

15 "HERCULES" CYCLES—and HUNDREDS OF OTHER PRIZES TO BE WON!

SEE
INSIDE

The Magnet 2^o

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



**A NEAR THING
FOR BUNTER'S SCALP!**

PRIZE NEWS **THE GREAT ARMAMENTS RACE** **FOR YOU**

IS First Prize
of 'Hercules'
Bikes

6000
Other
TIP-TOP
PRIZES

LOOK, Boys—staggering news, **PRIZE NEWS**—for **YOU!** Fifteen spanking new **Bikes**, and *Thousands and Thousands and THOUSANDS* of other top-hole prizes all going **FREE**. And here's how:

Each week in **MAGNET** I am going to print **Armaments Stamps**—**BOMBERS, GUNS, SEARCHLIGHTS**, and so on—8 kinds altogether, and all you have to do is just **CUT 'EM OUT AND COLLECT 'EM**. You have 20 stamps to start with this week—twelve here, and another eight on page 28. If you also take the other best boy's papers like "**Gem**" and "**Modern Boy**" you'll find more stamps in them to swell your total.

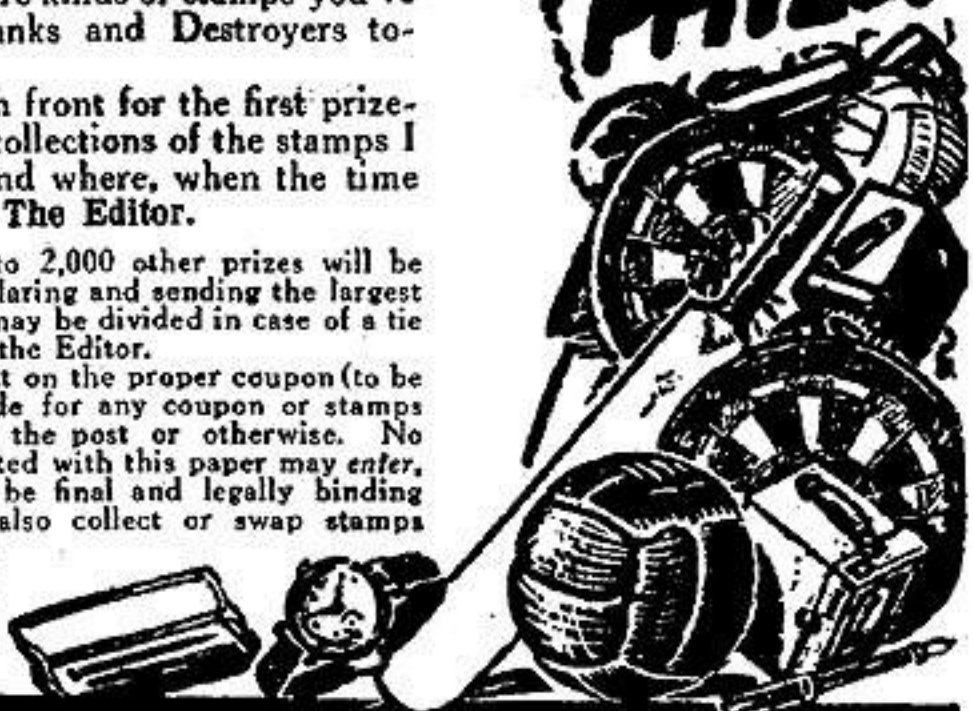
At the end of this month I shall ask you how many of one or more kinds of stamps you've collected. It may be **Bombers, or Battleships, or perhaps Tanks and Destroyers** together. *Which*—well, that's my secret!

So get busy, collect all the stamps you can, so as to be right in front for the first prize-giving. I shall ask you which prize you want, too—the biggest collections of the stamps I call for will win. But don't send any yet; I'll tell you how, and where, when the time comes. There you are—and **Nothing to Pay!** Isn't it great? **The Editor.**

RULES: Five First Prizes of £4-7s. 6d. "**Hercules**" Cycles and up to 2,000 other prizes will be awarded in order of merit each month during the contest to the readers declaring and sending the largest collections of the stamps called for. Cash value of any of the first prizes may be divided in case of a tie or ties for such prizes. Ties for any other prizes will be decided by the Editor.

All claims for prizes to be sent on the proper coupon (to be given later): no allowance made for any coupon or stamps mutilated or lost or delayed in the post or otherwise. No correspondence. No one connected with this paper may enter, and the Editor's decision will be final and legally binding throughout. (N.B. You can also collect or swap stamps with pals who read "**Gem**," "**Modern Boy**," "**Triumph**," "**Sports Budget**," "**Champion**," "**Detective Weekly**," "**Boy's Cinema**," and "**Thriller**.")

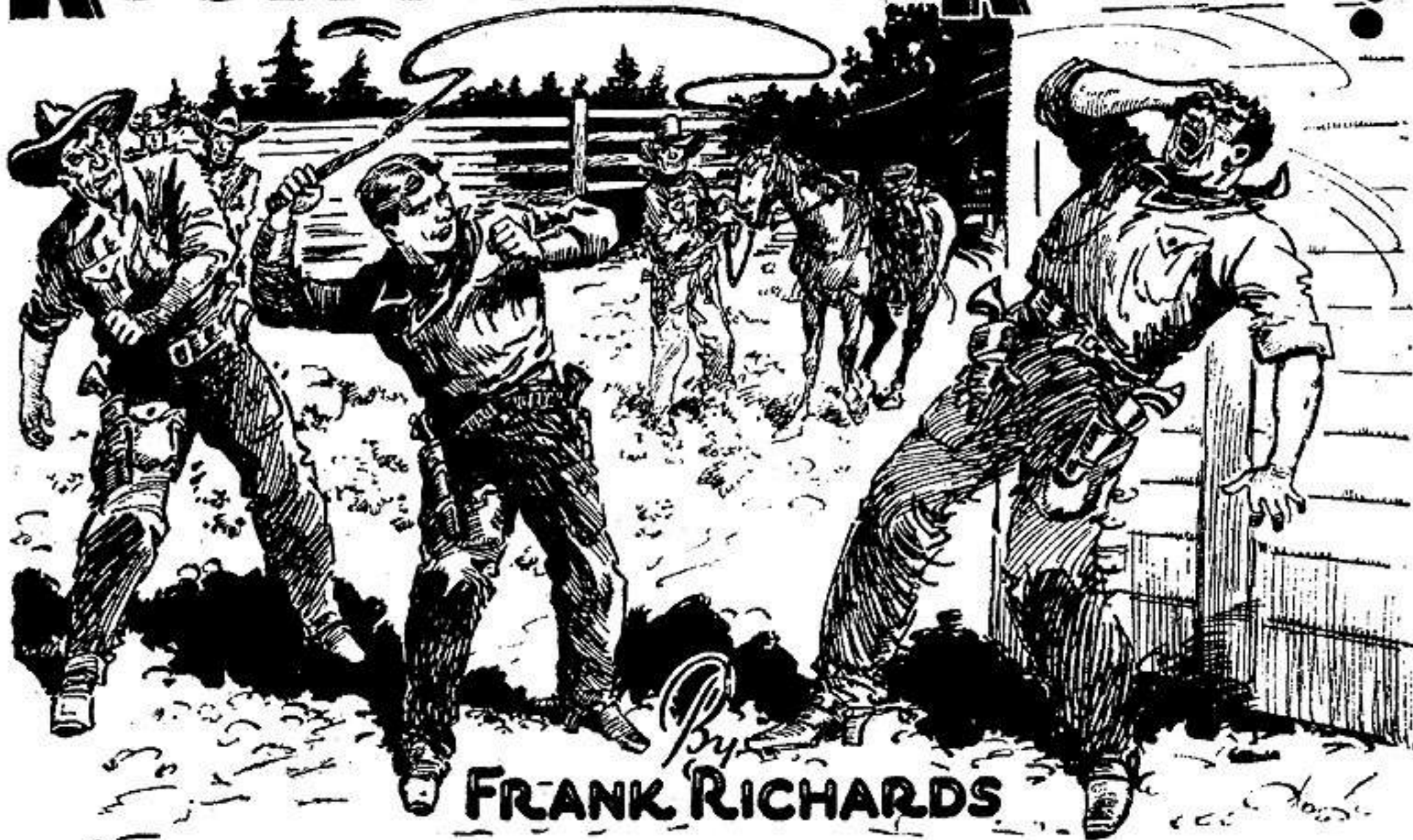
For Collecting
Armaments
Stamps



Overseas Readers, Too! You pals who are far away—you're in this great scheme, also, and special awards will be given for the best collections from overseas readers. There will be a special closing date for you as well, of course! So be sure that you keep these stamps each week!

DANGER IN THE AIR! Vernon-Smith's presence at Kicking Cayuse, his father's ranch in Texas, spells danger for Barney Stone, the foreman. And it's a danger Barney must remove!

RUCTIONS on the RANCH!



There was a roar of surprise and alarm from the punchers, as Vernon-Smith followed the horse-wrangler up, slashing with the quirt, with all the strength of his arm!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter on a Bronc!

"SURE he's quiet?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Jest like a lamb, sir," said Lariat, the horse-wrangler of Kicking Cayuse Ranch.

He winked at Hank, the ranch cook, as he spoke, with the eye that was farthest from Billy Bunter.

Hank grinned all over his fat, shiny face.

Five or six punchers, standing round at a little distance, grinned at one another.

Billy Bunter did not observe it.

Bunter's eyes and spectacles were fixed on the horse, which Lariat was holding by the bridle.

It was bright morning on the Texas prairies.

Harry Wharton & Co., who turned out two or three hours earlier than Bunter of a morning, had gone out with Herbert Vernon-Smith, riding over to Packsaddle for letters.

Billy Bunter, left on his own, was going for a ride, too, if he could find a suitable mount.

The chums of the Greyfriars Remove had very soon fallen into the cow-puncher's way of practically living on horse-back. But Billy Bunter was rather dubious about the "cayuses" at the ranch. Broncos had rather too much pep and go to please Bunter, who found difficulties in keeping on the back of a donkey at Margate.

Still, a fellow who was spending his holidays at a Texas ranch, really had to ride. Distances everywhere were too great to be covered on foot. And Bunter preferred to cover even the shortest distance sitting down—if only

he could be sure that his steed would submit to be sat upon.

So, having made up his fat mind to it, the Owl of the Remove requested Lariat to pick out a quiet horse for him. And the horse-wrangler led that bronco out of the corral, ready saddled and bridled, and held it for the fat junior to mount.

That bronco looked quiet enough.

If there were a wicked gleam in his eyes, the Owl of Greyfriars did not notice it. If he laid back his ears, Bunter did not grasp the significance of that trifling circumstance. Neither did it occur to him that the rough-

STIRRING ADVENTURES of HARRY WHARTON & CO. in the WILD WEST!

and-ready outfit would regard it as a tremendous joke to see a "tenderfoot" up on a bucking bronco. The horse looked quiet—so long as Lariat's strong hand was on the bridle. Billy Bunter blinked at him, dubiously; but he was satisfied at last.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Hold him till I'm on."

"Sure!" said Lariat.

The punchers, already grinning, grinned more widely as Billy Bunter mounted the bronco. Billy Bunter had his own way of mounting a horse. He looked rather as if he were clambering up a wall.

The bronco stirred; Bunter squeaked. "I say! Hold him, you know!"

"You bet!" said Lariat.

And he gripped and kept the horse's head steady. The bronco knew the master's hand, and was quiet. It was likely to be a different story when the horse-wrangler let go. But Billy Bunter was, as yet, happily unaware of that.

He squatted in the saddle at last, and gathered up the reins. The bronco stood like a statue. But his ears were laid farther back, and his eyes gleamed. He was only waiting for Lariat to let go.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bunter. He was feeling quite confident now. "Not a bad gee. You can let go, my man."

Lariat, when he let go, made a backward jump, to get clear of the fireworks. All the onlookers backed. Their idea was to give the bronco plenty of room.

Only Bunter, unfortunately, was unable to give him room—being on his back.

Bunter was going to wheel the horse round, and ride out at the ranch gate-way, and canter down the trail to meet the fellows coming back from Packsaddle.

He rather fancied the idea of meeting them on the trail mounted on a bronco, and showing them that he could handle a Texas Cayuse as well as any other fellow in the Greyfriars party.

That was the programme—destined never to be carried out.

From the moment the horse-wrangler released the bronco, and jumped back out of reach, the fireworks began.

That bronco's head went up into the air, till it seemed to the startled and

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,577.

alarmed Owl that he was reaching for the clouds.

Up and up and up went that head in front of Bunter's startled eyes that almost popped through his spectacles, till the bronco was standing on his hind legs.

How Bunter stuck in the saddle was a mystery to himself and the Kicking Cayuse punchers. Every "guy" on the spot expected him to slide off over the horse's tail, and bump on the hard, sun-baked earth.

Such a bump would have done some damage; but the rough crowd at the Kicking Cayuse gave no thought of that. This was a cowboy joke on a tenderfoot, and if the tenderfoot got damaged, it was his own funeral.

But the fat Owl of Greyfriars did not slide over the whisking tail, and crash to the ground. He lost his stirrups, and he lost his reins, and he lost his head; but with hands and feet he clung on, digging his feet into the bronco's ribs, and clutching frantically at his shaggy mane. At the same time, he let out a yell that woke most of the echoes of the ranch, and the rolling prairie round it.

"Yaroo!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Lariat.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the punchers.

"Oh, carry me home to Jane!" gasped Hank, the cook, doubled up with mirth. "Say, that's some rider!"

"Attaboy!" yelled Panhandle.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Crash! came the bronco's forefeet on the ground. Up went his hind legs in the air.

Having stood on his hind legs, he now, as it seemed to the terrified fat Owl, was trying to stand on his head.

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Help!"

"Ride him, cowboy!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Very nearly Bunter shot over the lowered neck; but not quite. He was clutching on to that horse like a lobster. The bronco righted again, and jumped clear into the air.

Earth and sky swam round Billy Bunter.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the Kicking Cayuse punchers.

"Yaroo! I say, you fellows— Oh crikey! Help!" yelled Bunter.

"Attaboy!"

"Ride him!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The roars of merriment reached the ranch-house, and Barney Stone, foreman of the ranch, stepped out of his office, on to the veranda, and stood looking on the scene from a distance. His lean brown face relaxed into a grin.

The fact that the hapless fat junior was in danger of serious damage, did not seem to affect Mr. Stone at all. But it was not much of a secret on the Kicking Cayuse that Barney Stone did not like the presence of the owner's son, Vernon-Smith, and his school friends at the ranch. Barney was not man to intervene to save one of the Greyfriars party from damage.

Bunter was sorely in need of help.

He never knew how he clung to the back of that bucking bronco. He held on for his fat life. But every leap and bound of the animal threatened to hurl him off. Any of the punchers could have roped in the bronco, and put an end to its antics. But they did not think of doing so. They stood round at a safe distance from the lancing hoofs, and roared with laughter.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,577.

"Help!" yelled Bunter. "I say, help! Beasts, rotters! Help!"

Clash! Clatter! Crash! Clatter!

The bronco's hoofs beat a wild tattoo on the hard earth. One moment his head was high in the air, the next, his hind legs. It was like a wild see-saw, and Billy Bunter, yelling with terror, gave himself up for lost.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Fired!

"I'LL tell a man!" ejaculated Bill Buck.

Bill came out of the bunkhouse drawn by the howls of merriment. He stared at the startling scene by the corral, and frowned.

Bill was a good-natured "guy." Bill was the biggest "galoot" in the Kicking Cayuse bunch, standing six-feet-six in his riding boots. Like many big men, Bill had a kind heart and a gentle nature. Moreover, Bill had "ridden herd," as he called it, over the Greyfriars juniors on their journey out to Texas, and he regarded them as being to some extent under his care.

To the laughing crowd by the corral it did not seem to matter what might happen to that fat tenderfoot, tossed like a cork on the back of the bucking bronco. To Bill it did matter.

He frowned, grasped his lasso from a hook in the bunkhouse wall, and strode towards the scene with great strides.

"You big stiffs!" he roared as he came. "You want to break up that greenhorn into small pieces? You figure that Mr. Vernon-Smith wants one of his visitors all broke up by that cayuse?"

He grasped his lasso for a cast.

"Forget it, Bill!" shouted Lariat angrily. "Don't you horn in here, you piecan!"

"You stand pat, Bill Buck!" shouted Panhandle.

"Help!" yelled Bunter.

"Keep that rope down, Bill, you big stiff!" roared Lariat. And there was a shout of protest from the other punchers.

Bill did not heed.

His lariat whirled and flew and the loop settled over the neck of the bucking bronco as it leaped into the air once more.

Bill's grip on the rope was like iron. In a flash the loop tightened round the tossing neck, and Bill drew in the rope.

Earth and sky ceased to spin round Billy Bunter. He was still on the bronco's back and still in one piece, though certainly that buck-jumping performance could not have lasted much longer. Gasping, panting, spluttering, the fat junior still clung on as Bill pulled in the bronco and grasped the bridle.

Then the horse was quiet again. Bill's grip on the bridle was not to be denied.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, blinking dizzily at Bill over his big spectacles. "Oh crumbs! Oh jiminy!" Bunter was not quite sure whether he was still alive.

Bill grinned at him.

"Git off'n that cayuse, you fat gink!" he said. "I guess if you want to ride you better let me pick out a cayuse for you! You sure ain't the guy to back a buck-jumper! Git off'n it, I'm telling you!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter got off in his own graceful and inimitable way. He sat on

IT'S UP TO YOU, CHUMS, TO—

Texas as he did so with a bump that almost shook Texas.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Wow! Oooh!"

Bill unhooked the lasso, and with a smack from a large hand sent the bronco scuttling back into the corral. He was about to stoop and give Bunter a hand up, when Lariat strode up to him with clenched fists and a furious face.

"You doggoned piecan!" roared Lariat? "What call you got to horn in? You figure you can put it across this bunch, you Bill Buck, because you been crawling around the owner's son?"

Bill picked Bunter up before he answered—with a single swing of a powerful arm, weighty as the fat Owl was.

Bunter, breathless and spluttering, tottered away to the rancho. Bunter had quite given up the idea of a ride that morning and meeting Harry Wharton & Co. on the trail and displaying to them how he could handle a bronc. What Bunter wanted just then was to sit down at the greatest possible distance from anything that went on four legs.

The fat Owl spluttered away, leaving his rescuer facing the enraged horse-wrangler.

"You pack it up, Lariat," said Bill quietly. "You got no call to play tricks that-a-way on a fat geck who don't know enough to go in when it rains. I'll tell a man!"

"You piecan—" roared Panhandle, coming up beside the horse-wrangler. "You pesky big stiff—"

"Aw, can it!" snapped Bill. "What'd Mr. Vernon-Smith say if he came back and found that gink all broke up by a bronc?"

"Mr. Vernon-Smith—nothing!" roared Lariat. "Barney Stone runs this ranch—and I'm telling you I don't give a Continental red cent for the owner's son, or the owner either! You ain't horning into my game, Bill Buck—and I got a quirt here what says the same!"

Bill, big as he was, was quick and alert. He grasped the arm as Lariat struck at him with the quirt and twisted it till the horse-wrangler dropped the quirt, with a yell of agony. The next moment Lariat was coming at him with both fists, and Panhandle with him.

Both were powerful men, but neither was a match for the gigantic Bill. He grasped the pair of them and, powerful as they were, spun them over. Lariat went to the earth with a crash, and Panhandle went spinning across him, sprawling over his legs.

They sprawled and panted; and Bill stared down on them grimly, his hand very near the butt of a Colt.

The punchers, no longer laughing, looked on breathlessly.

Every man on the Kicking Cayuse packed a gun—and every one of the onlookers expected gunplay to follow this rough handling of the horse-wrangler and his sidekicker as soon as they got their breath.

Lariat, sitting up dizzily, reached round his belt. Panhandle still sprawled and gasped. But before the horse-wrangler could "pull" Barney Stone strode on the scene from the direction of the rancho.

"Cut that out!" he snapped. "Bill Buck, you big stiff, what you mean by this? You figure you can horn in on the boys' game and throw them about promiscuous? I guess I've had enough gall from you, Buck, since the owner's son hit this ranch! You're fired!"

"Fired!" exclaimed Bill.
 "Yep—fired! You can take your time, Bill Buck!" snapped Barney Stone. "I guess I got no use for a guy in this bunch running the ranch! Mebbe you figure that you can put it across the foreman of this ranch because the owner's son makes a favourite of you. Forget it—and git!"

