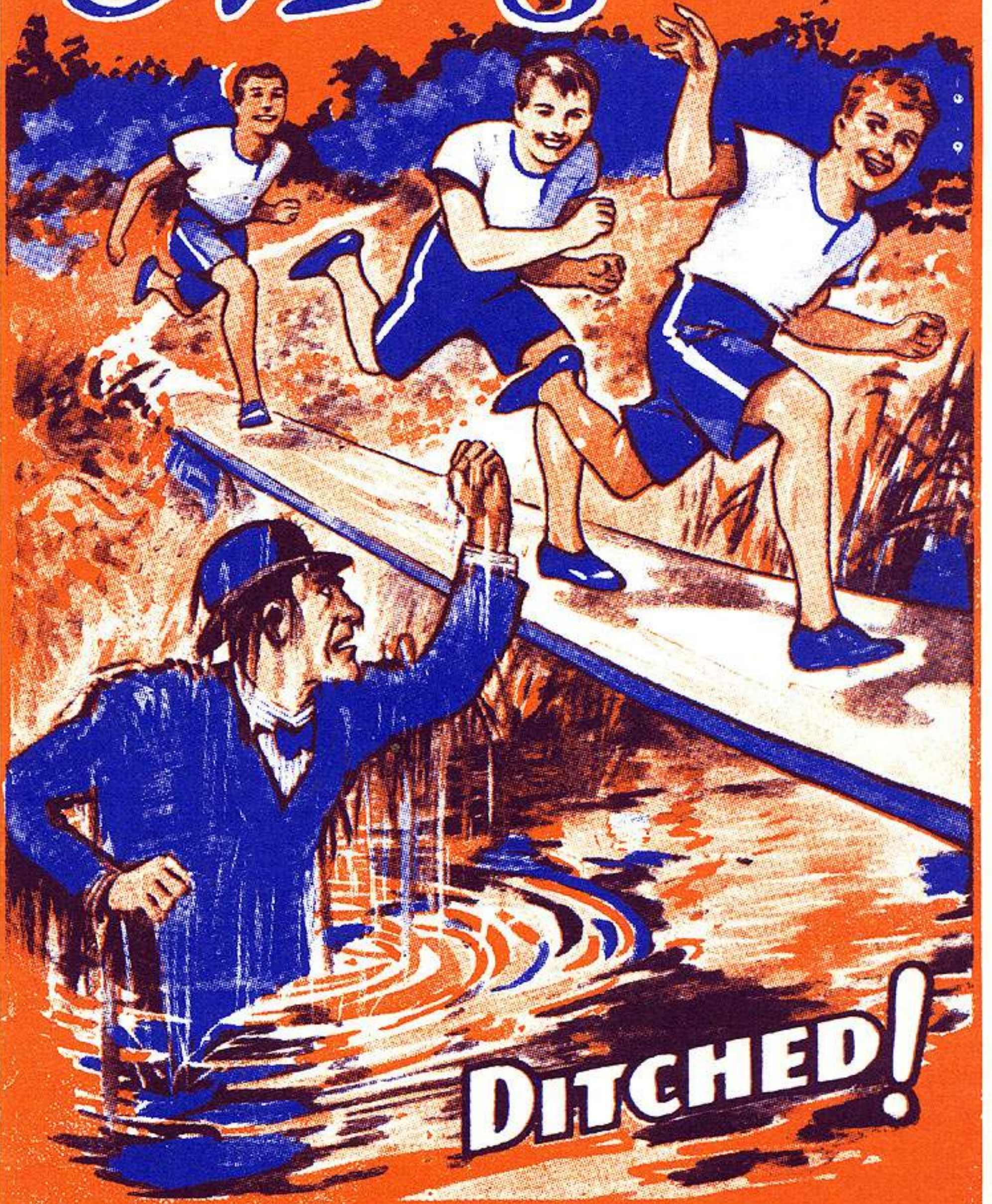
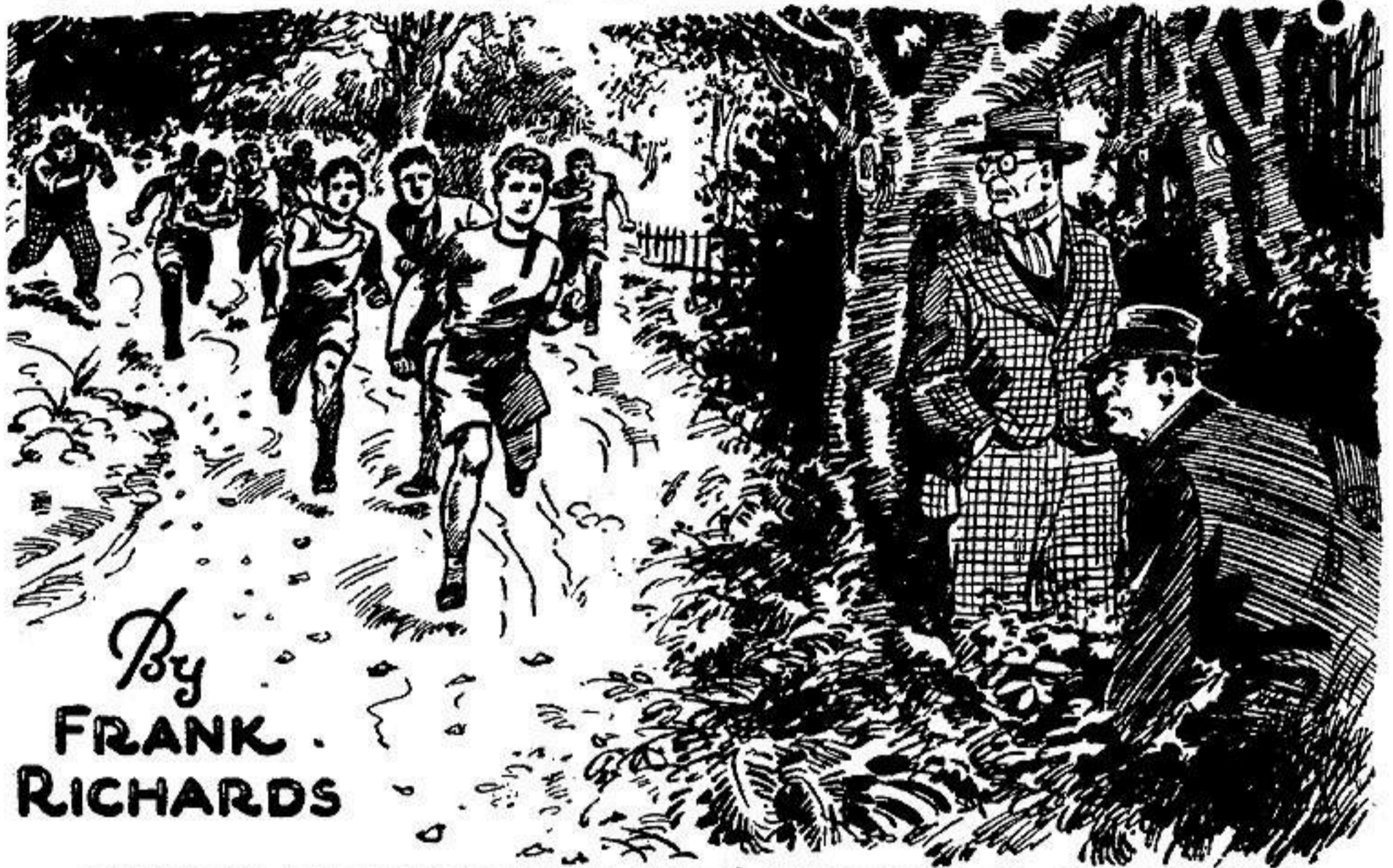


Harry Wharton & Co. in another "THE GANGSTERS SWOOP!" By Frank Richards
Thrilling Schoolboy Adventure . . .

The Magnet 2^o



The GANGSTERS SWOOP!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

FEATURING THE WORLD-FAMOUS HARRY WHARTON & CO., OF GREYFRIARS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter is Too Obliging!

"SHUT that door!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I say—"
"Shut it!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut that door!" yelled six or seven voices in chorus.

"But—" howled Billy Bunter.

"You fat ass, shut that door!"

Instead of shutting the door of Study No. 1, Billy Bunter blinked in, through his big spectacles, at the crowd of juniors there.

He blinked through a cloud of flying fragments of paper.

Harry Wharton & Co. were busy. They were tearing up paper for "scent" in a paper-chase that was due on the morrow.

On the study table was a stack of paper—old exercises, disused books, newspapers—anything and everything that could be collected for the purpose.

The Famous Five were all there, and Putnam van Duck, and Smithy, and several other fellows—and many hands made light work. A large basket was filling with torn paper—till Bunter opened the study door. Then it began to unload a little.

It was a fine May day, but there was a keen wind blowing in the quadrangle. There was a strong draught coming along the Remove passage. The study window was wide open.

So when the door was open also, something like a gale blew through the study, scattering torn paper in clouds. Which was rather exasperating to the fellows who had torn it up. They did

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not want to crawl over the floor gathering up innumerable fragments. So they all yelled to the fat Owl of the Remove to shut the door.

Instead of which, Billy Bunter stood in the middle of the open doorway, blinking at them.

"Will you shut that door?" shrieked Harry Wharton.

"Look here—"

"Bang it on his silly nose, Smithy—you're nearest!"

The Bunder reached out, grasped the door, and hurled it shut. Billy Bunter made a swift backward leap, just in time. Never had his fat little nose had a narrower escape.

"The silly ass!" growled Bob Cherry, as fragments of paper fell like snowflakes. "What the dickens does he want? It's past tea-time!"

"Maybe he's honing to lend a hand with this job," suggested Putnam van Duck.

There was a chuckle in Study No. 1. Van Duck was a new fellow. That accounted for his suggestion. No fellow who had been long at Greyfriars School, and become well acquainted with Billy Bunter, would have fancied that he was keen to lend a hand in a job of work.

Whatever Billy Bunter wanted, it was not a job. Bunter was unemployed as often and as long as he could manage it; and he had never been known to be genuinely seeking work.

But it seemed that he wanted something; for about a minute later, the door opened a few inches, and he blinked cautiously in.

"I say, you fellows—" came his squeak. Along with it came the

draught from the passage, and a fresh scattering of fragments.

"Get out!" roared Johnny Bull.

"But I say—"

"Slaughter him!" howled Frank Nugent.

Two or three fellows jumped up. With that gale from the passage scattering the fragments, they looked like having a paper-chase in the study, without waiting for the morrow. Which was not at all what they wanted.

"I say, I've got a letter!" yelled Bunter. "I say, there was a letter for Van Duck, and I've brought it up—"

"Chuck it in, then, fathead, and shut that door!"

"But I say—"

Bang!

Billy Bunter jerked back his head like a tortoise popping back into the shell, as a whizzing cushion crashed. The door shut again.

"Beasts!" came a howl through the keyhole.

Putnam van Duck, who was seated on the box under the window, busily ripping old newspapers, sat up and took notice.

"Say, if there's a letter for me, I guess I want it," he remarked. "Maybe it's from my popper, back in Chicago."

"Tain't!" came the voice through the keyhole. Evidently Bunter heard the American junior's remark through that aperture.

"How'd you know, you fat clam?" called out Van Duck.

"The postmark's London!" squeaked Bunter, through the keyhole. "And the fist ain't your father's, either!"

"How'd you know my popper's fist?" At which there was another chuckle

in Study No. 1. The boy from Chicago was learning a lot of things at Greyfriars, but he had yet a lot to learn about William George Bunter.

"Bunter sees the outsides of all the letters, and the insides of a good many," explained Bob Cherry.

"Beast!" came through the keyhole. "Well, he's an obliging guy to bring the letter up for me!" remarked Van Duck. "Chuck it in, Bunter! Might be from old Coot—"

There was yet another chuckle. "Bunter's always obliging to millionaires and things!" said Bob. "He scents a remittance in that letter!"

"Beast!"—through the keyhole. "Shove it under the door, Bunter!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Shan't! There may be money in it!" retorted Bunter, through the keyhole. "A chap oughtn't to be careless with a letter with a remittance in it. I'm going to give it to Van Duck!"

The door reopened. Bunter rolled in—extracting a letter from his pocket as he did so. He blinked round the study with the letter in his fat hand.

It did not seem to occur to him to shut the door while he handed over the letter. Bunter was not bothering about torn paper blowing in the wind. He was thinking of what might be inside Van Duck's letter—and the chance of securing a small loan from a fellow who had just received a remittance. It was not Billy Bunter's way, as a rule, to be fearfully obliging; but a millionaire's son was the sort of fellow Bunter liked to oblige.

Owing to a disappointment about a postal order he was expecting, Bunter was short of cash. He wanted to be present when that letter was opened. If it contained, as seemed very probable to Bunter, a remittance, Bunter wanted a whack in the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Bunter, as usual, was on the make!

"I say, here it is," said Bunter. "I say, Van Duck—I say—whoop! I—I—varooop! Leggo, Inky, you beast! Woo-hoop!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh jumped up and grabbed the Owl of the Remove. Nobody in the study cared twopence whether there was a remittance in Van Duck's letter or not; unlike Bunter, they were bothered about the "scent" blowing all over the place. The Nabob of Bhanipur grabbed Bunter by the back of a fat neck.

"Chuck that letter over, Bunter!" said Van Duck.

"Yaroooh!" "And buck up with the chuckfulness, my esteemed fat idiot!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, administering a hefty shake.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Bunter. "Beast! Urrgh! Leggo! I'm chucking it, ain't I?"

He chucked the letter over to the American junior at the window. Then he left the study—swiftly. A swing of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's arm spun him into the passage, and the door slammed on him.

A howl sounded from the Remove passage. At the same moment there was a howl from Putnam van Duck.

"Gee—my letter—"

He grabbed at the letter as it flew. But that letter, borne on the draught through the study, flew past him, and out at the open window. It was gone before Bunter, swift as Bunter's departure was.

Putnam van Duck jumped up, and stared from the study window. He had

a glimpse of an envelope flying on the wind, and then it vanished.

"Search me!" gasped Van Duck. "That pesky bonehead—I guess I got to get after my letter!"

"You'll find it in the quad!" said Harry Wharton; and Van Duck cut across the study to the door.

It opened and shut quickly. A fat hand caught at Putnam's sleeve as he ran towards the stairs.

"I say, old chap—" gasped Bunter. "Leggo, you fat clam!"

"But, I say—" Bump!

With his letter flying about in the wind in the quad, Putnam had no time to waste on Bunter. He grabbed the fat junior, and sat him down in the Remove passage—hard.

"Sit down, you pesky bonehead!" grunted Van Duck; and as Bunter sat, he cut down the passage to the staircase.

"Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter. "Catch me bringing up letters for you again, you rotter! Urrrgh! Beast!"

In Study No. 1, Harry Wharton & Co. continued tearing up "scent," expecting Putnam to come back every minute. But he did not come back. The sportive

ON THE SCENT!

To Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, it seems absolutely impossible to think that kidnappers could be looking out for a chance to grab a school-boy on a paper-chase. But kidnapping Putnam van Duck means a ransom of half a million dollars from his "popper," the multi-millionaire of Chicago, and that makes all the difference!

winds of May were whirling that letter into unknown spaces, and the American junior was hunting for it, and hunting in vain.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Rounding Up the Slackers!

"OUT you come!" roared Bob Cherry.

He was looking into the doorway of Study No. 12 in the Remove.

On an expensive sofa in that luxuriously appointed study was stretched the elegant figure of Lord Mauleverer.

It was the following afternoon—a bright, sunny May afternoon, and a half-holiday at Greyfriars. The Remove run was about to start, and a crowd of fellows, in running shorts, were gathering in the quadrangle.

On a fine, keen day hare and hounds appealed to most of the fellows in the Greyfriars Remove—a strenuous Form. But there were exceptions.

It was a rule that every fellow in the Form had to join up, though fellows who disliked the strenuous life generally managed to tail off very early in the run.

Some preferred not to start if they could possibly get out of it. Lord Mauleverer, the laziest man ever, was one; Billy Bunter, emphatically, was

another. Skinner & Co. preferred cigarettes in their study—a preference they were not allowed to gratify.

Harry Wharton, as captain of the Remove, was going round hunting out slackers and shirkers, and Bob Cherry was lending him a hand—an energetic hand! Everything that Bob did had a spot of energy in it—a considerable spot. Whether he liked a fellow, as he did Mauly, or whether he loathed him, as he did Skinner, it was all the same to Bob; they were all going to line up for the start, at least, whatever they might contrive to do later.

Perhaps Mauly had forgotten that the paper-chase was on, or perhaps he hoped that the paper-chasers would forget him. Anyhow, his lazy lordship had retired to his study after dinner, and was now reposing on his sofa, with a silken cushion under his noble head, gazing out of the study window at the blue sky in dreamy contentment, till Bob Cherry happened, rather like an earthquake and a thunderstorm, rolled into one.

"You're not changed, you ass!" roared Bob. "Buck up! Get a move on! Jump to it! Do you want to stick on that sofa while we're doing miles and miles and miles and miles and miles?"

"Yaas!" assented Lord Mauleverer. "Tired?" asked Bob.

"Yaas!" "What's made you tired?" "You!" said his lordship plaintively. Bob chuckled.

"I'll give you something to cure all that, old bean!" he answered. "If you feel that you can't get off that sofa—is that how you feel?"

"Yaas!" "I'm the man to help you!" said Bob.

He came across the study, and his lordship eyed him apprehensively. His lordship's apprehensions were well-founded.

Bob grasped the end of the sofa, heaved at it, and tilted it over. There was a howl as his lordship rolled off his expensive sofa, and landed with a bump.

"Ooooooh!" howled Mauleverer. "Feel that you can get going now?" asked Bob.

"Ow! Wow!" "Still tired?"

"Ow! Yaas! Wow!" "Race you down the Remove passage!" said Bob. "I'll give you a start—with my foot—like that—"

"Yaroooh!" "And like that!"

"Keep off, you dangerous maniac!" yelled Mauleverer.

And he bounded out of the study, followed by the chuckling Bob.

Harry Wharton was coming out of Study No. 14, helping Fisher T. Fish, the American junior. Unlike his fellow-countryman, Putnam van Duck, who was very keen on the strenuous life, Fishy wanted to give the paper-chase a miss. Fishy had some accounts to do that afternoon—he loved to spend a holiday at accounts. It was really rather "fierce," as he would have expressed it; for Fishy was not sure what had become of a halfpenny he had missed, and he was very anxious to trace that missing halfpenny.

But it booted not! Fishy's pencil went in one direction and his account-book in the other as the captain of the Remove helped him out of the study. He helped him by a rather long ear, to the accompaniment of fiendish howls from Fisher T. Fish.

"You pesky boob, will you leggo my year?" Fishy was yelling.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,474.

"Another tired man? Leave him to me, old top! Stand steady, Fishy—and see if I can land you at the stairs with one kick!"

Fisher T. Fish did not stand still. Wharton let go his ear, and he flew! Fishy had no desire whatever to see whether Bob could buzz him the length of the passage with one kick!

"Any more?" grinned Bob.
"Skinner hasn't turned up!" said Harry, laughing.

"Come on!"
Skinner's study was No. 11. The door of Study No. 11 burst open as if a battering-ram had hit it when Bob arrived there.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott were in the study. They were gathered round the table, with impot paper before them and pens in their hands. They looked busy.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "You fellows know that we're just starting? Get down and change!"

Skinner glanced round.
"Sorry!" he answered. "I've got lines for Loder!"

"Same here!" said Snoop. "You know that beastly bully, Loder of the Sixth! No good telling him that we want to go on a paper-chase when he's given us lines!"

"Oh!" said Bob, rather nonplussed. He did know, only too well, what a very unpleasant fellow Loder of the Sixth was.

Stott, who was not quite such a slacker as his friends, looked sheepish. He laid down his pen, and rose from the table.

"Look here, I'm going!" he said. Snoop sneered, and Skinner shrugged his shoulders. Stott passed Bob, and went out of the study. Harry Wharton looked in.

"Come on, Skinner and Snoop!" he said.
"Lines for Loder!" said Skinner.

That was good enough for Bob Cherry, who was as unsuspecting as he was strenuous. The captain of the Remove was not quite so trustful as Bob. A Form captain had duties to do, and had to keep an eye open.

"That's all right, Skinner!" he said. "Lines can't stop a chap joining up for a run! I'll explain to Loder of the Sixth."

"That won't stop him giving me six if I don't take in the lines!" said Skinner. "I'd rather get them done, if you don't mind."

"But I do!" pointed out the captain of the Remove. "You're joining up for the run, old bean! But I'll tell you what—I'll cut down and see Loder, and ask him to give you leave first, if you like."

That offer did not seem to please Skinner. It made Snoop look quite alarmed. Snoop laid down his pen.

"May as well go!" he said.
"Why, you spoofing slackers!" roared Bob Cherry. What the captain of the Remove had guessed at once now dawned on Bob. "You haven't got lines for Loder at all! It's just spoof to get out of the run! Bag them!"

"I say, I'm going!" gasped Snoop. And he cut out of the study in a hurry, and joined the other slackers on the way to the changing-room.

Skinner gave the captain of the Form a bitter look. As he had no lines to do for Loder of the Sixth, he certainly did not want that prefect asked to give him leave. Loder would have been annoyed by the use of his name for purposes of spoof, and would no doubt have made the lines a reality, as well as adding, in all probability, a swipe from his ashplant!

"Look here," said Skinner savagely, "I'm not coming—see? There's a beastly east wind, and I don't like it! I've got a pain in my foot, too!"

"Which foot?" asked Bob.
"The right!" grunted Skinner.
"I'll give you one in the other foot to match!"

Bob Cherry lifted his own foot—a large size in feet—and brought it down, and Skinner jerked his left foot away just in time.

Whether he had a pain in his right foot or not, he certainly would have had a pain in his left had that hefty stamp landed on it.

"You silly ass!" yelled Skinner. "Keep your hoofs to yourself! Look here, I'm jolly well not going—"

"Take his other ear, Harry."
"Yaroooh!" roared Skinner, as his ears were captured.

Wharton and Bob walked out of the study with Skinner's ears. Needless to state, the rest of Skinner accompanied the ears.

"Seen Bunter?" called out Johnny Bull from the landing.

"Hasn't he turned up?"
"No; can't find him anywhere."

"The fat porker! Help Skinner down to the changing-room while we look for him."

But it was useless to look for Billy Bunter.

Generally that fat and fatuous youth was seen oftener than any Greyfriars fellow could possibly desire to see him. Now he was conspicuous by his absence.

Studies and passages were drawn blank. He was not in the Rag or hiding in the Form-room. He could not be seen in the quad, and every fellow who was asked had seen nothing of him. Billy Bunter had vanished.

That he was dodging the Remove run was certain, but in what secluded spot he had parked his fat person for that purpose was a mystery. Up and down and round about went half a dozen fellows, looking for Bunter; but they found him not! He had vanished as completely as Van Duck's letter, blown away the previous day, though it was certain that Billy Bunter had not blown away—the most powerful of hurricanes would hardly have been equal to his weight!

Bunter had to be given up. Wingate of the Sixth was to start the run, at the appointed time, and the captain of the school could not be kept waiting. Of all the slackers in the Remove, Billy Bunter was the only one who succeeded in escaping—but Bunter had made a success of it! Harry Wharton gave him up at last and joined the fellows in the quad.

"Can't find Bunter?" asked Smithy.
"No—he's keeping doggo somewhere, the fat slacker," growled the captain of the Remove.

"I can tell you how to catch him!" grinned the Bounder.

"How?"

"Make a noise like a postal order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fathead!" said Harry. "I'll kick him when we come back! Now, then, you men, ready! Wingate will be here in a tick! Got your 'scent,' Van Duck?"

"Sure!" answered Putnam.

Harry Wharton and Putnam van Duck were to be the hares, the rest of the Remove the pack. All was ready now for Wingate to come down to the gates to give the signal for starting. But before Wingate of the Sixth arrived someone else arrived on the scene—Poker Pike, the Greyfriars gunman.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Poker Says "Nope!"

