" gasped Bunter. "Where?"

"In—in that hut by the lake—"

"The hut by the lake has been searched, several times," said Mr. Clark. His eyes glittered again.

"I—I mean he—he was there, but now—now they're hiding him in—in the—" Bunter cudgelled his fat brain for something that Mr. Clark would be willing to believe. "They—they've got him in—in the room over the garage!"

Bunter was immensely relieved to see that Mr. Clark believed this, and he went on with more confidence. "You see, they've tipped the chauffeur to keep it dark, and he takes in meals for the kid—see?"

"I see," said Mr. Clark. He let go Bunter's arm and stepped back. "I shall call on Colonel Wharton to-morrow and request him to hand the boy over."

Bunter suppressed a grin. Mr. Compton Clark, having done with Bunter, walked away through the frosty wood, and Billy Bunter hurried back to the road, much relieved to have done with Mr. Clark. And when Harry Wharton & Co. came back from their drive the fat owl told them, with many chuckles over his own astuteness, how he had pulled Mr. Nosey Clark's leg, and that the nosy man was going to call the

next day. And, for the first time on record, Billy Bunter found interested hearers.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Cold Reception!

MIDNIGHT!

Not a light gleamed from the many windows of Wharton Lodge.

The house seemed buried in slumber in the darkness of the winter's night. The garage, at a little distance, was as dark and silent as the house. No one would have guessed that five members of the household were wide awake and out of bed, and certainly Mr. Nosey Clark did not guess it as he trod softly and silently through the soundless snow, with a red-moustached man and another slinking figure at his heels.

The three shadowy figures stopped close by the garage.

"All clear, gov'nor!" whispered the man with the red moustache.

"Quiet!" Mr. Compton Clark glanced round quickly at the sound of a faint rustle.

"Only the wind, gov'nor." "We've got to get the boy away quietly," whispered the crook. "Easy enough for you to crack a crib like this, Nutty."

"With my eyes shut!" answered the third man.

The hawkish eyes searched the shadows. At a little distance was a bank of laurels, thick with snow. It seemed to Mr. Clark that the rustle came from that direction. But all was still again.

But the man with the vulture's beak was uneasy and suspicious.

"I told that fat fool that I should call to-morrow and see the master of the house," he muttered. "But—but if he told them they might guess that that was only a blind."

"A set of silly schoolboys!" grunted Barney. "Bet you they're in bed and fast asleep long ago, gov'nor. You get going on that lock, Nutty Nixon."

Nosey Clark listened intently, uneasily. But there was no sound. He was satisfied at last, and he signed to his confederate to begin on the lock of the garage door. Nutty Nixon bent over to his task, and Nosey Clark and Barney stood watching him in silence.

In silence, also, five shadowy figures rose from behind the laurel bank.

Harry Wharton & Co. were not in bed and asleep, by any means. Billy Bunter had been much amused by the idea of Mr. Clark calling on the morrow to see Colonel Wharton. But the Famous Five had had a suspicion that Mr. Clark would not leave his call till the morrow.

Knowing, as he believed, where to lay hands on Jim Valentine, the chums of the Remove thought it extremely probable that Mr. Clark would seek to lay hands on him. For which reason they had slipped down quietly by Harry Wharton's window after going to bed, and ever since had been watching the garage. Behind the laurel bank was a heap of snowballs, ready made, and each of the juniors had a snowball in his hand as he rose from cover. In the dimness of the night they could make out the three shadowy figures grouped by the garage door.

"Go it!" whispered Wharton.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

There was a startled howl from Nosey Clark as two snowballs together crashed on the back of his head and pitched him forward. He crashed into Nutty Nixon, and that gentleman spun round, with a startled oath, just in

time to catch a snowball with his eye. Barney Hayes staggered as one landed in his ear.

"Go it!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Give 'em beans!"

"The beanfulness is terrific!"

"What the thunder—" gasped the red-moustached man. "Oh, thunder! Ow!"

A snowball smashed on his mouth, filling it with powdery snow.

Crash, crash, crash! the snowballs landed. The juniors had a big heap of ammunition at hand, and they kept up a rapid fusillade. Snowballs, hard and heavy, fairly rained on the astonished crooks.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "That's for your nose, Nosey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nosey Clark spluttered with rage—and snow. His misgivings had been well founded. That midnight visit had been expected and watched for. In his rage he made a stride towards the laurel bank, from which the rain of missiles came. But Barney caught him by the arm.

"Don't be a fool, Nosey! Ooogh!" he gurgled, as a snowball crashed in his face. "Hook it! We can't get the boy now! Hook it, I tell you! Do you want the whole House woke and the police here? Get going!"

It was good advice, and Nosey Clark realised it. Nutty Nixon was already running, and Nosey, with the red-moustached man dragging at his arm, followed.

"After them!" shouted Johnny Bull.

"Give 'em jip!"

The Famous Five emerged from cover, snowballs in hand. They rushed in pursuit, whizzing the last of their missiles after the fleeing trio. Nosey Clark & Co., spluttering and panting, vanished into the night, and a few minutes later the snorting of a car was heard on the road. Nosey & Co. were gone—for that night, at least!

"What larks!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as the chums of the Remove turned back. "It was worth sitting up for—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The rathfulness is terrific!" chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It was quite a surprise for the esteemed and ridiculous Nosey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The house was still silent when the juniors clambered in by the balcony to Wharton's window. The chums of the Remove went back to bed, chuckling over the surprise they had given Nosey & Co. To the minds of the schoolboys the affair was rather a "lark." But Colonel Wharton, when he was told in the morning, took a much more serious view of it, and he communicated with the police. It was possible that Nosey Clark, if he still believed that the lost boy was at Wharton Lodge, might make another attempt—a prospect that made the juniors chuckle, as Jim Valentine was not there, and they had not the foggiest idea where he might possibly be.

They little guessed when and where they were to again meet the boy from the underworld.

THE END.

"THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOL-BOY!" is the title of the second yarn in this magnificent new series, starring Jim Valentine, the boy from the underworld, and the chums of Greyfriars. It will appear in next Saturday's bumper number of the MAGNET, which will also contain six more FREE picture-stamps. See that you order your copy early, chums!

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