Bill looked at him, breathing hard. "I ain't figured no such thing, Mr. Stone," he said quietly. "Mebbe the owner's son has cottoned to me a few. And didn't I let daylight through that greaser who was gunning after him? Ain't Mexican Joe in the calaboose at Packsaddl- now, with an ounce of lead in him that I threw? Mebbe young Vernon-Smith thinks he's obliged to a guy for looking after him that-a-way. But—"

Barney Stone raised his hand. "You've spilled enough!" he snapped. "There ain't room for two bosses on this here ranch, Bill Buck! You're fired, and that's what's the matter. Chew on that—and git!"

Lariat and Panhandle picked themselves up and stood looking on with sour grins on their faces, but the rest of the crowd did not seem pleased. Bill Buck—or "Buckskin Bill," as he was called in the bunch—was liked by almost all the Kicking Cayuse outfit, and they did not want to see him fired.

"Say, Mr. Stone, sir—" began Yuba Dick.

"Can it—you, Yuba!" snapped the foreman. "What I've said goes! You can step up to the office for your pay, Bill—and then hit the trail! I guess I want to see your back—and see it soon!"

Bill gave a snort. "I guess I'm sorry to quit the bunch," he said. "But I'll tell a man, I ain't sorry to quit you, Barney Stone! I reckon I'll ride jest as soon as I can pack a saddle on my cayuse."

A quarter of an hour later the Kicking Cayuse punchers watched Buckskin Bill ride away, his few belongings packed on the bronco behind him—fired from the ranch.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Redskins on the Trail!

"INDIANS!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton & Co. were riding back from Packsaddle with the mail for the ranch packed in Smithy's saddle-bags.

The Famous Five were looking very merry and bright that sunny morning. They were enjoying their holiday in Texas with the Bounder on the ranch his father had bought in the valley of the Rio Frio.

They rode out of the cow town in a cheery bunch and followed the trail to Kicking Cayuse at a gallop. They did not find Billy Bunter's difficulties in managing the Texas cayuses, and they were oftener in the saddle than out of it. Their faces were burned by the hot southern sun; they were fit as fiddles, and they were enjoying life—startling as the change was from what they had been accustomed to at Greyfriars.

Mounted on shaggy broncos, with stetson hats shading their boyish faces, rifles in leather cases strapped to the saddles, they would hardly have been recognised by fellows in the old Greyfriars quad.

Ahead of them, as Bob Cherry spoke, loomed a "timber island"—a clump of great cottonwood-trees, with small timber growing between the mighty

trunks. The trail ran through the timber, under the shade of mighty branches that locked overhead.

In the shade of the branches they saw a number of horsemen, and supposed at first that they were punchers from some of the ranches, but as they drew nearer they made out dark, coppery faces and tattered blankets.

"Redskins!" said Vernon-Smith, and he looked at the riders under the trees with interest. "Might find that chap Running Water among that lot; I'd like to see him again."

The juniors rode on without slackening rein. In old days, the sight of Indians would have been alarming; but the days of Redskin raids in Texas were long over. They were only interested to see the specimens of a dispossessed and disappearing race.

At the same time they were on their guard. Indian raids were a thing of the distant past; but Indian horse-thievery was far from being a thing of the past; and it was quite possible that the outcasts of the prairie might be tempted by an opportunity of robbery. They were not likely to expect much in the way of resistance from a party of schoolboys.

In that, however, they were destined to find themselves mistaken, if they were looking for trouble. The Greyfriars fellows were quite able to take care of themselves. They "packed" rifles, and knew how to use them—and had, in fact, used them with effect, in gun-fighting with the rustlers of Squaw Mountain.

Red Indians, once the lords of the vast prairies, were few and far between in the Packsaddle country. So far, the juniors had seen only one—Running Water, of the almost extinct tribe of the Wolf-Apaches; and towards him they had very kindly feelings, for he had saved Smithy from being sucked to death in the quicksand in the Squaw river.

As they drew nearer they discerned that there were six Indians in the bunch, and wondered what they were doing so far from their haunts. Redskins who persisted in keeping out of the reservations, and remaining "wild," did not usually ride the cow country in parties. Generally they kept to their haunts in some remote recess of the desert.

"They're waiting there for somebody!" said Johnny Bull; and that fact was clear to all the juniors.

The Indians sat their shaggy mustangs, in the trail, looking towards the Greyfriars party as they came. One of them, who had a feathered head-dress, and was not quite so tattered as the rest, probably a chief, had a raw-hide lasso in his coppery hand.

"Not waiting for us, I suppose?" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

The Bounder knitted his brows.

"I'm not so sure!" he said quietly.

Harry Wharton gave the Bounder a quick look. A rather grim expression came over Smithy's face as he watched the Indians, with keen eyes; and he drew the butt of the revolver in his belt nearer to his hand for a grasp, if it was wanted.

Among the six coppery faces turned towards the juniors, with their black, hawkish eyes fixed in a grim stare, that of Running Water, the Redskin he knew, was not to be seen.

Whether these Indians were of the same tribe, he could not tell; but, whether or no, the Indian he had made friends with was not among them.

"My dear chap," said Harry, "they can't be waiting there for us—they couldn't know we were on this trail to-day."

"Think not?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"Well, I don't see—" "Barney Stone asked us, this morning, if we'd like to ride into town for the mail!" said the Bounder, in the same sarcastic tone.

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton. "We've been away from the ranch since early this morning. Barney's had ample time to send word to any friends of his that he might like to fall in with us on the way back," sneered Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "Who put up that Mexican to fire on me from the dark the other night?" went on Vernon-Smith. "Think Barney was pleased when Bill got him with his six-gun? I've seen him scowling at Bill a good many times since."

The juniors exchanged glances, and, without a word, took their rifles out of the leather cases.

They were drawing near the Indians now, and though there was no hostile move, so far, from the Red riders, they did not mean to be caught unprepared, if a hostile move came.

Once under the trees, shut in by the vegetation on either side of the trail, they would be at close quarters. Vernon-Smith, who "packed" a revolver as well as a rifle, jerked the six-gun from his holster at his belt.

The Greyfriars fellows felt a thrill as they rode on.

Except for knives and lassos, the Indians did not appear to be armed. Probably they did not possess fire-arms; or did not venture to carry them when riding in the white men's country. But there were six of them, and they were all hefty-looking braves.

And the Famous Five could not help thinking that the Bounder's suspicion might be well-founded.

Since they had been at the Kicking Cayuse Ranch they had discovered—to their own satisfaction, at least—that Barney Stone, the foreman, was running the ranch more for his own profit than that of the distant owner.

They had known from the start that something was going on behind the scenes at Kicking Cayuse; and now they were convinced that they had discovered what it was.

Actual proof was another matter. Most of the Kicking Cayuse outfit were honest punchers, though rough-and-ready enough in their ways. But two or three of them, the juniors believed, were in "caloots" with Barney, in the underhand game he was playing.

And that game was, if they were right in their belief, nothing more or less than working in collusion with the "rustlers," or cattle-lifters who ran off bunches of Kicking Cayuse cows into the inaccessible recesses of Squaw Mountain.

Smithy knew it, and suspected that Barney guessed that he knew it. He did not believe it was by mistake that Barney had sent him riding a trail which landed him in a quicksand. He more than suspected that Barney was behind the attempt to pick him off with a rifle on the veranda of the rancho. The double-dealing foreman of the ranch either suspected, or feared, that the owner's son was "wise" to his game; and Smithy had had more than one narrow escape of never seeing Greyfriars School again.

If this was a new move in the same direction, the Bounder was quite ready to put "paid" to it.

The juniors drew nearer and nearer the timber, the half-dozen Indians sitting like statues on their mustangs, watching them as they came.

They passed, at length, out of the glare of the sunlight into the dusky shade of the great branches.

A minute more and they would have ridden past the Indians. But in those moments, the bunch of Redskins suddenly stirred. A coppery arm went up, and the lasso held by the Indian with the feathered headdress flew; and had the Bounder been off his guard, the loop would have dropped over his head, "roping" him in.

But Herbert Vernon-Smith was on his guard. Watchful as a cat. He pulled in his horse as the lasso flew, and dodged the loop he was watching for. It dropped in the grass of the trail; and an angry guttural grunt escaped the Indian. The next moment he was yelling, as the Bounder threw up his hand, with the revolver in it, and fired.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Hidden Hand!

BANG, bang, bang! Loud, startled yells rang under the branches that jutted over the trail. The Bounder fired three times, in as many seconds, cutting away feathers and locks of greasy black hair from the Redskin's head.

The five others had pushed forward their horses as the lasso flew; with the obvious intention of driving off the other juniors, while the Bounder remained a prisoner in the lasso.

It was the Bounder they wanted; and it was as good as proof that they were in ambush for the son of the owner of the Kicking Cayuse; and the juniors hardly needed telling that the foreman of the ranch was behind it.

This was Barney Stone's latest move, to rid himself of the owner's son, whose presence on Kicking Cayuse spelled danger for him.

Obviously the Indian must have had Vernon-Smith, at some time, pointed out to him, or he could not have picked him out from the others as he had done. The feathered chief was going to ride off with Smithy at the end of his lasso, while the rest prevented the Bounder's comrades from intervening.

But Smithy, instead of being imprisoned in the lasso, was firing at the chief, cutting chunks of matted black hair from his startled head. The other fellows, instead of scattering before the sudden rush of the Redskins, pulled in their horses, raised their rifles, and blazed away in a volley.

They did not aim to hit, with the first volley. The Famous Five had already learned that the Greyfriars ways were not of much use in the cow country; but, at the same time, they would not shed blood if they could possibly avoid it.

They fired a volley to warn; but had the Indians come on, they would have had no choice but to pull the trigger, in earnest, and send the red-skinned outcasts reeling off their mustangs.

Luckily, it was not needed.

The chief, as the Bounder's bullets clipped his hair in rapid succession, yelled and howled, dragged round his horse, and rode away down the trail, loose lasso dragging behind him as he went.

That the Bounder was firing only to scare him off certainly did not occur to the Redskin. Three bullets had grazed his matted head, one of them taking a patch of skin, as well as a chunk of greasy hair; and the Redskin fully expected the next to crash through his brain—as, indeed, it would have done had he carried on with the attack.

In defence of his liberty, the Bounder of Greyfriars would have shot him down, as ruthlessly as any gunman in Packsaddle.

As the feathered chief fled, and the rifle-volley rang and echoed, some of the bullets grazing the shaggy mustangs, the bunch of Indians swung their horses round and galloped after their leader, in flight so sudden as to be almost ludicrous.

One moment they were riding at the Greyfriars fellows; the next, in full and frantic flight, ducking their heads to dodge following bullets.

Bang, bang, bang! roared the Bounder's revolver, pumping bullets after them as they rode, the lead whizzing dangerously close over the ducking heads.

Bang, bang! roared the rifles. But the Famous Five were careful to fire high and miss the ducking heads by yards.

Yells and howls floated back, and, with a thunder of hoofs, the Indians vanished down the trail, galloped out of the timber, and urged their mustangs in flight across the prairie.

Herbert Vernon-Smith burst into a chuckle. The Famous Five could not help grinning at the sudden flight of their assailants.

"Greyfriars wins!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"The winfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Vernon-Smith jammed fresh cartridges into his empty revolver, and dropped it back into his holster.

"Come on!" he said. "Barney will be pleased to see me arrive safe at the ranch! I want to see his face!"

"You think——" asked Nugent.

"I don't think—I know! That greasy brute knew me all right! I've been pointed out to him. If we hadn't been on our guard, he would have got me in that rope!" The Bounder set his lips.

"Those brutes never expected us to stand up to them; they fancied they had quite an easy thing in dealing with a party of schoolboys. And so they would have had if we hadn't had the guns and the nerve to use them."

"No doubt about that!" agreed Harry Wharton. "But as it was they hadn't an earthly."

The Bounder's brow was knitted as he rode on with his comrades.

The victory had been an easy one, but it might have been far otherwise. Only the fact that the juniors had been warily on their guard, that they were armed, and prompt to handle their weapons, had prevented Smithy being led off a helpless prisoner in the Indian's lasso.

"I guess," said Vernon-Smith—Smithy had fallen into the way of "guessing" since he had been in Texas—"I guess I'm fed-up with this, you fellows! We got through that easily enough, but we mightn't have. And what is the next move going to be?"

His brow darkened.

"We've got to come to a finish with Barney Stone!" he said, between his teeth. "I haven't come out to Texas to be kidnapped or shot up by a scoundrel who's afraid of my spotting that he's robbing my father—as he's robbed every other owner of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch! We've got to get a show-down with Barney!"

"I suppose there's no doubt——" said Bob slowly.

"There's no doubt at all. But"—the Bounder gritted his teeth—"he's as cunning as a rattlesnake! We know he sent a herd out to the Squaw range to be picked up by the rustlers; we know

he shares their profits; we know a lot of things. But——"

"But the butfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"But we can't prove it on him," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm not sure what would be my father's opinion if I got a cable through to him. He's sent me out here, not so much for a holiday as to survey his property and report on it; he trusts a lot to my judgment. But he knows that Barney Stone has been foreman of the ranch for donkey's years, and a report that Barney is in league with a gang of cattle-thieves would make him jump. But——"

The Bounder fell into silence as they rode out of the timber and galloped across the plain towards the ranch. The Indians were out of sight on the rolling prairie by that time.

Smithy's position was not an easy one in dealing with the treacherous foreman of the ranch, and it was not easy for his friends to advise him.

A cable to Mr. Vernon-Smith, if it convinced him, would cause the millionaire to cable back the "sack" for Barney; and Smithy had thought more than once of making the forty-mile ride to the railroad and sending off that cable.

But, unless he had more definite proof in his hands, he did not feel assured of the result. Moreover, he would have preferred to "get the goods" on Barney Stone, and hand him over to Sheriff Lick, at Packsaddle, as a confederate of the rustlers of Squaw Mountain.

The Bounder was thinking it over, with knitted brows, as the Greyfriars fellows rode back to the ranch. Until he came to a "show-down" with Barney Stone, danger dogged his footsteps like a shadow; and behind every peril that threatened him, he suspected the hidden hand of the foreman of the ranch. But how he was going to get the goods on Barney was, so far, a question to which he could find no answer.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Barney Means Business!

"**H**ALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Oh dear!"
"What's up?"
"Ow!" groaned Billy Bunter.

"Too many brekkers all at once?"
"Beast! Ow!"

Billy Bunter was stretched in a rocker on the veranda when the juniors came into the rancho. He was emitting a series of painful squeals, squeaks and moans. Evidently something was amiss with William George Bunter.

The Famous Five had enjoyed their morning, notwithstanding the brush with the Indians. Plainly, Bunter hadn't.

They gathered round the moaning fat Owl, with smiling faces.

Billy Bunter blinked at them dolorously through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—wow!—I say—wow—I'm aching all over! Wow!"

"Been walking more than a dozen yards?" asked Johnny Bull sympathetically.

"Oh, really, Bull—ow!—that beast ought——"

"Which?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

Everybody who did not realise that Billy Bunter's fat comfort was the most urgent and important matter in the universe was, in Bunter's opinion, a "beast"; so, really, he might have alluded to almost anybody.



Bill Buck grasped the two punchers and, powerful as they were, spun them over. Lariat went to the earth with a crash, and Panhandle went spinning across him. "You got no call to play tricks on a fat geck who don't know enough to go in when it rains!" snapped Bill.

"Ow! That rotter Jenkins—" moaned Bunter.

"Lariat? You haven't been rowing with the horse-wrangler?" asked Nugent.

"Ow! No! I say, Smithy, I wish you'd sack that beast! I say, you can sack a beast, I suppose, as you're the owner's son? If Stone doesn't like it, sack him, too! He's a beast as well!"

The Bounder laughed.

"You can cackle!" said Bunter indignantly. "Look at me! Aches and pains all over! I feel as if I've been under a—wow!—lorry! My—wow!—legs are nearly dropping off! I think I've broken some bones!"

"You think?" ejaculated Bob. "Oh, my hat! If you'd broken any bones, old fat man, you'd be sure about it!"

"Well, I'm awfully injured!" groaned Bunter. "Chucked all over the place by a mad beast of a horse! Ow!"

"Been riding?" asked Bob.

"Ow! I asked that beast to pick out a quiet horse—wow!—and the brute jumped all over the place with me! Ow! I should have been killed, very likely, if Bill hadn't lassoed that beastly brone! Wow!"

"Oh!" said Harry.

The juniors understood now.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders, but the chums of the Remove looked rather serious.

Clearly Bunter had been the victim of an extremely rough and reckless joke on the part of the horse-wrangler, and Bill had come to the rescue.

"I say, Smithy, will you sack that beast?" moaned Bunter.

"Fathead!" answered the Bounder.

"Yah! Rotter!" moaned Bunter. "Wow! If this is how you let your guests be treated, Smithy, I can jolly well say—Ow! Wow! Oh crikey! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep clear of the horses if you can't ride!" said the Bounder.

"I can ride all right!" hooted Bunter.

"I can't ride these wild beasts that they call horses in Texas. I'm all right when I'm backing a bunter at Hunter Court—I mean, a hunter at Bunter Court—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" said Bunter bitterly. "It's what I expect after all I've done for you! Wow! I'm aching all over! Wow!"

"Well, it was a rotten joke to play on a fat duffer!" said Bob. "But it was jolly decent of Bill to weigh in and stop it! Where's Bill now?"

"Sacked!" answered Bunter. "Wow!"

"What?" exclaimed all the juniors together.

"What they call fired!" said Bunter.

"Stone sacked him! Wow! Never mind Bill. Ow! I think you fellows might think of me! Ow! Leggo my shoulder, Smithy, you beast! Wharrer you shaking me for?"

The Bounder grasped him by a fat shoulder and shook him. His eyes were glinting.

"What do you mean by saying that Bill is sacked, you fat fool?" he snapped. "Are you talking out of your silly hat, or what?"

"Leggo!"

"Bill can't be sacked!" said Harry Wharton. "It's rot! Why, Bill's the best man in the bunch."

"Well, he's jolly well sacked!" said Bunter. "Leggo, Smithy, you beast! I'm telling you, ain't I? Lariat and Panhandle had a row with Bill for stopping their rotten game, and he pitched them over, and then Stone sacked him—"

The Bounder released Bunter's shoulder. He stood breathing hard and

deep, with such intense anger in his face that the other fellows looked at him rather uneasily.

"Sacked—Bill!" breathed the Bounder. "Sacked for stopping that Mexican from getting me the other night! That's the reason! Stone's been watching for an excuse ever since. Don't I know it? By gad! This does it!"

"Hold on, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "Keep cool!"

"Keep cool! Do you think I'm going to let that villain send away the only man I can trust on the whole ranch?" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "I'll let him know. Do you know where Stone is now, Bunter?"

"He was here a few minutes ago, watching you fellows come in. I think he went to his office—"

Smithy did not wait for the fat Owl to finish. He tramped away along the veranda towards the doorway of the foreman's office.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged troubled glances.

It was a blow to all of them to hear that Bill Buck had been "fired" off the ranch. Like the Bounder, they had little doubt of the foreman's real motive.

But the fact remained that Barney Stone was foreman of the ranch, with full powers to "fire" any man in the bunch, if it seemed good to him to do so.

Smithy was the owner's son; but he had no power to controvert Barney's authority. Only an order from his father, three or four thousand miles away, could do that. And it was a ride of forty miles to the nearest telegraph.

Coming to an open break with the foreman was not likely to be useful. So

far, Smithy had agreed with the Famous Five in that view. Indeed, he had cautioned them to be careful on that very point. But his angry resentment had carried him away now, and it looked as if the break was coming.

The Famous Five followed Smithy along the veranda, leaving Bunter moaning and mumbling in the rocker, fully occupied with the aches and pains of William George Bunter.

The door of the foreman's office was open. Barney Stone was seated at the roll-top desk within when the Bounder arrived.

He glanced round at Vernon-Smith.

Bunter had mentioned that the foreman had watched the party ride in—with what feelings, they could guess. But if it had got Barney's goat to see the owner's son ride in with his friends, safe and sound, he showed no sign of that in his lean, brown face. He gave the Bounder a nod, apparently not noticing the angry excitement in Vernon-Smith's looks.

"Mornin', sir!" said Barney. "You got the mail from Packsaddle?"

"Never mind that!" The Bounder calmed himself with an effort. "Bunter's just told me that Bill Buck has left the ranch."

"Yep!" assented Barney.

"You've fired him!"

"Sure!"