"WHAT'S this here stunt?"
Poker Pike asked that question.

Mr. Pike had been sitting on the bench by Gosling's lodge, with his eye on the gates, while the Removites were gathering there.

Poker Pike, when he was not prowling round the quad or the Cloisters, the playing fields or the tennis courts, generally had his eye on the gates.

It was rumoured in the Remove that he was paid an enormous salary by the Chicago millionaire for keeping guard over his son at Greyfriars School.

Large or small, there was no doubt that Poker earned that salary, and earned it conscientiously.

He watched over the safety of Putnam van Duck night and day, often causing Putnam extreme irritation thereby.

Chick Chew, star kidnapper of the United States, had made no fewer than three attempts to kidnap the son of the multi-millionaire; and Poker had put paid to every one of them.

The headmaster, when he gave leave for the gunman guard to take up his quarters at Greyfriars, had hoped that Mr. Pike would exercise tact and reserve and rather keep out of the public eye.

Instead of which Poker had become a very prominent character at Greyfriars, and very often had the spotlight.

Still, even Poker Pike was forgotten sometimes, and Harry Wharton & Co., in fixing up the paper-chase that Wednesday afternoon, had not bestowed a single thought on the Greyfriars gunman.

Van Duck, naturally, was going to take part in the Form run; nothing would have induced him to stand out. In fact, he couldn't have stood out—without being rounded up like Skinner & Co., unless he had found some deep hiding-place like Billy Bunter. Which certainly would not have suited that very keen and energetic youth from Chicago.

Like the other fellows, he had forgotten his guardian. And, like them, he was reminded of him when the hefty gunman, with his black bowler hat jammed down on his bullet head, lounged on the scene. Poker Pike was not a man to be forgotten long.

Having inquired what the stunt was, Poker Pike stood with his hands on his hips, eyeing the juniors with his keen slits of eyes. His hard-boiled hickory face wore its usual serious expression. Evidently he was on the alert at the sight of Putnam preparing to go on a cross-country run. To Mr. Pike's suspicious and wary mind the whole countryside was haunted by American kidnappers on the watch for the millionaire's son.

"That blessed gunman!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Van Duck, old bean, you'd better tell him that this is where he gets off."

"Poker, you big stiff," yapped Putnam van Duck, "you beat it! See? You beat it pronto! You're too numerous! Vamoose!"

Poker did not "vamoose." He stood like a rock. Wingate of the Sixth could be seen coming down from the House. The run was booked to start. But that did not matter to Poker Pike. He stood immovable in the way.

"I guess I want to know, you Putnam van Duck!" said the gunman. "I figure from your outfit that you're aiming to burn the wind with this bunch of young guys. That it?"

"You said it!" agreed Putnam. "It's a paper-chase, you geck, if you know what that is! Absquatulate!"

"I guess not!" said Poker, with a grave shake of the head. "You can't do this, big boy. I'm telling you! I got to keep tabs on you, and I'll say you got to sit it out."

Van Duck snorted! The other fellows grinned.

"Forget it!" growled Van Duck. "I'm going!"

"You ain't!" contradicted Poker. "How'd I keep tabs on you and you beating it all over the horizon? Mebbe that galoot Chick Chew is around this afternoon—I'll say he ain't the hombre to lose chances. I ain't aiming to cable Old Man Vanderdecken, in Chicawgo, that Chick has cinched his boy! Surest thing you know."

in a mob like this. There is no order for him to keep in gates, and he will do as he pleases."

Poker shook his head.

"You got another guess coming!" he replied. "Old Man Vanderdecken van Duck sure has put it up to me to keep tabs on him. I guess if he wants a walk I'll walk with him—but I ain't running none. I'll murmur that he's going to sit it out."

"It's for you to settle, Van Duck!" said Wingate.

"I'm going!" roared Putnam.

"That's that, then! Get going!"

The two hares made a move. So did Poker Pike! Poker's move was swift, and he grabbed the shoulder of the millionaire's son.

"Forget it!" he remarked.

"Leggo!" yelled Putnam.

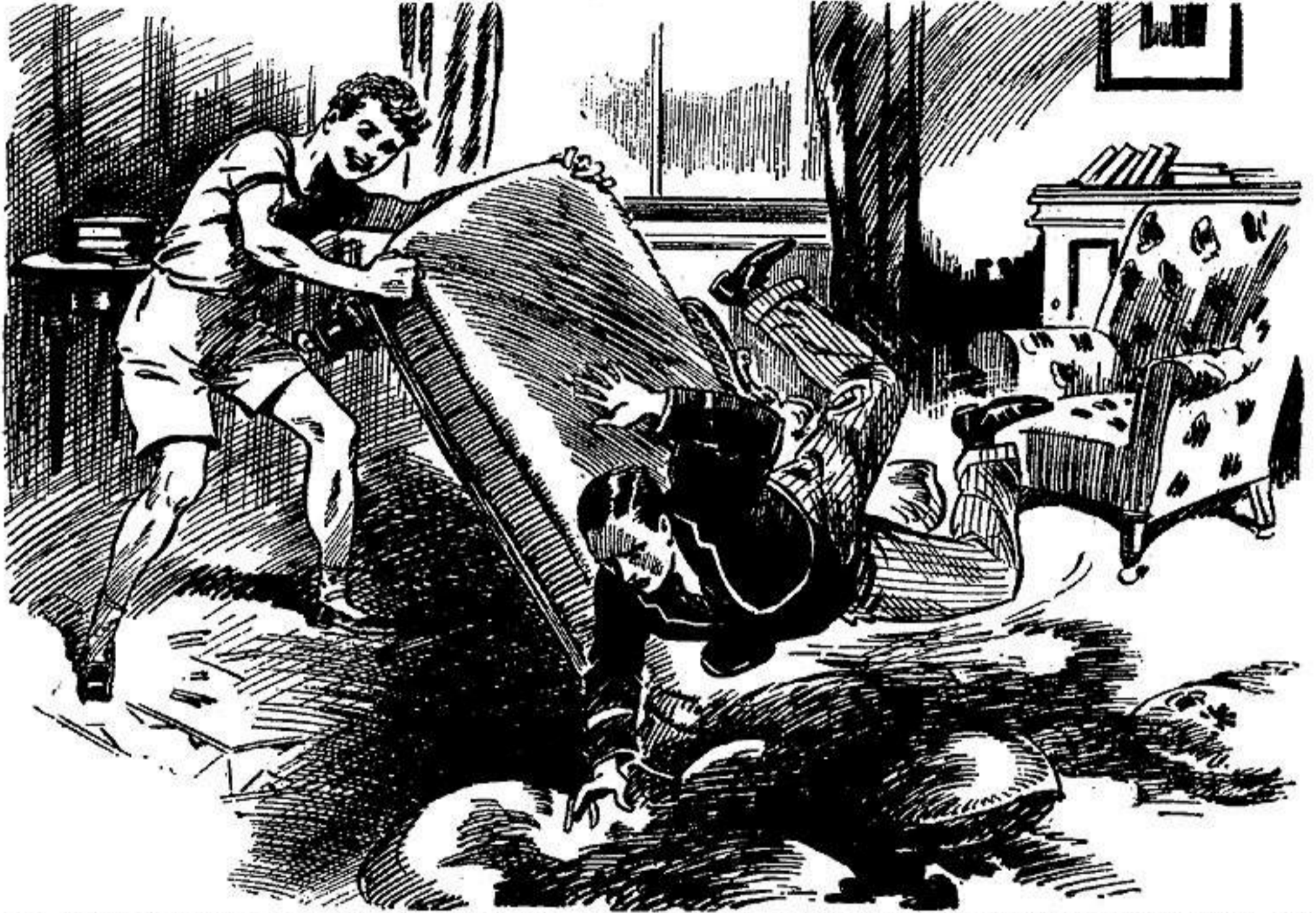
"Barge him out of the way!" exclaimed six or seven fellows at once.

"Hold on!" rapped Wingate. "Better call Quelch!"

Wingate, as head prefect and captain of the school, was a person of authority. But, to Mr. Pike, he was only a schoolboy like the rest. Wingate, fortunately, was a good-tempered fellow, and could be patient with a stranger within the gates, who did not understand Greyfriars manners and customs.

An order from Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, would have been enough, no doubt. It was the easiest way out. But Quelch, as it happened, was not available.

"Quelch's gone out, Wingate!" said Harry. "He went out after dinner with Prout."



Bob Cherry grasped the end of the sofa, heaved at it, and tilted it over. There was a howl, as Lord Maulsverer rolled off his expensive sofa, and landed with a bump. "Ooooooh!" howled his lordship. "Feel that you can get going now?" asked Bob cheerily. "Ow! Yaas! Wow!"

"It's all right, Mr. Pike," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Chick Chew won't bother Van Duck in a crowd like this."

"Mebbe," said Mr. Pike—"and mebbe not! I ain't taking chances! Boyees will be boyees—and I guess you'll scatter, and never think of Chick till he gets a cinch on that young geck. You wash it out, you Putnam."

"Go and chop chips!" was Putnam's answer.

"Here's Wingate!" said Frank Nugent. "All ready, Wingate!"

"Line up," said the Greyfriars captain. "Ten minutes start for the hares. Now, then—Here, what do you want?" He stared at Poker Pike.

"I'll mention I want that Putnam van Duck!" said Poker. "I guess he ain't hitting the horizon with that bunch."

Wingate laughed.

"That's for Van Duck himself to settle, Mr. Pike," he said. "I don't suppose the kid will be in any danger

"I guess not."

"Will you leggo?" shrieked Putnam.

"Not so's you'd notice it!" said Poker calmly. "Chew on it, big boy! I got to keep tabs on you."

"Let him go at once, you ass!" exclaimed Wingate.

"Park it, you!" said Poker.

There was a buzz from the Remove crowd. Some of them were laughing, but some were getting wrathful. Time was being wasted, and Poker, who very often "horned in" where he was not wanted, had never been so much in the way as now.

But it was clear that he meant business. His grasp on Van Duck's shoulder fastened like a vice.

"Chuck it, Pike, you fathead!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Up-end the cheeky ass!" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently.

"Roll him over!" said Peter Todd

"Oh!" said Wingate. "Well, we can't bother the Head! Pike, you ass, let go that kid at once!"

"Forget it!" answered Poker.

Wingate's good temper failed him a little. He came up to the gunman, with a rather grim expression on his face.

"Chuck it, now!" he snapped. "Take your paw off Van Duck's shoulder!"

The Removites looked on breathlessly. The captain of Greyfriars was not the man to take no for an answer. But it was only too clear that Poker Pike's answer was going to be in the negative.

"Poker, you gink—" urged Putnam.

"Pack it up, you Putman van Duck," answered Poker. "You ain't beating it none! You hear me talk!"

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"Will you let that kid go?" snapped Wingate, losing patience.

"Nope!" answered Mr. Pike.

"I shall have to make you, then!"

"Forget it, bo'!"

"Last time of asking!" snapped Wingate.

And as Mr. Pike's grasp remained immovable on Van Duck's shoulder, the Greyfriars captain grasped Mr. Pike, to drag him off.

Big and strong as the captain of Greyfriars was, his wrench at the gunman did not even make him stir. Poker stood rock-still! But, as Wingate wrenched again, the gunman swung round his left arm, and the big Sixth Former went spinning.

"Oh!" gasped Wingate, as he spun.

He tottered a couple of yards, under the impetus of that hefty shove, stumbled, and fell.

What would have happened when he got on his feet was never known, for, before he could rise, the whole Remove rushed at Poker Pike.

Poker was hefty and wiry, strong almost as a horse. But even Poker had no chance against the swarm of juniors.

They grasped him on all sides and dragged him bodily over; and Poker yelled as he hit the county of Kent.

"Bag him!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Down him!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Sit on him!"

For a couple of minutes there was a wild mix-up. Then Poker Pike, still resisting, was on his back, with about a dozen feet planted on him, pinning him there, and three or four fellows sitting on him.

Under the Removes, the Greyfriars gunman heaved like the mighty ocean. But he heaved in vain!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Poker in the Pack!

"KEEP him there!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob.

"We've got him!" grinned the Bounder.

Smithy's foot was planted on Mr. Pike's bull neck, and Poker gurgled under the pressure.

"Safe as houses!" chortled Peter Todd. "Get going!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say, you ginks, you let up!" came a suffocated howl from Poker Pike, wriggling under many feet. "I'm telling you to let up! Don't I keep on telling you I got to keep tabs on that Putnam van Duck?"

"Forget it, old-timer!" chuckled Putnam. "This is where you get off, Poker."

"Come on!" said Harry, laughing.

The two hares trotted down the road. Poker made another mighty heave—in vain! Most of the pack were pinning him down, and they were not going to let him go till the hares had had their start. After which it would be too late for Poker to horn in again.

Wingate, rather breathless and not in the best of tempers, gave the wriggling gunman a very grim look. However, Poker was safely held, and the Greyfriars captain left it at that.

Harry Wharton and Putnam van Duck trotted down Friardale Lane, and disappeared from sight towards the wood. Wingate looked at his watch. The pack waited for the signal to start.

The pack was not quite so numerous now. Two or three fellows had taken advantage of the excitement to slip away unnoticed. Fisher T. Fish had scuttled off to get back to his accounts, and Skinner had disappeared somewhere in the quad.

Bob Cherry, certainly, would have had an eye on them, and would have rounded them up had he been less busy. But Bob was very busy with Mr. Pike—his foot was on Poker's waistcoat, jammed hard. So Fishy got back to his study—and Skinner dodged behind the elms—and both escaped!

Time was up at last, and Wingate gave the signal to start. Bob Cherry blew a blast on a bugle.

Innumerable feet were withdrawn from Poker Pike—they were wanted for other purposes now. The pack went

streaming down the road on the trail of the hares—leaving Mr. Pike sitting up breathlessly in the dust.

"Search me!" gasped Mr. Pike.

He grabbed at his bowler hat, which had fallen off in the tussle. He jammed it down on his bullet head before he rose to his feet. Then he scrambled up.

Wingate gave him a glance and went in at the gates. Poker did not heed Wingate. He stood staring after the streaming pack.

"Carry me home to die!" he ejaculated.

What Poker would do when he was released, the Removes neither knew nor cared. But Mr. Pike knew what he was going to do!

It was his business to "keep tabs" on the millionaire's son. The millionaire's son was already far away, cutting across country with the captain of the Remove, leaving a trail of torn paper. There was only one thing for Poker to do—he started running after the pack.

Poker was not clad for running. But he had a turn of speed, and he was soon on the tail of the pack.

Bob Cherry glanced back at the sound of pounding footsteps behind him. He gave a yell.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's after us!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, glancing over his shoulder. "He's joining up for the paper-chase!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Poker came pounding on. He joined the running pack as they reached the stile that gave admittance from the lane into Friardale Wood. Bob Cherry gave him a welcoming yell.

"Come on, old bean! The more the merrier!"

"I guess I ain't letting that Putnam van Duck get fur out of my sight!" panted Poker. "I'll say I'm going to rope in that young gink!"

"Right-ho!" chuckled Bob. "We're all after him, to rope him in if we can—nobody's going to stop you now, old scout!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The pack, chuckled as they went on. As one of the pack, Poker was welcome to catch the hares if he could! But the juniors did not think it likely that the gunman would be in at the death. In coat and trousers, boots and bowler hat, Mr. Pike did not seem, to them, likely to keep in the running long. Much lighter attire was needed for a run across country extending over many winding miles.

But Poker was a stickler. He was a serious guy, and took his duties seriously. Certainly, he was not so keen on paper-chases. But he was going to catch Putnam van Duck, if he could. So he ran with the pack, amid a chorus of chuckles.

The paper trail left the footpath and wound among the trees of Friardale Wood. In the thickets, fellows who were not keen on the run disappeared. Snoop was the first, and then Lord Mauleverer sat down on a log to rest for a moment or two—and that moment or two lasted a good half-hour before his lazy lordship got going again—and then his footsteps carried him homeward.

Stott tailed off, breathless from the effect of too many cigarettes in the study. Hazeldene conked out next, perhaps for the same reason. But the pack was still numerous when it came to the plank bridge over the stream in the wood.

The paper trail crossed the stream.

WALLY on the WAR-PATH!



Pity the poor cricket skipper! Tom Merry little realised the trouble he was piling up for himself when he ignored the claims of fags to play in the School House cricket eleven! For the fags, led by Wally D'Arcy, went on the war-path against him—with results that were all too painful and exciting for Tom!

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and the pack headed for the bridge. Only one fellow could cross at a time, and Bob Cherry reached it first and trotted over. The Bounder was second, when Poker Pike, reaching it at the same moment, shouldered him aside to pass ahead.

Keen as all the fellows were on hunting the hares, the keenest Remove man was not so keen as Poker. With streams of perspiration running down under his bowler hat, Poker barged on hard and fast. He was not going to waste any time with schoolboys getting in the way.

His hefty shoulder sent the Bounder spinning, and Poker leaped on the plank. There was a howl of rage from Vernon-Smith as he sat in the shallow stream. Poker, unheeding, barged across the plank.

Smithy was up in a second, his running shorts soaked and dripping. The Bounder did not care for that, but he did care for being shouldered out of the way. He leaped on the plank with a spring like a tiger, flew after the gunman, and barged him in the middle of the back.

Poker had reached the middle of the stream at the moment that Smithy reached the middle of his back!

He went headlong.

There was a terrific splash as the gunman took a header into the water! The water splashed right and left on the pack as they followed the Bounder across the plank.

"Yurrrgh!" gurgled Poker.

He went right under for a second, then he was on his feet, standing with the stream flowing past under his armpits. Streaming by in single file across the plank bridge, the juniors howled with laughter as they passed him.

"Wet?" howled Peter Todd.

"Damp!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"The dampfulness is terrific!" chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrrrgh!" gasped Poker. "I guess I'll beat that pesky young guy up a few! Gurrgh! And then some! Wurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole pack had streamed past by the time Poker scrambled out of the water.

Looking back a few minutes later, the Removites howled with laughter at the sight of the gunman.

Drenched and dripping, squelching water from his boots at every step, Poker Pike was still coming on! He could not have felt happy, but he was not going to be beaten! More than a ducking was required to deter Poker Pike.

He was breathless, he was wet, his drenched clothes were sticking to him, his hickory face was crimson under the dripping bowler, but—like Charley's celebrated aunt—he was still running!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Awkward for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER leaned back in Mr. Quelch's armchair, rested his feet on Mr. Quelch's hassock, and grinned.

Bunter was taking it easy.

It was no wonder that the Remove fellows had failed to find him when they were rounding-up the slackers. Nobody had thought of looking in a master's study. Fellows were not supposed to enter Masters' Studies without leave—and few fellows were ever anxious to do so!

Certainly Billy Bunter would not

have risked stepping into his Form-master's study, even to dodge a paper-chase, had Mr. Quelch been anywhere about the House or the school. But he was aware that Quelch had gone out after dinner, with Prout, the Fifth Form master, for a long walk.

Quelch being safely off the scene, and Quelch's study certain never to be searched by juniors, it really was the safest spot that the fat slacker could have selected.

What Quelch would have said—and done—had he suddenly come in and found the fat junior taking it easy in his armchair in his study, hardly bore thinking of. But there was no danger of that. Henry Samuel Quelch was miles away, walking Mr. Prout off his portly legs!

So Bunter, grinning, took it easy! He could hear the voices of Remove fellows in the quad, but he was careful not to show himself at the window. The voices died away at last, and he knew that the paper-chasers were gone.

But he was in no hurry to move. He could not be too careful in such an important matter. He was not going to run the slightest risk of being rounded-up, after all, and forced to exert his fat self. For half an hour after the Removites had started, the fat Owl remained sprawling in Quelch's armchair.

Then at last Bunter rose and took a cautious survey from the window. There were plenty of fellows to be seen on a half-holiday, but none of them were Removites.

Coker of the Fifth was walking and talking with Potter and Greene of that Form. Temple, Dabney & Co. could be seen, heading for the tuckshop. Sammy Bunter of the Second Form was sucking toffee under one of the elms. Hobson of the Shell, with a cricket ball, was demonstrating a rather tricky action in the bowling line to his friends Hoskins and Stewart. In the distance, Sixth Form men could be seen at games practice. Hacker, master of the Shell, was strolling with his hands tucked under his coat tails, and his usual worried expression on his face.

All these things Billy Bunter saw, from Mr. Quelch's study window, without interest. What interested him was the fact that no Removites were to be seen. Evidently the danger was over.

Suddenly, however, he spotted a Removite. But it was not alarming, for it was Skinner that he spotted.

He grinned at the sight of Skinner. Evidently Harold Skinner had succeeded in dodging, as well as Bunter. Skinner owed that to Mr. Pike and his obstreperous intervention. Having changed, Skinner was sauntering at ease in the quad—happy to have escaped the exertion of a cross-country run.

The sight of Loder of the Sixth coming along with Walker and Carne caused Bunter to pop back from the window.

Loder was not likely to care whether he joined up for a paper-chase or not; but it was not safe to let a prefect spot him in a master's study.

All was clear now, and Bunter decided to vacate that study.

He rolled over to the door, and opened it a few inches, to peer out, to make sure that the coast was clear.

Unfortunately for Bunter, it wasn't. A murmur of voices was audible farther along the passage. He recognised the tones of Capper and Wiggins, masters of the Fourth and Third.

Capper was talking to Wiggins, in the latter's study doorway.

Billy Bunter shut the door again, quickly and noiselessly. He dared not let other beaks see him emerging from

his Form-master's study at a time when, obviously, he had no business there.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter.

He waited impatiently. Five minutes later he reopened the door a few inches—only to hear a third voice added to the two. Monsieur Charpentier had joined the two masters, and was taking part in the conversation at Wiggins' door.

Bunter shut Mr. Quelch's door again. He snorted angrily.

Having escaped the paper-chase by taking refuge in Quelch's study, he now had to escape from Quelch's study, and there was a lion in the path—or, rather, three lions in the path, in the shape of two Form-masters and a French master.

It was very irritating for talkative beaks to choose that time and place for talking—very awkward for Bunter. He could not possibly emerge while they were there. He would be reported to Quelch, and there was a strict rule on the subject of entering Masters' Studies without leave.

"Beasts!" repeated Bunter.

He went back to Quelch's armchair and sat down again. As he had to wait, he preferred to sit it out.

Coker of the Fifth had been heard to say that when the beaks got together they cackled like a lot of old hens! Really it seemed like it! Bunter wondered how long that cackle was going on at Wiggins' door.

Buzzzz!

The telephone bell interrupted his reflections on that subject.

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter, in alarm.

Bunter did not often move quickly. But a jumping kangaroo had nothing on Bunter as he bounded to the telephone and hooked off the receiver.

Quelch could not possibly come in to take that call. He was miles off the scene. But if the bell was heard, someone would come in and take it—and discover Bunter there! And certainly it would be heard if it went on ringing! Bunter dreaded that even that single buzz might have been heard by the three masters down the passage.

He stood gasping, the receiver in his hand. That beastly bell stopped, but Bunter did not bother about the person who had rung up. He stood listening, with thumping heart, for a sound from the passage.

Luckily there was no sound. Wiggins' doorway was well away down the passage, and that single buzz had not reached the group of masters—all busy "cackling." One or two repetitions would certainly have dawned on them. But there was going to be no repetitions. Bunter was going to take care of that.

He breathed more freely, as there was no sound of alarm. All was well so far. Relieved on that point, Bunter had leisure to remember that there was somebody on the phone, expecting to be answered.

He had to answer that somebody! It was no use replacing the receiver and leaving the unknown to ring up again! He had to shut the beast off somehow! It was easy to tell him, whoever he was, that Quelch was out, and not expected in till tea-time. So Bunter put the receiver to a fat ear, and found that somebody was talking on the phone, and had, no doubt, been talking all the time Bunter was listening for an alarm from the passage.

"... and put him wise that his popper's old friend will be there to give him the glad hand—"

That was what Bunter heard, and it was rather puzzling. He could guess,

from the phraseology, that it was an American speaking. But he could not make head or tail of the rest.

"Hallo!" gasped Bunter into the transmitter. "I—I say, I didn't catch that. Who's speaking?"

"Say, didn't you hear me tooting all this time?" demanded a rather annoyed and indignant voice over the wires.

"No! Yes! I—I mean there's rather a row going on!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean who is it?"

"Ezra Coot!"

"Ezra Coot!" repeated Bunter. The name sounded familiar to him. It came into his fat mind that he had heard Putnam van Duck mention it. It was the name of an American business man in London, a friend of Van Duck's father.

"Sure! That's Mr. Quelch, I reckon," went on the voice. "I guess I'll sing it over agin if you haven't got it, Mr. Quelch. I sure want to see Putnam. And I guess he's put you wise about my letter to him yesterday—what?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The fat junior had forgotten about Van Duck's letter, which had blown out of the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove the previous day and had never been found. He remembered it now.

That letter, apparently, had been written by this Ezra Coot, who was following it up on the telephone.

Had Putnam read that letter and known that he was to be called on the phone by his father's old friend that afternoon, no doubt he would have stood out of the paper-chase; as it was, he was gone.

"Say, I got the right number, ain't I?" demanded the nasal voice over the wires. "Mr. Quelch, at Greyfriars School?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Bunter.

He was about to add that Quelch was out and was not expected back till tea-time, but he paused in time.

If this Ezra Coot wanted to see Putnam van Duck, the fact that Quelch had gone out would not stop him; he would keep on ringing till he got in touch with somebody at Greyfriars, that was certain.

That did not suit Bunter.

Mr. Quelch and Ezra Coot and Putnam van Duck mattered nothing; what mattered was that the telephone-bell should not draw anyone to the Remove master's study to discover Bunter there.

While the dismayed fat Owl was wondering how he could bar off this obnoxious Coot the nasal voice went on:

"I guess you remember my name, Mr. Quelch. I rang you up first day of your school term to ask if my old friend's son had arrived safe and sound."

Bunter remembered that there had been a phone call for Quelch the first day in the Form-room that term. It had made Quelch late for class.

"Oh!" he stuttered. "Yes—quite!"

"I wrote Putnam yesterday and told him I'd be in Courtfield to-day on business and would be sure glad to make his acquaintance," went on the voice.

"Mum-make his acquaintance!" stammered Bunter.

"Sure! I ain't met up with Vanderdecken's son yet, and I'll be pesky glad to see him and make his acquaintance," said Mr. Coot. "I figured on coming along to the school, but time don't allow. I got my train to catch after I get through my business at Chunkley's here."

"Oh!"

"But Vanderdecken's written me from Chicawgo and asked me to give his boy the once-over, and I guess this

is an opportunity. I get through my business here at four, and I can give young Putnam till half-past. Tell him to mosey along to the Courtfield Hotel at four and have tea with his father's old side-kicker. You get me?"

"Oh, yes! I—I— Yes!"

"I told Putnam to show you that letter, sir, and put you wise. I reckon he ain't forgot—what?"

Certainly Putnam had never shown Mr. Quelch that letter, as he had never seen the inside of it himself; but the man on the phone, of course, knew nothing of the happenings in Study No. 1 the day before.

"I guess Putnam will be glad to see a friend he's heard his popper talk about a whole lot back in Chicawgo. Anyhow, you tell him, sir, to come along to the Courtfield Hotel at four if he wants to see me. If he ain't turned up by half-past, I got my train to catch, and I shall have to give him a miss. But I'd sure like to see him."

"Oh, yes!"

"That's the whole packet, sir. I won't waste your time. Good-bye!"

The man at the other end rang off. Billy Bunter was left blinking at the telephone.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Brain-wave!

"**B**EAST!" murmured Billy Bunter.

He put up the receiver and grunted.

He had been alarmed. Every moment while Mr. Coot was talking on the phone he had dreaded to see the study door open. It was all very irritating to Bunter.

However, all was safe. No one had come to the study, and he had got rid of Ezra Coot by the simple expedient of allowing him to believe that he was speaking to Mr. Quelch.

That was all right so far as it went. Mr. Coot had gone away satisfied, and was not likely to ring up again.

According to what he had stated, he was going to wait for Putnam at the Courtfield Hotel from four till half-past, and if he did not come would then catch his train. That did not matter very much. He couldn't have seen Putnam that day anyhow, as the American junior was miles away on a paper-chase.

A tea at the Courtfield Hotel was going begging. Bunter was rather sorry that that letter had been lost.

Had Van Duck been there he might have been persuaded to take a pal along to tea with his father's old friend. Bunter would have been willing—more than willing—to go to tea with a rich American.

Still, there was not much in that. Had Van Duck taken a pal to tea with him, it was pretty certain that he would have picked one of the fellows in his study. Fascinating fellow as Bunter was, the kind of fellow to make any tea party a success, there was little chance that Putnam would have selected him.

Bunter went to the door again and listened. "Cackle" was still going on down the passage.

He returned to Mr. Quelch's armchair and sat down, fervently hoping that no other beast would ring up on the phone while he was there.

Bunter was getting more and more impatient. Quelch's study had been a useful refuge, but he was tired of it.

He was, in fact, getting hungry. And while all the fellows were out of gates on a paper-chase there was a chance for a hungry Owl to do a little scouting in

the Remove studies. Bunter was accustomed to make the most of such opportunities as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. Even a solitary doughnut, or a few bullseyes, would have been welcome.

Apart from that chance, the afternoon presented rather a dreary prospect to Bunter. No Remove man, so far as he knew, was within gates, excepting Skinner—and Skinner was not the fellow to ask a fellow to tea, or to lend him a half-crown, or even a humble bob, on a postal order he was expecting.

If the hares and hounds came in late for tea, as was more probable than not, there was only tea in Hall for Bunter—and even that was hours off.

It was a serious matter to the fat Owl, whose life was one long series of food problems, one after another.

And all the while there was a ripping spread going begging. It made Bunter feel quite bitter to think of that.

He remembered what he had heard Putnam say on the subject of Mr. Coot. Ezra Coot was rich; as a pal of a millionaire was pretty certain to be. Bunter could not doubt that it would be a really handsome spread at the Courtfield Hotel—the best that money could buy. Putnam was going to miss it; but he did not care a lot about such things, anyhow. Billy Bunter cared more than a lot. He could not help thinking of that wasted spread.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

He sat upright in Mr. Quelch's armchair, his little round eyes glistening behind his big round spectacles.

A sudden idea had shot into Bunter's fat brain—a brilliant idea—so brilliant that it positively dazzled him. It was an absolute brain-wave.

Bunter grinned.

That gorgeous spread need not be wasted. Bunter was the man who would enjoy it most. And why should he not?

Ezra Coot had said that he had never met Putnam van Duck, and wanted to make his acquaintance. He had lived many years in London; and until recently, of course, Putnam had lived on the other side of the Atlantic. If he had never met Putnam he could not possibly know him by sight.

Suppose a fellow turned up at the hotel in Courtfield at four o'clock. Was not Mr. Coot certain to believe that he was the fellow to whom he had written, and to whose Form-master he had telephoned? He had never seen either Van Duck or Bunter. Why should he not suppose that Bunter was Van Duck if he turned up in Van Duck's place?

It was, indeed, scarcely possible that he could suppose anything else, in the circumstances.

"By gum!" breathed Bunter.

It was a positively dazzling idea.

Billy Bunter jumped out of Quelch's armchair. With this great scheme in his fat brain he simply had to get out of that study.

Once more he opened the door and listened for sounds. The "cackle" at the door of Mr. Wiggins' study had died away at last. But there was a quick tread in the passage, which Bunter knew was Mr. Hacker's.

Back popped Bunter! Hacker had had to choose that awkward moment for coming in, after his walk in the quad!

Bunter had Quelch's door shut, just in time, before Hacker passed. He shook a fat fist at the passing master of the shell—behind the door!

Really, it looked as if Bunter would never get out of that study! And he had to get to Courtfield by four, if he was going to capture the spread intended for Putnam van Duck! It was



Coming along at full pelt, the "hounds" bumped into Coker and sent him sprawling. But they were not to escape with impunity. Coker seized Bob Cherry by the ankle and brought him down. "Oh crikey!" gasped Bob, as he sprawled. "Leggo, you mad ass! Leggo!"

a long walk to Courtfield—miles across the common! And owing to that sad disappointment about a postal order, Bunter lacked not only a taxi-fare, but even the few coppers necessary for a lift on the motor-bus. Time and tide wait for no man, and here was Bunter a prisoner in his Form-master's study, unable to escape.

That passage, sometimes, was quite deserted for quite a long time. It had been deserted when Bunter dodged into the study. Now it seemed to be thickly populated with beaks.

Hacker's jerky tread having died away, and a door closed up the passage, Bunter tried again. Opening the door a few inches, he listened anxiously. He had the pleasure—or otherwise—of hearing the voice of Mr. Lascelles, the games master. Bunter loathed Harry Lascelles, who was maths master, as well as games master, maths being the most awful thing in existence, from Bunter's point of view. But never had he loathed them so much as now.

He was speaking to Wingate of the Sixth—Bunter recognised Wingate's voice replying.

There was nothing unusual in the captain of the school coming along to speak to the games master. They often consulted about the games. But it was frightfully annoying to Bunter. Gladly he would have knocked together the heads of Wingate and Mr. Lascelles, had that been practicable.

Closing the door once more, Bunter gave that up as a mode of egress. It was clear that the passage was going to be haunted by the beaks for an indefinite length of time. He crossed to the window.

If nobody was at hand he might drop from the window unperceived. It

would not matter if juniors saw him; it was all right so long as beaks and prefects were not about. Beaks were not likely to be at hand in that direction, with so many of them haunting the passage.

Bunter blinked from the window cautiously.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Fourth, were still in sight. Dicky Nugent and some other fags of the second Form were scampering at a distance. They did not matter. No Sixth Form man was to be seen anywhere near.

Bunter resolved to chance it—after a long and searching stare out of the window. It did not occur to him to look downward. No master or Sixth Form man could have stood under the window without his head showing above the broad stone sill. It did not occur to Billy Bunter that a junior might be standing there, with his head just below the level of the high sill.

He had forgotten Skinner, and if he had remembered him he could not have guessed that Harold Skinner, tired of loafing about, was leaning on the wall under that window. Bored, with nothing to do, Skinner leaned there idly, thinking that he might as well have gone on the paper-chase.

Happily ignorant of that, Billy Bunter prepared for swift action. If he did not want to be seen leaving Quelch's study by the door, still less did he want to be seen leaving it by the window. Speed was essential.

He acted quickly, when his fat mind was made up.

He grabbed the window-sash and shot it up, bundled out, and dropped over the stone sill, with very unaccustomed rapidity.

He expected, of course, to land on

the earth. His expectations were not realised.

He landed on Skinner.

Skinner, hearing the window open above his head, was just looking round, when Bunter happened!

He did not know that it was Bunter. He was taken quite by surprise. All he knew was that something large, and heavy, thudded right on his head, squashing him down to the ground.

That large and heavy something sprawled over him, knocking every ounce of breath out of him, and squeaking with surprised alarm.

"Oooogh!" squeaked Bunter.

"Gurrrgh!" gurgled Skinner faintly.

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter sat up. He did not realise, for a moment, that he was sitting on a face.

Skinner did!

Skinner realised it with great clearness.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter. "What—ooogh—"

"Urrrrgh!" came a suffocated gurgle from beneath Bunter as the hapless Skinner wriggled like a worm beneath the heel!

"Oooogh! Ow! What—oh crikey! Oooogh! Yarooooop!" yelled Bunter. "I'm bitten! Ow! What's biting me? Yarooooh!"

Bunter fairly bounded. He was off Skinner's face in a twinkling.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hard Pressed!

TA-RA-RA-RA-RA!

Bob Cherry blew a blast on the bugle.

Up the towpath by the Sark, between the green woods and the THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,474.

shining, rippling water, streamed the pack. Fluttering on the towpath were the fragments of torn paper. But the paper trail was not needed then, for the hares had been, for a moment, sighted—running swiftly up the river, past Popper's Island.

They vanished again, by a bend in the winding bank, but they had been spotted. The pack had high hopes of catching them, far from home.

"Come on!" panted the Bounder.

"Put it on!" gasped Peter Todd.

There were miles yet to run—up the river, and across Courtfield Common—before the hares headed for home. The pack were eager to bag them half-way on the run, and this looked like a chance. They tore on, by the shining river.

The pack had thinned out by this time. Even keen fellows had been unable to keep up the pace. Some had tailed off and taken short cuts back, others were keeping on, far in the rear. Nine or ten were still running with Bob, and behind them, sweating and breathless, ran Poker Pike!

People who saw the paper-chasers pass glanced at them—and stared at Poker Pike! It was an interesting, but not an unusual sight to see a crowd of cheery schoolboys on the run. But it was very unusual indeed to see a hickory-faced man in a bowler hat running with the pack!

Poker did not care for stares or smiles. He was quite indifferent to the impression he made on the public. But he was not feeling good. He was hefty and muscular, and had good wind, but the run was telling on him. His clothes were drying in the sunshine, but they were still damp and clinging, and they were far from being a suitable garb for a cross-country run.

For which reason Poker had discarded his coat, and was running in his shirt-sleeves!

He had gained a much-needed breathing-space while he stopped for a minute to remove articles from his coat pockets and transfer them to his trousers pockets. He simply could not keep on in that coat; he had to leave it behind and risk its loss. But he left it with empty pockets, hanging on a branch in Friardale Wood.

Then he re-started, running more easily, it was true, but collecting still more startled stares from people on the river or the towpath. At the tail of the pack, he pounded resolutely on.

Looking back every now and then, the juniors grinned at the sight of the crimson, perspiring face under the black bowler. Poker, quite unintentionally, was adding a little comic entertainment to the paper-chase.

Once or twice the pack distanced him, but the paper trail was a sure guide, and Poker kept grimly on.

To the juniors it was an absurd possibility that kidnappers could be looking out for a chance to grab a schoolboy on a paper-chase. But it seemed very far from impossible to Poker.

He knew the reputation of Chick Chew, the star kidnapper, the gangster who never admitted defeat. In the great United States, Chick had never been known to fail, and he was reputed to have made a huge fortune in his peculiar profession.

Kidnapping Putnam van Duck meant a ransom of half a million dollars from his popper, the multi-millionaire of Chicago. That was a sum for which it was worth while to put up a real tussle—even if Chick had not had his professional pride to consider in this matter.

Poker would not have been surprised

to find Chick Chew, or some of his side-kickers, turning up at any point on the trail. He would not have been surprised had one of the hares, instead of being run down by the pack, vanished into a motor-car driven by Chick Chew or Bud Parker or Tug Keary, or some other of the kidnapping gang.

Breathless, but with unshaken determination, Poker pounded on, much to the entertainment of the Removites ahead of him.

"There they are!" yelled the Bounder as he had another glimpse of the hares on the bank between Popper's Island and the Popper Court Woods.

"Put it on!" gasped Tom Redwing.

"We've got 'em!" breathed Bob.

The hares vanished again. Green branches on the winding bank hid them. But the pack were more than confident now.

Still more confident would they have been, had they seen what was happening beyond the curve of the bank ahead.

Harry Wharton and Putnam van Duck went round that curve full tilt, still dropping handfuls of paper from the bags of "scent." Both of them knew that it was touch and go now. Hard pressed, they spurred.

As that towpath was used by members of the general public, and anybody might have come along at any moment, it behoved the hares to look where they were going—to look before they leaped, as it were.

But with the pack whooping close behind, the hares rather forgot the need of care and caution. It was quite a sharp bend by the river, and they came round full pelt; and never knew that anyone else was on the path till the crash came.

Coker of the Fifth was not to blame—that was certain. Often and often, in his little troubles with the juniors, Horace Coker was the man who hunted trouble. This time Horace was absolutely blameless; but he found the trouble, all the same, just as if he had hunted for it in his usual style.

Coker was sauntering down the towpath, thinking—certainly not of Remove fellows and their fag paper-chase—but of the great game of cricket. He was thinking what an absolute idiot Blundell was. The captain of the Fifth had a practice game on that afternoon, in which Potter and Greene, Coker's pals, were wanted, and Coker wasn't.

While Potter and Greene played cricket, Coker, if he liked, could have looked on and seen them doing it—which he didn't want to do in the least. Walking by the Sark, Coker of the Fifth was wondering, sardonically, how that absolute idiot Blundell expected to win matches, when he left out the best man in the Form—and not only the best man in the Form, but the best man in the school. Then the hares arrived, like a couple of bullets, and Blundell and cricket and all things else were driven out of Coker's mind, as he was hurled headlong, and strewn at full length on the towpath.

Harry Wharton and Putnam van Duck staggered back from the shock.

Wharton reeled against a tree by the path, panting. Van Duck sat down, with a bump, in the grass.

Coker lay on his back, staring dizzily at a blue sky, with a first hasty impression that the crack of doom had sounded, and that the Universe was falling into pieces around him.

Fortunately it wasn't.

The solid earth was still in its usual place when Coker dizzily sat up on it. He blinked at two breathless juniors.

"You idiot!" gasped Wharton.

"You pesky gunk!" gurgled Van Duck.

Which was adding insult to injury, for Coker was not to blame for that collision; really, the juniors were to blame.

But they were naturally exasperated, for the hounds were coming on fast, and there was not a second to waste. The question of who was to blame mattered less than the fact that precious moments were lost.

"Ooooh!" gasped Coker. "Ow! My hat! Ow! Knocking a fellow over— Ooooh! Why, I'll smash you!"

Coker got on his feet, somehow. He was winded by the shock, and he gurgled for breath. But smashing the cheeky fags who had knocked him over was, of course, too important a matter to be postponed. He tottered at them.

"Get on!" gasped Wharton. "Never mind that ass!"

"You said it!" panted Putnam.

They were rather winded by the shock as well as Coker, but not so badly as Coker. Swerving to right and left they dodged Coker, who was luckily too winded to deal with them as they deserved.

Leaving Coker gasping, they ran on, resuming the distribution of "scent," and covering the ground at great speed.

Coker, gurgling, gazed after them.

They vanished from sight almost in a moment. Coker, struggling for breath, was in no state to pursue.

Neither was he given long to think about it. Round the bend by the river came the pack, whooping.

The hares had met Coker face to face. The hounds came at his back as he stood staring after the vanished hares.

Like the hares the hounds had rather forgotten that the general public might be walking on that towpath. Like the hares they came round the bend full pelt.

For the second time Coker of the Fifth was strewn on the grass, though this time the charge came from the rear.

He went over on his face, and Bob Cherry and Smithy and Redwing, leaders of the pack, sprawled blindly over him.

Before they knew what had happened, or was happening, Peter Todd and Squiff, Tom Brown and Russell and Ogilvy, were sprawling over them in turn.

The rest of the pack came to a hurried halt.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" spluttered Bob Cherry. "What—who—"

"That fool Coker—" hissed the Bounder.

"That idiot Coker—"

"That blithering chump Coker—"

"Yooop!" roared Bob as, leaping up and running on, he was caught by the ankle, and brought down again, with a terrific crash.

It was Coker who had grasped.

The hares had floored Coker, and escaped with impunity. The hounds had floored him again; but they were not to escape with impunity, if Horace Coker could help it. He had grabbed one of them, at any rate.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob, as he sprawled. "Leggo, you mad ass! Leggo!"

"I'll smash you!" gasped Coker. "I'll smash the lot of you! I'll jolly well mop up the whole crew of you!"

He scrambled up. Letting go Bob, he grasped at Smithy and Redwing, who were nearest, and got them by the necks. There was a loud crack as two heads came knocking together. There was a louder yell.

"Barge that idiot over!" howled Peter Todd.

Some of the hounds were running on. But most of the pack turned their attention to Coker. He was giving them all his attention, and they had to give him some.

They gave it promptly and efficaciously. Smithy and Redwing were struggling in his grasp, when Bob and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh collared Horace, and hooked him over.

The odds were overwhelming; but Coker of the Fifth was not the man to count odds. He was the man to put up a fight against the most terrific odds. And he did.

For two or three minutes Coker raged in the midst of the Removites, keeping them very busy. But the odds were too overwhelming, even for the hefty and infuriated Horace.

He was left on the towpath at last, sprawling, breathless, quite at the end of his resources. The pack, panting, ran on, leaving him for dead, as it were.

The hapless Coker lay gurgling for breath in a fearfully untidy state, as a man in shirtsleeves and a bowler hat came trotting by. Poker Pike gave him a surprised stare, but did not stop. Almost as breathless as Coker, but determined as ever, the Greyfriars gunman charged on after the pack. Coker was left with the towpath to himself; and it was a long, long time before he resumed the perpendicular.

Forgetting Coker, the pack whooped on, off the towpath to the wide, open spaces of Courtfield Common. The paper trail lay ahead; but the hares had gained valuable minutes, when every second was precious—owing to Coker. They were far out of sight as the pack panted along the paper trail across the common.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Rival Spoofers!

HAROLD SKINNER looked at Billy Bunter, under the window of Mr Quelch's study, with a deadly look.

Billy Bunter was wriggling painfully, and he seemed to be hurt; but he was not hurt so much as he was going to be. Skinner's temper was never very good, and sitting on his face had not improved it in the least. Kicking Bunter across the quad, and back again, seemed quite a good idea to Skinner.

"You fat, fozzling freak!" said Skinner. "What the dooce do you mean by jumping out of a window on a fellow's head?"

"Ow!" moaned Bunter. "Wow! Wharrer you mean by biting a fellow like a mad dog, you beast? Ow!"

"I'll jolly well——"

"Oh crikey!" exclaimed Bunter. It was not Skinner's threatening words that caused him to exclaim. It was the sound of three o'clock chiming out from the clock-tower.

Three o'clock, and Mr. Coot's visitor was expected at the Courtfield Hotel at four! And there was a long, long walk between.

"I—I say, Skinner, old chap!" gasped Bunter, backing hastily away as Harold advanced on him. "I say, lend me four bob for a taxi fare, will you?"

Skinner stared at him in sheer astonishment. Under no circumstances whatever, would he have lent Billy Bunter four bob. In the present circumstances he was less likely to do so than

ever. Dropping on a fellow's head, and sitting on his face, was really not the way to get that fellow into an unusually generous mood.

"Mad?" asked Skinner. "Well, look here, lend me a tanner for the bus!" gasped Bunter—moderating his transports, as it were.

"I'll lend you four bob, as soon as a tanner!" said Skinner. "Just as soon! But at present I'm going to lend you a boot!"

Bunter backed away again. He did not want the loan of Skinner's boot! That was quite useless to him. And he had no time to waste on a row with Skinner.

"Keep off, you silly beast!" he hooted. "I'm in a hurry! I shall be late for tea if I don't get off! You might lend a chap a tanner—I'll settle out of my postal order when—when it comes! I say—Keep off, you beast!"

Bunter made another backward jump as Skinner followed him up. Bunter had no time to waste on Skinner; but Skinner had some to waste on Bunter. He seemed quite bent on that idea of lending Bunter his boot!

"Don't play the goat, you fathead!" howled Bunter. "I tell you, I've got to get to Courtfield by four, or I shall miss the spread——"

"Sticking somebody at the bunshop?" jeered Skinner. "Who? All the fellows are out on the paper-chase."

"I'm not going to a fag spread!" answered Bunter disdainfully. "And it isn't at a mouldy old bunshop, either. I say, Skinner, look here." Another bright idea struck Bunter—it seemed to be his day for brain-waves. "I say, I could take a pal if I liked. You stand the taxi, and I'll take you! What?"

Skinner paused. He did not give up that idea of lending Bunter his boot! But he postponed the performance till he ascertained whether there was anything in this.

Skinner, like Bunter, was hard-up that afternoon! The black sheep of the Remove had lately placed all his available cash on a horse that was absolutely certain to win.

Unfortunately, that horse had come in eleventh. He had not run off with the race—only with Skinner's cash!

Tea in Hall—the last resource of the stony—was Skinner's prospect, as well as Bunter's that afternoon.

Certainly he was not prepared to stand a taxi, as Bunter suggested. But he was prepared to hear whether Bunter could stand a spread. That, too, was improbable, but it was worth while to make sure. There was lots of time for kicking Bunter, if there was nothing in it.