"And why?"

"I guess I ain't been satisfied with that hombre for some time. Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir," said Barney, shaking his head. "He's a good man with the cows, and I ain't saying that he ain't. But on a ranch like this, sir, it don't do to take back-chat from one of the bunch. Bill's got too big for his boots, and he had to go."

Vernon-Smith breathed hard.

"Bill's the best puncher in the Kicking Cayuse outfit," he said. "You know that, as well as I do, Mr. Stone."

Barney smiled faintly. Probably he had expected the owner's son to "kick" when he learned that Bill was gone. He was prepared for that.

"I ain't denying that he's a good puncher, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir!" he admitted. "But he sure has too much gall for a man riding under my orders."

I guess I thought it over, but he had to be fired. Now, if you got the mail, sir—"

"Bill Buck is not going to be sacked off this ranch, Barney Stone!" said the Bounder deliberately. "He's coming back."

"Search me!" said Barney.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood in the doorway of the office, in silence. Their feelings were all on the side of the Bounder; but they could see what the angry Bounder seemed to have forgotten—that the power was in the foreman's hands.

"Where is he now?" demanded Smithy.

"You can search me!" said Barney coolly. "Cavorting round looking for a job on another ranch, mebber."

"Bill doesn't want a job on another ranch! Bill Buck's coming back to this ranch, Barney Stone."

Barney shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I guess I don't get you, sir," he said stolidly. "I'll mention that I'm foreman of the Kicking Cayuse, and I got to handle the bunch. If a man don't suit me, he goes. I don't want no trouble with the owner's son, sir—but I give orders on this ranch, so long's I'm foreman."

Vernon-Smith's eyes blazed.

"That won't be long!" he said between his teeth. "Either Bill Buck comes back to this ranch, Barney Stone, or I ride over to Prairie Bend to-morrow to send a cable to my father. You'll stay foreman just so long as it takes for my father to cable back."

Barney's deep-set eyes narrowed.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched him. It was open war now, and they wondered what line he would take. He remained perfectly cool.

"You figure that your popper will fire a foreman who's been on this ranch so long to please a schoolboy who's lost his temper?" asked Barney.

"I've got a few things to put in the wire that will make him make up his mind about that!" said Vernon-Smith.

Barney eyed him. He did not ask what the "few things" were! Perhaps he did not need to ask. Although his lean, grim face never betrayed his

thoughts, the juniors had thought more than once that he knew that he was doubted and suspected.

"Waal, I guess I can't stop you," drawled Barney. "If the noo owner ain't satisfied with me I guess he's got his remedy. But jest like I said, so long's I'm foreman, Buckskin Bill's fired. That's the lot, sir!"

Vernon-Smith clenched his hand.

"If you got the mail from Packsaddle—" added Barney calmly, as if the subject was now done with and dismissed.

The Bounder choked back his rage, turned, and left the office without another word. His friends followed him in silence. It was open war now with the foreman of the ranch, and Barney, at all events, had won the first round.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"YOUR horse, sir!" said Lariat respectfully.

Dawn was glimmering over the Kicking Cayuse Ranch. In the bunkhouse many of the bunch were still asleep. In the rancho Billy Bunter was snoring, and was booked for a good many hours more of the same. But Harry Wharton & Co. were early astir that morning.

Chick, the choreman, was not yet up; the juniors had sorted out breakfast for themselves, and they came down to the corral for their horses, in the fresh, golden dawn.

Vernon-Smith's mind was made up.

He had not spoken a word to the foreman since that scene in the office. Barney Stone was grimly keeping to his point. Barney meant business. Bill Buck, the man whom the owner's son could trust, the man who had saved him from peril, was gone—not to return, so long as Barney Stone bossed the Kicking Cayuse. Smithy was not standing for that. All depended now on the result of that cable to his father.

Smithy was fairly confident of the result.

His father trusted his judgment and his sagacity, and, schoolboy as he was, the millionaire relied upon him to give him a full and accurate report on his new property in Texas.

Vernon-Smith would have preferred to leave the matter till he had more definite proof. But Barney had forced his hand. Whether it was wise or unwise to come to an open break with the foreman of the ranch, Herbert Vernon-Smith was determined not to yield. His friends, on the whole, considered that he was right, for they could not doubt that Smithy's peril was greater now that Bill was gone.

Harry Wharton & Co. arrived at the corral for their horses, prepared, as usual, to handle them themselves. They were a little surprised to find the horse-wrangler there, with Vernon-Smith's bronco ready saddled and bridled, holding it for him at the gate of the corral.

Lariat was the cause—or, at least, the excuse—for the firing of Bill Buck. He had had trouble more than once with the owner's son. He was, if Smithy's suspicions were well founded, Barney's confederate in dealings with the gang of rustlers who ran off Kicking Cayuse herds. His unwillingness to take orders from the owner's son had been very much in evidence ever since the juniors had been on the ranch. So his respectful civility on the present occasion was quite unexpected.

He had not got the other horses

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ready. All his obliging civility was reserved for the owner's son.

"Thanks!" said Smithy carelessly, as he took the horse from Lariat Jenkins. He smiled rather sarcastically. It looked to him as if the horse-wrangler aimed to make his own peace, in view of the possibility of Barney getting "fired." Certainly this was the first time that Lariat had shown himself obliging.

The Famous Five saddled up, and led out their horses. Smithy was mounted first—with a tight hand on the rein, for his bronco seemed very fresh and spirited that morning.

The horse-wrangler stood watching them as they rode out in a bunch under the rising sunlight. There was a curious expression on Lariat's hard, bronzed face. But the juniors did not look back at him, and did not know, or care, whether the horse-wrangler was interested in their movements.

They rode away at an easy trot. Forty miles riding lay ahead of them to reach Prairie Bend, most of the distance over wide and solitary prairies, where they were likely to see none but an occasional puncher "riding herd."

Unless, indeed, they came on foes—and for that they were fully prepared, Smithy was quite assured that the foreman would prevent him from reaching the railroad town, if he could.

But it was difficult to see how Barney could have planned an ambush on the way, either with a bunch of rough-necks, or the outcast Indians. There were a dozen trails to choose from, and the foreman could not possibly know which one the Greyfriars fellows would take once out of sight of the ranch.

Unless they were followed from the ranch, they were going to disappear beyond Barney's ken. And, during the first two or three miles, glances back revealed no sign of a rider on the plains. They were not followed.

Vernon-Smith, by that time, had another matter to occupy his mind. His bronco was giving trouble.

The Bounder was a good rider; and had he been in Billy Bunter's place the previous day, the horse-wrangler's rough joke would not have bothered him. He would have ridden that bucking bronco without difficulty.

But he seemed to be having trouble now to keep his own horse in hand.

The Bounder's mount was a very handsome pinto, or "painted" horse, which Smithy had selected for himself with great care. He could have out-distanced the other fellows on the pinto, though they were all well mounted. Now he was finding it difficult to hold the pinto in.

The animal had seemed very fresh when he started, and in two or three miles, instead of settling down to the pace, the pinto became more and more uneasy, and its uneasiness grew into excitement.

Every now and then it tried buck-jumping; and Smithy needed a hard hand on the rein to control it.

"Bother the brute!" exclaimed the Bounder at last. "What the dickens is the matter with it?"

He dragged on the reins as the pinto attempted to bolt. With set teeth and a knitted brow, he held the bronco in.

"Look out, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in alarm.

The Bounder's horse made a sudden leap into the air, and came down with a crash. Then its heels flew up, and its head came down—then its head up, and it towered on its hind legs.

They backed their horses out of reach of the pinto's flying heels.

They were about six miles from Kicking Cayuse by this time, riding towards the Frio river. Round them was the rolling prairie, stretching unbounded on all sides.

In surprise and alarm, the Famous Five watched the pinto. Smithy had ridden that horse a score of times, and it had never given trouble. Now it seemed to be wrought up to a pitch of excitement little short of madness.

Only a first-class rider could have kept his saddle as the horse leaped and bounded, and towered on its hind legs, and crashed down on its forefeet. For full five minutes that desperate struggle between horse and rider lasted—and the Bounder kept his seat, his face set, and his eyes glinting. What was the matter with the pinto, was beyond his understanding; but it was plain that there was something very much the matter with it.

Crash, crash! Clatter, clatter! went the ringing hoofs and still the Bounder sat fast—he was, in fact, riding for his life now. A crash on the hard, sun-baked earth, with those mad hoofs trampling, would have meant serious injury, if not death.

His friends could give no help. They could not even draw near him. They could only wait, and watch, for the finish of that wild and unexpected struggle.

Suddenly the pinto seemed to give up the fight, and, instead of trying to unseat its rider, dashed away across the prairie at a mad gallop. This time the Bounder failed to hold it in. The most powerful puncher in the Kicking Cayuse outfit could not have held the pinto in at that pitch of maddened excitement.

"After him!" panted Bob. Smithy had to give the horse his head—there was no choice about that. All he could do was to sit tight, and keep his saddle, and hope that the brute's own frantic exertions would tire out.

Harry Wharton & Co. put spurs to their horses, and galloped in pursuit. Vernon-Smith was going like an arrow, drawing farther and farther ahead of his friends. With spur and quirt they urged their broncos on in chase, deeply alarmed for the Bounder, striving their hardest to keep him in sight.

But it was in vain! The maddened pinto was going like the wind; and, fast as they rode, it drew farther and farther away, till it disappeared with its rider in the far distance.

In deep anxiety they spurred on. The Bounder was gone out of their sight, and they dreaded what they might find when at last they saw him again.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bill Horns In!

HERBERT VERNON SMITH rode—with set teeth.

The wind rushed by him like a torrent—the grass raced under the thundering hoofs. His feet were firm in the stirrups—his grip hard on the reins.

To control the maddened horse was impossible—no hand could have controlled it. The Bounder's efforts were concentrated on one object—to keep his seat, to save himself from crashing to the earth with broken and shattered limbs.

Miles—swift miles—raced under the flying hoofs. He did not think of trying to look round—but he knew that his friends must be out of sight.

He was alone on the vast prairie—alone in the wilderness of grass and bush, under the blue dome of the sky—alone with the maddened horse. And his life hung on a thread.

In that fight for life, he had little leisure to think—but he knew that it was no outburst of temper that affected the bronco to this extent. The horse had been tampered with.

What had been done he did not know; but he knew now why Lariat had saddled the bronco, and had it ready for him; he knew, as well as if he had seen him, that the horse-wrangler had done this, and sent him riding to his death.

Barney Stone had not meant him to reach the railroad town, and cable home—and this was the method adopted to prevent it. Now that it was too late, now that he was caught in the trap, the Bounder knew it, and knew it clearly.

Only by a miracle, as it seemed, had he escaped so far with his life. Few riders would have sat through that mad spasm of buck-jumping. Now, as the bronco raced on, death was the rider's companion. He could not stop the horse—he could not check its mad speed—only by bitter concentrated effort could he keep his seat. And it could not last much longer.

The bronco galloped at an almost unbelievable speed. It was as if he was seeking to flee from what tormented him—and every now and then there came a shrill squeal from the animal that told of pain.

Foam flecked the open muzzle like snowflakes—the eyes bulged and blazed—the nostrils steamed. Gallop, gallop, gallop, with leap and bound, every leap almost flinging the rider from the saddle.

But still the Bounder sat tight, and rode.

Far away, ahead in the distance, he glimpsed lines of scrubs and small timber, and guessed that it marked the course of the Rio Frio, below Pack-saddle. It meant a new peril—for the runaway was heading direct for the river, and if it did not swerve away from its course, it meant a fall down the steep bank—a crash into the Frio far below. But no drag on the reins influenced the maddened animal—the Bounder was as powerless as a mosquito on its back.

Thunder, thunder, thunder, crashed the galloping hoofs, ringing incessantly. The speed did not slacken—the bronco seemed to race faster and faster—and the Bounder's head was almost spinning with the rushing speed, the roar of the wind past his face. How long was this to last? What was the end to be? It seemed only too clear what the end must be.

He fancied he glimpsed a stetson hat on the plain—but, if so, it was lost to sight the next moment.

The thunder of the hoofs filled his ears with sound.

Gallop, gallop, gallop! A gully, at the bottom of which a trickle of water ran to join the Frio, stretched across the way—shallow, but wide. The bronco took it in a leap, crashing down on the farther side, and almost losing its feet. Vernon-Smith felt himself going—he clamped his knees to hold on, and lost his stirrups. A savage wrench of the bronco's head, at the same moment, tore the reins from his hands.

The maddened brute thundered on, and still Vernon-Smith, with stirrups flying loose, and the reins gone, clung on.

But this was the end, and he knew it! Desperately he clung. But he knew that the crash was coming—the crash on the hard earth, breaking his limbs, even if he was not trampled under the thundering hoofs.

Crack!

In the thunder of the hoof-beats, he hardly heard the shot that suddenly rang sharply through the clear air.

The bronco gave one more leap—and plunged over.

It was well for the Bounder that he was quick-witted, that he was swift on the uptake—well for him, too, that his feet were already clear of the stirrups. As the bronco plunged down heavily in the grass, he leaped clear from the falling animal.

A shot had struck the bronco down and given him that chance. Even then, had the animal rolled and struggled, the hoofs would have crashed on the Bounder. But the pinto, after that last plunge forward, did not stir. The bullet was in his brain, and he had been killed instantly and mercifully.

The Bounder stumbled away and fell in the grass.

The bronco lay inert. Dazed, dizzy, the Bounder stumbled over. His strength was spent—he tried to rise, and stumbled over again, from sheer weakness.

He raised himself on his elbow, and looked round him with dizzy eyes. He could see nothing but the thick grass and the blue dome of the sky—and the dead body of the bronco, lying a few yards away.

But there was a sound—a sound of hoof-beats—a rider was approaching him. A stetson hat loomed against the blue.

He heard the jingle of bridle and stirrup as the rider pulled in; the crash of heavy riding-boots as he jumped down from his horse. Then the shadow of the ten-gallon hat was over him—a bronzed, bearded face looked down on him, a face he knew.

"Bill!" panted Vernon-Smith, in wonder.

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill.

He put his arm under the exhausted schoolboy and raised him to his feet.

Smithy stood leaning on him, weakly.

"Bill!" he repeated, like a fellow in a dream. He almost thought that it was a dream—he could hardly believe that it was, indeed, Bill that he saw—Bill who had saved him from destruction.

"Yep!" said Bill. "I'll say that was a close call, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir! I'll tell a man from Texas."

The Bounder leaned on him, panting and panting. It was Bill; big, rugged, honest Bill; and Bill had saved him.

"I guess," said Bill, "that you want this here baby riding herd over you, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir! I'll tell a man! Say, what's got that hoss? I seen a hoss mad afore, more'n once, but I never scen a hoss as mad as that hoss!" Smithy panted for breath.

"You've saved my life, Bill! I was right on the finish! You've saved my life, old-timer!"

"Surest thing you know!" agreed Bill.

"How did you come here? How—"

"I guess that's easy, Mr. Vernon-Smith. Mebbe you've heered that Barney Stone fired me off'n the Kicking Cayuse yesterday, arter I had a row with Lariat and Panhandle—"

"Yes—yes, but—"

"I guess I was hitting the trail to-day for Hard Tack," explained Bill. "I got to get into another bunch. I was jest riding down the Frio when I seen you going hell-for-leather! I seen that hoss

was mad, and I'd never get near enough for the rope. That's how!"

Vernon-Smith understood. Something like a smile came over his strained white face.

Barney Stone had "fired" Bill to get rid of the puncher who had "ridden herd" over the owner's son. But for that, Bill would have been on the ranch. It was because he was fired that Bill had been riding down the river that day to look for a new job at Hard Tack. Barney certainly had never dreamed of such an outcome as that!

"If you'd missed, Bill—" muttered Smithy.

"Aw, forget it!" said Bill.

The Bounder shivered. That single shot from the puncher had struck the mad bronco down and killed it instantly. But had it only wounded the hapless brute, the result to the Bounder would have been terrible, mixed up on the earth with a rolling, struggling, kicking bronco. Bill's aim had not failed him, however.

"I guess you been through it, sir!" said Bill, as the Bounder ceased to lean on him, and stood more steadily. "I'll tell a man. I guess it's got me beat what was the matter with that cayuse of yours. He sure was plumb loco."

The Bounder set his teeth.

"Lariat saddled him for me," he said. "Lariat played some trick on that horse—I don't know what! It wasn't the bronco's fault—he was a good horse. Find out what that villain did to him, Bill!"

Bill whistled.

"I'll tell a man!" he ejaculated. "That cuss Lariat Jenkins is sure a hard case—but I don't reckon—"

"I tell you, he did it!" exclaimed the Bounder fiercely, "and I'm going back to the ranch to reckon with him."

Bill whistled again, and stepped to the inert form of the pinto. But his look changed as he bent over the animal.

"Carry me home to die!" he exclaimed.

There was blood mingled with the thick streaks of sweat on the pinto's flanks. Bill's rugged face set hard and grim. He removed saddle and girth, and then the look on his face startled Vernon-Smith, gazing at him.

"The dog-goned skunk!" roared Bill.

"You've found out—"

"The pizen polecat!" Bill's face was red with rage as he held up a bunch of cactus-thorns that gleamed crimson in the sunlight. "I've knowed that trick to be played afore, but I never reckoned—"

"Oh!" gasped Smithy.

He knew now.

Already he had suspected that the horse-wrangler had played some treacherous trick when he saddled the pinto. Now he knew. The cactus thorns had been packed under the saddle. At first they had merely irritated the bronco; but after a short distance the rider's weight, and the horse's movement, had caused them to bite deep—tormenting the hapless bronco to the pitch of madness. It was clear enough now.

"The pizen skunk!" hissed Bill.

Herbert Vernon-Smith gripped his quirt.

The ride to the railroad town, and the telegraph office there, was dismissed from his mind now. There was only one thought in the Bounder's mind at this moment—to get back to the ranch and deal with the dastard who had played this deadly trick.

"We must hit Kicking Cayuse, Bill," he said. "And hit it quick! I'm going to deal with Lariat as he deserves!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Has His Way!

"**H**I-YI!" roared Bill. He waved his hat in signal to the riders, whose stetsons topped the waving grass.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! It's Bill!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"And Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in great relief.

The Famous Five rode up. They reined in their panting, sweating broncos. They had followed at a hard gallop, but with little hope of seeing Smithy—unless they found him lying on the earth, thrown by the runaway. They had had no chance whatever of overtaking the pinto, so long as he kept going. But the pinto lay inert in the grass now—and Bill's deep roar, and his waving stetson, guided them to the spot.

"All right, Smithy?" gasped Bob Cherry, as he dismounted.

"O.K.," said the Bounder. He was recovering now from the strain. "One of you fellows will have to lend me his horse to get back to the ranch! A couple of you can ride double—I've got to hit Kicking Cayuse, and hit it quick."

"But what?" asked Harry.

The Bounder picked up the bunch of stained cactus thorns, and the Famous Five stared at it as he held it up. The look on Vernon-Smith's face was making them feel uneasy.

"That's the latest!" said the Bounder grimly. "Lariat saddled my bronco—you noticed that? He packed these thorns under the saddle—"

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

"If Bill hadn't turned up and shot the pinto, I should never have given Barney Stone any more trouble!" said the Bounder, with glittering eyes. "But I'm going to give him a whole heap yet. But Lariat first—I'm going back to the ranch to deal with him."

"The awful villain!" breathed Nugent.

"I'll say that guy Lariat is a pizen skunk," said Bill. "But don't you figure that you can handle that guy, Mr. Vernon-Smith—I'll tell a man you couldn't handle one side of him."

"I'm going to!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "I'm going straight back to the ranch, and I'm going to quirt Lariat off it."

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill.

"Smithy!" murmured Bob.

"My esteemed and absurd Smithy—" exclaimed Hurrce Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder gave a harsh laugh.

"Barney Stone can hardly stand up for him when I let the whole outfit know what he's done," he said. "Barney's got appearances to keep up. Not that I'm bothering about Barney. I'm going back to deal with Lariat, and I'm going to quirt the hound off the ranch, and I'm going to do it now! Give me a horse!"

The Famous Five stood in the grass, holding their horses by the bridles. The Bounder's look had made them uneasy. His words made them more so.

So far they had known nothing of the dastardly trick played by the horse-wrangler. They had only supposed that the pinto had got out of hand and bolted. Now that they knew the truth their anger and indignation were deep. But the idea of the Bounder "quirting" Lariat off the ranch was rather startling.