"I mean it!" said Bunter impressively. "A first-class feed at the best hotel in Courtfield! Everything of the best, and as much as you like."

"Gammon!" said Skinner. "Only I've got to get there by four!" said Bunter. "It's a jolly long walk across the common! You stand the taxi—and come with me, see?"

"I'll come with you like a shot, if you're telling the truth!" grinned Skinner. "Of course, you might be—accidents will happen! Tell me about it first."

Billy Bunter blinked round cautiously through his big spectacles. He did not want other ears to hear.

There were very few fellows at Greyfriars to whom Bunter could have propounded so extraordinary a scheme for getting a free tea, without danger of being kicked. But Skinner was one of the few.

He was quite as unscrupulous as Bunter, without having the excuse of being such a duffer.

"Keep it dark, you know!" murmured

Bunter. "It's rather a secret! Ever heard of a man named Coot?"

"Coot!" repeated Skinner blankly. "Coot! I believe I've heard that American chap mention the name—some man who may be coming down to see him some time, I believe. What on earth about Coot?"

"He's standing the spread!" breathed Bunter. "He's in Courtfield to-day, on business; and he's standing it, at the hotel——"

"He's asked you?" exclaimed Skinner. "Not exactly asked me," admitted Bunter. "But I'm jolly well going—and I can take a pal, if I like! Van Duck would very likely have taken a pal—might have taken Wharton or Nugent! Luckily, they're all out. I say, keep it dark, old man! You'll have to back me up, of course! You'll call me Van Duck, see?"

"Call you Van Duck!" repeated Skinner, wondering whether William George Bunter was wandering in his fat mind.

Bunter winked. "You see, he's going to think I'm Van Duck!" he whispered.

"You look like him, don't you?" said Skinner. "A lot! Is he going to believe that Van Duck has grown double width since he's been at Greyfriars?"

"Oh, really, Skinner! He's never seen Van Duck—wants to make his acquaintance, see? Van Duck can't go—he's out with the fellows! Well, why shouldn't I go—and you with me? See?"

Skinner gazed at the fat Owl of the Remove. This sounded to him as if the fat junior's wits were going astray.

But as Bunter proceeded to explain about the lost letter, and the call he had taken on the telephone, Skinner's expression altered.

He could see that there was, after all, something in it.

"By gum!" said Skinner. His eyes glistened. "Why, if the man's never seen Van Duck, he might take any chap for him—any chap who went along in his name."

"Safe as houses!" said Bunter complacently. "You see, the mere fact of the fellow turning up will show that he is Van Duck—so far as old Coot can tell. He doesn't know that the Yankee never had his letter, and he can't possibly guess that I was in Quelch's study and took his call. See?"

Skinner nodded. He was not thinking of kicking Bunter now! He was thinking of quite other things. But he did not tell Bunter of what he was thinking!

"Why, if any man in the Remove walked up at four and said he was Van Duck, how would the old bean know he wasn't?" said Bunter, grinning. "Of course, he'd never dream it wasn't the right chap."

"Never!" agreed Skinner. "And he's going straight back to London—he said he was catching a train, and had only half an hour for Van Duck! Safe as houses! Even if he mentions it afterwards to Van Duck in a letter, nobody will know who went."

"Right as rain!" "And I can tell you, it will be a spread!" said Bunter. "American millionaires do you all right! Better than doorsteps and dishwater in Hall, what?"

Skinner chuckled. "As Inky would say, the betterfulness is terrific!" he answered.

"Only there's no time to lose!" said Bunter anxiously. "It's a jolly long walk to Courtfield. You stand the taxi—it will only be four bob, and we can call it on Quelch's phone, see? You're

going to have a whack of a spread worth pounds."

"Come up to the study!" said Skinner.

"Haven't you got the tin about you?"

"No!"

"Well, look here, I'll wait for you here." Bunter did not like stairs.

"I mean, I've got some toffee in my study—"

"Oh, all right, old chap! Come on!"

Even with the prospect ahead of a gorgeous spread stood by an American millionaire, Bunter fell to the lure of toffee!

He followed Skinner into the House and up to the Remove passage. That passage was quite deserted.

Except for Fisher T. Fish, happy and busy with his accounts in Study No. 14, at the end, there was not a single Remove fellow on the spot.

Skinner paused at the doorway of Bunter's study, No. 7. He opened the door of that study and glanced in. It was, as he expected, vacant.

Bunter blinked at him impatiently.

"I say what are you wasting time for, Skinner?" he yapped.

Skinner's answer was not in words.

Taking hold of the fat Owl's fat shoulders, he gave him a sudden spin, sending him headlong into the study.

Bunter, with a startled yell, rolled.

Skinner swiftly whipped the key out of the lock inside, and jammed it into the lock outside. As Bunter sat up he slammed the door, turned the key, and slipped the latter into his pocket.

There was a roar from Bunter in the study.

"Skinner, you beast—"

No answer from Skinner—unless a sound of retreating footsteps, dying away towards the stairs, could be taken as an answer.

Bunter, equally astonished and enraged at this extraordinary trick, dragged frantically at the doorhandle and yelled.

"Skinner, you beast! Skinner, you rotter! Let me out, you tick! Let me out of this study, you cad! Do you hear?"

Skinner did not hear—being downstairs by that time. Anyhow, he would not have heeded.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I shall be late at Courtfield! I say, it's no good if a fellow doesn't turn up by four."

He banged on the door and yelled frantically through the keyhole. But he realised that Skinner was gone.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

The game was up—for Bunter! He could see now that Skinner had been pulling his fat leg, in pretending to fall in with his scheme. This, it seemed, was Skinner's retaliation for having his face sat on!

Bunter had been a prisoner in Quelch's study, and had escaped by the window. Now he was a prisoner in his own study—but there was no escape by a window thirty feet from the ground! This time he was a study prisoner for keeps!

He gasped with wrath. Minutes—precious minutes—were passing, and that gorgeous spread at Courtfield was fading away like the unsubstantial vision of a dream.

"Oh, the beast!" groaned Bunter. "Rotter! Toad! Tick! Beast! Blighter! Worm! Oh lor'!"

He could hardly find words for Skinner's iniquity.

And he did not guess, as yet, the full depth and extent of that iniquity! While the hapless Owl raged in Study No. 7, Skinner was swinging out of the school gates, to start for Courtfield.

It was a good idea—a real brain-wave of Bunter's—Skinner admitted that.

But Bunter was not the fellow to carry it out.

The fat and fatuous Owl would have given away the deception before he had opened his mouth twice—in Skinner's opinion, at least. A much more artful fellow than Bunter was required to carry out such a spoof successfully—a fellow, for instance, like Harold Skinner!

Skinner could get brain-waves, as well as Bunter! And—cheerfully leaving the fat Owl of the Remove to rage in a locked study—Skinner started to walk to Courtfield, to carry out Bunter's scheme on his own, and stick Mr. Ezra Coot for the spread intended for Putnam van Duck!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Man who Watched the Road!

"ALL right now?" said Harry Wharton breathlessly.

"O.K.!" agreed Putnam.

The hares had fallen into

a gentle trot. Behind them, the paper trail wound among the bushes and furze of Courtfield Common. During the long run there had been only one spot of danger—when Coker of the Fifth had butted in—fortunately for the hares, though rather unfortunately for Coker. He had delayed the pack long enough to give the hares the chance they needed—and they had made the most of it.

From that time they had kept well ahead, and when they looked back, from a knoll on the common, they saw nothing of the pursuers. So they ventured to fall into an easy trot, as they headed for the road over the common, by which the way lay back to Greyfriars School.

"I guess we've got them beat!" added Putnam van Duck.

"Well, I fancy we may see something of Bob, or Smithy, or Squiff!" said Harry. "But we can take it easy for a bit."

Taking it easy, they trotted on to the long, white road, that lay like a ribbon across the green common, from Friar-dale and the school to the town of Courtfield.

They struck the road about midway between Courtfield and the school, and at that spot a small, black, closed car stood by the roadside.

The chauffeur was standing by it, staring steadily in the direction of the distant school, as if in expectation of seeing someone coming from that direction.

Harry Wharton did not take any particular notice of either the car or the driver, but Putnam gave the latter a rather keen "once-over."

"I guess that hombre hails from my side!" he remarked.

"Eh?"

"I mean he's American."

"Oh!" said Harry, and he glanced at the man—a stocky, clean-shaven man, with keen eyes in an alert face.

The man turned as he heard the schoolboys approaching, and watched them come off the common into the road. Then, as they would have passed on, he stepped towards them, touching his cap.

"I guess you'll excuse me!" he began, and Wharton smiled. The guess confirmed Putnam's remark that the man was an American.

They came to a stop.

"Yes," said Harry. "Anything we can do for you?" It was rather puzzling what the man wanted, but he concluded that a foreigner might be doubtful about the way to somewhere.

"Mebbe!" said the clean-shaven man. He was eyeing the two juniors very keenly, and Wharton noted that Van Duck's face was equally keen.

It came into his mind, suddenly, that Van Duck had reason to be alert, if he fell in with strange Americans. Certainly this man was neither Chick Chew nor Bud Parker, both of whom Van Duck knew by sight. But Chick had a good many "side-kickers" in the kidnapping game, and an American standing by a car on a rather lonely road, only a mile from Greyfriars, would certainly have made Poker Pike suspicious.

"I guess I'm waiting here for a boy from the school," explained the driver. "Mebbe you belong to Greyfriars?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"One of you might be the feller, then, though I didn't look for him in that kit!" said the clean-shaven man.

"We're on a paper-chase," said Harry, with a smile.

"What's the name of the fellow you want?" asked Van Duck. "This chap is Wharton, and I'm Smith!"

Harry Wharton repressed, with difficulty, a start of surprise. Van Duck generally spoke with a slight nasal intonation, which betrayed the fact that he came from the other side of the "pond." Now, however, he spoke very carefully, without that nasal sound in his voice. And he gave his name as Smith!

Wharton was quick on the uptake. He did not need telling that Van Duck scented danger in that black, closed car and the waiting driver. Poker Pike after all, had been right!

Both the juniors saw the shade of disappointment that came over the sharp American face as Van Duck gave the names.

"I guess neither of you ain't my bird!" he said, and he stepped back to the car.

"But what chap do you want?" asked Harry. "We'll give him the tip you're waiting for him, if we see him. What's his name?"

"Oh, Jones!" said the driver. "If you see Jones, tell him to get a move on."

"Right-ho!"

The hares trotted on towards the school. They trotted more swiftly than before. Putnam made the pace, and Wharton kept up with him.

A glance over a shoulder showed the clean-shaven young man standing again as the juniors had first seen him, staring along the road after them.

"By the great horn spoon!" murmured Van Duck.

"You think—" muttered Harry.

"I guess it's a cinch! There ain't a lot of Amurricans hanging about this quiet spot—and he's waiting for a fellow from the school. I guess that guy Poker was on the right mark!"

Putnam chuckled.

"Did you pipe his face when I said our names? I guess he was honing to hear that one of us was named Van Duck."

"But—" said Harry.

"I guess I gave him the straight goods—I'm a Smith on one side of the family!" grinned Putnam. "And mopper's name is mine as much as popper's, I guess."

"But I can't make it out," said Harry. "If he's one of that gang, what possible reason can he have for supposing that Van Duck—you—may be coming along this road this afternoon?"

Putnam shook his head.

"That let's me out!" he answered. "I can't guess that one, sure! Mebbe Chick's been working some game—or mebbe the feller's just cruising on the



Before Poker Pike could fire at the running gangsters, Bob Cherry gave him a hefty charge, and sent him crashing to the ground. There was a roar of rage from Pike, as the gangsters disappeared among the trees!

chance of a guy walking out on a half-holiday! Anyhow, I'll lay Rockefeller's millions to a continental red cent, that if he'd been wise to it that I was little me, he'd have roped me into that car."

"But if Chick Chew set him to watch for you, surely he'd set a man who knew you by sight—"

"If he did, wouldn't I likely know him by sight, too, and give him a wide berth?" grinned Putnam.

"Oh! Yes, I suppose so. But—Blessed if I can make it out!" said Harry. "If it's as you think, that man's got some special reason for believing that Van Duck will come along here this afternoon—and how the dickens—"

"Ask me another! But if he wasn't one of Chick's gang, I'll eat Poker's gun, and then some!"

Much puzzled, Wharton trotted on by the American junior's side. The car and the man beside it dropped out of sight.

"Gee!" ejaculated Putnam suddenly. "I guess that's one of the bunch, ahead of us—I mean, the pack!"

"Skinner!" exclaimed Harry.

A Remove fellow was coming along the road from the direction of the school. It was Harold Skinner—and Wharton frowned as he recognized him.

"It's all right," he said, "Skinner can't catch us—he never followed the trail. I don't suppose he started at all."

Certainly Skinner showed no sign of having done any hard running that afternoon. He was quite fresh, and walking with unusual quickness.

He started a little at the sight of the two hares coming down the road. It was rather an awkward meeting for Skinner, as one of the hares was his Form captain, whose duty it was to see that slackers did not slack.

Skinner would have passed on without stopping, but the hares stopped.

"All serene," said Skinner uneasily. "I can't catch you, you know! I haven't followed on. I conked out rather early."

"Very early, I fancy!" said Harry contemptuously. "Did you start at all?"

"Every fellow was bound to start, wasn't he?" said Skinner blandly. "But I told you about the pain in my foot. It came on rather bad after a mile, and I had to chuck it."

"If you started, and did a mile, all right!" said the captain of the Remove. "That's not bad for a slacker."

"Well, I did!" grunted Skinner. "But the pain in my foot—"

"That hasn't stopped you from taking a walk."

"It's passed off, luckily," said Skinner, still bland.

"If you did a mile—"

"I've told you I did!"

"That would be as far as Giles' mill. Did you get as far as the mill?"

"Just!" agreed Skinner. "I sat down there a bit to rest my foot before I started back to the school."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Try again!" he suggested.

"What do you mean?" demanded Skinner.

"I mean, that we never went within a mile of Giles' mill, and that any fellow who followed the trail can't have seen the mill this afternoon."

"Oh!" ejaculated Skinner.

Van Duck chuckled. Skinner was fairly caught.

"So you were pulling my leg?" he snarled.

"Exactly!" assented Wharton coolly. "I jolly well knew you never started. I suppose you cut while Pike was kicking up that row at the gates, or Bob would have bagged you. You know as

well as I do, Skinner, that a man can't cut a Form run. You get a bating."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Skinner, and he tramped on, leaving the hares to resume their trot to the school.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

"Got!"

THE man who stood by the small black car fixed his eyes, with a glint in them, on a schoolboy coming up the road across the common at a quick walk.

Skinner, as he came on, glanced at him carelessly. But the clean-shaven man's glance at Skinner was not careless—it was keen, searching, scrutinising. And as Skinner reached the spot where the car stood by the roadside, the man stepped towards him, touching his hat.

"Skuse me, sir!" His manner was very respectful. "If you're the young gentleman from the school, sir—the one I'm waiting for—"

Skinner stopped. He was half-way to Courtfield, and he would have been glad of a lift in a car for the rest. Skinner was a better walker than Billy Bunter, but he was no whale at any kind of exertion. The man spoke with an American accent, which Skinner noted at once, and it occurred to him, naturally, that he might have some connection with the American at the Courtfield Hotel.

"You're waiting for a Greyfriars fellow?" he asked.

"You said it, sir! If you are Mr. Van Duck—"

(Continued on page 16.)

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The GANGSTERS SWOOP!



FRANK RICHARDS

(Continued from page 13.)

As he was going to present himself to Mr. Ezra Coot as Van Duck, Skinner was prepared, of course, to lay claim to that name.

He nodded coolly.

"Did Mr. Coot send you to meet me?" he asked.

He mentioned the name of the American gentleman intentionally, so that this man should have no doubt that he really was Van Duck. Any other fellow coming along the road, of course, would have known nothing about Mr. Coot—so far as this man could know.

Skinner was a keen and observant fellow, and he did not fail to note the flash of satisfaction in the man's sharp eyes. Quite plainly, the man was very glad to have met Van Duck on the road!

"That's the how of it, sir!" he said. "Mr. Ezra Coot, at the Courtfield Hotel—"

"He's expecting me at four!" said Skinner calmly.

Skinner had no doubt about being able to carry off that "spoof" successfully, much as he doubted Billy Bunter's ability to do so. Still, he was glad to put it to the test before meeting Mr. Coot himself!

If he satisfied this man, who had come from Mr. Coot, it was pretty certain that all would go well when he met Ezra.

Indeed, Ezra Coot could hardly entertain the slightest imaginable doubt on the subject, if his visitor arrived in the car he had sent to meet Van Duck on the way!

"You said it, Mr. Van Duck, sir!" The clean-shaven man was obviously very satisfied. "You see, sir, I met up with Mr. Coot in Courtfield, and when he said he was expecting his old friend's son, coming from the school, I allowed I'd run down and meet him up the road, and give him a lift. It's an honour, sir, to meet the son of Mr. Vanderdecken van Duck."

Skinner suppressed a grin.

He had no doubt that a pushing American would be glad of a chance of establishing contact with the son of the multi-millionaire of Chicago.

That was the impression he received from this American's remarks. Perhaps it was the impression the American intended him to receive!

"That's all right," he said. "I'll be glad of a lift."

"My car's quite at your service, sir!"

"Thanks!" said Skinner, airily.

The man opened the door of the car for Skinner to step in. As he did so, he looked past Skinner, as if in expectation, or perhaps apprehension, of seeing someone else coming up the road.

But the road was quite deserted.

Across the green common a scattered crowd of schoolboys in running kit came into sight. The pack was arriving on the paper trail. The high wind had

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scattered that trail a little on the wide common, and there had been some delay; but the hounds had picked up the "scent" again, and were coming on fast.

The man with the car, however, did not look at them. He had stopped the hares, on the chance that one of them might be Van Duck; but now that he had Van Duck—as he believed—in his presence, he was not interested in any other schoolboys.

Skinner followed his glance down the road. He had the impression that the man with the car expected to see him followed by somebody. It did not occur to him, at the moment, that the man was uneasy lest Poker Pike might be in the offing, keeping "tabs" on the millionaire's son.

But no one was to be seen on the road.

Skinner stepped into the car.

He sat down, in a very cheerful mood.

All was going well!

He was getting a lift into Courtfield; he was going to arrive early at the hotel; and he was going to bag the magnificent spread intended for Van Duck! And it was an added satisfaction, to Skinner's peculiar nature, that Billy Bunter, who had schemed and expected to bag that spread, was locked in his study at the school, disappointed and furious.

But Skinner's satisfaction was brief.

Having sat down in the car, he expected the man to shut the door, step into the driving-seat, and drive on to Courtfield.

His expectations were not realised.

What happened was nothing like that! It was, indeed, something that made Harold Skinner wonder whether he was dreaming—a particularly horrid and terrifying nightmare.

The clean-shaven man did not shut the door. He stepped into the car after Skinner. In utter horror and amazement and dismay, Skinner saw him jerk a revolver from his hip. He grasped it by the barrel in his right hand, and with his left grasped Skinner's collar.

"Don't yaup." His voice came with a snap. "You ain't going to be hurt none, if you keep quiet! Jest a yaup, and you won't give another! You get me?"

Skinner could only gaze at him in stony horror.

Almost stunned with amazement and terror, he could hardly believe that this was really happening.

But he kept quiet!

Astounding, unbelievable as it was, he knew—knew only too well—that a cry, an attempt at resistance, would be followed instantly by a crash on his head from the heavy metal butt of the pistol—which would put it out of his power to give further trouble.

White as chalk, he goggled at the man.

"Keep it parked!" came the snap again.

Unresisting, Skinner was twirled off the seat to the floor of the car. The man jerked the door shut.

The blind were drawn on the windows, and the interior of the closed car was invisible to any passer-by.

Skinner, frightened out of his wits, was as unresisting in the man's hands as clay in the hands of the potter.

Dazed with astonishment, he felt a cord passed round his wrists, and then his ankles, and knotted. Then a gag was fastened in his mouth.

Utterly helpless, he huddled on the floor of the car, and the man drew an ample rug over him, completely screening him from sight.

Skinner saw nothing more. But he could hear. He heard three sharp, loud blasts on the motor-horn in swift succession. Then he heard the buzzing of the engine. The little black car jumped into motion.

It roared away.

What direction it was taking, Skinner did not know; but he was certain that it was not in the direction of Courtfield.

Obviously, the man was not taking him to tea with Mr. Ezra Coot in this extraordinary way!

What did it mean?

What could it mean?

He was kidnapped!

And as that word came into his mind, along with it came the explanation. Nobody, it was certain, would possibly want to kidnap Harold Skinner of the Remove. He was kidnapped as Van Duck!

He had given the name of Van Duck—he had artfully and cunningly made this man believe that he was Van Duck—and the man, so far from coming from Ezra Coot, was one of the kidnaping gang, on the look-out for a chance to "cinch" the millionaire's son.

Skinner groaned through the gag.

He had been given no chance to explain. Indeed, had he done so, the man would hardly have believed him. If he had denied that he was Van Duck, after laying claim to that name, the rascal would have taken it for a palpable falsehood.

Tea with a rich American was very much off the programme now. He was not going to the Courtfield Hotel; he was going to some hidden and remote den of the kidnaping gang.

The car roared on.

Tea with Mr. Coot! Skinner—now that it was too late—was keen enough to realise that there was no tea with Mr. Coot—no Mr. Coot at all!

The whole thing was a trick to get Putnam van Duck out of the safety of the school.

It was a trap, and Skinner, the sharpest and most cunning fellow in the Remove, had walked into it.

Possibly Van Duck would have walked into it, but for the lost letter. That lost letter had never been written by the genuine Mr. Ezra Coot. The telephone call that Bunter had taken in Quelch's study had not come from the genuine Ezra, but from a scheming rascal using his name. It grew more and more clear to Skinner that the whole thing, from beginning to end, was a "plant."

And he had walked into it!

What was going to happen to him now?

Billy Bunter would have walked into it, but he had fooled the fat Owl and taken his place—for this! Wriggling under the enveloping rug, Skinner groaned, a muffled groan under the gag. Many times Skinner's artfulness had over-reached itself. But never so disastrously as now.

Billy Bunter, boiling with fury in Study No. 7 in the Remove, pictured the artful Skinner sitting down to a magnificent spread with a spoofed American at the Courtfield Hotel. It had dawned on Bunter's fat brain at last what Skinner's game was.

But if Billy Bunter could have known the facts, he would have been exceedingly glad that he was locked in Study No. 7. It was not nice, but it was nicer than being tied up under a rug on the floor of a rushing motor-car in the hands of Chicago kidnapers.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

O.K.!

"SKEERED?" sneered Chick Chew.

"I guess," said Bud Parker, "that I'd rather be back in Chicawgo, Chick. I ain't making no pretence of liking this country."

Chick snorted contemptuously. The fat gangster was standing, leaning on an old beech, in a clump of trees on Courtfield Common. Bud Parker stood near him, his eyes watchful as a scared rabbit's through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

Bud was uneasy. He had been uneasy ever since the gangsters had transferred their activities from their native haunts to the dangerous side of the Atlantic—dangerous for gangsters!

In a one-horse island where cops did not even pack guns, Bud might have been expected to consider gangstering an easy job—mere pie. But he did not. He had a wholesome respect for the British Police Force, in spite of their lack of guns. Shooting up cops was all very well in Chicago, but in this dog-goned island a cop could not be shot up without setting the whole country on its hind legs, rubbering after the guy with the gun. And Bud, though he packed his accustomed automatic, had not the slightest intention of using it until he was safe back on the other side of the pond.

It was difficult for Bud to believe that there really existed a country where a guy couldn't buy his way out of the "stone jug." But he was driven to believe it. And he had a deep dread of finding himself inside a "stone jug" in a land where the way out was not for sale.

"I'll say you're some Dismal Jimmy, Bud!" said Mr. Chew. "I ain't shouting out that we've had a whole heap of luck so far. Nope! This ain't the country that I'd pick out of a heap for our game. Surely not! If I was picking and choosing, I'd sure leave this here island on the counter. But Old Man Vanderdecken has parked his boy in this pesky island—yep or nope?"