Smithy was strong and sturdy, and courageous to the point of utter recklessness; but the burly Lariat could have picked him up in one hand and tossed him over the corral wall.

"Keep cool, Smithy," said Harry quietly. "There's not a lot of law in the Packsaddle country, but there's enough law to deal with a scoundrel like that. The sheriff—"

Vernon-Smith snapped his fingers.

"That for the law and the sheriff!" he said contemptuously. "I'm going to deal with that villain, and do it now—as fast as I can get back to Kicking Cayuse. I'm going to quirt him till he howls, and quirt him off the ranch, and if Barney Stone chips in I'll handle him, too, and glad!"

"Say, you young gink," gasped Bill Buck, staring blankly at the Bounder, "you figure that guy Lariat will stand for it? You leave that guy Lariat to a galoot about my size. You hear me yaup?"

"He had better stand for it," said the Bounder, between his teeth. "I pack a gun, Bill Buck, and do you think I'd think twice about handling it on a man who planned to get me killed by a bronco?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

"Smithy, old chap—"

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill.

"I want a horse!" snapped the Bounder. "Lend me your horse, Bill?"

Bill grinned.

"I guess I'd lend you my cayuse, and hoof it ten miles to Packsaddle, to rustle another critter," he said, "but not to help you hunt for gun-play with a guy of Lariat's heft! Nope!"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth. His glance swept round at the Famous Five holding their horses.

His own pinto lay dead on the earth, and it was a good fifteen miles from that spot back to the ranch. In his rage and resentment every moment was precious. He grudged even the time for a gallop back to Kicking Cayuse.

But his friends had a very different view. They understood the Bounder's deep rage, and sympathised with it, and they admitted that no punishment could be too severe for a scoundrel who had tormented a horse to cause it to endanger the rider's life. But gun-play did not come into the picture if the Famous Five had any say in the matter.

"Look here, Smithy—" said Harry.

"Will you let me have that horse?"

"Not for what you want," said Harry Wharton, shaking his head. "Wait till you're cool, and—"

He was interrupted.

The Bounder made a swift stride at him, grasped the bridle with one hand, and with the other gave Wharton a rough shove that sent him stumbling backwards to fall in the grass.

In an instant the Bounder swung himself into Wharton's saddle and dashed his spurs into the flanks of the bronco.

"Smithy!" roared Bob.

"You cheeky ass, stop!" bawled Johnny Bull.

The Bounder, if he heard, did not heed. He was riding away like the wind, with quirt and spur, at a mad gallop towards the distant ranch.

Harry Wharton staggered to his feet. His face was red with anger.

"Search me!" gasped Bill Buck, staring after the Bounder. "I'll say that young geek has got gall—he surely has! I guess I'm getting after that young gink! He sure ain't going to be shot up by that guy Lariat, arter his popper handed him over to me to ride herd. I'll say nope!"

And Bill mounted his bronco and dashed away after the Bounder—already at a distance, and galloping on Wharton's horse almost as fast as he had galloped on the runaway pinto.

The Famous Five were left standing and staring.

Harry Wharton breathed hard; but anger gave place to alarm—alarm for the reckless Bounder.

"Come on," he said, "we've got to get back. I shall have to ride double with you, Frank."

"Jump on!" said Nugent.

The chums of the Remove mounted, Nugent's bronco taking a double burden. The juniors headed for the distant ranch. But the Bounder was already out of sight; Bill Buck almost out of sight behind him. They made all the speed they could; but they knew, only too well, that whatever was going to happen at Kicking Cayuse would be over before they could arrive at the ranch.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Greyfriars Gun man!

LARIAT, the horse-wrangler, stared, and stared harder.

Standing in the open gateway, he was looking out over the prairie trail. A faint, derisive grin dawned on his hard face at the sight of a distant horseman spurring towards the ranch.

He could see little of the rider but the stetson hat, but he could see that it was not one of the outfit. It was one of the Greyfriars schoolboys.

One of them was returning, hard and fast. That was why the grin came over the horse-wrangler's hard face. The others he reckoned were staying with a young guy who had been smashed up by a mad horse. One was riding back for help. That was how it looked to Lariat.

But as the galloping rider came nearer a change came over Lariat's hard face, and he stared with surprise and almost unbelief. He glimpsed the face under the stetson, and it was the last face that he had expected to see—the face of the boy he had sent to destruction—the face of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the owner's son. It was the Bounder who was riding back to the ranch at a mad gallop.

"Search me!" breathed Lariat.

He could hardly believe what he saw. The boy had ridden away from the ranch on the pinto, and the hard-hearted ruffian had no doubt of what had happened—what must have happened—within a few miles of Kicking Cayuse. Yet here was Herbert Vernon-Smith riding back—evidently unhurt, unharmed, though clearly something had happened to his horse, as he was on a different mount.

Lariat's eyes gleamed at him as he came.

He had failed—how, he could not imagine, for such a trick might have proved deadly to the most experienced puncher, and it seemed impossible that a mere schoolboy could have escaped serious injury on the back of a bronco driven out of its senses by pain. But he had failed, that was clear. He scowled blackly at the approaching rider.

Yuba Dick joined him in the gateway. "Say, that young geek is burning the wind!" said Yuba. "What's brought the owner's son back in such a hurry, Lariat?"

The horse-wrangler did not answer. He turned away and tramped across to the bunkhouse.

Five or six punchers were there, and all of them were looking out towards the rider who was coming at such a wild and reckless speed.

"That young gink can ride!" remarked Frio Pete. "I'll say that young gink can ride! But what's got him?"

"Search me!" drawled Lariat.

He sat on the bench outside the bunkhouse, and watched the approaching rider under the shadow of his stetson. He was wondering whether the Bounder knew of the trick that had been played with the pinto. It was easy to read the bitter, concentrated passion in Vernon-Smith's face as he came nearer.

The Bounder came up at a gallop, pulling in his bronco so sharply that it almost fell on its haunches in the gateway. He sprang from the saddle, leaving the bronco to its own devices, and Yuba Dick caught it by the bridle.

"Where's Lariat?" snapped Smithy.

"I guess he's over by the bunkhouse. Say, what—"

The Bounder strode across to the bunkhouse. Yuba stared after him, hitched the horse, and followed.

Vernon-Smith, his quirt gripped hard in his hand, reached the bunkhouse, and the look on his face made the punchers stare at him. That look, on a Packsaddle man's face, would have meant gun-play!

"Say, Mr. Vernon-Smith—" began Frio Pete.

"Lariat, you hound!" burst out the Bounder furiously.

The horse-wrangler gave him a look. He saw now that Vernon-Smith knew. His hard face set harder.

"You talking to me?" he asked, in a low, growling voice.

"I'm talking to you, you coward and cur!" shouted Vernon-Smith. "You others, listen to this! That villain saddled my bronco this morning. He packed cactus thorns under the saddle, and the horse went mad on the prairie, and would have killed me, as that villain meant it to do, if Bill Buck hadn't turned up and shot it."

"Aw, what you giving us?" exclaimed Pete.

"Forget it, you young gink!" said Yuba Dick.

Lariat breathed hard. It did not occur to him to fear the angry schoolboy; but he feared the Kicking Cayuse punchers, if they believed that he had been guilty of foul treachery. Even Barney Stone, had he been present, could not have stood by him, though he had been at the back of the dastardly scheme.

"I guess you're dreaming, buddy!" said the horse-wrangler scoffingly. "You sure shouldn't back a Texas cayuse, if you can't ride! You been having trouble like the fat gink yesterday, and want to put it down to me?"

The Bounder's eyes flashed at him.

"You lying rascal!" he roared.

Lariat set his lips.

"Pack that up!" he said. "I ain't honing to break up a schoolboy—but I don't take that talk from any guy, man or boy. Can it, pronto!"

"You'll take it from me, and more!" snarled the Bounder. "You men, Bill Buck shot down the pinto before it killed me—and he took off the saddle and found the thorns that had driven the horse mad. That scoundrel laid the trap for me, and he never expected to see me alive again. That's for you, Lariat!"

The Bounder's arm went up, and the quirt came full across the horse-wrangler's face with a fearful slash.

So sudden was the blow, that Lariat took it before he knew that it was coming, and he staggered back against

the bunkhouse, the blood pouring from his face under the cut of the whip.

There was a roar of surprise and alarm from the punchers.

Yuba Dick caught the Bounder by the shoulder.

"You locoed young geck—" he gasped.

Vernon-Smith shook off his hand savagely.

As the horse-wrangler staggered, gasping, he followed him up, slashing again with the quirt, with all the strength of his arm.

Twice the whip landed with terrible force across the horse-wrangler's face—so swiftly the lashes came, and so utterly taken aback was the ruffian by the attack.

Then, with a roar like a maddened buffalo, Lariat leaped at the reckless schoolboy.

A moment more, and the breathless punchers expected to see Herbert Vernon-Smith crumpling in his powerful grasp, beaten almost to a jelly by the heavy fists.

But the Bounder, passionately furious as he was, was as watchful as a cat. He leaped back as the horse-wrangler leaped forward and whipped out the Colt from his belt.

"Hands up!"

He rapped out the words like any gunman at Packsaddle. No roughneck at the Red Flare had anything on the Bounder of Greyfriars at that moment.

His revolver was levelled, his finger on the trigger, his eyes gleaming over the barrel.

Lariat, mad with rage as he was, stopped as the Colt looked him fairly in the face. The gleaming eyes of the Bounder over it told that he was ready to shoot.

The burly ruffian stood shaking with fury.

"Hands up, you cur!" snapped the Bounder. "You murderous scoundrel, I'm going to quirt you off the ranch! And if you lift a finger I'll shoot you like the cowardly cur you are!"

"Aw, search me!" gasped Yuba Dick.

"Can it, you young geck!" howled Frio Pete. "You want Lariat to pull a gun on you?"

"Let the cur pull his gun!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Do you think I'm afraid of his gun, you fool?"

"You doggoned young lobewolf," breathed Lariat, his voice husky with fury. "I guess—"

"That's enough! Put up your hands, you cur, and keep them up while I quirt you off the ranch!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

Lariat's answer to that was to grab at the butt of the six-gun in his belt.

The punchers jumped back hurriedly from the line of fire.

Lariat's gun was half-out when the Bounder, without the slightest hesitation, fired. Another moment, and the horse-wrangler would have been pulling trigger. But Smithy gave him no time for that. He fired instantly, and the bullet smashed through the ruffian's right arm at the elbow.

The horse-wrangler, with a fearful yell, staggered back, his arm sagging helplessly. He reeled against the wall of the bunkhouse.

The Bounder, with the smoking revolver at a level, watched him. The Kicking Cayuse punchers stared on, almost dazedly. They had seen gun-play more than once—plenty of it. But they had never seen a schoolboy stand up to a burly ruffian gun in hand before. They could hardly believe

their eyes as the brawny horse-wrangler, beaten at gun-play by the schoolboy, sagged against the bunkhouse wall, and slid helplessly to the ground.

"Search me!" breathed Yuba Dick.

There was a clatter of hoofs on the trail. Bill Buck, red and breathless with hard riding, dashed up and pulled in his horse in front of the bunkhouse.

"Say—" panted Bill.

The Bounder glanced round at him.

"Too late, old-timer!" he said coolly.

"I've handled that cur! Lariat won't put up any more foul play on this ranch."

Bill blinked at him and at the horse-wrangler, sprawling wounded and helpless against the bunkhouse.

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill.

Vernon-Smith gave the horse-wrangler another look and holstered his gun. He glanced at the punchers.

"You can ask Bill what that villain did if you want to!" he said. "He's taken what was coming to him—but he's got to get off this ranch! Some of you fix him up to be taken away—I guess the sooner he sees the Packsaddle doc, the better it will be for him!"

With that the Bounder walked away to the ranch-house, leaving the punchers in a buzz of excitement round the groaning horse-wrangler.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Blow for Barney!

BARNEY STONE smiled sourly.

He was riding towards the ranch, when he spotted a party of horsemen on the prairie, heading for the same destination, from a different direction.

He recognised Harry Wharton & Co. The Famous Five were riding back—Vernon-Smith was not with them. Like the horse-wrangler, he had never expected to see Vernon-Smith ride back to the ranch. But he expected to see the Famous Five ride in, after the Bounder's disaster on the mad bronco; so now, he reckoned, he was seeing what he expected to see!

Barney had been out on the plains, on one of the cattle ranges that morning. He was returning, when he sighted the Greyfriars fellows—and when he saw them he did not doubt that they had left the Bounder somewhere on the prairie, a victim to the treachery he had planned with the horse-wrangler. Not for a moment did he dream that Vernon-Smith was already back at the ranch—still less could he possibly dream what had happened there.

Why two of the juniors were riding double he did not know, but he concluded that one of them had had a spill and lost his horse.

With a sour grin on his lean, brown face, Barney joined the party as they rode up to the ranch.

"Mornin'!" he said. "Say, you're early back! Wasn't you riding over to Prairie Bend with the owner's son?"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him. Feeling assured, as they did, that he was a party to the horse-wrangler's black treachery, it was not easy to answer him civilly, or to restrain the dislike and disgust they felt.

"Smithy never went to Prairie Bend after all!" answered Harry curtly.

"Nothin' happened to that young guy on the trail, I hope?" said Barney blandly.

"Yes!" said Harry.

Barney's eyes glistened under his heavy brows. He could guess what had

happened to the young guy on the trail—or he fancied he could.

"Hurt?" he asked.

"No!"

Barney started. He could not help it—at that utterly unexpected reply. He stared blankly at Harry Wharton.

"Not?" he exclaimed.

"Did you expect to hear that he was hurt, Mr. Stone?" Wharton could not help asking.

Barney recovered himself.

"If he ain't hurt, then, where is he?" he asked. "What you left him out on the prairie for?"

"We haven't left him out on the prairie," answered Wharton coolly. "He went back to the ranch on my horse, and he's got in before us—"

Barney struck spurs to his horse and dashed on to the ranch.

The juniors rode in after him, keenly anxious to know what had happened, and dreading to hear of what might have passed between the Bounder and the horse-wrangler.

There was a little crowd outside the bunkhouse, Bill towering over it.

Barney leaped from his saddle and strode on the spot, with black brows.

The horse-wrangler lay on the earth, half-conscious; Yuba Dick, kneeling beside him, was binding up his arm.

Barney Stone stared down at him.

"What's this?" he snarled. He glared at Bill. "You, Bill Buck! What you doing here, arter you've been fired from this ranch? You been shooting up my horse-wrangler?"

Bill grinned.

"Not so's you'd notice it," he answered.

"Then who?" snarled Barney.

"I guess I horned in to handle that doggoned big stiff!" said Bill. "And I sure would have handled him a few, only young Vernon-Smith got in first. I'll say that young guy can handle a gun."

"What you giving me? You allow that that young gink has shot up Lariat?" howled Barney.

"Surest thing you know," grinned Bill.

"You mean to say—" gasped Barney Stone. "You asking me to believe that that kid from school beat a guy like Lariat at gun-play?"

"You said it. He sure is some gunslinger."

"Ko-rect, Barney," said Yuba Dick, looking up. "That young guy horned in, as mad as a hornet, and allowed that Lariat had fixed up a dirty trick with his bronc. And he sure quirted Lariat a few, and Lariat pulled on him, and the young guy let him have it—"

"Search me!" gasped Barney.

He stood as if turned to stone, staring down on the half-senseless, groaning horse-wrangler with almost unbelieving eyes.

Harry Wharton & Co. rode up. A voice hailed them from the direction of the rancho. They looked round, and saw Vernon-Smith leaning on the front rail, a grin on his face.

It was a relief to see him safe and sound, though the sight of the scene at the bunkhouse made their faces very grave.

They hitched their horses, and went over to the ranch-house. The Bounder gave them a cheery grin as they came up the steps.

"Sorry, Wharton, old bean," he said. "I had to have a horse—"

"Never mind that," said Harry quietly. "Thank goodness we've found you safe, Smithy! But what—"



“Listen, Barney Stone!” said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. “Either Bill Buck comes back to this ranch, or I send a cable to my father!” “You figure that your popper will fire a foreman to please a schoolboy who’s lost his temper?” asked Barney.

The Bounder’s eyes glinted. “I gave the scoundrel the quirt, and he pulled a gun,” he said. “You can guess the rest from what you can see yonder.”

“Oh, my hat!” murmured Bob. “Don’t you worry,” said the Bounder, with a sarcastic grin. “It isn’t last sickness for him, as Bill would call it. He won’t use his gun-arm again in a hurry’s that’s all.”

“My esteemed Smithy!” murmured Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

“Barney doesn’t seem quite able to believe his eyes, does he?” grinned the Bounder. “I am wondering how he’s going to take this. If he comes out into the open, I’m ready for him.”

Smithy touched the butt of the six-gun in his belt.

“Smithy!” exclaimed Nugent.

“It’s not likely,” said the Bounder, laughing. “Barney’s running this ranch for himself, instead of for the owner. And he’s fearfully keen to see me follow the way the last owner went; but he’s got to keep up some sort of appearance, even in the Pack-saddle country. It would be rather too thick for even Barney to shoot up the owner’s son. Barney prefers the hidden-hand game. But I’m ready, if he loses his temper and comes clean.”

The juniors made no reply to that, but they watched the foreman of the Kicking Cayuse with rather anxious eyes.

Certainly it was not likely that Barney would throw all disguise to the winds, and “pull a gun” on the son of the owner of Kicking Cayuse Ranch.

That was the least likely of all happenings. But knowing, or at least suspecting, what they did, the juniors hardly knew what to expect when, at length, the foreman left the group

at the bunkhouse, and came over to the rancho.

The Bounder watched him curiously and coolly. He did not expect open trouble; but he was fully prepared of it if it came.

But Barney, whatever his feelings were like—and the juniors could guess—had himself well in hand.

His face expressed only a grave seriousness as he came into the veranda.

“This sure has got my goat, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir,” said Barney. “From what Bill says, I guess that guy Lariat sure did play a locoed trick on your bronc—he sure is some bonehead! I guess it was jest a fool trick on a tenderfoot—jest that, sir—no more’n that.”

“Rubbish!” snapped Vernon-Smith. “The scoundrel hoped I’d never get back to Kicking Cayuse alive. And neither would I have done, but for Bill Buck—the man you fired from the ranch!”

“But—”

Smithy’s eyes glinted. “You’re firing that man off the ranch, Mr. Stone?” he asked quietly.

Barney looked at him furtively. “I guess he’s being fixed up to get to Packsaddle in a buckboard,” he answered. “It will sure be a month of Sundays afore that guy Lariat gets mended, and I got to get a new horse-wrangler. That guy Lariat won’t worry you none, sir, on your holiday here.”

The Bounder smiled sarcastically as he went. There had been no sign of hostility. Barney Stone did not intend to come out into the open. He had failed; but Smithy knew, and his friends knew, that the Bounder would never reach Prairie Bend to send that cable to his father if the foreman of Kicking Cayuse could prevent it.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Invalid!

“**W**HERE’S Bunter?”
Chick, the chore man, grunted.

Important person as William Bunter was, the Greyfriars fellows did not remember his fat existence, till they went into the living-room for the midday meal.

A meal, naturally, reminded them of Bunter.

The events of that eventful morning had put the Famous Five into a rather serious mood. The trip to Prairie Bend had to be postponed till the morrow. It had been a fatiguing morning, and it was not much use to start on a forty-mile ride late in the day. The juniors could not help wondering whether something might occur before that trip was through.

Smithy was not in the best of tempers. The delay irritated him; and he had seen Bill ride away from the ranch, which irritated him still more.

Bill had saved his life; but he was still “fired,” in spite of that—more likely because of that. It was easy enough to guess the bitterness of Barney Stone’s feelings towards the puncher who had horned in and rescued the owner’s son from that deadly peril.

For a moment Smithy was helpless in the matter. Barney was foreman, and Barney had fired Bill, and Bill had to quit. But he was intensely irritated. And the Famous Five were rather uneasy that his temper might break out, in some reckless shindy with the foreman.

Barney, however, avoided seeing the
(Continued on page 16.)

RUCTIONS on the RANCH!



FRANK RICHARDS

(Continued from page 13.)

juniors, after those few brief words in the veranda. Lariat had left the ranch in a buckboard, and Barney had ridden away soon afterwards, doubtless on some duty on the ranges. Anyhow, he was absent from the ranch, and the Greyfriars fellows, in the circumstances, were very glad to see nothing of him.

Neither had they seen anything, so far, of Billy Bunter. The fat Owl had not been up when they went, and he did not seem to be up yet—which was rather unusual, even for Bunter. Even in holiday time the fat Owl generally turned out before midday, and now it was an hour past midday.

Chick, the choreman, was placing the "eats," as he called them, on the table. Chick was a plump and good-tempered man, and the juniors got on with him pretty well. Chick did all the "chores" in the rancho, and the Famous Five gave him as little trouble as they could, being quite able to rough it, and to look after themselves, to a very great extent. Billy Bunter did not follow their example in that respect—being loftily indifferent to the amount of trouble he gave anybody.

"Isn't that fat fool up yet?" grunted Smithy.

"Where's Bunter, Chick?" asked Bob Cherry.

Snort from Chick.

"I guess he ain't turned out," he grunted. "He allows he's ill. Mebbe he did get a shake-up on that bronc yesterday. Me, I been up them stairs three-four times, carrying eats. I'll tell the world."

"He's not too ill to eat?" grinned Bob.

"Forget it!" snorted Chick. "Three-four times I've hoofed it up them stairs with eats, and I allow I'm tired of them stairs."

Chick's plump good temper seemed to have failed him a little. Perhaps that was not surprising, after a morning with Billy Bunter.

"Better give him a call," said Harry.

"Bunter won't want to eat dinner."

More snorts from Chick.

"That guy allows he's staying in bed, and I got to take him his eats," he growled. "I guess—"

"Rot!" said the Bounder. "Let him come down."

"I'll give him a call," said Bob Cherry, and he went out into the hallway, from which a ladder-like staircase gave access to the upper floor of the rancho.

Bob tramped up to the landing, and hurled open Bunter's door.

The fat Owl was sitting up in bed.

He turned an indignant blink on Bob Cherry as Bob's cheery face looked in.

"Is that you, Chick? Oh! You! I say, where's my dinner?"

"On the table downstairs, old fat man!" said Bob. "Turn out!"

"I'm ill!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"You mean lazy?" asked Bob.

"Beast!"

"Shall I help you out?" asked Bob.

"Keep off, you beast! I'm ill!" howled Bunter. "I've been fearfully shaken up by that beastly bronco! I'm bruised all over! I've got about a hundred bumps all over me—I'm stiff as a poker! I can't get up!"

It was very probable that Bunter felt stiff, after his wild adventures on the bronco the day before. No doubt he had a few bumps. That was quite a sufficient reason for the fat Owl to spend a day slacking in bed. There was, after all, no special reason for a fellow to get up, so long as his meals—and a few meals between meals—were brought to him in bed.

Alternately feeding and snoozing seemed, to William George Bunter, quite a happy way of spending a day—a real holiday, in fact!

"Look here, you fat ass!" said Bob. "You'd better turn out! This isn't the Ritz, old podgy bean! You can't ring for waiters and things, in a Texas ranch-house—"

"There isn't any bell!" said Bunter, with deep indignation. "I can't ring for that lazy beast Chick, because there isn't any bell! That's the way Smithy treats visitors! Not the way I do a guest at Bunter Court. I had to get out of bed and yell down the stairs to Chick, before I could get any brekker! Nice, ain't it, for a fellow who can't move a limb—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" howled Bunter. "I don't expect any sympathy from you!"

"How did you get to the stairs, if you can't move a limb?" inquired Bob.

"Well, I mean, I can hardly move a limb—fearful aches and pains all over. Dozens of aches and dozens of pains, and they're all over—"

"Well, if they're all over, forget them—"

"You funny idiot, I don't mean they're all over—I mean they're all over!" hooted Bunter. "Look here, go and tell that brute Chick to bring up my dinner! I've had hardly anything since brekker! That man's lazy! He's cheeky, too. He grumbles at bringing my meals up."

"I don't suppose he's ever brought a meal up in his life before," chuckled Bob. "They don't in this quarter, old fat man."

"What's he paid for?" snorted Bunter. "I believe in making servants work. Let 'em work, see? That's my idea."

"Better not tell Chick that!" grinned Bob. "They're not servants in this country, old ass—they're helps: and Chick is a free and independent citizen of the United States—"

"Oh, rot! Tell him to bring up my dinner at once!"

"Better turn out—"

"Beast!"

Bob Cherry gave it up, and tramped down the stairs again.

The other fellows had already started dinner: and Bob sat down to his.

"Isn't Bunter coming?" asked Nugent.

"The poor old fat bean seems to feel stiff, after witching the world with his noble horsemanship yesterday," answered Bob. "Chick, old timer, do you mind taking his grub up to him?"

"O.K.," grunted Chick. "I guess I'll take it up this once. But if that guy yowls down the stairs again, I'm telling you, he can yowl! I'll mention that I'm paid to do the chores in this here rancho, not to mosey up and down them stairs like I was a butler on a film."

Chick was a busy man for some time,

supplying the needs of half-a-dozen hungry juniors. Really, the choreman of Kicking Cayuse had enough to do, without waiting on an invalid—especially an invalid whose maladies were of the imaginary order.

However, Chick was going to take up Bunter's dinner—as soon as he had time. In the meantime, Bunter had to wait.

He did not wait patiently. A few minutes later, the dulcet tones of the fat Owl were heard. Bunter had, apparently, succeeded in getting to the head of the stairs again, in spite of the fact that he could not move a limb.

"Chick!" came a howl. "Chick!"

"Aw, pack it up, you!" howled back Chick.

"Smithy! Are you there, Smithy?"

"Here, you fat chump!" called back the Bounder.

"Tell that lazy beast to bring up my dinner at once!"

"I'll tell him to come up and boot you, if you don't shut up!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Why don't you sack him, I'd jolly well sack him!"

"Go up and kick him, Chick!" said the Bounder.

Chick grinned.

"I guess I'll take him his eats, when I got time!" he said.

Perhaps Billy Bunter's remarks caused some delay in finding time. Anyhow, it was a good quarter of an hour later when Chick started up the stairs with a well-laden wooden tray.

Billy Bunter, having "yowled" in vain, had returned to bed—and he sat up in the same, waiting for his "eats," in a state of indignation to which words could not possibly have done justice.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets The "Eats"!

"BEAST!"

That was the remark with which Billy Bunter greeted the choreman of Kicking Cayuse, as he entered, at last, with the tray.

Chick looked at him.

It was no part of a choreman's duties to take meals up to bed-rooms. Chick was a "hired" man, and would have been very surprised, and very indignant, if he had heard himself described as a "servant."

That mattered nothing to Billy Bunter! That he was in a foreign country, where the manners and customs differed from those of his own land, mattered to Bunter not a whit! Wherever Billy Bunter went he took his own manners and customs with him. Bunter, at least, was satisfied with them: though often they gave little satisfaction to others.

He blinked at Chick through his big spectacles, with an absolutely devastating blink!

If that cheeky choreman fancied that Bunter was the fellow to put up with his cheek, that cheeky choreman was making a mistake! Bunter wasn't!

"You've kept me waiting!" hooted Bunter.

"Search me!" said Chick.

"You jolly well knew I was waiting!" roared Bunter.

"You said it!" agreed Chick. "I guess you can wait, feller!"

"Don't answer me back!" snapped Bunter. "I don't take back-talk from cheeky servants."

Chick looked at him—hard! He was considering whether to set down the tray, yank Bunter out of bed by his fat neck, and spank him right and left! Such were the cheeky thoughts in the mind of the choreman!

Bunter glowered at him. Bunter was

no thought reader, and he did not know what was in the choreman's mind. But he knew that the man was standing there with the tray, keeping him waiting for his dinner.

"Get a move on," snapped Bunter. "What are you sticking there for, you dummy! Put the tray on my knees—see? Don't upset it over me, you idiot! Don't be a clumsy ass!"

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Chick.

He approached the bed with the tray. There was quite a large consignment on that tray. Chick had learned very soon that Bunter's requirements, in "eats" were extensive. Among other things, there was a large dish of stew, which had such an appetizing scent, that it might have mollified Bunter, had he been less justly annoyed.

But Bunter was angry—and, like the ancient prophet, he considered that he did well to be angry! Several times, during that morning, he had yowled for Chick; and his yowls had been passed unheeded. Now the cheeky beast had kept him waiting for his dinner! If that was not enough to make any fellow angry and indignant, Bunter would have liked to know what was.

"Put it there!" he snapped. "My hat! What the dickens do you mean by putting the pie on the same tray? Too lazy to come upstairs again, or what?"

A large fruit pie, from which rich juice oozed, stood beside the dish of stew on the tray. It was a nice-looking pie, so far as that went—and there was enough of it for six or seven fellows, which was also to the good! Chick had saved time and trouble by bringing up the whole cargo at once. Bunter saw no reason for saving Chick time and trouble.

"Take that pie away, and keep it warm!" said Bunter.

"Hey?"

"And bring it up when I call!"

"Search me!"

"And don't keep me waiting again! I don't expect servants to know how to behave here," added Bunter crushingly. "But there's a limit."

Chick was about to place the tray on Bunter's fat knees. Now he changed his mind. His patience—which was probably not very extensive at the best of times—seemed exhausted.

Instead of landing the tray on Bunter's knees, he lifted it into the air and turned it upside down on Bunter's head!

Bunter had not expected that! He had not dreamed of it! Really, he might have—but he hadn't!

Bunter got his "eats" all at once—in a shower!

The yell that came from Bunter as he got them woke all the echoes of the Kicking Cayuse ranch-house.

"Yaroooh!"

"You got it coming, you fat gink!" roared Chick. "I guess you got it coming!"

"Yurrrgh!" spluttered Bunter wildly. "Ow! Beast! Gerrsway! Ooogh!"

"Chew on that!" roared the angry choreman; and he tramped out of the room, leaving Billy Bunter to "chew" on it.

"Urrgh! Ooogh! I say—Yoooh! Beast! Grooogh!" spluttered the hapless fat Owl. "Oh crikey! Ooogh! Wooogh!"

The tray rolled off on the floor with a crash. Crockery rolled over the bed. Eats in great variety spread over the bed, but a large quantity clung to Bunter. The dish of stew fairly crowned him, and the stew ran down all

over him, mingling with fruit and juice from the pie.

Bunter sat and roared.

His wild roars reached the juniors in the living-room below; indeed, they reached the punchers at the bunkhouse. They echoed far and wide.

"Ow! Urrgh! Yaroooh! Whooo-hoop!" roared Bunter.

He sat like a monument of stew and pie, in a bed soaking with stew and pie, and roared, and roared, and roared.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Harry Wharton; and he jumped up.

The Famous Five had nearly finished lunch, and they did not stay for more. They jumped up, and ran out into the hallway, wondering what had happened to Bunter. The Bounder followed them, grinning.

Chick had tramped down, and he tramped away to his own quarters, snorting. From above came Bunter's frantic roars.

"Ow! Wow! I'm soaked! I'm scalded! Yaroooh! Oh crikey! Wow!"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Bob.

The juniors ran up the stairs. They gathered at Bunter's door and looked in. They jumped at the sight of him. There was so much stew and so much pie on Billy Bunter that he was barely recognisable.

"Great pip!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"The pipfulness is terrific!" ejaculated Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

"What on earth—"

"Ow! Wow! Urrgh! I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter dabbed stew and pie from his vision and blinked at the juniors. "I say, look at me! Ow! I say, I'm all soaked with stew! Groogh! The bed's soaked with it! Ooogh! Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, that cheeky beast Chick pitched my dinner all over me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cheeky beast, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Banged the whole lot right on my head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "Look at me!"

The juniors looked at him, and howled. One look at Bunter in his present stewy and fruity state was enough to make a cat laugh. They howled and yelled.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter. "Rotters! Smithy, you cad—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go down and sack that beast Chick!" howled Bunter. "Do you hear? If you don't sack that ruffian, I refuse to stay here any longer! Mind, I mean that!"

The Bounder gasped with merriment.

"You won't stay if Chick stays?" he gurgled.

"No, I jolly well won't!"

"That does it! I wouldn't part with him for his weight in greenbacks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you cheeky beast!" howled Bunter. "Are you going to sack that choreman, or are you not going to sack that choreman?"

"Not!"

"Rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better turn out now, old fat man!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I'd suggest a wash, too! I know it's not in your line, but just for once—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

The juniors, almost weeping, left Bunter to it.

Chick met them in the hallway downstairs. Chick was looking aggressive.

"Say, I guess that fat gink had it coming!" he snorted. "I'm telling you, he got my goat! I guess I've stuck all the sauce I want from that fat stiff, and some over! You got that? And if you got a kick coming, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir, I guess I'll mosey along to Barney Stone and ask for my time! Yes, sir!"

The Bounder chortled.

He assured the indignant choreman that he had no "kick" coming, and went out of the rancho laughing. The Famous Five followed him out, also laughing. Chick went back to his kitchen, still snorting.

Billy Bunter turned out. He washed. He needed a wash; even Bunter realised that. And he forgot that he was ill. Never had an illness been so suddenly cured. It was, in fact, impossible to continue being an invalid; for if Bunter wanted eats—which he certainly did—he had to go down in search of the same. Deeply indignant, but happily cured of his illness, the fat junior rolled down in search of eats, almost resolved to shake the dust of Kicking Cayuse Ranch from his feet and depart in indignant scorn.

But not quite!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Man In Possession!

"ALL right!" said Bunter.

He made that remark at supper.

"Eh?" said Bob Cherry.

"All right!" repeated Bunter.

His tone was sardonic.

Illness being, happily, a thing of the past, Bunter was able to sup in the living-room with the other fellows. Certainly he would not have cared to ask the choreman to bring up any more meals for him. He had had more than enough of Chick's bedside manner!

It was a good supper, and Bunter was doing it justice, but for once his fat thoughts were not wholly concentrated on the foodstuffs.

After supper came bed. And, owing to the choreman's attentions that day, Billy Bunter's bed was in a most uninviting and unattractive state.

The choreman made the beds in the morning. Perhaps, naturally, he did not like making beds in the afternoon. If a guy stayed in bed till the afternoon, he could either make his bed himself or go to bed with his bed unmade—that was Chick's view.

Had that been all, Bunter could have managed with a bed unmade. But that was not all.

Bunter's bed was packed with all sorts of eats. It was rich with gravy; it reeked with stew; it floated in fruits and juices. Bunter was not fearfully particular, perhaps; but even Bunter, who could sleep almost anywhere, could not think of turning in in the midst of gravy and stew and fruits and juices. That bed required changing from top to bottom, fore and aft, port and starboard, so to speak.

Chick had not touched it, and, after one blink at Chick, Bunter had not ventured to ask him to touch it.

He had mentioned it to Smithy. Smithy had advised him to ask Chick where the necessary things were to be found, and to make up a new bed for himself.

Bunter had not taken that advice.

He was unemployed, but he was not looking for work.

Had the other fellows thought about

it, they might have wondered what Bunter was going to do when bed-time came. But, sad to relate, they did not think about it; they gave it no thought whatever, apparently unconscious of the fact that Bunter's comfort was the most urgent matter in the universe.

So when Bunter, at supper, said "All right!" in that sarcastic, sardonic tone, they did not even know that he was alluding to his arrangements for the night, and that deep and artful schemes were working in his fat brain.

"What is that fat ass burbling about?" asked Vernon-Smith, glancing across the table at the fat Owl.

"I can't sleep in my bed to-night, Smithy!" said Bunter. "There's still time for you to order that beast to make up a new bed for me—if you can get your servants to obey orders here!" added Bunter, with a withering sneer.

"Haven't you done it?" asked Smithy carelessly.

"No!"

"Better do it after supper, then!"

"I haven't come here to make beds, Smithy! I refuse absolutely to do anything of the kind!"

"Fathead!"

"Beast!"

And the subject dropped.

After supper the juniors went out into the veranda for a chat before going to bed.

Bunter did not follow them out. He blinked after them as they went, and called to the Bounder.

"I say, Smithy, are you going to order that beast—"

"I'm going to boot you if you don't shut up!" answered the Bounder, over his shoulder.

"All right!"

Again Billy Bunter pronounced those mysterious words in that mysterious, sardonic tone. Then he rolled out into the hallway and disappeared.

Having disappeared from sight, he disappeared from mind.

Harry Wharton & Co. sat for some time discussing the morrow's trip to the railroad town at Prairie Bend. But as they were going to turn out at the first gleam of dawn for the long ride across the prairie, they intended to turn in at an early hour.

They took their candles in the hallway, and went up the stairs. From somewhere in the darkness came the sound of a rumbling snore. Billy Bunter was already in the embrace of Morpheus.

A number of doors opened round the pinewood landing; there was plenty of accommodation in the rancho, though it was of a rather rough-and-ready description.

Since the Greyfriars party had arrived, Barney Stone, who had formerly occupied the rancho, had transferred his quarters to the bunk-house. He still used his office, on the lower floor, but at night the juniors had the building to themselves, with the exception of Chick, who slept downstairs.

The Famous Five went into their rooms; but Vernon-Smith, instead of going in, stood shaking the door handle irritably.

"What the dooce—" he snapped.

"Anything up, Smithy?" asked Bob, glancing out.

"This dashed door won't open!" grunted the Bounder.

Snore!

Smithy gave a jump.

That snore came from the other side of the door!

"By gad!" he ejaculated. "That fat scoundrel—the door's locked—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,577.

Bunter, you blithering idiot, come out of my room!"

Snore!

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Nugent.

The Famous Five came out of their rooms again. They looked into Bunter's. It was vacant!

The bed was still in its stewy, fruity, and juicy state. And it was empty! Now it dawned on the juniors what the fat Owl had meant when he stated, in those sardonic tones, that it was "all right."

Bunter had gone up first—and annexed the Bounder's room. He was in the Bounder's bed—from which his snore now proceeded.

Vernon-Smith rattled the door-handle savagely. He could not open the door. He knew now that it was locked on the inside.

"Bunter!" he roared.

Snore!

Thump, thump, thump!

Snore!

The Famous Five grinned. They could not help it. But Herbert Vernon-Smith did not grin. Billy Bunter's fatuous proceedings did not amuse him in the very least. Only the locked door saved the fat Owl from being yanked out of bed by his neck, and quitting the room at the end of a boot.

"Bunter!" howled Smithy. "You fat fool, come out of my room!"

Snore!

"I'll smash you!"

Snore!

Thump! Bang! Thump! Bang!

"He, he, he!" came from the Bounder's room. That change from a snore to a fat cackle showed that Bunter was awake.

"Will you come out of my room, you fat idiot?" howled the Bounder.

"You can have mine, old chap!" chuckled Bunter. "If you think that a fellow can sleep in a bed full of stew and pies, and things, you can try it on! He, he, he!"

"I'll boot you all over the ranch!" roared Vernon-Smith.

"He, he, he!"

"You fat, blithering Owl—"

"Beast!"

Bang! Thump! Bang! Thump!

The Bounder banged and thumped on the door. There was no getting at Billy Bunter unless he opened the door. That, evidently, the fat junior did not intend to do—till morning!

"The fat ass!" said Bob Cherry, laughing. "We might have guessed he was up to something! Bunter, you howling ass, turn out!"

"Yah!"

"Make the best of it, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "You can turn in with one of us."

"I'll smash him!" hissed the Bounder. "I've a jolly good mind to get a ladder up to the window, and burst in the shutters—"

Bang! Thump!

"Bunter, you podgy pirate—"

"Bunter, you bleated burglar—"

"Bunter, you blithering bander-snatch—"

Bang, bang! Thump, thump!

"I say, you fellows, you might go to bed, and let a fellow go to sleep," came Bunter's voice. "You've woke me up, Smithy! If that's the way you treat a guest here—"

"I'll smash you!"

"Yah!"

The Bounder bestowed a final kick on the door, and turned away, breathing fury.

Bunter was in possession—and he had to remain in possession. A fat chuckle was heard—followed by a snore! Billy

Bunter was settling down to comfortable slumber again—in Smithy's bed!

"I'll boot him all over the ranch to-morrow!" breathed the Bounder.

But that was only a future consolation. For the present, the angry Bounder had to make up his mind to it; and he turned in with Bob Cherry for the night.

Billy Bunter, left in indisputed possession, snored in peace.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Done In The Dark!

BARNEY STONE stood, in the glimmer of the stars, looking up at the dark mass of the ranch-house.

His lean face was hard and grim.

It was past midnight.

The Greyfriars fellows had long been fast asleep; in the bunk-house, the punchers slept soundly. Kicking Cayuse Ranch was deep in slumber.

"O.K., I guess!" muttered the foreman.

His eyes were fixed on a shuttered window. All the windows of the rancho were shuttered, fastened within by a bolt, screwed on one shutter, slipping into an iron socket on the other.