"Yep!" agreed the uneasy Bud. "Are we going to cinch half a million dollars for that infant, or are we not?" demanded Chick.

"Sure—if we get him!" "Did you say 'if'?" growled Chick. "You pie-faced bonehead, I'm telling you to forget it! Did you ever know me let up on a racket when I'd once got my molars into it?"

"Nope!" admitted Bud. "Did I ever get left?" continued Mr. Chew, whose method of argument seemed to be the Socratic one of asking questions. "I'm inquiring of you, Bud Parker?"

"We ain't never throwed it on this side yet," said Mr. Parker. "I'm telling you, Chick, this ain't Chicawgo, nor it ain't Noo Yark, nor even Frisco. I'll tell a man, I surely dislike seeing a cop around. They don't pack no guns, sure. But they're on the level. And I'm shouting out to you, Chick, that a cop on the level is more trouble than a cop with a gun!"

"Aw, can it!" grunted Chick. "We ain't getting cinched by no cops! And if we was—"

Bud shivered. It was clear that he really hated the idea of getting "cinched" by a man in blue.

"Mebbe," said Chick, "we can't buy cops and we can't buy judges in this pesky one-horse island, what I guess some mangy cat left lying around. But we can buy lawyers here, same as in the Yew-nited States."

"Mebbe," said the pessimistic Bud.

"But I ain't figuring that that will cut a lot of ice if they get us."

Chick gave another grunt. "Mebbe," he said, "we win up this very day. Ain't we got it all cut and dried?"

"Ain't we had it all cut and dried afore?" asked Bud, taking up the Socratic method himself. "Ain't we slipped up on it every time? I'm inquiring of you, Hannibal Chew?"

"One swaller," said Mr. Chew, "don't make a summer! I allow it ain't so easy here as in the States. There ain't the room here for a guy to move around without falling over some other guy. But we're getting through. Ain't I wrote to that guy Putnam, using the name of old Coot in London in a fist that old Coot would sure figure was his own if he piped it?"

"Sure!" assented Mr. Parker. "Ain't I told Putnam, in that there billy-doo, that Coot'd be calling him to-day on the phone, and so making it sure that he wouldn't write no answer and put the old guy in London wise in the racket?"

"Yep!" agreed Mr. Parker. "And ain't I phoned to his pesky

schoolmaster this afternoon and fixed it up O.K. for the young guy to mosey along to Courtfield and take tea with old Coot what's a hundred miles away?"

"You said it." "Waal, then, you bonehead, what's the matter with Hanner?" demanded Mr. Chew warmly. "Ain't it working? Ain't Tug waiting on the road with a car, ready to meet up with young Putnam when he comes along?"

"Sure thing!" "Ain't he a man what young Putnam's never seen? And ain't the young guy sure to hop into that car when asked so to do?"

"Mebbe." This time Mr. Parker gave a qualified assent. "And if he don't hop in, ain't Tug the guy to pass him one on the cabeza and throw him in?"

"I'll say so." This time the assent was unqualified. "And ain't Tug going to give three hoots on the klaxon, to put us wise when he's got that young guy?" pursued Mr. Chew. "And ain't we


(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Our clever Rhymester is still going great guns. The latest victim to come under his eagle eye . . . and pen is **HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH**, Nabob of Bhanipur, the Hindoo junior of the Remove.


(1)
Of highest caste in all his land,
A Prince of wide dominions,
He comes from India's coral strand
And has his own opinions
About the English climate, which
Is certainly much cooler
Than that which smiled upon the rich
And powerful young ruler.

(2)
Good natured, kind and full of sense,
He's a real admirer of the law
His popularity's increasing
Save with the English
Week in, week out, he's not heard
From this good-tempered chappie
One snappish or ill-natured word,
He's always calm and happy.



(3)
The language Inky speaks is queer,
It regularly dazes
Strange visitors when first they hear
His weird and wondrous phrases.
"Terrific!" is the word he loves,
And all things are "terrific,"
From battleships to boxing-gloves,
From Poles to the Pacific!

(4)
A moonshee wise and full of lore
Taught Inky English grammar,
He should have taught himself before
He started in to hammer
His verbs and proverbs, both so odd,
Into his hopeful pupils,
He should have been clapped into quod
Without the slightest scruples.





(5)
So Inky's tongue is queer and quaint,
While ours is full of knowledge,
And Inky's words are like what ain't
Not spoke at this here College.
But on the field of play his fame
Is quite another story,
At any kind of outdoor game
He shines in brightest glory.

(6)
I found him bowling at the nets
Upon a pitch of matting,
And I had very few regrets
That I was not there batting,
For when he bowls in Larwood style,
His lightning-like expresses
Can shift your stumps about a mile,
As everyone confesses.

(7)
"Take up the battfulness," he said,
"And hit the bowling smiteful!"
And when I shook a cautious head
His grin became delightful.
"I wagerfully bet," said he,
"A bag of doughnuts niceful,
If you will bat, I'll bowl you three,
And hit the wicket twiceful!"

(8)
I took him on and grasped the bat,
He bowled a daisy-cutter,
I shut my eyes and lifted that
To the pavilion gutter.
"Well donefulness!" he grinned, and then
He swiftly bowled a second,
The off-stump vanished from my ken,
About one mile, I reckoned.

(9)
"Gosh! What a snorter!" was the cry
I made to Inky's chuckles,
He bowled his third express, and I
Late-cut it (with my knuckles).
I jumped about upon the pitch
In pain and indignation,
But still, I got the doughnuts, which
Were ample compensation!

waiting here ready to horn in if that Poker Pike is treading on his tail?"

"I should smile!" assented Mr. Parker.

"Waal, then, chew on it and get happy!" said Chick. "I'm telling you any minute we'll hear Tug hooting to put us wise that he's got that young guy. Three hoots mean that he's got him. I'm telling you, we're going to hear three pesky hoots."

Mr. Parker did not answer. He seemed to doubt it.

"And then," said Mr. Chew cheerfully, "we walk our chinks around a few to pipe whether that guy Poker is around offering trouble. I ain't denying that he's a bully boy with a glass eye when it comes to handling a gat, and he'd think no more of throwing lead at Tug than he'd think of shooting up a cop on the side walk in Chicawgo. But I guess I can throw lead a few, if it comes to that!"

"I ain't liking it!" grunted Mr. Parker. "I ain't liking it at all! This ain't no country where a guy can throw lead."

"Ain't I wise to that?" growled Chick. "I guess I ain't pulling no gun jest for greens! Nunk! But if Poker is around, horning in, I got to handle a gat! So've you! I'm telling you, three toots on the tooter means that Tug has got young Putnam—and four toots means that Poker is horning in. And if there's four toots on that there horn, Bud Parker, you pull your gun and follow me, and burn powder like you wos in a rookus in Chicawgo. You hear me whisper?"

"You said it!" mumbled Bud. Clearly he did not like the idea.

Chick snorted, and chewed his cigar. Bud listened in undisguised trepidation.

The clump of trees, where the two gangsters stood in cover, screened from the public view, was some little distance back from the road.

Known so well by sight to Poker Pike, and to a good many Greyfriars fellows, Chick had to be very careful not to be seen in the vicinity of Greyfriars. But he was on the spot—if he was wanted.

His plans had been laid so carefully that he had little doubt that Putnam van Duck would walk straight into the trap. Like many cunning schemers, he did not allow for the chapter of accidents.

The only danger, Chick reckoned, was that Poker Pike might be keeping tabs, to the extent of shadowing the millionaire's son on his way to Courtfield.

If that proved to be the case, Chick was ready to wade in—gun in hand! He shayed, certainly, Mr. Parker's misgivings about gun-play in a country where guns were so much at a discount. He would have avoided gun-play, if possible. But if gun-play was imperatively called for, Chick was the man to answer the call!

The gangsters listened.

It was getting towards four o'clock, and if Putnam had fallen into the trap, it was time he did the falling. Bud evidently had doubts—but if Chick had any, he did not allow his dubiety to appear in his fat face.

Suddenly from the direction of the road came the sharp, loud, clear hoot of a motor-horn.

Honk!
Bud started. Chick listened.

Honk!
"That's two!" breathed Bud.

Before he had the words out, the third hoot came, loud and clear.

Honk!
Bud listened, almost in anguish, for
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a fourth honk. Three hoots meant that the schoolboy millionaire was kidnapped in the black car, safe and sound. Four meant danger. Was a fourth coming?

If it came, Chick was ready to dart out of the clump, and speed on the scene, gun in hand—loosing off lead as soon as he spotted the gunman. And Bud had to back his play, repugnant as the game was to him. The sweat started out on Bud's forehead, over his horn-rimmed glasses, as he listened.

But there was silence—save for the sound of a distant car, growing more distant. Silence is said to be golden—but never had it seemed of such pure gold to Bud Parker.

Chick Chew grinned.

"What'll I be telling you, you Bud?" he asked.

"He's sure got him!" breathed Bud.

"Yep!" grinned Chick. "He's got him—Tug's got him! And that guy Poker ain't around none. Three toots on the horn if he got him safe—four if Poker was around. Did you hear three or four, you Bud?"

"Three!" said Bud.

"You said it!" agreed Mr. Chew. "Are we pulling off this here stunt, or are we not, Bud Parker?"

"I'll say we are!" said Mr. Parker, deeply relieved.

"Yep!" said Mr. Chew. "Old Man Vanderdecken can sure start counting out half a million dollars, Bud—he'll be handing them over soon. I'll say we're earning them harder than we used in Chicawgo—but we're cinching them, Bud! If you want to see a guy that never gets left, you want to give this baby the once-over! I'll tell a man this is jest clam pie! I'm asking you, Bud Parker, whether it is O.K., or whether it is not O.K."

"O.K.!" said Mr. Parker.

"You said it!" smiled Chick. "I guess Tug's a mile off by this time, and we want to beat it easy and quiet across this here bit of prairie. We got the Daimler parked a mile off, and I guess we can hit it without any galoot getting wise to us. I allow that this ain't a stunt that calls for publicity."

Chick Chew heaved his heavy bulk away from the beech, and left the clump on the side farthest from the road.

Bud followed him.

A mile away, in a secluded lane, the gangsters had a car waiting, which they could reach by cutting across the common without coming out into a road. It was, as Chick declared, a stunt that did not call for publicity—and the less they met the public view, the better. Leaving the trees, they started at a quick walk across the open green common—and as they did so, there was a yell of surprise.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That's Chick Chew—they're the kidnappers! Collar them, you fellows!"

A dozen schoolboys in running kit, following a paper trail, were swooping down towards the clump of trees as the gangsters emerged. Chick and Bud met the Greyfriars pack fairly face to face.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry Butts In!

BOB CHERRY was in the lead. Close behind him came Nugent and Johnny Bull, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and the Bounder. Strung out after them were Squiff and Tom Brown, Peter Todd and Redwing, and two or three other fellows.

Bringing up the rear, panting and perspiring, was a hickory-faced man in shirtsleeves and a bowler hat.

The paper trail ran at a short distance from the tree-clump. The hares had passed that clump, without seeing anything of the gangsters, deep in cover in the midst of the trees.

Neither had the gangsters seen anything of the hares.

If they had heard the light running footsteps at a distance on the grass, that sound had only caused them to hug cover the closer!

Certainly it had never crossed Mr. Chew's mind, keen as he was, that the millionaire's son he wanted, running as a hare in a paper-chase, had passed within twenty yards of him!

Chick was good at guessing, but that was one of the things that he could not be expected to guess!

Of the hares, Mr. Chew knew nothing. Of the pack, he learned more than he wanted to know. They would have passed the thick clump of trees, a dozen yards off, had not the gangsters emerged when they did.

But as they emerged, Bob Cherry saw them at once, and, swerving towards the trees, he yelled to his comrades.

Chick and Bud stopped dead, staring.

"The kidnappers!" yelled Bob.

"The esteemed Chew!" panted Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"That gang!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"You're leaving the trail!" shouted Smithy.

"Come on!" roared back Bob. "The kidnappers—bag 'em!"

From Mr. Pike, in the rear, came a gasp. His slits of eyes were on the gangsters at once.

Ever since Putnam van Duck had started, as a hare, the resolute Poker had kept up the chase—with the firm belief in his mind that Chick was surely somewhere around watching for a chance to cinch the millionaire's son. And here was Chick!

"Search me!" gasped Poker.

He was tired. He was perspiring. He was sticky. He was almost at the end of his tether. His bowler hat felt like a band of iron on his burning brow. But at the sight of the gangsters he woke to new life. He raced.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Mr. Chew.

He was surprised.

In fact, his sharp eyes almost popped from his fat face at the sight of the Greyfriars gunman at the tail of the Greyfriars pack.

He had been prepared for an encounter with Poker on the road where the car waited, keeping tabs on Putnam and giving Tug trouble. But he was utterly amazed at seeing him coming at a panting run across the common, in his shirtsleeves at the tail of a running crowd of paper-chasers.

It was clear that Poker knew nothing of the kidnapping scheme—carried out with such complete success! He was on the spot by accident! Running in a schoolboy paper-chase—the very last thing that the astonished Chick would have expected to see the grim-faced gunman doing!

Chick was so astonished that his fat jaw dropped, revealing gleams of gold from his expensive American dentistry.

"Beat it!" panted Bud.

Bud beat it promptly. Mr. Chew was not long after him—about the tenth of a split second!

"After them!" yelled Bob.

"Tally-ho!" roared the Bounder. Paper-chase and hares were forgotten for the moment.

With Bob in the lead, the whole pack swooped down on Chick and Bud. Only swift retreat saved them from clutching hands.

They darted away, with the pack whooping after them.

Fast after the pack came Poker Pike. Poker had been feeling as if he had hardly a run left in his legs, wiry as they were. He would have given half the princely salary paid by Mr. Vanderdecken van Duck just to sit down for a couple of minutes and rest his weary limbs, and fan his crimson face with his bowler hat. But he forgot all that at the sight of the gangsters. He found new energy from somewhere. He accelerated; he raced; he flew.

He passed Bob Cherry and took up the lead, instead of panting at the tail. After him flew the juniors.

"They got him!" Poker gritted between his teeth. "They sure was around—and they got him!"

Bob gave a breathless chuckle as he caught the words. "Where have they got him?" he gasped. "In their waistcoat pockets?"

Poker did not answer. He had little breath left, and he needed it all for running.

If the gangsters had "got" Putnam, as Poker guessed, it was clear that they had disposed of him somehow; he was not with them.

But Poker had no doubt of it!

He had feared it, all through the paper-chase; it had haunted him along all those weary, sticky miles. Obviously, the hares must have passed near the gangsters, as the paper trail had led the pack right on to them. That was enough for Poker. They had got him!

And Poker was going to get them!

His lungs were almost bursting. His legs were nearly falling off. Sweat ran in streams down his hickory face. His bowler hat felt now more like a ring of fire than a band of iron. But he flew on.

It was fortunate for Mr. Chew and his horn-rimmed side-kicker that they were fresh, and good at sprinting. Good as they were at the game, the pack would have had them had the meeting taken place earlier. But long, hard miles lay behind the hounds—and every mile had told! Hard as they ran, they did not gain on the fleeing gangsters.

Poker Pike, wonderful to relate, did gain. He shot ahead of the panting pack, much to their astonishment.

But even Poker, though he gained, could not keep it up. Ahead of the running gangsters appeared a fringe of trees, along a sunken lane, at the edge of the common. That was where the Daimler was parked out of sight. That was their objective. They flew for the car. Poker, gaining on them by a tremendous spurt, came almost within clutching distance.

But they flew on—and Poker sagged. He ceased to gain; he lost ground, though still ahead of the pack.

Grim and hard the hickory face set, in its sea of perspiration. Poker halted. He dragged the gun from his hip.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob Cherry, a dozen yards behind. "Oh crikey! Chuck that, you mad ass!"

If Poker heard, he did not heed. Up went his six-gun to a level, glinting in the May sunshine.

The pack, in sheer horror, came to a breathless halt, staring. They had forgotten Poker Pike's gun. Poker hadn't!

The gun was aimed, Poker's finger on the trigger. Perhaps remembering that he was no longer in Chicago, even at that breathless moment, Poker aimed at Chick Chew's flying fat legs. In his happy native city, no doubt, his aim would have been to hit the gangster where he lived, as he would have expressed it. Now he was content to roll him over, with a bullet in the leg.

"He—he—he's shooting!" gasped Nugent.

"Oh crikey!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Before Poker Pike could pull trigger, however, Bob Cherry gave him a hefty charge, and sent him crashing to the ground.

There was a roar of rage from Poker Pike as he scrambled to his feet. Roaring with rage, he rushed on again. But there was no chance now. The running gangsters disappeared through a fringe of trees.

Three minutes later Pcker stumbled down into the shady lane. It was only to hear the buzz of a car and to see the Daimler disappearing in the distance.

Poker Pike stood staring after the car as the pack gathered in the lane. He brandished his useless gun.

"Gone!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The gonefulness is terrific!" panted the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"They—they had a car!" breathed the Bounder. "Might have guessed that one. They're gone!"

Poker gave a groan.

"They got him! They sure cinched that Putnam van Duck! And Old Man Vanderdecken paying me to keep tabs on him! He sure will figure that I've sold him out!"

(Continued on next page.)

The BLACK CLOUD

No. 527

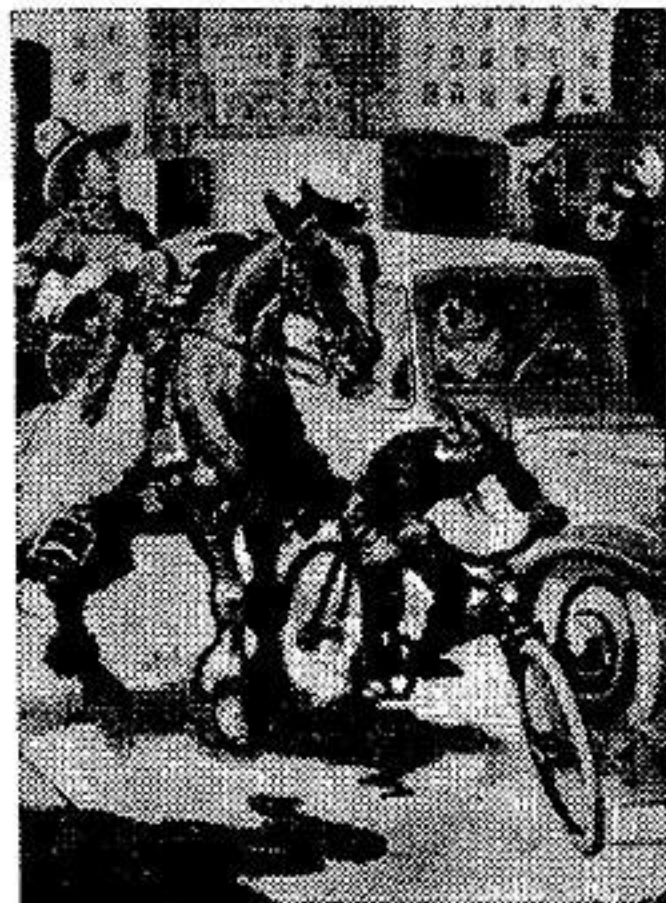


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COLUMBUS JUNIOR

No. 528

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"But—" gasped Bob.
 "I guess you young guys put this across me!" roared Poker. "Didn't I put you wise at the start? Didn't you set on a guy and keep him cinched while that Putnam van Duck walked his chinks? Yep! I'll say so! And ain't I going to beat you up a few? Surest thing you know!"

"Here, look out—" yelled Bob.
 "Oh crumbs!"
 "Barge him over!"
 "Great pip!"

Convinced that Putnam had fallen into the hands of the kidnapers, and that he had failed in his trust, Poker's next idea was to "beat up" the fellows who had put it across him! He parked his gun and charged at the pack.

They scattered.
 They could feel for Poker, in the distressing circumstances. They would willingly have consoled him; but they were not prepared to give him the consolation of "beating them up."

"Hook it!" gasped Bob.
 The pack scattered and ran. They headed back across the common, to the deserted paper trail. After them charged Poker.

It was rather fortunate for all concerned that Poker was at an end of his running resources. He dropped behind in the race.

He was far in the rear when the juniors hit the paper trail again. They followed it fast, and Poker's bowler hat dropped out of sight when they reached the Courtfield road.

After that loss of time there was no hope of catching the hares. But the pack ran hard, anxious to learn whether anything really had happened to Putnam van Duck, as Poker firmly believed.

On that score their fears were relieved as they came panting up to the school gates. For there, cheerful and smiling, the hares stood, waiting to welcome them home.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner in a Scrape!

"**L**IGHT down!"
 Skinner did not know how long he had lain, tied like a turkey, under the enveloping rug, in the black car. It seemed to him like centuries; but certainly it was nothing like so long as that!

But the car had stopped at last.
 The rug was jerked off, a knife slit through the cord on his wrists and ankles, the gag was jerked away, and Skinner was free.

In a dusky twilight, he blinked dizzily at the clean-shaven man, who told him curtly to light down.

Skinner tottered from the car.
 His first impression was that it was night, or, at least twilight. But he discerned that the duski-ness was due to the fact that he was inside a closed building. Looking round, he saw that it was a garage.

Tug had closed the garage doors after running the car in. Skinner had a dim view of the garage—that, and nothing more. Where it was, to what building it was attached, he had not the faintest idea. All he could feel sure of was that it was at a great distance from Greyfriars School.

He tottered, leaning on the car and gasping. The terror in his face drew a contemptuous sniff from Tug. He did not seem to have expected such a total loss of nerve on the part of Putnam van Duck!

"Take a cinch on your nervous system, big boy!" said Tug. "You ain't going to be chewed up in this here

shebang! This here is a home-from-home, where you'll sure be looked after like you was in your popper's mansion."

"I—I say—" gasped Skinner.
 "I guess I had to treat you rough!" said Tug. "I hadn't no time to lose, with mebbe that guy Poker rubbering around. But you're O.K. now! You jest got to sit down and wait for Chick to trickle in."

"I—I say, let me go!" gasped Skinner. "If you think I'm Van Duck you—"

"Hay?"
 "I'm not Van Duck!"
 Tug stared at him. As Skinner had told him, on the Courtfield road, that he was Van Duck, he was not likely to believe that statement.

"I'm not!" groaned Skinner. "Oh crikey! I say, I give you my word that I'm not Van Duck! You've made a mistake—"

"I guess you're the guy that's doing that!" grinned Tug. "I'll say it's a big mistake to figure on stringing me along that-a-way, young Putnam."

"I'm not Putnam!" groaned Skinner. "It was a lark—just a lark. I was pretending to be Van Duck—"

"Keep it up!" said Tug. "I'll say you'll go on pretending."

"But I'm really not—"
 "Can it!" said Tug tersely. "Can it, and put the lid on the can! You come this way, young Putnam!"

He gripped Skinner by the arm and led him to the back of the garage, where he opened a small door; it led into an adjoining room. Tug pushed Skinner into it.

That room, he saw at a glance, had been prepared for an unwilling occupant. It had a window, across which iron bars had been newly screwed; outside the window was a closed and locked shutter. Bedstead, table, chairs, and other articles of furniture stood about, evidently placed there recently for the kidnapped junior.

This, it was clear, was designed as Putnam van Duck's abode while Chick carried on negotiations with his popper for the ransom. Now it was going to be Skinner's abode. It might have been Billy Bunter's, had not Skinner so artfully ousted the Owl of the Remove. From the bottom of his heart Harold Skinner wished that he had not been quite so artful. Bunter was welcome to this—more than welcome!

"I say, do listen to a fellow!" moaned Skinner. "I'm no use to you if you want that Yankee chap! I'm not Van Duck!"

"Carry on!" grinned Tug.
 "I'm not at all like him!" gasped Skinner. "If you knew Van Duck by sight you'd jolly well know—"

"You're telling me—because you're wise to it that I ain't never seen you afore!" grinned Tug. "Carry on, bo! Say, you'd like me to believe that you ain't the bird we want?"