There was a step beside the foreman, and he looked round. Panhandle came through the shadows, with a ladder under his arm.

"Quiet!" grunted Barney. "If that young guy wakes up afore he's safely cinched, I guess there'll be gunning, and the whole bunch of them turning out. That young piecan is mighty handy with a gun."

"You said it!" agreed Panhandle.

The foreman lent him a hand with the ladder, and it was reared up to the window on which Barney's eyes had been fixed. Hardly a sound was made, as it rested against the narrow wooden sill.

"O.K., if we get that shutter open quiet!" muttered Panhandle.

Barney grunted.

"I guess I seen to that! Mind he don't wake till we got him—that's all! If he gave a howl that woke the others, we should have them on to us—and if the bunk-house wakes, I guess the outfit wouldn't stand for this. Get him quick, and get the bag over his head, and roll him in the blankets."

"You said it!"

Barney stepped on the ladder, and ascended; Panhandle following close behind.

He reached the window, and grasped at the closed shutters of Herbert Vernon-Smith's room.

The occupant of that room had drawn them shut and shot the bolt in place, on going to bed. To all appearances, the shutters were securely fastened, impossible to open from outside.

As a matter of fact, they were not fastened at all. Barney had taken care of that.

The juniors, naturally, spent little time indoors; and during the afternoon there had been ample opportunity for tampering with the window fastening.

The bolt was in the iron socket; but the screws that held the latter to the wood had been taken out and replaced by short screws, that gave little grip.

To all appearances, the iron socket was as firm as ever, and it held fast when the bolt was shot into it. But all that was needed was a strong and steady pull from outside, to pull the shutter off the screws, leaving the socket on the bolt.

Even the Bounder, keen, and wary, and watchful as he was, would hardly have suspected that his room was



Instead of placing the tray on Bunter's fat knees, Chick lifted it into the air and turned it upside down on Bunter's head. The fat junior got his "eats" all at once—in a shower! "Yurrrrgh!" he spluttered wildly. "Ooogh! I say—yoooooch! Beast! Grooh!"

accessible from outside that night. There was nothing to awaken suspicion.

Billy Bunter, certainly, had never dreamed of anything of the kind when he annexed the Bounder's quarters.

Bunter had locked the door and bolted the window, and that was that!

Barney Stone, standing on the ladder, put his ear to one of the orifices bored into the wooden shutter for ventilation, and listened.

A grim, sneering grin came over his lean face as the sound of a snore reached his ears.

Evidently, the occupant of that room was fast asleep.

That was only to be expected, at two o'clock in the morning, but Barney was glad to be assured of it.

After what had happened at the bunkhouse that day he did not want to give the Bounder of Greyfriars a chance to use a "gun." The Bounder had proved himself altogether too handy in that line.

It was quite likely that Vernon-Smith kept a six-gun handy at night, and quite certain that he would shoot without hesitation if he awakened to find himself attacked.

For a long moment Barney listened, Panhandle waiting on the ladder below him. Then he grasped the shutter, inserting his fingers in the circular ventilating holes.

With a strong, steady grip he pulled on the left-hand shutter, to which the socket was screwed.

Had that socket been held by the former long, strong screws he would have pulled in vain. As it was, the shutter yielded to the pull, coming off the short screws, of which the threads had been flattened before they were pushed into place.

The shutter swung open. The socket, completely detached, was left sticking

on the end of the bolt, on the other shutter.

Barney listened again.

What he had done had been done almost without a sound. The snore continued, uninterrupted. Obviously, the sleeper had not awakened.

He waited a moment or two, and then pulled the other shutter open. The window was wide open now, giving ample space to enter.

Windows at Kicking Cayuse ranch were innocent of glass! There was nothing but the shutter to close them. The way was now wide open.

Barney's eyes gleamed into the dark room.

A faint glimmer of starlight fell past him, but he could see little. But he did not need light. He knew every inch of the interior of the rancho; but had he needed guidance in Vernon-Smith's room, the snore from the bed would have guided him.

He stepped in, over the low sill, and made no sound with his stealthy movements.

Panhandle, as stealthily, stepped in after him, from the ladder.

Treading on tiptoe, they approached the bed, one on either side. Panhandle had a large flour bag in his hand, all ready to be whipped over the sleeper's head, to silence a possible outcry.

Dimly, in the darkness, they made out the bed, and the faintest outlines of a sleeper under the blankets.

Barney Stone grinned with sour satisfaction. The schoolboy in the bed was fast asleep, and snoring! This was easy!

Lariat had failed him: the deadly trick on the pinto had only caused the ride to the railroad town to be postponed till the next day.

But Barney was not going to fail! Herbert Vernon-Smith was not going to ride in at Prairie Bend, either the

next day or any day. That cable was not going to be sent to the new owner of Kicking Cayuse Ranch. What Herbert Vernon-Smith knew, or what he suspected, was going to remain known only to Herbert Vernon-Smith—if Barney got away with this!

And the schoolboy in the bed was utterly at his mercy! Vernon-Smith was in his hands!

Never for a moment did it cross his mind that the boy in the bed was not Vernon-Smith.

Of Bunter's antics at bed-time he knew, of course, nothing.

Vernon-Smith's window had been tampered with, to give him access to the Bounder's room in the dark, silent hours of the night; he was in that room, and he did not, and could not, suspect that the schoolboy sleeping in the Bounder's bed was not Herbert Vernon-Smith.

For a moment or two the two ruffians stood on either side of the bed, peering at it in the dimness; then they acted, swiftly and suddenly.

Barney Stone's rough, sinewy hand groped for a face, and found it. There was the beginning of a gasp as the sleeper awakened at that rough touch, but it was shut off as the heavy hand gripped over the mouth. The other hand, the next moment, was gripping the throat, pinning down the occupant of the bed.

The faintest of gurgles came—that was all. Then the flourbag, in Panhandle's hands, was drawn over the head. Barney grasped its edges and drew it under the chin, fastening it there.

"Pronto!" he breathed.

Swiftly the figure on the bed was rolled in the blankets and lifted. It wriggled feebly in the grasp of two

pairs of powerful hands. There was a gasping sound, choked by the thick canvas bag, pressed over the mouth. Swiftly a looped cord was dropped over the bundled figure and drawn tight. Hardly a moment more, and it was swung to the open window.

A gasping gurgle died away as Barney's hand pressed the bag harder on the face, almost suffocating the fellow inside.

Panhandle stepped out on the ladder. Barney Stone handed him the figure in blankets and bag, and the burly cowman took it over his shoulder, like a sack of alfalfa, and descended the ladder with it.

The foreman watched him from the window till he disappeared into the shadows. Then he stood listening for a few moments. There had been little sound—certainly not enough to reach any of the other rooms. The kidnapped junior's friends slept on undisturbed while he was carried away into the darkness of the night.

Assured on that point, Barney drew the shutters shut and lighted a candle. By its light he drew a bunch of screws from his pocket, and a tool, and quietly screwed the socket in place again, as strong and secure as it had ever been. Then he replaced the bar.

He blew out the candle, crossed to the door, and unlocked it. He stepped out on the landing, closing the door softly behind him.

The stairs hardly creaked as he descended, and he crossed the hallway and went into his office. From the office he stepped out on to the veranda, descended the steps, and left the ranch.

From the dark plains came the sound of a horse. The foreman of the Kicking Cayuse gave a low, sardonic chuckle as he heard it.

Herbert Vernon-Smith—as he believed, at least—had gone from Kicking Cayuse, never to return.

On the morrow his friends could only wonder what had become of him—they could only judge by appearances, that he had left his room of his own accord. The window-shutters were fastened safe, the door had been locked on the inside. Who could have unlocked it but Vernon-Smith? They would wonder and surmise—what they liked! The double-dealing foreman of the Kicking Cayuse was through with Vernon-Smith!

There was a grim, hard, sardonic satisfaction in Barney's lean face—which would probably have vanished on the spot could he have known that Herbert Vernon-Smith at that moment was sleeping undisturbed in Bob Cherry's room in the rancho, and that Billy Bunter, in a state of terror and dismay quite indescribable, was being carried away across the shadowed prairie!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Awful For Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER wondered whether it was an awful dream. His fat mind had been in a state of utter and dire confusion ever since that rough grasp had awakened him.

His first vague impression had been that Vernon-Smith had got into the room somehow, in spite of the locked door, and was dragging him out of the borrowed bed.

Very quickly he realised that it was not that. But what it was he had no idea. He was too confused and terrified to think, even if thinking

would have done any good; too scared to struggle, if struggling had been of any use.

Frightened out of his fat wits, choked by the floury bag over his head, he half-believed that he was in the grip of some fearful nightmare, from which he would awaken.

In the bag, he gasped, and gasped, and gasped for breath. Once clear of the ranch he was at liberty to gasp as much as he liked—to yell, if he wanted to! Panhandle did not care if a muffled yell came from the interior of the flour-bag as he spurred his bronco over the dark prairie. There were no ears to hear now.

But Bunter did not yell. He gasped for breath, he gurgled—but that was all. Terror paralysed him.

Had the prisoner been the Bounder, Panhandle would not have found him so easy to handle, even with the bag tied over his head and the rolled blankets roped round him. But Billy Bunter, in such a situation, was not the fellow to give trouble.

Slowly the fat brain cleared a little. He tried to understand what was happening.

He was in motion—on a horse! He was rolled up—evidently in his bed-clothes! He was grasped in a strong arm that held him where he had been pitched across a horse, in front of the rider, like a sack of fodder. He had been taken out of the rancho, and was now being carried away on horseback. So much, at long last, dawned on his dizzy, fat brain.

But how, and why, and by whom he had no knowledge. Worst of all, he could not guess what was to follow. Plainly, he was in an enemy's hands. But who was the enemy, and what was he going to do? Bunter could find no answer to these terrifying questions.

In his uncomfortable position the motion of the horse shook and jolted the hapless fat Owl horribly. Every now and then a painful squeak alternated with breathless gasps.

Fortunately for him the ride was not a long one. Billy Bunter was still trying, confusedly, to make out what it all meant, when the horseman drew rein, and the shaking and jolting came to an end.

Where he was, except that he was somewhere on the prairie at a distance from the ranch, Bunter could not begin to guess. He could see nothing.

But a sharp-calling voice came to his fat ears through the thickness of the flour-bag:

"Rainy Face!"

What that call meant was a mystery to Bunter, and he was in no mental state to elucidate mysteries.

But other sounds, dim and vague, reached his ears. He realised that others were on the spot. It dawned on him that the horseman had ridden away from the ranch to a spot where the others were waiting.

Something touched him. He was grasped in strong hands, and he felt himself lifted from the horse's back and placed on his feet. Rolled and tied in the blankets, he could not have stood unaided. The hand grasped him and kept him upright.

A mutter and mumble of voices came dimly through the flour-bag. Then he felt the blankets drop away; the knotted rope had been untied or cut. He stood shivering in his pyjamas in the keen wind on the prairie. Then the flour-bag was jerked off his head.

He blinked wildly in the open air.

All was dark.

Faintly round him waving grass

shimmered in starlight; but where he stood heavy branches cast deep shadow. Under the circle of the branches of a great ceiba-tree it was almost as black as a hat.

"Ooooh!" gasped Bunter.

He heard a hoarse chuckle.

"I guess that guy is surprised some! You got a grip on him, Rainy Face? I'll tell you he's no slouch, if he gets a chance."

"Ugh!" came a grunt.

A coppery, sinewy hand was grasping Bunter's arm with a grip that made him squeak. In utter amazement the fat junior realised that it was an Indian who was holding him.

Faintly in the dark shadow he made out the glinting black eyes, the head-dress of feathers.

It was, though Bunter did not know it, the chief of the gang of outcast Redskins who had waylaid the juniors in the timber coming back from Packsaddle.

Bunter gave a faint squeal. It only needed the discovery that he was in the grasp of a Red Indian to give the finishing touch to his terror.

His fat knees sagged under him, and he would have fallen but for the grasp of the Indian, Rainy Face.

A couple of yards away he made out the figure of a horseman—a dim shadow in a stetson hat.

Panhandle had not dismounted. He had halted, called to the waiting Indian, and handed the hapless captive down to him. Two or three other coppery faces were staring from the gloom, though Bunter did not observe them.

"You got the goods, Injun!" Panhandle was speaking. "I guess you want to stick him on a mustang and beat it, pronto."

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian.

"And I'm telling you, you don't want to let him get his hands loose and get hold of a gun," said Panhandle. "He sure is handy with a gun, that young geck."

"Ugh!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the horseman. He did not know who it was. He had never specially noticed Panhandle at the ranch, and even if he had known him from the other parties he could not have recognised him now. It did not even occur to Bunter that the horseman belonged to Kicking Cayuse ranch at all. He had not the remotest idea who he was, or where he came from.

But one thing was clear to him—the man was about to ride away and leave him in the hands of the Indians. And in utter desperation the fat junior found his voice and howled:

"I say, don't leave me here! I say, d-d-don't you leave me with this Indian! I say— Oh crikey! Help! Mercy! I say, d-d-don't you go away! Oh lor'!"

The stetson hat bent as the horseman stooped his head to stare more closely at Bunter in the deep gloom.

From under the stetson came a loud and ringing oath.

Up to that moment when Billy Bunter found his voice and howled out that frantic appeal, Panhandle had not doubted that it was Herbert Vernon-Smith whom he was handing over to the Apache.

But the frightened voice, as well as the words, told him of the mistake. He stared savagely at Bunter, trying to make out his face in the darkness, but failing. But he knew now that it was not Vernon-Smith.

"By the great horned toad!" he panted. "That ain't the goods! That

ain't the guy! Carry me home to die! Say, who're you, you geck?"

"Oh dear! I'm B-b-b-Bunter!" stuttered the fat Owl. For the first time he understood that he had been seized in mistake for someone else. "I—I—I'm Bib-bub-Billy Bib-bub-Bunter! Oh lor!"

"Bunter!" breathed Panhandle. "That fat geck! I guessed he was heap heavy! That fat piecan! Doggone my cats!"

The Indian's hawkish black eyes turned on him, and then on Bunter, puzzled. Even the Apache's keen eyes had not picked out Bunter's face in the blackness under the tree. Now he bent closer and scanned it.

He gave an expressive grunt.

"Ugh!"

"That mossheaded gink!" breathed Panhandle, in amazement and rage. "I guess this lets us out a few! You piecan, how come you was in the owner's son's bed?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

His fat brain was not quick on the uptake, but he understood now that it was in mistake for Vernon-Smith that he had been seized.

"Doggone you!" hissed Panhandle. "How come?"

"Oh lor! I—I changed rooms with Smithy. I—I wish I hadn't now!" moaned Bunter. "Oh erikay! Don't I wish I hadn't! Oh crumbs!"

Panhandle sat his horse, staring at him in the gloom, and fuming.

It was not the prisoner that was wanted. Vernon-Smith, in the hands of the outcast gang of Apaches, was to vanish into the utmost, unknown recesses of the desert. But Bunter was not wanted. Bunter did not matter a boiled bean, one way or the other, to the plotters of Kicking Cayuse.

What was to be done with him now that he had been "cinched" by mistake was rather a puzzle to the cowman; but he soon decided that. He did not want Bunter, and he was done with him.

For several minutes he sat cursing. Then he muttered a few words to the Indian. Like a dark spectre, the Apache, releasing Bunter's arm, vanished into the darkness. The fat Owl did not see him again, but he heard sounds—sounds of riders departing. He stood blinking at the cowman on the bronco.

"I—I—I say—" he stammered.

Panhandle rapped out an oath. He wheeled his horse and rode away, leaving the fat junior standing alone under the ceiba.

"Oh erikay!" gasped Bunter.

The Indians had gone in one direction; Panhandle had gone in another. Bunter was left alone on the prairie, standing, in his pyjamas, in a heap of blankets!

Bunter was not wanted, and as he was not wanted he was left where he was. He was glad enough, so far as that went, that he was not wanted. But that was the only comfort he had. Left alone on the prairie, in the darkness, under the great tree, Billy Bunter blinked round him dimly, and ejaculated again:

"Oh erikay!"

Then, as the cold wind on the prairie made him shiver, he gathered up the blankets and wrapped them round him.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Foreman's Orders I

"BURNING daylight!" roared Chick.

He thumped at locked doors. Dawn was in the sky, and the foreman had undertaken to call the Greyfriars fellows at dawn.

"Right-ho, old bean!" called back Bob Cherry's cheery voice.

Chick tramped down the stairs.

Harry Wharton & Co. turned out. They had passed an undisturbed night, which possibly would not have been the case had not the doors been locked and the shutters bolted.

Quite unaware of what had happened in the night, the juniors were soon down. Bunter, they supposed, was still fast asleep in Smithy's room, and the door, they naturally took for granted, was still locked.

They did not think of calling the fat Owl. Nothing would have induced Bunter to turn out at that unearthly hour; neither would anything have induced him to join up for the forty-mile ride to Prairie Bend. If the Bouncer was still thinking of booting him for having annexed his room, the booting had to be left over. But Smithy, as a matter of fact, was not giving Bunter a thought.

Breakfast did not take the juniors long, and they left the ranch in the fresh, bright glow of sunrise.

In a cheery bunch, they walked down to the corral for their horses.

Some of the outfit were up at that early hour; others had not yet turned out of the bunkhouse. Among those who were up was the burly cowman, Panhandle.

Panhandle was lounging at the corral gate, which was shut. He leaned on the gate, and watched the juniors with a grim grin as they approached. He did not stir from the gate as they arrived.

Vernon-Smith gave him a sharp look. Panhandle, he was aware, was the "side-kicker" of Lariat, the horse-wrangler; he had noticed the two together a good deal. For that reason, Smithy suspected that the burly cowman was, like Lariat, a secret confederate of the foreman.

"Get aside, please!" said Vernon-Smith. "We want our horses!"

"Says you!" remarked Panhandle, without moving.

"What do you mean?" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"I guess you ain't taking any hosses from this corral," answered the cowman. "I'm telling you, it's agin orders!"

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith's eyes flashed.

"Whose orders?" he demanded.

"Mr. Stone's!" answered Panhandle coolly. "Foreman of the ranch, sir! Mr. Stone's done given me Lariat's job, now he's all shot up and over to Pack-saddle for the doc. I got to see that the cayuses ain't taken out."

Panhandle's manner was more or less gruffly civil, but there was a mocking glimmer in his eyes.

Vernon-Smith breathed hard! The other fellows exchanged startled looks.

They had fully expected Barney Stone to make some move, if he could, to prevent them from getting to Prairie Bend that day. What Lariat had done, the day before, had shown clearly enough how unwilling Barney was for that cable to be dispatched to Mr. Vernon-Smith, over the "pond."

But they had certainly not expected this move!

Without horses, of course, they could not get to the railroad town. Even on horseback it was a fairly stiff journey for schoolboys. This, evidently, was Barney's move—simple, but efficacious.

"Look here!" said Bob.

"We've got to have our horses, Panhandle!" said Harry Wharton.

The cowman shook his head.

"Tain't no use talking to me, sir!" he answered. "I got my orders from my

foreman, and I got to jump to them. You better speak to Mr. Stone."

Vernon-Smith made a step towards him.

Harry Wharton promptly caught him by the arm and pulled him back.

"It's no good rowing with this man, Smithy," he said. "We'd better go and speak to Barney Stone."

"The betterfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"What reason did Mr. Stone give for not letting us have our horses, Panhandle?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Mr. Stone don't give reasons along with his orders," answered Panhandle. "He jest spills his orders, and the bunch jumps to them, I'm telling you! I guess I ain't going to be fired, like Bill Buck, for giving Mr. Stone back-chat! Nope!"

"We've got to deal with Stone!" said Harry Wharton. "Where is he, Panhandle?"

"I guess you'll locate him in the bunkhouse," drawled Panhandle. "He ain't up yet! That guy was late out on the ranges last night, and I guess he ain't turning out airy."

"I'll wake him up fast enough!" said the Bouncer, between his teeth. And he strode away to the bunkhouse—leaving Panhandle lounging at the corral gate, and grinning.

"Blessed if I make this out!" muttered Bob Cherry.

The Bouncer gave an angry grunt.

"Plain enough, isn't it? Barney Stone knows, as well as if I'd told him, what I'm going to put in that cable to my father. He doesn't fancy I'm going to ask my father to sack him, simply because he's fired a man from the ranch! He knows I've spotted his cattle-stealing, hand-in-glove with that gang in Squaw Mountain—and he knows that's what's going in the cable."

"Yes; but—"

"He dare not let that cable be sent, if he can stop it!" said the Bouncer, gritting his teeth. "This is his latest move. But we're going over to Prairie Bend, if I have to rustle the horses at the end of a gun!"

"I don't get it, all the same," said Bob. "He can prevent us from going to-day by keeping the horses from us, but that's only putting it off. We shall get horses from somewhere."

"It's his last card to hold us up!" snapped the Bouncer. "It gives him time to plan some other dirty trick—that's his game. He's playing for time now."

"Um! I suppose that's it!" agreed Bob, with a nod.

Some of the punchers were having their breakfast on the benches outside the bunkhouse when the juniors arrived there.

They gave the schoolboys a cheery "morning." With the exception of the foreman and the horse-wrangler and Panhandle, the Greyfriars fellows were on quite friendly terms with all the Kicking Cayuse outfit.

"Barney Stone here?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Yep—jest turning out!" said Yuba Dick. He called in at the open doorway of the bunkhouse. "Say, Barney, here's the owner's son wants to see you!"

"I guess I'll be along pronto!" called back the foreman.

The juniors waited—Vernon-Smith with angry impatience. But in a few minutes, Barney Stone stepped out of the bunkhouse.

He gave the Greyfriars fellows a nod, and glanced inquiringly at Vernon-Smith.

"You want me, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir?" he asked. His manner was civil. "I guess you can spill it."

"We want our horses!" said Vernon-Smith sharply. "Panhandle stopped us at the corral gate, and he says you've given him orders—"

"Sure!" assented Barney. "I guess I hate to spoil your ride, sir, but there's news of Indians on the prairie—some gang of thief-Apaches from the Staked Plain. I guess the trails ain't safe for schoolboys to ride so long's that gang is loose on the prairie. I got to see you safe here," added Barney, with an air of frankness. "Your popper, over the Pond, has trusted you and your friends to me, and I can't let you run into danger that-a-way. Mebbe in a few days—"

"That will do, Barney Stone! I want my horse, and I want it at once."

Barney shook his head. The punchers, silent, looked on. Although they did not speak, it was easy to read, in their bronzed faces, that they fully agreed with the foreman.

With a gang of lawless Apaches, horse-thieves, and outcasts, on the prairie, the punchers figured that a bunch of schoolboys were safer keeping to the ranch.

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands.

His suspicion amounted to a certainty that it was Barney Stone himself who had brought that gang of outcast Apaches into the locality for his own treacherous purposes. Now he was using their presence as a pretext for keeping the juniors on the ranch—and away from Prairie Bend! The Bounder of Greyfriars was not likely to stand for that.

"Will you order Panhandle to let me have my horse?" he asked, between his teeth.

"I guess I've explained—"

"Yes or no?" snapped the Bounder.

"Nope!" said Barney.

The Bounder, with gleaming eyes, turned to go back to the corral. With what intention he was going was easily read in his face.

"Hold in, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir!" said Barney quietly. "I'm foreman of this ranch, and I'm giving orders here! I've ordered Panhandle not to let you into the corral—and that goes! But if you're giving that guy trouble for carrying out my orders, I guess there's enough guys in this outfit to hold you in! I sure don't want trouble with the owner's son—jest like I've allowed already—but you ain't getting a cayuse from that corral! You don't want to make me give these guys orders to keep you away from the corral with their quirts, sir."

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Blows In!

HARRY WHARTON caught the Bounder's arm.

Smithy shook his hand off savagely. But he paused.

He had to pause.

Barney Stone spoke quietly, but he spoke very determinedly. He was foreman of the ranch, and his authority was undisputed at Kicking Cayuse. The bunch were ready to obey his orders—they had, in fact, no choice in the matter—that was why they were there. The pretext Barney had given was good enough—any man on the ranch would have said that he was right in keeping a party of schoolboys from undertaking a long and lonely ride while a gang of lawless Redskins were known to be in the vicinity. Angry as he was, head-

strong and reckless as he was, even the Bounder realised that it was futile to attempt to use force when the force on the foreman's side was irresistible.

The Famous Five stood silent, hardly knowing what to do. The Bounder was pale with anger.

"I guess Barney's right, sir!" said Yuba Dick good-naturedly. "Them Apaches is pizen! I'm telling you, if you horned into them they'd have your horses off'n you—they sure are durned hoss-thieves! Where'd you be then?"

"And mebbe your scalps, too!" said Frio Pete. "I wouldn't put it past them if there was nobody around."

The Bounder did not heed.

"Look here, Mr. Stone," said Harry Wharton, speaking as quietly and civilly as he could, "we're quite able to take care of ourselves. We ran into that gang of Redskins the other day, coming back with the mail from Packsaddle—and they cut off fast enough when we started shooting."

Barney Stone shrugged his shoulders.

"Mebbe," he said. "I'll say you was lucky. Next time they might get you from ahind a bush without giving you a chance to do any of your fancy shooting."

"Sure!" said Yuba Dick.

"I guess Mr. Vernon-Smith over the pond never sent you out here to get mixed up in Injun fighting," went on Barney. "I reckon he'd say I ought to keep you clear of that kinder game. I sure do reckon so."

The Famous Five were silent.

Barney's argument was plausible enough—quite plausible enough to satisfy the punchers, at all events. Indeed, had Barney Stone been a straight-dealing man with a sense of responsibility for the schoolboys it was probable that he would have acted exactly as he was doing now. He was not likely to share their belief that they could take care of themselves in dealing with a gang of savage Redskin outcasts.

Anyhow, he had the upper hand. Even the headstrong Bounder realised how futile it was to think of entering into a struggle with a bunch of hefty, long-limbed punchers. The Kicking Cayuse men were ready to carry out Barney's orders—that was plain enough. Smithy was the owner's son, but Barney was foreman of the ranch—and Barney's orders were unquestioningly obeyed by the bunch.

The Bounder's eyes gleamed at Barney Stone.

"I'm going to Prairie Bend, and you shan't stop me!" he said, between his teeth.

Barney gave another shrug.

"I guess not," he said. "I guess—"

Without waiting for him to finish, the Bounder turned and walked away.

His friends followed him rather anxiously.

They were uneasy lest he should make some attempt to force a way into the corral, in spite of the cowman at the gate.

Willingly they would have backed him up in pitching Panhandle out of the way, but that was useless. Three or four of the punchers, at a sign from Barney, walked across to join Panhandle.

Vernon-Smith, as he passed the corral gate, paused a moment—but only a moment. Then he tramped on to the rancho, and his friends followed.

Barney, from the bunkhouse door, watched them, a sardonic grin on his hard face. That cable to Mr. Vernon-Smith over the pond was not, he

reckoned, going to be sent that day—or any day.

But for the mischance in the night, Herbert Vernon-Smith would have been far from Kicking Cayuse that morning, and Barney would have been done with him. His rage had been deep and bitter when Panhandle rode in and told him of the mistake that had been made. That change of rooms—a chance against which no one could possibly have guarded—had caused his whole cunning scheme to go for nothing. But the foreman of Kicking Cayuse was not at the end of his resources.

Chick, the choreman, stared at the juniors as they came into the rancho with clouded faces and knitted brows.

"Say, ain't you young guys hitting the trail?" he asked.

"Stone's ordered the bunch to prevent us from getting the horses," answered Bob Cherry.

"How come?" asked Chick in astonishment.

Bob told him what the foreman had said.

Chick gave a nod.

"I guess Barney's right, sir," he said. "I've heard about that gang of Injun hoss thieves—Rainy Face and his gang. They sure are pizen! You want to ride clear of that bunch."

"A hundred dollars any use to you, Chick?" asked Herbert Vernon-Smith quietly.

The choreman's eyes opened.

"Search me!" he answered emphatically.

"If you can get horses for us—"

Chick shook his head.

"Not agin Barney's orders, sir," he answered. "I guess it ain't healthy to buck agin Barney."

"You could ride over to Packsaddle and get a bunch of horses, and we'd walk out and meet you on the trail—"

"I guess Barney's orders goes on this ranch, sir," answered Chick, and he went back to his kitchen to cut short the discussion.

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

The juniors gathered in the veranda to discuss ways and means. Not one of them was thinking of accepting defeat at the hands of the foreman. But what step they were to take was a puzzle to them.

The only resource seemed to be to "hoof" it to the cow town, where horses could be obtained. But Packsaddle was fifteen miles away across rugged prairie. That was a last resource.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "What the dickens is—"

His eyes fixed on a horseman riding in from the prairie. It was one of the Kicking Cayuse bunch, whom they had heard spoken to by the name of Cactus. On his horse, in front of him, Cactus had an extraordinary-looking bundle.

It looked at the first glance like a bundle of blankets; but Bob, in amazement, spotted a fat face and a large pair of spectacles emerging from the blankets.

He stared at that fat face.

"Bunter!" he said almost dazedly.

"Bunter!" repeated Harry Wharton blankly.

"The esteemed and absurd Bunter!" stammered Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Up to that moment the juniors had supposed—so far as they had thought of Billy Bunter at all—that he was still asleep and snoring in Smithy's bed.

They gazed at him in utter amazement.

Cactus, grinning, rode in and called to some of the punchers, who stared at his burden and grinned, too; then he



"That's to rattle our nerves, I suppose!" said Vernon-Smith, as the Apaches rode in a circle round the group, brandishing lassoes and uttering harsh cries. "I'll let the unwashed skunks see how much my nerves are rattled!" He threw his rifle to his shoulder, and took aim.

rode up to the rancho and grinned up at the astounded juniors in the veranda. "I say, you fellows!" came a fat squeak.

"Is that Bunter or his ghost?" gasped Nugent.

"How the thump—" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"I guess I picked up this here gink on the prairie when I was riding range," grinned Cactus. "I'll say he went walking in the night and forgot to put his rags on. I reckoned I'd tote him in. Say, he sure is plumb loco, that fat gink!"

Billy Bunter, gasping, slid down from the puncher's horse. Bundled in blankets he tottered up the steps of the veranda. Cactus, grinning, wheeled his horse and rode away.

"Bunter!" gasped Harry Wharton.

In blank amazement the juniors watched Bunter as he tottered in. Bunter, evidently, was not in bed. The other fellows had been up early, but Bunter apparently had been up earlier, and there he was—clad in pyjamas, spectacles, and blankets.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He sank into the nearest chair and sat blinking at the astounded juniors, and they stared at him dumbfounded.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hitting the Trail!

"I SAY, you fellows—" moaned Bunter.

"Where on earth have you been?" gasped Harry Wharton. "We thought you were still in bed."

"Oh dear! Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I've had

a fearful time! Oh crikey! I've been kidnapped! Oh crumbs!"

"Kidnapped?"

"Ow! Yes! Oh lor'! It's all that beast Smithy's fault!" groaned Bunter. The Bounder stared at him.

"What do you mean, you fat fool—if you mean anything?" he snapped.

"Beast! If you'd made that lazy beast Chick make up a new bed for me I shouldn't have been in your room!" moaned Bunter. "If I hadn't been in your room they wouldn't have got me in mistake for you! Oh lor'!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"What the thump—"

"What on earth's happened?" exclaimed Bob.

"I've been kidnapped and murdered by Indians—I mean, nearly murdered by Indians!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm fed-up with this! I'm going home! Oh crikey! Oh dear! Ow!"

"Must have been sleep-walking!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Well, you seem to have gone out in your pyjamas, wrapped up in blankets."

"I tell you I was kidnapped!" howled Bunter. "I've had an awful time! After they left me I couldn't get back. How could I in the dark? I can tell you I was jolly glad to see that man Cactus! The beast started laughing when he saw me—as if there was anything to laugh at—"

"Well, you look a bit unusual in that outfit," said Bob Cherry. "What the dickens did you go out like that for?"

"I didn't!" yelled Bunter. "Don't I keep on telling you I was kidnapped in the middle of the night? They thought I was Smithy, as I was in his room. Oh lor'!"

The Bounder set his lips.

"Tell us what happened, Bunter," he said quietly.

Billy Bunter was only too willing to tell what had happened. The juniors listened in astonishment as he told. There was doubt in the faces of the Famous Five. It sounded to them a good deal like nightmare and sleep-walking. But there was no doubt in Vernon-Smith's face.

"By gad!" he said, between his teeth, when Bunter had gasped to an end of his startling tale. "That was the game, was it?"

"But—" said Bob dubiously.

The Bounder made a gesture of angry impatience.

"Can't you see it, you fathead? If that fat idiot hadn't bagged my room last night they'd have got me."

"But how could anyone get in at a bolted shutter?" exclaimed Bob.

"They did," groaned Bunter. "They got me out of the window, and stuck me on a horse. Oh dear! There was a bag over my head. Ow! I was tied up in the blankets. Wow! If they hadn't found out that I wasn't Smithy, that beastly Indian would have hiked me off! Oh crikey!"

"But—"

"I say, you fellows, I'm hungry!"

"But—"

"Famished!" said Bunter pathetically.

Vernon-Smith, with a set face, went into the house, and the Famous Five followed him up the stairs. They went into the Bounder's room, occupied the previous night by Bunter.

The shutters were fastened at the window, and the room was dim. The fastenings were secure enough.

"Nobody's been in here," said Johnny Bull. "That fat ass must have had nightmares, and walked in his sleep."

"Idiot!" said the Bounder.

Johnny shrugged his shoulders.

Vernon-Smith opened the shutters. The sunlight streamed into the room. In the light he examined the fastenings, and a sneer came over his face.

"Look at that!" he snapped, pointing to the iron socket on the left-hand shutter.

"Safe as houses," said Johnny Bull.

"Now—yes. It wasn't safe in the night. If you use your eyes, instead of your chin, you'll see that it's been tampered with. Those screws have been drawn and replaced."

"Oh!"

The juniors examined the screws, by which the iron socket was fixed on the left-hand shutter, carefully. A close examination was all that was needed. The slots showed the unmistakable traces of the recent use of a screw-driver.

The Bounder's eyes were glittering.

"That bolt-socket was tampered with yesterday—all ready for the night," he said quietly. "If I'd been in this room—as that villain, of course, believed—you fellows would never have seen me again. They didn't want Bunter; they left him stranded, when they found out who they'd got. If I had been here, I should be fifty or sixty miles away by this time—in the hands of that gang of Redskins."

"By gum!" said Bob.

There could be no doubt of it now. In the night, while they had slept peacefully, that danger had come, and gone. The fatuous antics of the fat Owl of the Remove had saved Herbert Vernon-Smith from the grasp of his enemy—the narrowest escape he had had since he had come to Kicking Cayuse.

"That was the game," said Vernon-Smith, in a low voice of intense and bitter anger. "They'd have got me, only that fat fool—"

"The gotfulness would have been terrific!"

"The villain!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"That does it!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm through here! I'm going to Packsaddle for a horse, and hitting the trail for Prairie Bend as soon as I get one. And any man who stands in my way will find out that I pack a gun."

The Bounder tramped down the stairs, with the other fellows at his heels. They found Billy Bunter in the living-room, sitting down to eats, supplied by the astonished Chick.

He was still clad in blankets. Lesser matters had to be postponed till Bunter had filled the aching void in his extensive interior. He was filling it at a great rate.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter, with his mouth full.

The Bounder tramped on unheeding, and the other fellows followed him. The discovery of what had happened in the night had settled the matter for Vernon-Smith. Packsaddle was fifteen miles distant, but it was the nearest place where horses could be obtained, and it was in the direction of Prairie Bend. The juniors had to walk fifteen miles—but they had made up their minds to it.

What worried them chiefly was the idea that Barney Stone might make some attempt to keep them at the ranch by force.

In such an event, it was clear from the Bounder's look what he intended to

do. His hand was close to the butt of the six-gun in his belt as he left the rancho.

The other fellows had their rifles under their arms, but they certainly were not thinking of turning them on Kicking Cayuse punchers, who might bar the way at the order of the foreman.

But the desperate gleam in the Bounder's eyes told what was in his mind. If his way was barred, he was going to fight his way out.

To the relief of the Famous Five, however, no such move was made.

Panhandle was still at the corral gate, and three or four other punchers were to be seen, but the foreman was not in sight.

No hand was raised to stop them as they went out on the trail. Barney, it seemed, had contented himself with giving orders that they were not to be allowed horses. They were free to go where they liked on foot.

It was a relief to get clear without further trouble. They tramped away down the trail, and the ranch buildings dropped out of sight behind them.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Red Foes!

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

He pointed.

A bunch of feathers, showing over a fringe of mesquite near the trail, was the first warning of danger.

The juniors had covered five miles—long, hard miles over the rugged, rolling prairie—hard and heavy going, under the blazing sun of Texas.

They tramped on slowly, but steadily. Fifteen miles of rugged prairie on foot was a large order, even for fellows who were thoroughly fit. They were going to halt for a good rest, when they reached the shade of the timber island on the trail.

But they were still far short of the timber on the open, sun-scorched plain, when that bunch of feathers bobbed over the mesquite.

"The Indians!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

And they came to a halt.

The Bounder gave a scoffing laugh.

"I rather expected that," he said. "Barney Stone isn't likely to let us hit Prairie Bend if he can help it."

None of the juniors, in fact, felt any surprise. Barney Stone had not been in sight when they left the ranch; but they had no doubt that he was perfectly well acquainted with their movements.

Indeed, there was little doubt that the foreman had expected exactly the move they had made—starting for Packsaddle to get horses. It was their only resource, and they had inevitably come to it.

It was not surprising, therefore, for enemies to show up as soon as they were at a distance from the ranch, out of sight of the outfit. It would have been surprising, if that had not been the case.

But the Greyfriars fellows were not alarmed.

Their previous encounter with Rainy Face and his tattered gang had ended in an easy victory, and they had no doubt whatever of being able to take care of themselves.

The only difference was that they were now on foot, and could not take to flight if they wanted to. But they

had no idea whatever of taking to flight.

Halting in the trail, they half-lifted their rifles, and watched the bunch of feathers that bobbed over the thicket. Unwilling as they were to fire, even on the savage outcasts of the desert, they were quite ready to do so if the Indians attacked. And they were quite assured of being able to drive off the copper-skinned gang, as they had driven them off before.

The feathered chief rode into view, and from the cover of the thickets six or seven more tattered braves followed him.

The black, hawkish eyes of the Apaches were turned on the group of schoolboys in the trail; but they did not approach. They rode in a circle round the group, at a distance, brandishing lassoes, and uttering harsh cries.

The Bounder laughed again contemptuously.

"That's to rattle our nerve, I suppose," he said. "I'll let the unwashed skunks see how much my nerves are rattled."

He threw his rifle to his shoulder, and took aim at the chief.

Harry Wharton called to him sharply:

"Hold on, Smithy! Don't start the trouble!"

"I'm going to warn that rotter off, fathead! We're not going to stick here while they play their circus tricks."

The Bounder fired. He was a crack shot, and the range was easy. The bullets tore feathers from the black-matted head of Rainy Face.

There was a loud yell from the Indians, and they swerved away on their shaggy mustangs, riding in a wider circle.

But they still circled the group on the trail, though out of effective shooting range.

"Come on!" said Smithy.

He tramped on up the trail, and the Famous Five tramped after him, watchful and wary. It was fairly clear that the Apaches had no "hunch" to ride at the rifles; but a sudden charge might have come at any moment, and the juniors were ready to greet it with a volley if it came.

Unless, indeed, the Red riders hoped to take them by surprise by a sudden overwhelming rush, it was difficult to see what their object was.

For the present, at least, they seemed satisfied with circling at a distance, waving their lassoes and yelling.

Incessant watchfulness, added to the fatigue of tramping over the rugged trail and the blaze of the semi-tropical sun, was trying enough to the nerves and to the temper. Every now and then two or three of the Indians circled closer, as if intending to charge, and the juniors halted and raised their rifles. But no charge came, and they tramped onward.

The Bounder's brow grew darker and darker.

Harry Wharton & Co. were growing grim in temper as this went on; but Vernon-Smith was getting into a dangerous mood, and less and less inclined to hold his fire. Suddenly, as one of the Indians rode closer, he lifted his rifle and fired.

There was a loud yell from the Apache as the bullet cut a gash along his coppery shoulder. Instantly he spurred his shaggy steed out of range.

"Smithy, old man—" muttered Bob.

"Oh, rats!" snapped the Bounder. "We're in Texas now! How do you think Bill would handle that crew?"

And he fired again and again, with the effect of sending the circling riders scuttling still farther off.

The Apaches were so distant now that they were half-hidden in the waving grass, and instead of circling round the Greyfriars party, they collected in a bunch to follow them.