"Yes!" gasped Skinner.
 "And, not being the bird we want, you'd like me to let you beat it here and now?" asked Tug.

"Yes! You see—"
 "Mebbe you'd like me to run you back to where I picked you up, and drop you there, to hoof it back to your school?" suggested Tug.

"Oh, yes!" gasped Skinner.
 "That's what you want?" asked Tug.
 "Yes, yes!"

"Well," said Tug, "I guess there ain't no harm in your wanting, and you can sure keep on wanting, young Putnam van Duck. Keep on wanting all you want!"

And Tug chuckled.
 Evidently he did not place the slightest faith in Skinner's denial of

identity. It seemed too palpable to Tug. It sounded to him the thinnest story he had ever heard.

He would not have been surprised had Putnam van Duck sought to bribe him to let him go before Chick returned to make sure of him, but he really was surprised that Putnam should try such a flimsy tale as this; it was altogether too thin.

Skinner stood overwhelmed with dismay. Little as the clean-shaven man believed him, he certainly was not Putnam van Duck. What was going to happen to him when the leader of the kidnaping gang discovered that a mistake had been made?

Skinner had read a good deal about American gangsters; he had obtained quite a lot of lurid information from the films on that subject. He was feeling almost sick with apprehension.

Certainly he had rather made fun of Van Duck's supposed danger from kidnapers at Greyfriars, but that was when he was safe at school. He was not feeling like making fun now—now that he was in the power of the gangsters in Van Duck's place.

Tug went to the door. Skinner jumped after him.

"Look here," he panted, "I tell you I'm not Van Duck! I'm Skinner—that's my name! I've got letters in my pocket to prove it—"

"Cute!" assented Tug. "All fixed up ready to back up this yarn if you was cinched by a guy what wasn't wise to your frontispiece. Cute!"

"Oh, you fool!" gasped Skinner. "You idiot! I'm not Van Duck! I tell you I'm no use to you!"

"You'll do!" grinned Tug. "We'll sort of make you do."

"But I'm not Van Duck!" shrieked Skinner, as the gangster prepared to close the door on him.

"And you a cute American!" said Tug, with playful reproach. "Ain't you cute enough to know that that sort of dope ain't no use? I'm sure s'prised at you, young Putnam van Duck! I'll tell a man! If there's a guy that could string me along with a tale like that I'd like to see the colour of his hair—I sure would!"

And, with a cheery chuckle, Tug drew the door shut, and Skinner heard a key turn in the lock on the other side.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Skinner.
 He sat down on the edge of the bed. He was a prisoner! For how long? Until Chick Chew turned up and discovered that he was the wrong bird. What was going to happen then?

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Asks for a Batting!

"**I** SAY, you fellows—"
 "Bunter!"
 "Bat him!"
 "I say, don't you play the goat!" roared Bunter.

Hares and hounds were home after a hard run. They had splashed and changed in the changing-room and come up to the studies to tea. The Remove passage, so silent that afternoon, rang to footsteps and cheery voices.

Six fellows were in Study No. 1—the famous Co. and the American junior. They were doing full justice to ham and eggs and other good things when the Owl of the Remove blinked in through his big spectacles.

Bunter's fat existence had been rather forgotten during the paper-chase. But as the chums of the Remove were reminded of it they were reminded also of the fact that Bunter had dodged the

run, and was, therefore, entitled to a batting on the bags. Which was not what Bunter had come to the study for, by any means!

"There's a fives bat on the bookcase, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "Hand it over, and then bend across the fender."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Don't make a chap get up for it after a hard run," said Harry. "You might hand over the bat; it's for you, you know."

"Beast!"

The chums of the Remove chuckled. Bunter, not a very obliging fellow at the best of times, was really not likely to oblige by handing over a fives bat intended for his own tight trousers.

"You out the run, you fat slacker!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! The fact is, I—I forgot," said Bunter. "I was—was awfully keen on it, but I fell asleep; I was fast asleep in Quelch's armchair in his study, you know, when I heard you fellows starting—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you were hiding in a beak's study!" exclaimed Bob.

"Oh, no! I—I went there to—to borrow a—a book; I'd lost my Latin grammar, and I wanted one particularly—"

"On a paper-chase?"

"Yes—I mean no! I mean I went there to see the time by Quelch's clock, to make sure of not being late starting. As for dodging the run, of course I never thought of such a thing. I hope I'm not a slacker, like that cad Skinner!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob. "He hopes he's not a slacker!"

"The hopefulness is terrific."

"Being fast asleep, I forgot all about it," went on Bunter. "If you think I heard you starting, you're quite mistaken. I never heard Bob say 'Where's that fat slug?'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Nothing of the kind, you know! Sorry I missed the run. Still, you were pretty lucky, Wharton; you'd hardly have got home without being caught if I'd been in the pack. Same with you, Van Duck."

"Search me!" gasped Van Duck. And the Famous Five chuckled. So far from catching a hare in a paper-chase, it was rather doubtful whether Billy Bunter could have caught a tortoise. It would have had to be a very aged tortoise.

"But never mind that," said Bunter. "It was rather rotten of you fellows to start without me really. But never mind that. I say, I'll have some of that ham; it looks good. I say, I suppose you're going to bat Skinner for cutting the run, Wharton?"

"Yes, rather—same time as you get it!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Bunter. "I was fearfully keen on it. That cad Skinner cut it from sheer slacking. I say, give it to him hard, won't you? Look here, I'll lay it on if you like, if you fellows hold Skinner. I'll make him jolly well squirm!"

The tea party in Study No. 1 stared at Bunter. A batting was due to Skinner for slacking, but nobody expected Billy Bunter to be keen on seeing a slacker batted. He might have been expected to have a fellow feeling for a fellow slacker. A fellow feeling is said to make us wondrous kind. But it was clear that Bunter had no kindness to waste on Skinner.

"What has Skinner done, fatty?" asked Frank Nugent, laughing. Bunter gobbled ham and eggs.

"The awful cad!" he said. "He did me out of a spread! Locked me in my study, you know, to keep me out of it! I was sticking there till Mauly came in. Hours and hours—three-quarters of an hour, at least. Fancy that!"

Bunter talked with his mouth full. If he had been done out of one spread, he was taking care not to be done out of another.

"Rotten luck, you know!" he went on, his fat voice a little muffled by
(Continued on next page.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

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

FUNNY things happen over in Fisher T. Fish's country! But I think one of the most curious clubs to be found over there is the club for

DRAWING THE LONG BOW!

In other words—The Liars' Club, of Burlington, Wisconsin. Believe it or not, chums, in this club they actually give a gold medal each year to the member who succeeds in telling the "tallest story"! And what yarns some of them spin! One member, who lives in New Mexico, claimed to be so "quick on the draw," that he could stand in front of a mirror, and whip out his six-gun quicker than his own reflection could do!

Another club member claimed to have succeeded in growing buck-wheat mixed with Mexican jumping beans. When he made the buckwheat into pancakes, the jumping beans caused the pancakes to turn themselves!

All the members are not Americans, however. For instance, a London member weighed in with a story about an Irish fisherman. He tried hard to catch fish, but couldn't. So, as a last resort, he threw snuff into the water. This caused the fish to sneeze so hard that they hammered themselves to death on the rocks!

Finally, there was another story about a sea captain whose ship was called, appropriately enough, the Prevaricator. He claimed to have sailed over the Sahara Desert on the heat waves! What's more, he made the voyage pay for itself by catching smoked herrings on the way!

I think that's enough "tall stories" to be going on with!

Ever thought of keeping your own menagerie, chums? There are, of course, a large number of private menageries in this country. But menagerie keeping is a most expensive hobby. However, a resident of Llanelly has solved this problem. He possesses

A CEMENT MENAGERIE,

which is certainly a new one on me. This man is seventy-three years of age, and for the last four years he has been adding to his "menagerie." He has constructed a great number of coloured and life-like effigies of animals and birds—making them all of cement. They are placed around the lawn and forecourt of his house, and so natural do they look that many visitors receive a shock when they first spot them.

Who is

THE OLDEST MAN IN THE WORLD

still living? That is the question which "Curious," of Brighton, propounds to me

this week. The oldest living man is claimed to be Ali Sheffeyaga, a Turk, who is aged 137. He is a forester in the village of Karabey, in Kurdistan. Ali has three wives and eleven children. But, despite the fact that he is so old, he has not given up learning. On the contrary, he has just taught himself to read and write a new language. In his younger days Ali used to read and write the old Turkish script, but that has been changed. So the old man has learned the new Turkish alphabet with Latin characters. Good luck to him!

DON BRADLEY, of Chelsea, asks me an interesting question this week, concerning

SKYSCRAPERS MADE OF GLASS?

He wants to know if any have yet been constructed. Up to the present, no. But many architects are experimenting with glass as a building substance, and, as a matter of fact, several houses have already been constructed of glass bricks. These glass bricks are opaque, so, while they allow daylight to pass through the walls, people outside can't see through them. It is claimed that they insulate the building against cold in winter. Another big advantage is that they are fireproof. Besides being strong and durable, glass bricks can be manufactured in all kinds of colours, thus giving a great variety of artistic effects.

In the future we may see factories, homes and skyscraper office buildings constructed of glass. Architects say that they will stand as long as, if not longer than, buildings of steel, concrete, and stone. They will, of course, be more beautiful to look at, and much more pleasant to work in, because of the greater amount of sunshine and daylight that will come through their walls.

And now we come to the

STAR ITEMS IN NEXT WEEK'S MAGNET!

The top-notch yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled:

"ORDERED TO QUIT!" By Frank Richards,

and it's a mixture of fun, thrills, excitement and the thousand and one things which go to make a really good story. The extraordinary idea of having a professional gunman to keep watch and ward over a boy in his Form is far from pleasing to Mr. Quelch, who thinks it high time Poker Pike is given "marching orders." But Van Duck's bodyguard is not so easily got rid of, which, incidentally, is very fortunate for Mr. Quelch!

Following this star school story is a sparkling edition of the "Groyfriars Herald," and further thrill-packed chapters of our great new pirate yarn. Of course, we must not forget our clever Rhymester's verses—they're well up to standard.

A final word, order next Saturday's MAGNET in good time!

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,474.

ham and eggs. "I banged on the door and yelled through the keyhole, but nobody heard me till Mauleverer came in. And then he had to hunt for a key to let me out. Skinner took away my key."

Bunter gasped under the combined effects of wrath, indignation, ham, and eggs!

"But what did Skinner lock you in your study for?" asked Harry blankly.

"He did me out of a feed! You see, when Mauly got me out it was too late to start for Courtfield. That beast went instead!"

"He was going to Courtfield when we met him on the road over the common," said Harry. "But what feed are you talking about, and how could Skinner diddle you out of it?"

"Oh!" Bunter paused—not with the ham and eggs, but with his outburst of indignation. It occurred to his fat brain that as Van Duck was present, less said about that little scheme to annex his spread the better. "Oh, nothing! I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I mean, I'll have some more ham."

"Is that all you mean?"

"No; I'll have some more of the eggs, too!"

Bunter had some more of the ham and eggs. There was consolation in ham and eggs! Bunter took a lot of consolation.

"I say, you fellows," he went on, "Mind you don't forget about batting Skinner! Not because he did me out of that feed at the Courtfield Hotel, you know, but because he's a rotten slacker!"

"A feed at the Courtfield Hotel!" ejaculated Wharton. "Who the dickens was standing a feed at the Courtfield Hotel?"

"Oh, nobody!" said Bunter hastily.

"Wha-a-t?"

"Nobody at all! Nothing of the sort, you know!"

"Is that fat gink loco?" asked Van Duck, in wonder.

"Oh, really, Van Duck—"

"He's telling lies, of course," said Bob. "That's nothing new. But why? What are you rolling them out for now, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—" Bunter gobbled. "If you fellows were as truthful as I am—grooogh!—you'd do! Any more ham?"

"No, you cormorant!"

"I'll try that cake! It's nothing like the cake I should have had at Courtfield, if that tick Skinner hadn't diddled me—"

"So there was a cake?"

"Well, a rich American would be bound to stand a pretty decent spread, I suppose," said Bunter. "Skinner jolly well thought so, or he wouldn't have dished me, and gone instead. Treacherous beast, you know—listening to the whole thing, and then barging me into the study and locking the door—"

"A rich American!" repeated Wharton.

"Oh, no!" Bunter remembered caution again. "Not at all! I don't know anything about an American at Courtfield to-day—the fact is, I've never heard of Mr. Coot at all—"

"What?"

"Never heard the name!" said Bunter. "It's quite new to me."

The juniors stared at Bunter. Bunter blinked at them. He could see that they doubted his statement, though he did not know why!

"Well, that fat idiot takes the cake!" said Bob. "Isn't Coot the name of the

American johnny your father knows in London, Van Duck?"

"Sure! I never heard that he was going to be in Courtfield to-day, though," answered Putnam. "Might have been in that letter that was lost yesterday—the one that fat gink chucked out of the window—I never found it."

"Looks as if Bunter did!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I didn't!" roared Bunter.

"Then how do you know that Mr. Coot was to be in Courtfield to-day?"

"I didn't know!" explained Bunter. "I've never heard of Ezra Coot—I've told you so. I hope you can take a fellow's word!"

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Van Duck.

"I never saw that letter after it went out of the window!" said Bunter warmly. "And as if I'd read a fellow's letter, too! I hope I'm incapable of it—not like some fellows I could name! Taking a telephone call is quite another matter! Anybody might take a telephone call."

"You took a phone call from Coot?" demanded Van Duck.

"Oh, no! You see, I wasn't in Quelch's study—"

"Not when you were asleep in his armchair?" asked Bob.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean—I mean I was fast asleep when I heard the telephone bell, and—and—and never heard it, you know. Besides, I had to take the call, or else some of the beaks would have come in—cackling like a lot of geese at Wiggins' door!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were concentrating their attention on the fat and fatuous Owl now. They could see that they were getting at something—though as yet they could hardly make out what.

"So Mr. Coot phoned," said Harry, "and you took the call?"

"Oh! No—nobody phoned!" said Bunter. "The bell never went at all, and I never thought the beaks might step in. I wasn't in the study. I hope you fellows don't think I'd even dream of bagging another fellow's spread! It was Skinner's idea, entirely."

"If that burbling bandersnatch means anything," said Bob thoughtfully, "he means that Mr. Coot telephoned from Courtfield, and Bunter took a call meant for Van Duck. If Coot's in Courtfield, he may have meant to ask Van Duck to tea! Is that the spread you're talking about, Bunter?"

"No! Coot never phoned!" explained Bunter. "The call I took was from—the grocer's. They rang up Quelch's number by—by mistake! Not that I took a call, you know! I wasn't in the study, so how could I? Besides, the idea of going instead of Van Duck never occurred to me—"

"Going instead of Van Duck!" stut-tered Wharton.

"Never even dreamed of such a thing!" said Bunter cheerfully. "How could I? You see, Coot never mentioned on the phone that he hadn't ever seen Van Duck, and wanted to make his acquaintance. So, of course, I never thought of anything of the kind."

"Great pip!"

"You locoed fat gink!" roared Van Duck, in great wrath. "You was going to string old Coot along, by making out that you was mo—letting him figure that I was a pie-faced fat geck of your heft—"

"Well, I like that!" said Bunter warmly. "I should think you'd be glad to let Mr. Coot think you were a good-looking, athletic fellow—even if it was a mistake, and it wasn't you!"

"A—a—a—what—" gasped Van Duck—"a—a—a which?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "If Coot had taken me for you, he would have gone away thinking you were a jolly decent-looking fellow—instead of what you are, you know!"

"Oh, search me!" gasped Van Duck, while the Famous Five yelled with laughter.

"In fact, that's really why I was going, so as not to disappoint Mr. Coot when he was expecting a fellow to tea," said Bunter. "As for the spread, I never gave it a thought! I'm always doing these kind, thoughtful things, and I never get any thanks. Is that all the cake, you fellows?"

"Mean to say that that gopher-faced geck Skinner has gone along to see old Coot, making out he was me, to snaffle that tea!" ejaculated Van Duck, as the truth dawned on him.

"Of course, that was his game," said Bunter. "That's why he locked me in the study. I hope old Coot spotted him and kicked him out! Getting it all out of me, you know, and then sticking me in a study, and going himself! Not that I personally thought of doing anything of the kind, you know. It was Skinner's idea from the very start—I dare say that was why he cut the paper-chase! I say, Wharton, mind you don't let him off that batting! It's up to you, as captain of the Remove, to see that a man's batted for slacking. I hope you're going to do your duty. A jolly good batting, see—a jolly good one!"

"Right-ho!" assented Harry Wharton. He rose from the table and took the fives bat from the bookcase.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, you won't want that yet," he said. "Skinner's not here now—"

"You are!" pointed out the captain of the Remove.

"Oh," gasped Bunter, "I didn't mean—"

"I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter made a bound for the door. A grasp on his fat neck hooked him back. A swing of the arm landed him face down over the armchair.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, in anticipation, "I say— Whooop!"

Whack!

"I was thinking of letting you off," explained Wharton; "but, as you're so particular about my doing my duty—"

Whack!

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "I ain't! Not at all! Leggo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack!

"Yaroooooooooooop!"

Bunter's fat neck was released, and he squirmed away.

"Hold on!" said Harry. "I haven't given you a jolly good batting yet!"

"Yaroooh!"

"You said a jolly good one, didn't you?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter did not hold on. He flew. He seemed to have changed his mind about a jolly good batting being due to slackers. He fairly whizzed out of the doorway of Study No. 1, and vanished up the Remove passage, followed by a roar of laughter.

"By gum!" said Putnam van Duck. "I guess I'm wise to the how of it now! That guy Skinner was on his way to string old Coot along when we met up with him! I guess I'll hand him a few when he moseys in! I shall have to get old Coot on the long-distance and explain some. By the great horned toad, I'll sure make that pie-faced gink Skinner feel like he was an odd piece



Skinner rose from the bed as the gangsters entered. "I—I say——" he stammered. "You cheap skate!" roared Chick Chew, turning on him savagely. "You two-cent remnant! And me figuring that we'd cinched that gilt-edged young gink, Van Duck!" Skinner fairly trembled as he faced the three disappointed gangsters.

that the cat brought in and left lying around!"

But that dire threat, as it turned out, could not be immediately fulfilled. For when the Greyfriars fellows assembled in Hall, for calling-over, one fellow in the Remove failed to answer to his name. That fellow was Harold Skinner.

Skinner was missing!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not Gilt-Edged!

MR. CHEW smiled, with a gleam of teeth and gold stoppings. "Did I mention it was pie?" he asked.

"Yep!" said Bud.

"Mebbe," said Chick complacently—"mebbe you'll get to remember, in the long run, Bud, that this baby never gets left! Mebbe you'll chew on that, Bud Parker, and quit grousing. I'm telling you!"

"We've sure got by!" said Bud.

"Sure!" said Tug. "I'll say it was easy!"

The gangsters were standing in the garage, where the Daimler now stood by the little black car. Chick was grinning with satisfaction—Bud was bright with newly revived confidence—Tug was beaming! It was as happy and satisfied a party of gangsters as could have been found anywhere in Chicago.

Tug took a key from his pocket and stepped towards the inner door. Chick and Bud followed him.

"I got him cinched safe!" said Tug. "And, you want to believe me, he allowed that he wasn't Putnam van Duck when I got him here! I'm telling you, he wanted to put that across! I sure been snickering a few over it!" Chick and Bud chuckled.

Tug unlocked the door and threw it open.

A junior rose from the edge of the bed as the gangsters entered.

"I guess I'm glad to meet up with you, young Putnam!" said Chick blandly. "I'll tell a man—Great Gophers! Great jumping snakes! What you got here, you Tug? Where's that Putnam van Duck?"

Chick stared at Skinner. Bud goggled at him through his horn-rimmed glasses. Tug stared at them.

"Say, what's biting you?" he demanded. "That's Putnam van Duck!"

"What?" yelled Chick.

"Hay?" roared Bud.

Tug looked bewildered.

"You ain't telling me that that young guy ain't Putnam van Duck!" he stammered. "That's the guy what came along the road, and give me his name as Putnam van Duck, going to see old Coot! He sure is Putnam!"

"Putnam nothing!" yelled the enraged Chick. "You telling me you cinched that pie-faced, slab-sided cheap skate, figuring that he was Putnam van Duck?"

"He sure allowed he was that very identical guy when I met up with him," gasped Tug.

"Carry me home to die! Buy me a pine packet, and put flowers on it!" groaned Chick Chew. "You pesky, dog-goned bonthead——"

"I—I say——" stammered Skinner.

Chick turned on him savagely.

"You cheap skate!" he roared. "You two-cent remnant! Who're you? And what's this here game?"

"I—I told him I wasn't Van Duck!" groaned Skinner. "It was only a lark when I said I was. I told him afterwards——"

"A lark!" said Chick ferociously. "I guess if you was in Chicago, a feller about your size would be fished out of the lake to-morrow morning for that there lark! Sure! Tug, you bonthead——"

"How'd I know?" gasped Tug, with a glare at Skinner. "That pesky guy sure strung me along——"

"Aw, can it!" snorted the gangster.

"Pack it up, you! Me figuring that you'd cinched that gilt-edged young gink—and you landing me like this with that cheap skate! Aw, you pesky bonthead!"

Skinner stood trembling.

The three disappointed gangsters withdrew into the garage, where they held a whispered consultation.

Skinner waited—shivering. His fate depended on the outcome of that consultation. He wondered dimly what it was going to be.

Finally, Tug came in to him.

He did not speak. He collared Skinner, hooked him into the garage, and bundled him head over heels into the little black car. Skinner squealed with apprehension as he was bound again—till his squeals were cut short by the gag. Then the rug was thrown over him.

He heard the engine start. He felt the car in motion—rapid motion. He was being taken away—somewhere! Where?

Centuries, once more, seemed to pass, as he lay suffocating under the rug. Of the direction the car took, he had not the remotest idea.

But it stopped at last.

The rug was taken off; he was released. This time Tug did not ask him to light down. He took Skinner by the neck and slung him bodily out. Skinner sprawled and yelled.

He blinked round him. Grass and trees met his dazzled eyes in the bright May sunset. Where was he? It flashed into his mind that he was on Courtfield Common—hardly a couple of miles from Greyfriars! He realised that the gangsters did not want him, and had taken him back as the easiest method of getting rid of him. Chick wanted a millionaire's son—a cheap skate was no use to Chick!

Tug grasped him again, and set him on his feet.

(Continued on page 28.)

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START READING THIS THRILLING STORY OF MODERN PIRACY TO-DAY!

CAPTAIN VENGEANCE!

A Short Life and a Merry One!

FOR a split second young Roderick Drake found himself looking Death in the face as Von Eimar, pirate and master-spy, glared ruthlessly down the sights of his automatic pistol.

In the cruiser Zermac, Roy Drake had voyaged to the famous penal island settlement of Nemesis Island, belonging to the Republic of Varland, there to interrogate Convict No. 333—otherwise Von Eimar—who had been sent there by the activities of his father, Morgan Drake, mystery man of the British Secret Service. Little had Roy supposed that Von Eimar, on that very day of the cruiser's arrival, had organised a mutiny among the convicts that had thrown the whole island settlement under his sway. Nevertheless, it was a fact, and now, having by a masterly bluff secured possession of the cruiser itself, Von Eimar had revenge in his reach.

Roderick Drake sat rigid. He had known nothing of the startling events that had taken place in the penal colony. But there, incredible as it seemed, was his father's old enemy, Von Eimar, scowling over the levelled automatic, and the arch-mutineer's finger on the trigger.

Then all at once a sinewy brown hand caught the convicts' leader by his broad, square wrist. Twisting his bull neck, Von Eimar scowled into the face of Ronald Westdale, his English lieutenant.

"Cut it out, Von Eimar!" said Westdale, smiling a little wearily. "That sort of thing won't do, you know. Cold-blooded murder, and all that. I'd pack it up!"

The piggy little eyes of Von Eimar narrowed to mere slits.

Roderick Drake, slowly realising the situation, glanced quickly from one to the other as he assessed his chances. For one moment it seemed as if all the pent-up storm of Von Eimar's rage was to be exploded upon the daring Englishman's head. Then the arch-mutineer eased the tension by uttering a short, guttural laugh, slipping the gun back into its holster.

"I thank you, Mr. Westdale!" He clicked his heels, Teutonic fashion, and bowed stiffly from the waist, thumbs to the seams of his white trousers. The ghost of a smile hovered around his thin lips. "You have done me a service, my friend. Ah! A moment ago I might have done a most foolish and regrettable thing—shot one who should prove to be a useful hostage—and, more than a hostage, a decoy! It is not often that my temper masters me. But"—and this time a steely hint of a threat sounded in Von Eimar's silky voice—"another time you will be pleased to remember that I am now your captain—Captain Vengeance, the pirate, Mr. Westdale. Although myself a mutineer, I do not tolerate mutinies against myself. Bear that in mind, for the future, my impulsive and over-generous friend."

With that, the smile upon his hard, masterful features was more ominous than the blackest frown would have been.

"As you will, Von Eimar," answered the Englishman, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I'm not so sure that it matters so much, so far as I'm con-

By JOHN
BREDON



Like wild beasts, the escaped convicts sprawled and lolled about the deck of the cruiser, laughing, drinking, and singing riotously!

cerned. A convict; then a pirate!" He spoke harshly and bitterly. "Life's not so sweet a thing for me these days, Captain Vengeance, that I'm likely to hug it too closely to heart; as you may guess from the circumstance of my being in your company."

Von Eimar made no answer to that. Instead, ignoring both Westdale and Roderick Drake, the arch-mutineer, or Captain Vengeance, as he now called himself, strolled from the chart-room out on to the bridge and gazed sardonically upon the mob of released convicts who were talking, laughing, and arguing in groups upon the steel-plated decks of the Varland cruiser.

Roy Drake heaved a sigh of relief. He had been within a hairsbreadth of death; that much he had seen in Von Eimar's glare when the Englishman, whose face seemed vaguely familiar, had jerked aside the pirate's pistol. Carelessly Ronald Westdale lounged aside, resting his elbows on the narrow wooden ledge beneath the chart-room windows. But before Roderick Drake could stammer out his thanks there came a sudden interruption to attract both of them.

It was the sharp, clear blast of Von Eimar's whistle, summoning the convicts in lounging knots and groups to the base of the forebridge.

Captain Vengeance surveyed them grimly through his monocle. The scum

of the world was gathered there; brown, scarred, bitter faces in the soft yellow glow of the deck lights—thieves and murderers, traitors, spies, gun-runners, dockside rats, and "con" men from the big cities of Europe; in a word, hardly a man of them that was not a hardened criminal of some sort or the other.

Glancing through the dull glass of the chart-room windows, Roy Drake saw the faces of all types and nationalities, with their penal numbers and the crimson dagger of Varland branded on their naked, shaggy breasts. Every one was armed with bayonet, carbine, and revolver, loaded around their bare shoulders with belts of brass-clipped cartridges glowing in the light of the slush-lamps, broad knives glittering as they stood in massed ranks, evil faces uplifted to the stocky, hard-faced man on the bridge.

It would need a hand of iron and nerves of steel, Roy thought, to handle such a pack of reprobate and hardened villains. Well, Von Eimar was assuredly the man to supply such qualifications. Not for nothing had the erstwhile international spy set all the chancelleries of Europe by the ears in his time.

He spoke in English, that being the tongue understood by most of the polyglot gang, though the number that owned it as their native language was few.

It was a deep, attentive silence that settled upon those lawless ruffians as his sharp, trenchant voice cut the atmosphere of that warm tropical night.

Now it was that Von Eimar showed his powers of leadership and organisation, to say nothing of the almost uncanny, retentive memory that the master-spy possessed. For the past two years he had been in charge of all the records and card-indexes of Governor Zarda's prison office. By name and number he knew every man of the convict settlement, together with his criminal record and his nationality—and, what was now of the utmost importance, the trade or calling, apart from crime, which he normally followed.

In quiet, incisive tones he assigned to each man his particular duties. Killer Moran, the giant American racketeer who had once held a first mate's ticket on a rum-runner in the old days of Prohibition, was made Von Eimar's first lieutenant. Ronald Westdale became gunnery lieutenant; Mikhail Lebedoff, late Russian naval artificer, was appointed chief engineer, with a black squad of Chinese and negroes. The villainous Dr. Nieuwe, of course, retained the post of medical supervisor that he had held in the prison hospital.

As for the rest, quite a number had followed the sea at some time or other, many as smugglers or gun-runners, some even as slavers in the Red Sea. These were made inferior officers according to their qualifications. Not only that, but some even of the naval men of the Zarmac, dissatisfied with their conditions and pay, which last was several months in arrears, signified their willingness to join in with the mutinous convicts.

With these instructors Von Eimar had quite a respectable nucleus for his pirate crew.

The arch-pirate concluded with a short speech, leaning over the bridge-rail, with the glowing butt of a cigar in his plump fingers.

"Men, I'm not going to disguise from you the fact that this enterprise of ours is a desperate, life-or-death, sink-or-swim business.

"In my younger days—that is, when my criminal activities had gone no farther than what you English"—he glanced with a faint smile towards Westdale and Roderick Drake, both interested bystanders in the glow of the binnacle-lamp—"call, I believe, 'scrumping'—I was an inveterate devourer of all those books concerning the old-time gentleman of fortune who flew the skull and crossbones on the high seas.

"One of their sayings recurs to me—'A short life and a merry one, bullies!' It is a trite illustration of our position. This is the twentieth century, the age of wireless transmission, aeroplane bombers, and battle-cruisers that can do their forty knots to the hour. The times are past when our amiable predecessors could gut a ship, murder a crew, and sail away for some convenient port with nobody any the wiser for perhaps six months or more. A pursued vessel to-day has only to send out one SOS, and a dozen warships will be on the spot within twenty-four hours."

He flicked the ash out of his cigar and smiled grimly.

"I am not saying this to discourage you, but merely that you should understand the clear facts. One advantage, however, we have over our forbears. Every ship that crosses our bows, unless it chances to be a man-o'-war, is certain to be unarmed and helpless.

And there are some rich prizes afloat in these seas, carrying millionaire passengers, and laden with bullion into the bargain!"

He paused, raising an impressive forefinger.

"With reasonable luck, we should make some rich hauls in the brief time that is open to us. Understand this! I am master here! If any man fails me in the discipline and efficiency I shall require—well, that man had better never to have been born! We shall make our fortunes in a month, my friends, or we shall make Davy Jones' locker!"

A Talk with a Traitor!

RODERICK DRAKE felt a hand upon his shoulder. Turning, he saw the handsome, yet lined and drawn features of the fellow-countryman who had not long since saved him from Von Eimar's passing fit of fury.

"You'd better come with me, youngster," said Ronald Westdale, with a faint smile, as Von Eimar, concluding his speech, strolled into the charthouse, without a glance at them. "It won't be safe above decks for you among all these two-legged sea-wolves! Scum of the earth!" He flung a withering glance over the bridge-rail at the ragged rascals who were dispersing from under the fore-bridge, animatedly discussing Von Eimar's words. "There's hardly one of the dogs that doesn't cheat the hangman with every breath that he draws!"

Nodding, Roy followed Westdale as the convict descended the bridge-ladder to the gun-deck.

The boy was puzzled. Somehow Westdale's clean-cut, good-looking features were vaguely familiar to him, yet he did not remember to have met him before. He could not place the man. Quite obviously, the tall, upstanding Englishman, with the clear grey eyes and pugnacious jaw, did not belong to this rogues' republic of un-hung cutthroats.

The escaped convicts, three hundred ragged rogues in all, were enjoying themselves after the manner of their kind. Like wild beasts they sprawled and lolled upon the riveted deck-plates, about the cowed ventilators, the hatches, and the shielded four-inch guns on the well-deck battery.

All were talking, laughing, drinking, and singing in riotous orgy. They had looted the stores from the cruiser and from Governor Zarda's private quarters, and now these calloused scoundrels, straight from the hardships and privations of Nemesis Island, were smoking expensive Havanas, guzzling whisky, brandy, and claret neat from shivered bottle-necks.

After a preliminary examination of the cruiser's maps and charts, Von Eimar had retired to the captain's cabin of the Zarmac, which he had now renamed the Vengeance.

Scowling, suspicious glances followed Ronald Westdale and Roderick Drake as the two descended the after companionway to the 'tween decks, dimly lighted by evil-smelling slush-lamps. Sarlily the ruffians drew in their out-flung naked feet as they passed, paused in their drinking and oiling of rifles, and fingered sharp knife-edges as they glanced from squinting eyes and muttered together in low tones.

But none ventured to interfere. Almost as much as Von Eimar and his

ready automatic, they feared Ronald Westdale and his hard, quick-to-fly fists.

Through a narrow gallery lined with racks of rifles, Westdale led his charge into a small cabin that had once belonged to the first lieutenant of the Varland cruiser.

The English lad showed no signs of fear. Young as he was, in his fifteen years of life he had known many strange perils and adventures as the son and assistant of Morgan Drake, Britain's master-mind and secret agent, who had sent many a spy besides Von Eimar to justice.

Ronald Westdale unscrewed a brass-rimmed circular cabin-port, and, lighting a cigarette, seated himself upon a flapped table that he lowered from a bulkhead.

"So you're young Roderick Drake, Morgan Drake's son," said the Englishman, as a cooling breath of sea air pervaded through the open port. "I've heard of you, even here on Nemesis Island. And I dare say you will remember the name of Ronald Westdale."

There was a faint twitching of Westdale's lips as he spoke.

"I've heard it before," reflected Roy, searching his memory.

"Well, if I'm to sail under the Black Flag, I shan't sail under false colours, at all events," Shamefacedly Westdale avoided the boy's eyes, gazing steadily through the portlight. "In case you don't remember it all, I'll refresh your memory a little. I've good cause to remember every little incident, every single detail, only too well.

"A few years ago I was a naval lieutenant, with a promising career in front of me. But I was a fool—an utter, complete fool! I got into debt—what with cards, horse-racing, and the deuce in general. Then there was a girl. I thought the world of her. Of course, she was a spy for some foreign power. Before I realised what I was doing, she got some important dock-yard secrets out of me. Then she bolted, and left me to stand the racket."

With a reckless laugh he swung away from the portlight, pitching the stub of his cigarette into the sea.

"That's how I came to find myself on Nemesis Island, chum," he finished bitterly. "The spy gang she was in with helped me to get away to Varland, up in the Baltic. There I was safe for a time, till your father induced the authorities there to pass their criminal refugees' law, and, like the rest, I was shipped off here. Now I'm branded as a spy and a traitor—a convict on Nemesis Island, and the next thing I'm likely to become is a pirate." He laughed in fierce derision and self-contempt. "Pretty good, isn't it?"

Roy Drake didn't answer. Now that Westdale had outlined the facts, he remembered the case fully. In a way he couldn't help feeling very sorry for Westdale, who, more fool than rogue, had paid such a terrible price for his crime.

Ronald Westdale scowled moodily at the strip of carpet on the cabin floor, burying clenched fists into the pockets of his white uniform jacket.

"But if I met that girl again, or, better, the blackhearted villain who was behind her," he muttered, between shut teeth, "I'd—well, I think there'd be murder done!"

A shadow fell athwart the threshold
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of the cabin. Both looked up sharply. It was Luis Ramiro, the South American crook, padding softly on light, cat-like tread. He had changed his convict rags for the gaudiest clothing he could find aboard the cruiser, and, with a pair of gold ear-rings he had just stolen, and a vividly hued handkerchief swathing his black, greasy curls, the swarthy Latin looked the part of a pirate to the life.

"So! And what is this I see, companero mio?" he asked, purring in soft, sibilant English, with a flash of dark and smouldering eyes. "The little Ingles senior with the tall Ingles bravo, is it? Do we talk treachery, amigo? Do we seek to make terms for ourself with the son of the so cunning Morgan Drake?"

His voice hissed like that of a mountain cat between his sharp, white filed teeth.

"I suppose you can't help being a sea-snake, Don Dago?" Westdale was openly contemptuous. "Treachery is in your blood, and you measure others by the same standard that you find good enough for yourself. But keep your suspicions to yourself, Ramiro, or there will be mourning in your ancient and illustrious Castilian family, which was founded by a South American peon and knifer way back in the Argentine!"

"Caramba!" The South American's eyes blazed like lighted coals. "You insult my family! I am a hidalgo by birth! Ah!"

Like lightning his snaky, brown hand flew to the richly hilted knife that was thrust into the silken folds of his scarlet cummerbund.

But as his fingers closed upon the dagger-sheath, it was to discover it empty. Roy Drake had snatched it from under his very hand.

"Is this yours, senior?" asked the boy politely, holding the hilt towards the startled South American.

Westdale's gravity and angry contempt dissolved into an explosion of laughter.

With a throaty snarl Ramiro accepted the proffered dagger-hilt, and fell back a pace, not daring to make a movement with it under the cold grey eyes of Ronald Westdale. As suddenly as it had flared up, his rage oozed out in fierce, muttered curses in sibilant Spanish.

"Now, d'ye mind sayin' your book o' words out in the passage? I asks ye." It was Hilarity Hinton, or 'Iarity' Inton, as he called himself, the grinning little Cockney, who took the muttering Ramiro by the arm and piloted him gently into the passage-way. "An', if ye don't mind, my old canary, take that manicure-set with you."

With a snarl, Luis Ramiro thrust the dagger back into its elaborately worked sheath, and, darting a malignant glance over his shoulder, climbed a steel ladder to the gun deck above.

Hat on one side of his head, thumbs resting in his belt, Hilarity Hinton surveyed him whimsically as he went.

"Narsty-tempered cove, that dago, Mr. Westdale," he said, with a grin to the ex-naval lieutenant, as Ramiro heaved his lithe body through a scuttle. "Sort o' bloke as'd cut your throat behind your back, as the Irishman said, out o' sheer kindness of 'art. Rot me billy-kin if he wouldn't, the dirty furriner!"

Westdale laughed tersely.

"We'll be having trouble before long with Von Eimar's crew of cutthroats," he said grimly. And with that he closed the cabin door.

Von Eimar Shows the Iron Hand!

THE trouble came sooner than even Westdale anticipated—in fact, the very next morning.

The piercing notes of a bugle roused Roy Drake from his slumbers at the very first flush of daybreak. Climbing to the dowy-damp gun-deck in the chill mists of morning, the lad found the convicts scowling and muttering as they mustered under the bridge, rubbing their tired eyes and yawning.

"What in blazes is t' matter wi' Von Eimar?" growled one close-cropped, evil-eyed rascal as he passed beside the English lad. "Fond o' discipline, h'ain't he? Thinks he's prison governor hisself, belike. P'r'aps 'e forgets 's 'ow theer's been a mutiny on this island once, an' mebbe will again."

Crowled oaths from his companions sounded in agreement.

Unleashed now from galling prison discipline, the convicts were disposed to sink into idle lethargy, eating, drinking, and sleeping. But that was not Von Eimar's way, and it was significant that all the growls and grumbles subsided suddenly as the convicts caught sight of his stocky white figure stalking the upper bridge.

The shrill squeal of a pipe belonging to the one-eyed Finn sailor man, whom Von Eimar had promoted to be boatswain, stiffened them into something like orderliness. In a few curt words the pirate captain assigned the men to work-parties under officers. Some were set to polishing the brass fittings and the anchor cable, others to swabbing the decks, while parties were sent ashore to ransack the prison stores.

Others, under the eye of Ronald Westdale and a master gunner, who had been in the Varland Navy, were put to working the electric ammunition hoists, cleaning, oiling, loading and unloading the great eight-inch and six-inch guns, and receiving their first lessons in elementary gun-drill.

Murmurs there were in plenty, but it was hidden by shading hands. And sudden glances were flung from eye to eye, only when the broad back of the arch-mutineer was turned from them.

Roy Drake, finding himself alone and unheeded, paced forward to the iron fore deck, where unwilling convicts were scraping the rust off the hawsers, and busy with brushes and paint-pots under the eye of the Finn. Leaning on an iron rail stanchion, the boy gazed over the waters of the lagoon towards Nemesis Island.

Above the feathery crowns of coconut-palms loomed the cool, white prison buildings, and the tall observation tower, etched against the intense, dazzling blueness of the sky.

Warily the boy glanced around him. One dive into the jade-green, translucent waters of the bay, a short swim to the shore, and he would be hiding in the thick, green tangles of tropical jungle that clothed the island like a leafy net. Was it worth chancing it? Fever, hunger, thirst, the prospects of a bullet from the convict sentry patrolling the quarter-deck, months perhaps of being marooned on this island of evil fame until help arrived.

He decided that it was. Better, at least, than sailing as a prisoner and hostage under Von Eimar's pirate flag, with the probability of sinking with the pirate cruiser when at last it foundered under the gun-fire of avenging warships.

He took off his shoes. The convicts working within a yard of him knew nothing until a loud splash into the water announced the boy's escape. Yells resounded from the decks of the convicts' cruiser.

But luck was not with Roy Drake in his desperate attempt. Round from under the stern of the cruiser came scudding a motor-launch, with the out-board engine thundering at full revolutions as it propelled in his wake.

Two minutes later, dripping, kicked, and buffeted, Roy found himself dragged up the accommodation-ladder to the deck of the cruiser, where a mob of howling convicts surrounded him.

"This be he!" snarled the same evil-eyed ruffian whom Roy had heard muttering discontentedly a short half-hour before. "Morgan Drake's brat! Who's got a rope? We'll swing him up to the yard-arm—ay, an' Gov'nor Zarda an' t' admiral with him! An' Von Eimar, too, if he says a word—"

The words died on the man's lips, as he suddenly noticed Von Eimar standing within a yard of him.

"You were about to say——" inquired the arch-pirate, with suave and mocking politeness, as the man faltered. And the convicts holding Roy released the English lad.

Wildly the man glanced around him, nerving himself for the defiance. The smoothness of Von Eimar's voice deceived him. A mutter from behind heartened him to glare savagely into Von Eimar's calm, smiling face.

"Look ye here, Von Eimar, ye're carryin' things too far!" he said chokingly. "Ye're ridin' wi' too 'igh a 'and. So thinks I, an' so thinks the others!"

"Ay, ay!" rumbled three or four men behind him.

"So?" Von Eimar spoke with disarming blandness. "Is that the case? How many are with you? Let me see."

Shifting and shuffling, a small group lined up behind the sullen mutineer.

"You men are dissatisfied with my leadership?" Von Eimar's light blue eyes ran over them pleasantly.

"Ay, that's so! You've got too 'igh an' mighty a way with you, Von Eimar!" said one gruffly.

And the others nodded assent.

"Very well." Von Eimar nodded his square, shaven head. "I will constrain no one to follow my leadership."

There was a sigh of relief from the men. They had been dreading an explosion. But their relief was short-lived.

"Of course, you cannot sail with me on the cruiser," Von Eimar ran on quietly. "But there is an easy way out of the difficulty. You can remain here, on Nemesis Island."

The little group of malcontents gasped. Suddenly they realised the trap into which they had fallen.

"Remain—remain 'ere?" gulped the first spokesman, paling. "On Nemesis Island? Oh, no, cap'n—not that! We climbs down. You wins, Cap'n von Eimar. D-don't leave us on t' island, cap'n—oh, don't!"

Obdurately Von Eimar shook his head.

"You have made your choice, men. Get off the ship! You remain on Nemesis Island till the Varland Government sends a ship!"

In horror the men protested. Von Eimar was unbending. They fell on their knees, crawling to him on the deck-plates while their convict companions stood around, silenced and awed. No punishment that the arch-mutineer could invent would have been half so dreadful as leaving the wretched recalcitrants ashore on the penal settlement to await the vengeance of the Varland authorities.

Curtly Van Eimar ordered Ronald Westdale to see them into a boat, then turned abruptly on his heel and left them.

Roy Drake, stunned, stood watching the glumness and dismay among the convicts; and then Krunow, the Finn bos'un, approached him, jingling a pair of handcuffs.

"Dis way, boy," he said, in his difficult English, clipping the irons on the lad's wrists and urging him down the ladder to the ship's brig. "Der capt'n, him say 'Keep dat younker safe, or you be moroon', too!' So gum on!"

There was no help for it, and Roy Drake accompanied the Finn forward.

Seeing him safely locked in the steel-walled cell under the foredeck, Krunow grunted in his shaggy beard and returned to his duties.

At War with the World!

TWO days after Von Eimar's well-planned and highly successful coup, the Government supply ship arrived at Nemesis Island.

It had been Von Eimar's intention to escape in this ship, but the unexpected arrival of the Varland cruiser had not only caused him to alter his plans, but had given him a powerful man-o'-war into the bargain.

Never was there a more surprised man than the skipper of the Government steamer, as the long, grey, sinister warship which he recognised as the Zernac suddenly boomed out an eight-inch shell from one of her gun-turrets, and hundreds of ragged convicts and renegade naval men put out in boats to board his vessel as it steered into the bay.

The crew were too utterly bewildered to offer any resistance, and the newly fledged pirates swarmed all over the vessel, hauling down the Varland flag.

Fore and aft the supply ship was filled with giant iron cages. Trained upon these barred pens—which were crammed with hungry, half-naked convicts—were brass nozzles that, at a given signal, could spurt jets of blinding, scalding steam upon the helpless occupants. They had short methods with convict recalcitrants aboard that ship.

Fifty International criminals destined for Nemesis Island were huddled like wild beasts in these closely packed cages. They howled like madmen as their fellow convicts boarded the vessel, and wild babble, explanations, and yells of joy ensued as they were released.

Rescuers and rescued alike danced and embraced one another on the iron, rusty decks, and the horrified guards and crew, stripped to their skins, were hustled into the cages in their place.

Von Eimar stepped into the wheel-house, followed by Ronald Westdale and Killer Moran.

"This ship will supply us with all we require for months," he said to his two lieutenants. "Food, ammunition, clothing, coal for the cruiser's bunkers—everything. Fortunately, we surprised her before she was able to send off a wireless message. She is not expected back in port for three weeks, and so we have that much grace before the alarm is spread throughout the world. The

question arises—what shall we do with the prisoners?"

"I guess thar's one short way, Cap," growled Killer Moran. "Lock the pesky galoots in the cages; gov'nor, admiral, an' all, and turn the steam jets on 'em an' open the sea-cocks so as she'll sink!"

Von Eimar rubbed a square, prominent chin.

"The plan has its advantages," he admitted. "Dead men tell no tales"—that was the motto of our forerunners in the days of Morgan and Captain Kidd. And in this delectable game of piracy we are bound to swing in any case if we're caught. What is your opinion, Mr. Westdale?"

The face of the ex-naval lieutenant expressed his contempt and disgust.

"That's the advice of a Chicago gangster," he said shortly. "And it suits him. But it doesn't suit me, nor you, I hope, Von Eimar. We're none of us saints. But cold-blooded killing of hundreds of men, sailors, officers, warders—no, that's too thick by a long way!"

Killer Moran snarled in his thick throat. But he avoided the cold, fearless eyes of the Englishman.

"A little thick, as is your English saying—true!" agreed Von Eimar. "But what then? I don't like it, but we can't carry all those men as prisoners—we can't spare the provisions, for one thing; for another they outnumber us now by two to one, and it's too dangerous!"

"Then maroon them on the island," urged Westdale. "What can they do? If we wreck the wireless station and all their tools, they can neither send for help nor build a boat. They'll have to wait until a ship arrives to inquire after the missing cruiser."

Slowly Von Eimar nodded his shaven, straight-backed head.

"That will serve our purpose," he said in agreement. "Very well! I rejoice to find a way out of the difficulty. Have the prisoners set ashore, Westdale, and then we'll scuttle this hulk after gutting it of everything that we need."

A day of hard work then followed for Von Eimar's gang of pirates and released convicts.

Derricks were set to work, and the cargo of the supply vessel was transhipped from her hold to that of the pirate cruiser. While teams of the prisoners thus strained and sweated under the rifles of the late convicts; others of Von Eimar's men were busy at the prison quarters. The stores were rooted out, and everything required was carried aboard the cruiser. Dynamite was used to shatter the walls of the fort and prison; and such huts and storage sheds that remained were set on fire.

Every tool or instrument that might be used for the making of a boat was either destroyed or carried away. They were particularly careful about the wireless transmission set. Every delicate instrument and switchboard was smashed almost to powder by the time they had finished.

By sunset, the sailors of the cruiser and the supply ship, and the warders of the prison, were left stranded disconsolately on the beach. With them were the half-dozen hapless convicts who had dared defy Von Eimar. Supplies were left, sufficient to keep them on short rations until help should arrive.

As Westdale had said, there was no fear that the marooned men would be able to spread the alarm. Nemesis

Island was far out of any of the recognised shipping routes. Even if they managed to construct a raft of sorts out of the island timber, the convicts had seen to it that they had neither compass nor chart to guide them over the trackless ocean, nor so much as a boat's barrico to hold the precious water.

For a month, at least, the castaways would be cut off from all communication with the outside world.

"What about Ol' Man Zarda an' t' Admiral, boss?" asked Killer Moran, as the newly appointed engineers, greasers, and stokehold hands were getting up steam under the watchful eyes of Mikhail Lebedoff.

"Send them down to the black squad," said Von Eimar with a grim smile.

And Governor Zarda and Admiral Mericski found themselves hustled down to the darksome, furnace-heated stokehold, there to endure the nightmare of slavery among the blacks and Chinese detailed for that duty.

The Zernac, or Vengeance as she was now called, was not exactly a modern cruiser, but she was sufficient for the pirates' needs. She carried four long eight-inch guns in her armour-plated turrets, two forward, and two on the after-deck; six six-inchers to starboard and port on her well-deck battery, besides searchlights, quick-firers, machine-guns, and two anti-aircraft guns. She was capable of thirty knots on her powerful turbines, the boilers being fired with coal instead of with oil as in the more modern fashion; but that, as it transpired later, was an advantage rather than otherwise.

Certainly it is safe to say that she was the most formidable man-o'-war that ever flew the black flag of piracy.

It was as sunset was melting into night that she steamed out into the Indian Ocean, deck-lights ablaze, her crew making merry. On the control-top, Von Eimar watched contemptuously as her iron stem curled up the phosphorescent water under the light of the stars, the Southern Cross, bright in the heavens, trailing a stream of light behind her taffrail. Let the dogs drink and debauch to-night, he decided. To-morrow he would apply the curb tightly enough. They had had already a taste of his humour. Woe betide the man that withstood him a second time.

Leaning against a steam-winch on her after-deck was Roy Drake, released now that there was no chance of his escaping, keeping apart from the hilarious crew as he watched the receding, indigo shadow that was Nemesis Island. Probably he was the only person alive that ever regretted leaving the place. His thoughts were troubled. A prisoner, and an enemy, among these wild, savage, lawless cut-throats and pirates who held life cheaper than dirt. Nor had he forgotten Von Eimar's ominous hint of using him as a hostage and a decoy.

Silently the lad descended to Ronald Westdale's cabin as a black tarpaulin, crudely painted with a white death's head, was hoisted to the masthead in a riot of drunken cheers.

For the first time for over a hundred years a pirate man-o'-war was taking the seas to wage war against the world.

(Piracy in the twentieth century! Von Eimar has certainly taken on some job! But the arch-mutineer has already shown the iron hand! Look out for another feast of thrills in next week's chapters of this modern pirate story.)

THE GANGSTERS SWOOP!

(Continued from page 23.)

He wasted no words on Skinner. He let out his foot, delivering a kick that started Skinner well on his way home. Skinner yelled, and ran. He heard the car roar away as he went, but he did not look back. He ran and ran till he arrived at the school gates at last, and tugged frantically at the bell.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Better Late Than Never!

"SKINNER!"

Mr. Quelch, who was taking the roll in Hall, repeated the name.

But there was no answering "adsum." The Remove master, frowning, marked Skinner as absent, and went on with the roll. After which the Greyfriars fellows streamed out of Hall. The Famous Five could not help wondering what had become of Skinner. They knew from Bunter where he had gone, and why. But there seemed no reason why he should not have returned long ago.

There was another man missing from his usual place, as well as Skinner—and that was the Greyfriars gunman.

The pack had been relieved on Putnam's account when they arrived at the school, and found the hares waiting for them at the gates, but that relief had not been shared by Poker Pike.

Poker had not come back after them. With the belief fixed in his mind that Chick Chew had, somehow, "got away" with the millionaire's son, Poker was busy. As he had not come in, Harry Wharton & Co. guessed that he was hunting for the car that had carried off Chick and Bud; a task that was likely to keep him busy.

Putnam van Duck joined the Famous Five as they were going up to prep. His face was very grave.

"Say, old-timers," he remarked, "I guess there's some sort of a guft game been going on this afternoon. I been getting old Coot on the long-distance."

Putnam had asked leave to telephone to Mr. Ezra Coot in London. His talk on the telephone seemed to have disturbed him.

"I was sure going to explain to old Coot how he'd been spoofed, and that it wasn't this baby that tea'd with him at Courtfield!" went on Putnam. "And I'll mention that you could have knocked me down with a coke-hammer when he allowed that he hadn't been in Courtfield to-day."

"Hadn't!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Nope! Nor he never wrote to me yesterday," said Putnam. "Nor he never phoned to-day. He don't know a thing about it."

The chums of the Remove stared at Putnam van Duck.

That communication rather took their breath away.

"But—" gasped Wharton.

"Somebody phoned, or Bunter couldn't have taken the call!" said Nugent.

Van Duck nodded.

"Sure! Some guy has been using old Coot's name! And I guess that guy's name is Chew!"

The juniors jumped.

"Chick Chew!" exclaimed Harry.

"What'd it look like?" demanded Van Duck. "A guy phones in old Coot's name to me here to get me along to Courtfield—there was a car with an Amurrican in charge waiting on the road—and Chick and Bud was found hanging about on the common! Add it up!"

Harry Wharton whistled.

"The whole thing was a trick of the kidnappers!" he said.

"That's the size of it! And me being away, Bunter wanted to walk into it instead—and Skinner dished him and walked right in!" said Putnam.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "Then Skinner—"

"He's missing!" said Van Duck.

The chums of the Remove all looked very grave now. Now that they knew that the genuine Ezra Coot had not been concerned in the matter at all they could not help seeing what it looked like. Where was Skinner?

"That guy with the car wasn't wise to my frontispiece!" said Van Duck. "If he had been he wouldn't have let me pass as Smith, I guess. I'll say he met Skinner next and—"

"And took him for you!" gasped Bob.

"Sure thing."

"Then Skinner—"

"They got him! That's why he ain't blown in."

The juniors went up to the studies in a thoughtful and worried mood.

But prep had not been going on a quarter of an hour when the sound of a bell was heard. A few minutes later footsteps were heard in the Remove passage—and six juniors fairly jumped out of their studies to see whether it was Skinner.

It was!

Skinner was looking tired and pale and worn. It was easy to see that he had not enjoyed his afternoon out. Other fellows came out of their studies; all the Remove were curious to know what had happened to Skinner.

All but six were astounded when he told them. There was a buzz of amazement in the Remove passage.

"But how did they come to take you for Van Duck?" asked Bob Cherry, with a private wink at the Co.

Skinner shook his head. He had not explained that to Mr. Quelch—who had been very sympathetic—and he did not intend to explain it to the Remove.

"Can't make that out!" he answered.

"But they did."

"He, he, he!" came from the doorway of Study No. 7.

Skinner gave the grinning Owl of the Remove a glare.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter, in great enjoyment. "He, he, he! I say, Skinner, was it worse than being locked in a study? He, he, he!"

Skinner made no reply to that question. He tramped on to his own study and slammed the door.

Putnam van Duck chuckled as he went back to Study No. 1 with Wharton and Nugent.

"Search me!" gasped Poker Pike.

It was a sunny morning, and Harry Wharton & Co. were taking a trot round the quad after brekker, when a tired man came in at the gates.

They had forgotten Poker.

Now they remembered him.

Poker's slits of eyes opened wide and his bowler hat almost fell off as he gazed at Putnam van Duck.

"Carry me home to die!" stammered Poker.

Poker, it seemed, had made a night of it. He had been searching for Putnam van Duck! Naturally he had not found him, as Putnam had been asleep in the Remove dormitory all the time!

Putnam grinned at him cheerfully. The Famous Five chuckled. Poker Pike rubbed his eyes and stared again.

"How'd you get away, you Putnam van Duck?" gasped Poker.

"From what?" asked Putnam.

"Them dog-goned kidnappers—"

"Who's been kidnapped?" asked Putnam.

"Ain't you?" howled Poker.

"Not a whole lot!"

"You ain't?" yelled Poker.

"Not so's you notice it!"

Poker gazed at him.

"I'll tell a man!" he said at last. "I'll tell all Chicago! I'll tell the whole United States!"

And the juniors, chuckling, resumed their trot, leaving the Greyfriars gunman still gazing after them, dumbfounded.

THE END.

(The next yarn in this grand new series is more thrilling than ever. On no account miss reading: "ORDERED TO QUIT!" It's the finest yarn Frank Richards has yet written—and that's saying something.—Ed.)



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BURLEIGH'S BRANE-WAVE!

Another rollicking instalment of "The Spartans of St. Sam's!" By the Second Form literary genius,

DICKY NUGENT

One fine day, a couple of weeks after the St. Sam's Spartans had commenced their comical career, Doctor Birchmall came galloping fevriously down to the Sports Ground on horse-back. He held the reins in one hand, a pistol in the other, and a long, crook-looking whip in the other; and there was a grim, determined expression on his skollary fizzog. Those who were near onuff heard him muttering into his beard as he galloped across the quad.

"If I don't turn my Spartans into champion sprinters this afternoon," he was muttering darkly, "then I'll eat my Sunday worst mortar-board!"

A grinning crowd followed the Head of St. Sam's to the Sports Ground to see the fun. There they found the St. Sam's Spartans lined up on the running-track. The fellows couldn't help larking when they looked at Doctor Birchmall's so-called athletes. So anxious was the Head to win the inter-skools sports without the help of Burleigh's followers that he had left out all the fellows Burleigh had previously chosen and roped in the weakest and puniest fizzical specimens at St. Sam's in their place!

The result was that they looked more like a collection of old crocks than a squad of Spartans!

Listening flashed from the Head's eyes as he rained in his steed and hailed them in a voice like thunder.

"Ho, there, you sons of dogs!" he roared. "Prepare for an afternoon of strenuous sprinting! I'm going to make sure that the efforts of those who march under my banner shall never flag! Woe betide the lazy lubbers who lag behind!"

"Mersey, sir!" wimpered some of the sprinters.

"Mersey be blowed!" cried the Head, with a leer. "Are you ready?"

The unfortunat Spartans nodded, and Doctor Birchmall raised his pistol.

"Bang!"

"Yarooooo!"

The Head's hand had wobbled as he fired, with the result that he had fired point-blank at himself!

Forchunitty, however, the bullet passed through his brane and did no damage.

Any hopes the sprinters mite have built up of that little accident making things easier for them were soon dashed to the ground. The Head came galloping

after them in a couple of jiffies, lashing out with his whip for all he was worth.

"Skamper along, Skellington!" he yelled encourridgingly. "Wade in, Wastead!"

Lead on, Littlegrub! Step on it, Starveling! Bless my sole! What are you all dawdling about for?"

This was insult added to injury with a vengeance, for the Spartans were running as fast as their flabby legs would carry them, whereas Doctor Birchmall was perched comfortably on the back of his horse. But it would have been asking for trouble to point out that to the Head, so the Spartan sprinters wisely refrained—and ran for dear life to avoid the Head's whip instead!

Burleigh of the Sixth joined the spectators as the sprinters finished the course for the second time. His eyes fairly flashed fire as he noted the feeble, flagging footsteps of the Head's chosen athletes. Cleaving his way to the front of the crowd, he ran on to the track and coolly brought the Head's horse to a halt.

"Stop!" he cried dramatically. "I'm not going to see those fellows torched like this without a protest, sir! Why, every one of them has got the stitch! Look at the way they reel!"

Doctor Birchmall knitted his brows.

"I don't quite cotton on, Burleigh!" he said.

"Then you must be wool-gathering, that's all, sir!" said Burleigh bluntly.

"Sir, the time has come to end this solium farce! If the skool is to win the sports you and I must patch up our differences!"

The Head grinned sardonically.

"Know any more funny stories, Burleigh?" he asked.

Burleigh culled ferwiously.

"Nothing funnier than the story that will be told after Sports Day if your so-called Spartans are allowed to represent St. Sam's!"

A stand-up fight between Bob Cherry and Bolsover major, whom Bob had caught twisting a fag's ear, lasted five rounds. By then Bolsover had one eye closed, and his other nearly so. Bob is not styled Remove champion for nothing—and Bolsover's bullying had made him see red! But when Bolsover admitted his fault, Bob was quick to offer his hand.

"A 'handy' pal!"

Lord Mauleverer kept Removites awake searching for his new pyjamas the other night—and it was not till Peter Todd jerked the bedclothes off Bunter that they came to light! Bunter had coolly "borrowed" them, splitting the jacket up the back to make it fit! Manly nearly had a "fit"—while the Removites went into "fits" of laughter!



No. 188.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

May 16th, 1936.

"Bosh!" growled the Head. "Under my marvellous system of training, Burleigh, the team is preparing to perform unheard-of feats of endurance! Already the stammerer of the Spartans is such as to make your spurious sportsmen look near spineless spoofers in comparison! Just look at them!"

He pointed proudly down the track, fondly imagining that the Spartans were still on the run. But, gratefully to his chagrin, he found that every single Spartan had collapsed! They were all lying about in various parts of the track, puffing and blowing like grampuses! Burleigh couldn't help grinning as he looked at them.

"My hat! By the look of them, sir, the only kind of race your Spartans will

win is an ambulance race—with the Spartans on the stretchers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" yelled the Head as the crowd roared with laughter at Burleigh's sally. "I'll have the lazy young raskals on their feet again in a couple of shakes, beleeve me!"

"I daresay you will," said Burleigh, with a scornful glance at the Head's instrument of tortchor. "But let me tell you, sir, that all the whips you can lay your

hands on won't make athletes out of those rabbits!"

"Rats!"

"No, rabbits!" said Burleigh, jerking his thumb in the direction of the Spartans. "Sir, let me make a last request to you to abandon this vencher and allow the old brigade, led by myself, to take over the sports once more!"

"Nothing doing, Burleigh!"

"But I want to appeal—"

"Ring off!" said the Head rudely. "It's no good of you arguing the toss, Burleigh, so you may as well save your breath. Ge-up!"

He gave his steed a flick with the whip and trotted off again.

It was the Head's last word on the subject—there was no doubt about that; and as Burleigh tramped off the track his face was very grim and stern. He had made up his mind what to do. He wasn't going to stand for it; he wasn't

going to take it lying down, but he was going to sit up and take notice at last!

"Tallboy! Tuffnut! Jolly! Follow me!" he said gruffly as he walked towards the Skool House. Tallboy and Tuffnut, of the Sixth, and Jolly, of the Fourth, fell in and followed their leader, and on the way to the House, Burleigh collected all the rest of the old team of athletes he had been training for the sports before the Head had interfered.

When he reached the Skool House, Burleigh led the crowd straight to the Sixth Form Room. There he locked the door and started speaking, and in a few jiffies the fellows were listening intently to a brief account of Burleigh's brane-wave.

"Fellow-sportsmen!" cried Burleigh. "You've seen for yourselves how Doctor Birchmall treats my plea to abolish the Spartans and allow us to compete for St. Sam's sports. He treated it with utter contempt!"

"Shame!"

"There is only one thing left for us to do, that is this—to pretend we're a team from another skool and to compete for the honours against the St. Sam's Spartans as well as everybody else!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"But the Head will reckon us!" gaped Jack Jolly.

Burleigh smiled. "No he won't. You see, we shall all be disguised—disguised so that even our own mothers won't reckon us."

"Grate pip!"

"Well, what do you think of the idea now?" asked Burleigh.

For several seconds the fellows were too surprised to say a word. Then suddenly they all jumped to their feet, cheering like "a very dickens!"

"Good old Burleigh!"

"Hooray!"

"Hip, hip, hooray!"

"Wonderful wheeze, by Jove!"

"Brilliant brane-wave, by George!"

Burleigh smiled. "Glad you like it, chaps! Now I'll see about getting our entry officially reckoned. We'll call ourselves the team from St. Alf's. But, remember—mum's the word! None of you must breathe a syllable about this!"

"No fear!"

"Rely on us, old chap!"

"Well, that's that," said Burleigh, with a sigh of relief, as the meeting broke up. "We know how we stand now, and we've at least got something to train for. Keep yourselves as fit as fiddles—and then on Sports Day you'll be ready to face the music!"

And, having given the fellows that wise advice, Burleigh went off to settle details of his brilliant brane-wave!

(How is Burleigh's "brane-wave" going to work out in practice? For the answer read next week's instalment of this mirth-raising serial!)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

"INQUIRER" (Remove): "What sort of ink was it that fell on to Loder out of that booby-trap yesterday?"

We don't know for certain, "Inquirer," but if it's any help to you we understand that Loder saw red!

N. DUPONT (Remove): "Bolsover says he is going to knock my head off. What shall I do?"

The best advice we can give you, old chap, is not to lose your head!

HOW BUNTER BEAT TREE-CLIMBING CHAMPS!

By PETER TODD

I hope that you chaps who have always said Bunter was too weighty for tree-climbing will now admit you were wrong. Those of you who were at the final of the Tree-climbing Championship certainly won't have any doubts about it! In fact, it's not going too far to say that you'll remember Bunter as a tree-climber for the rest of your lives!

In actual fact, the Championship had already been decided when Bunter put in an appearance. The test tree was a very tall oak in the meadow opposite Major Thresher's orchard, and Bob Cherry and Dick Russell, the finalists, had both done their stuff and come down again, Bob having succeeded in sticking his flag a few inches above Russell's, and thus winning the day.

Blundell of the Fifth, the judge, was just holding up Bob's hand in the sign of victory, when along came Bunter.

That's putting it mildly; what I should say is along flew Bunter! He covered the ground at a speed that was simply staggering, and he made straight for the old oak-tree.

Up he went like a fat frog that was animated by clockwork! Bob blinked and Russell rubbed his eyes. Bunter was climbing up by

the same route as they had taken themselves—and doing it a jolly sight quicker, too! They simply gasped when they saw him go without a single stop right to the top of the tree a good three feet beyond Bob's winning flag!

Well, there it was, anyway! Whether you like it or not, it goes down to posterity now that Bunter beat the tree-climbing champs at their own game!

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you why he did it.

The explanation was that whilst scrumping in Major Thresher's orchard Bunter had spotted a bull coming towards him, and the oak-tree happened to be the first haven of refuge he reached!

Chaps have since been pulling his leg, because the bull turned out to be a tame one belonging to old Thresher that often wanders around the grounds.

Be that as it may, Bunter has succeeded in beating the tree-climbing champs!



CRICKETERS, BE GENTLEMEN!

Urges BOLSOVER MAJOR

The old-fashioned courtesy that used to be part of the charm of cricket is fast dying out. If the Greyfriars game is anything to go by, there's about as much politeness in cricket nowadays as there is in all-in wrestling.

It saddened me, I can tell you, when I took a stroll round the playing-fields last Wednesday. As I passed Big Side I saw Loder stop a ball with his nose. Did he bow to Fitzgerald, the bowler, and murmur, "My fault, sir"? Not a bit of it! He just danced up and down the turf yelping like some blessed dog and calling Fitz all the names he could think of—including a lot that I myself had never thought of before!

Then on Little Side I saw Smithy swing back his bat to make a late cut and catch Wicket-keeper Hazeldene an awful whack on the napper! Did he profusely apologise? Nothing of the

kind! What he did was to laugh till the tears ran down his cheeks!

These incidents—typical of the sort of thing you can see any day of the week—make me feel it's high time something was done to bring back good manners to cricket. I've made up my mind to do all I can to help, anyway.

If I find anyone showing bad manners in any game where I'm playing, I'm going to walk right up to him and say: "If you don't learn better manners, you pie-faced pest, I shall give you a oner on the boko!" If that warning doesn't teach him to act like a gentleman, I shall roll the pitch with him, then jump on him!

(Looks like cricket will become a regular riot if Boley carries out his threat. May we suggest, Boley, that you alter your tactics and start by cultivating a few manners yourself!—Ed.)

FISH FAVOURS SCIENTIFIC FEEDING

Says FRANK NUGENT

Fisher T. Fish gave a lecture on "Malnutrition" in the Rag last week. Malnutrition, to save you the fag of looking it up in a dic., means under-feeding. And Fishy, in his lecture, maintained that practically every boy in the British Isles is suffering from under-feeding. Not because we don't eat enough—oh dear no! The trouble is, according to Fish, that we don't eat the right things.

"What I believe in and what I'm hyer to advocate," declared Fishy, "is scientific feeding—eatin' the right things in the right proportions!"

When he had finished and asked for questions, the first question was from Tom Brown.

"How could we learn to feed scientifically?" Brownly asked.

Then Fishy smiled. Looked as if he had been waiting for that question.

"You've said it, Brownly!" he chortled. "Jest to save you all the trouble of studyin' the science of correct feedin' for yourselves, you see, I've made up hampers of food sufficient to last any guy two days. These hampers are guaranteed to contain jest the right quantity of fat, protein and carbohydrate required to keep a guy as fit as a fiddle—an' I'm retailin' 'em at the amazingly low price of one shilling each. Cash with order, of course! Who wants one?"

It's surprising how Fishy still gets away with it sometimes. He had quite a rush of orders.

In due course his customers received their hampers. And what do you think they found inside them? You'll never guess, so here's the list:

1 packet of lard.
1 bag of flour.
1 bag of split peas.

That was all the hampers contained. Fishy stoutly maintained, when the complaints flowed in, that it was no swindle. The fat, protein and carbohydrate content was O.K., and the quantity sufficient to last two days. But, in spite of his indignant protestations, his customers weren't satisfied till he had been rolled all round the Rag and bumped in every corner!



WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



A registered letter for Billy Bunter provoked the Owl to great excitement. He felt sure it must contain a fat remittance! On opening it, however, nothing but a loose penny stamp fell whereupon, Bob Cherry noticed that the letter was postmarked "Aberdeen." Later, Skinner admitted getting a pal to post it. It was too bad of Skinner!



Modest and shy of "heroics," George Wingate, Captain of Greyfriars, was glad when the presentation of the Scouts' silver medal for saving a man from drowning was finally over. Sir Hilton Popper, Governor of Greyfriars, "gassed" on the subject for some time—little dreaming that Wingate would dearly have liked to "draw" him!



Wun Lung has his own ways of "paying out" fellows who bully his young brother, Hop Hi, in the Second. After Bolsover had cuffed Hop Hi, he "ound the leaves of his Latin grammar gummed together. Wun Lung offered him a "crib" in class next day—but it was an exercise purposely filled with errors! Bolsover's exercise was like a Chinese puzzle—and no "error"!



Mr. Prout is ever ready to recount how during a recent summer vac., he went tarpon fishing off Florida, U.S.A. Bunter, happening to point to the photograph of the biggest "catch" made by the expedition, had to listen to the whole story. Bunter said he would almost rather have had the caning Mr. Prout had originally promised to give him!



When he had finished and asked for questions, the first question was from Tom Brown. "How could we learn to feed scientifically?" Brownly asked. Then Fishy smiled. Looked as if he had been waiting for that question. "You've said it, Brownly!" he chortled. "Jest to save you all the trouble of studyin' the science of correct feedin' for yourselves, you see, I've made up hampers of food sufficient to last any guy two days. These hampers are guaranteed to contain jest the right quantity of fat, protein and carbohydrate required to keep a guy as fit as a fiddle—an' I'm retailin' 'em at the amazingly low price of one shilling each. Cash with order, of course! Who wants one?"