Glancing back every now and then, the juniors tramped on. Ahead of them in the distance was the timber island—a great mass of cottonwood-trees and thickets—where they intended to halt for rest and lunch. But the timber, though in sight against the blue sky, was still far off, and it was a long and weary tramp to reach it in the hot sunshine.

The Greyfriars fellows were hot, dusty, and tired, and looking forward keenly to a rest in the shade of the branches. But they were keenly on the alert, ready to turn and stand up to an attack if their pursuers came nearer.

The Indians, however, kept their distance, only following on the trail. The Bounder, in his angry irritation, sent a shot whizzing back at them, too wide to do any damage.

"All serene, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "It won't hurt us if they follow us all the way to Packsaddle—and you can bet they will clear off long before that."

"More likely to rush us when we hit the timber!" growled Vernon-Smith. "There's cover for the brutes as soon as we get there."

"We can keep them off easily enough, as we did before. I only hope it won't come to shooting in earnest!"

The Bounder grunted. He was getting into a mood for shooting in deadly earnest. He grunted, and tramped on.

Another weary mile lagged under the tramping feet, and then the juniors were close to the timber, through which the trail ran. Then at last came a move from Rainy Face and his gang.

With a wild whoop and a trampling of hoofs, the bunch of Apaches came on at a rapid rush.

"Look out!" exclaimed Bob.

"Shoot!" snarled the Bounder.

The juniors faced round, with ready rifles.

Bang, bang, bang! roared over the plain as they fired on the advancing Apaches.

But at the first shot the Indians separated and rode clear of the trail, circling wide again. Either the firing daunted them or they had never intended to come to close quarters at all. At all events, they rode wide and clear, and the rifle volley whizzed away through empty space.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"If that's jolly old Indian warfare, it isn't like what we used to read about," he remarked. "Bit tame in these days."

They tramped on into the shade of the timber. The trail ran on under high, over-arching branches, and the juniors were glad enough to get into the shade.

"By gum, this is better!" said Johnny Bull, fanning his heated face with his stetson.

"Look out!" snapped the Bounder. "They're coming!"

He lifted his rifle, his eyes gleaming over it.

From the sunlit plain, as the juniors looked back from the timber, the bunch of Apaches came on at a wild burst of speed.

It seemed this time as if they had resolved to push on to close quarters, and the juniors fired together, a shower of bullets whizzing out from the deep,

dusty shade of the trees into the glaring sunlight.

But again the Redskins swerved away on either side of the trail, circling on the plain, swinging over the flanks of their mustangs to dodge the fire. Not a man in the bunch was hit, so swift was the retreat.

The Bounder gave an angry laugh.

"It's all gammon!" he snapped. "They don't dare— Oh!"

He broke off, with a startled cry that was choked in its utterance.

His rifle went with a crash to the earth. Head over heels, Herbert Vernon-Smith spun away in the clutch of a looped rope that had suddenly, swiftly, silently dropped on him, flung by an unseen hand from the thickets bordering the trail.

"Smithy——"

"What——"

The Famous Five, like the Bounder, had been watching the riders on the plain. They spun round at his cry and fall.

But they had no time to help him; no chance to stretch out a hand. Even as they turned, the Bounder, dragged on the rope by irresistible force, crashed through the thickets and disappeared from their eyes.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Lost!

"SMITHY!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"After him!" yelled Bob.

The Famous Five rushed desperately after the Bounder.

He had disappeared as if by magic in the twinkling of an eye. They had not even seen the rope that dragged him, so swiftly had it been done, but they knew that he must have been lassoed.

In that instant they knew how they had been tricked. In open fight they could have beaten off the Apaches, as they had beaten them off before. But they were not equal to the wiles of Indian cunning.

But they knew now that the pursuit across the prairie, the repeated pretences of attack, had been designed to keep their attention on Rainy Face and his gang, while one of the Apaches, posted far ahead of them, waited and watched like a lurking panther in the timber.

That cunning trick had succeeded, and the Bounder, suddenly caught in the whirling lasso of the hidden Apache, was dragged away from his friends with such sudden swiftness that he was gone from their sight before they knew what was happening.

But they did not lose a moment. They could not fire into the thicket at the cunning Apache; the Bounder would have been in as much danger from the fire as the Redskin. Smithy had disappeared; the Indian they had not seen at all. They rushed in fierce and hurried pursuit, and crashed into the tangled scrubs hardly a few moments after the Bounder had been dragged off the trail. In breathless haste, they tore to the rescue.

It seemed impossible that, in those few moments, the Bounder could be gone—that he was out of the reach of rescue. They did not doubt that they would reach him, struggling in the Indian's grasp in the timber.

But he was gone.

They were only a few moments after him. But the swift Apache had not lost a second. The juniors, in wild anxiety, tramped in tangled mesquite and

juniper, amid great, hanging masses of Spanish moss. The Bounder was not to be seen.

"Smithy!" roared Johnny Bull.

A cry came back—a faint, choked cry. In desperation, the juniors plunged through the bush in the direction of the cry.

"Look!" yelled Bob.

He had a glimpse for a second of a brawny figure in a tattered blanket, with Vernon-Smith flung like a sack over his shoulder, vainly struggling. The figure vanished the next second.

Bob tore after it, his comrades at his heels.

The Indian was winding swiftly through the brush—as swiftly as a hunted coyote.

The burden on his shoulder was nothing to the brawny Apache. In his powerful grip the Bounder's struggles were futile. Another faint cry came back to his friends, but it was farther off.

They tore on desperately, tangling in drooping lianas, stumbling over jutting roots, crashing into pendants of heavy moss.

It had seemed certain to them in the first moments that they would reach the Bounder; now they knew that the Indian was drawing farther and farther away from them. The Apache was as much at home in the tangled brush as a panther, but it was desperately difficult going to the unaccustomed school-boys.

They could hear the rustling and crashing in the bush—again came the Bounder's choked cry. In sheer desperation they tore their way in pursuit. Had they sighted the Indian again, they would have risked a shot, at the risk of hitting the Bounder.

But they did not see him; the bush was too thick for that. Only the sounds he made, as he fled, guided them at all.

Panting, perspiring, desperate, they plunged on; and suddenly, from the thick bush, they staggered out into the open trail. The Indian, after winding some distance through the brush, had emerged into the trail—why, they could not for the moment guess.

But the next moment they knew.

Thud, thud, thud!

It was the beat of a horse's hoofs.

Far down the trail, in the direction of the open prairie where Rainy Face and his gang had halted, they glimpsed a horseman, his back to them, riding like the wind.

Across his saddle, in front of him, was a crumpled figure.

Then they knew that, somewhere along the trail, the Indian's mustang had been waiting for him. He had thrown off pursuit in the brush, reached his mustang, and now the last hope was gone. Harry Wharton threw his rifle to his shoulder. It was the last chance, and, at any risk, he had to fire now.

But the Apache was riding at a mad gallop, and he disappeared down the winding trail before the captain of the Greyfriars could even pull trigger.

The rifle roared; but Harry Wharton knew that he had missed.

"Come on!" he panted.

It was useless, and they knew it; but they rushed in frantic pursuit. In a few minutes they were out of the timber on the open plain, in the blaze of the sunshine.

Far away—a bunch of moving dots—were the Apaches.

In despair, the juniors came to a breathless halt. Among those distant riders, galloping away across the prairie, they could not even pick out the

Indian who held Herbert Vernon-Smith a prisoner on his horse. He had joined the rest of the gang, and was riding away with them; and, even as the juniors watched, the whole gang diminished to mere moving specks far away across the sunlit grass.

"They've got him!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"They—they've got Smithy!" muttered Bob.

"And we—we can do nothing!" said Johnny Bull, between his teeth. "If we had our horses—"

"That hound—that villain—" Wharton choked. "Barney Stone fixed all that! He planned the whole thing, and we—we—"

"We fell into the trap!" muttered Nugent. "He knew we should make for Packsaddle—and it was all out and dried—"

Wharton clenched his hands in helpless rage.

They had foreseen danger on the trail, and had been prepared for it; and never doubted that they could defend themselves—as, indeed, they could. But Indian cunning had been too much for them.

It was only Vernon-Smith that the Apaches wanted—the rest of the party were nothing to them. And Vernon-Smith was in their hands—disappearing across the boundless prairie, as fast as a swift mustang could gallop. On foot pursuit was impossible.

Standing there, on the edge of the timber, they watched helplessly, while the swift horsemen in the distance vanished from sight, till only the waving grass, shimmering in the sunlight, met their staring eyes.

The Indians were gone! Gone, not only from sight, but from the Packsaddle country, as the juniors could guess only too easily. Now that the Bounder was in their hands, they were not likely to draw rein till they were safe out of the valley of the Frio—safe from pursuit by the Kicking Cayuse outfit, or the sheriff of Packsaddle.

In what remote recess of the desert they might vanish, it was impossible to guess—but it would be far beyond the reach of search or pursuit.

It seemed like an evil dream to the juniors as they stood in dismay. Hardly half an hour ago their comrade had been with them—now he was raced away from their sight, and had vanished into the unknown, where they could not help him; where none could help him.

Johnny Bull broke a grim silence.

"There's one thing," he said. "Smithy's life is not in danger! It's been in danger, more than once; but even that plotting brute, Stone, will stop short of that, if he can. That Indian could have knocked him on the head easily enough in the brush—if that was the game! They've kidnapped him—and that shows that his life's safe."

Harry Wharton nodded. He had no doubt of that. Hard-fisted, unscrupulous, ruthless as he was, Barney Stone would not order the copper-skinned outcasts to take life, if kidnapping would serve his turn. The fact that the Bounder had been carried off, was proof enough of that. It was a comfort, so far as it went.

"We've got to save him!" said Harry. "Barney Stone's got by with it at last; but we're going to beat him—somehow! Get back to the ranch! The whole outfit will ride after Smithy,

and Barney dare not stop them—he dare not!"

It was all that could be done. Immediate pursuit was the only chance of saving the Bounder—if there was yet a chance. Whatever Barney's wishes, he could not stand in the way of a ride to the rescue. There was a chance yet—there was hope yet—the juniors, at all events, were determined to believe that there was.

But there were long and weary miles of rugged prairie between them and the ranch. It was with heavy hearts that they set out on that long and weary tramp—while, with every moment that passed, the Bounder of Greyfriars was drawing farther and farther away into the unknown, as fast as an Indian mustang could gallop.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Through at Last!

BARNEY STONE stood on a high mesa at the opening of a rocky canyon in Squaw Mountain, and watched the plain below.

His lean brown face was grim under the shadow of the stetson hat.

His horse was tethered in the canyon. For a long, long time, the foreman of Kicking Cayuse had stood on the high flat rock, watching the prairie with grim searching eyes.

And that for which he was watching came in sight at last—a cloud of dust that half-hid a bunch of galloping riders far off on the plain, but heading for Squaw Mountain.

At the ranch it was believed that Barney had ridden away that day on business at Hatchet. But Barney had been nowhere near Hatchet. From the lonely, rugged side of Squaw Mountain he watched, little doubting that this time his schemes had come to success.

And when he sighted that bunch of galloping riders, he knew. There were half a dozen copper-skinned Apaches in the bunch—and one who rode swathed in an Indian blanket, which was drawn partly over his head, hiding him. Any one sighting the riders on the prairie would have supposed that that rider was one of the red-skin bucks, wrapped up against wind and dust—but Barney fancied that he knew better. He could not see that that rider was bound to his horse, but he knew that he was. And his hard lean face gloated at the Bounder of Greyfriars.

He descended from the mesa, as the Indians rode near—and met them as they clattered into the canyon and drew rein.

"You got him, Rainy Face!" he said, with a sour grin.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian.

He made a gesture towards the figure swathed in the blanket.

Barney Stone stepped to it and pulled aside the corner of the blanket that covered the prisoner's head. Then the Bounder of Greyfriars looked at him, with a deadly glint in his eyes.

Barney smiled.

Vernon-Smith looked at him, in silence, with a savage face.

"Yep! They sure got you this time, hombre!" said the foreman of Kicking Cayuse. "They sure got you by the short hairs!"

The Bounder gave a wrench at his bonds. Then he panted. His feet were roped under the horse, his hands tied behind his back. He was power-

less—a helpless prisoner, at last in the hands of his enemy.

"You hound!" he said, in a low, thick voice. "I'll make you pay for this yet, Barney Stone!"

"Says you!" grinned Barney. "I guess I'll take the risk! You had it coming to you, you young geck! I reckon I did all I knew how to keep you clear of the ranch—you was warned, and you horned in all the same. I knowed that you was wise to the rustling game—and I'll say that I ain't run the Kicking Cayuse for years on end to have a schoolboy put it across me at the finish! Nope! You're a cute, spry young hombre, Mr. Vernon-Smith—a heap too cute and spry for your health, I reckon!"

The Bounder breathed hard with rage.

"You fancy that you will get by with this?" he muttered.

"I reckon so," said Barney, "and I guess when you want something to chew on it that you're getting by cheap. I guess any of these Reds would make it last sickness for you for an extra dollar or two. What you figure?"

The Bounder was savagely silent.

"If you wasn't safe where you're going, Mr. Vernon-Smith, I'll mention that you wouldn't be going!" said Barney Stone grimly. "I ain't honing to spill your juice and you a schoolboy—but I guess I ain't losing my grip on the Kicking Cayuse. You bank on it that you'll be safe—when they get you across the Staked Plain. Yep!"

"Wait till my chance comes!" muttered the Bounder.

Barney laughed—a grim laugh.

"Don't you start anything among these Reds!" he said. "They got you safe, and I reckon I'm making it worth their while to keep you safe. But they got their orders plain—you won't get away alive. You start anything, and I'm telling you it's you for the long jump! If you want a tomahawk cracking your cabeza, you only got to give them trouble."

His lean face set hard.

"I guess I'd be jest as pleased if I got news of it!" he said. "You better walk soft and talk turkey, Mr. Vernon-Smith—it's sure your best guess!"

"You rotter—you villain—you double-dealing scoundrel!" breathed the Bounder.

"I guess that's the lot!" said Barney. And he threw the corner of the Indian blanket over the Bounder's head again.

For a few minutes he remained in talk with Rainy Face. Then he mounted his bronco and rode out of the canyon by the plain.

The Indians set their horses in motion, at the same time, in the opposite direction, riding through the canyon. Their distant destination, whatever it was, was on the farther side of Squaw Mountain.

Barney Stone rode for the ranch at a gallop, grim satisfaction in his face.

He had won his game at last! The owner's son, who had spotted his double-dealing at Kicking Cayuse, would never report what he had discovered to the owner of the ranch—he would carry what he knew to the hidden den of the Wolf-Apaches in the desert. Barney was through with him at last, and there was no spot of compunction in his hard heart.

(Continued on page 28.)

LINE UP, CHUMS, FOR ANOTHER RAMBLE WITH—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



THE DAILY ROUND.

12.30 p.m. Dinner.

(1)

For dinner to-day, I'm enchanted to say,
There was beef and potatoes and
carrots,
And fellows came in with a satisfied
grin
And repeated the menu like parrots.
"It's beef, old fellow. I say, old bean,
It's beef for dinner. Yes, beef, I
mean!"

(2)

Some chaps, of course, say it's leg of
horse
That is served for our midday dinner.
When a horse is old it is often sold

To the Greyfriars cook; says Skinner.
The cook dissects it with an axe
And bakes it—these, he says, are facts!

(3)

But that's the sort of absurd report
That is Skinner's special mission.
We know the food is extremely good
And it's quite beyond suspicion.
Ask Bunter how he likes the stuff,
He seems to eat it fast enough!

(4)

Well, after the meat we have the sweet,
It's apricot tart and custard,
And jokers try as the plates go by
To put in a spot of mustard.
But Quelch frowns in a manner grim,
And nobody wants words with him!

AFTER SCHOOL HOURS

Beau Bunter



When Bunter pays a visit
To Bessie at Cliff House
He simply looks exquisite
And nobody could grouse
At Bunter's shoes, which nearly
Eclipse the sun itself.
(They're Harry Wharton's, really,
He left them on a shelf!)

His spats are simply splendid
(For Mauly keeps them so),
His socks are neatly blended
(It's Inky's taste, you know),
With Hazeldene's silk hanky
He looks superbly dressed;
His gloves are really swanky
(They're Toddy's very best!).

The suit seems out of gender,
But Bunter can't help that,
For Nugent's rather slender,
And Bunter's rather fat!
It fits him fairly tightly,
It could have been more slack!
The waistcoat's not unsightly—
It's been slit up the back!

With Cherry's collar lining
His neck, and Newland's tie,
And Smithy's topper shining
Upon his head on high,
The girls with circumspection
Stand round him to admire
This travelling collection
Of Lower Fourth attire!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

PERCIVAL SPENCER
PAGET,

The highly connected fag of the Third.

P is for PAGET—my word!
The aristocrat of the Third!
Related to dozens of earls
And barons and other base churls,
And peers by the hundred he counts
As uncles and aunts—the amounts
They tip the young blighter would cause
A Rothschild considerable pause.
This inky young nobleman here
Must tremble and shiver with fear
Before a mere commoner, who
Can't boast of a title or two!



This Wiggins, by all the mad flukes,
Can cane a relation of dukes,
And—this will make Parliament buzz—
He not only can, but he does!

A notice put up in the school bath-rooms warns bathers to be careful not to come into contact with the electric light. In the fags' bath-rooms, of course, it is quite unnecessary to warn them never to come into contact with the water!

ANSWER to PUZZLE

Tops, Pots, Post, Stop, Spot.

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRINS

It's Gosling's birthday next week, but what is one among so many?

Mr. Prout set up a target for a little rifle-practice in the Cloisters. Fellows who felt themselves in danger made a bee-line for the target as the safest spot.

Mr. Quelch says a boy should "stand up for himself." And bend over for his master, of course.

PUZZLE CORNER

Billy Bunter said recently: "I say, old —, there's — of money in the — for me, and I'm going to — on this — until it comes." The missing words are all spelt with the same four letters. What are they?

Answer at foot of col. 2.

Mrs. Mimble is making what she calls "Harrow cakes." If Bunter gets a chance they'll be "Eton" cakes.

Wibley is going to re-write his new play as soon as he has finished the thousand lines he got for giving Quelch the play instead of the hundred lines he had first of all.

While at batting practice with the Fifth yesterday Coker accidentally hit a boundary.

Mr. Prout asks angrily: "Why will boys slide down the banisters?" Chiefly because we're not clever enough to slide up!

Coker offered Potter a lift on the pillion of his motor-bike, but found neither of them would go.

Tubb of the Third has fixed a booby-trap over Loder's door. I wonder what his last words will be?

Skinner's father promised him a fiver if he won the hundred yards at the sports. He looks like doing it, too, now that he's hired a man to release a savage bulldog just behind his heels.

The Bounder, as he rode on, a helpless prisoner, in the midst of the Apache gang, into the lonely, rocky wastes of Squaw Mountain, did not believe that Barney was "through" with him.

Escape was the fixed thought in his mind—even if he was not followed and rescued, he would escape! And then there would be a reckoning with the double-dealing foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

distance. Miles and miles, endless miles, lay between him and his friends—and in the hot morning, under the blazing sun, the miles lengthened and lengthened.

The grasslands were not round him now—it was a desert of sage-bush and sand, with here and there a gaunt cactus, standing, sentry-like, that circled him—wide-stretching, trackless, far from the cow-country, far from the haunts of men. And when another long day had drawn to its close, there

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.

ARMAMENTS, armaments, armaments! The "big dailies" are full of this theme these days! But why worry, chums? We've got an armaments race of our own! On page 2 of this issue you've got full particulars of the greatest Armaments Race ever!

There are **Fifteen First Prizes of "Hercules" Bikes and 6,000 Other Top-top Prizes!**

But our Armaments Race, unlike the national one we hear so much of every day, and which is costing millions of pounds, is going to cost you practically nothing—only the price of the companion papers, which, incidentally, are already

FULL VALUE FOR MONEY!

Go in and win—that's my advice to all of you! All you've got to do is to collect the Armaments Race stamps—there are eight different kinds, comprising Bombers, Guns, Searchlights, and so on.

To kick off with your collection you have, this week, twenty stamps. Our companion papers—the "Gem" and "Modern Boy"—also contain twenty stamps, which, if you take the three papers, will amount to sixty stamps.

And here we come to

An Important Point,

especially to readers of the MAGNET who intend joining in this GREAT ARMAMENTS RACE—next Saturday's issue of the MAGNET, in addition to the number of stamps given away with our other companion papers, will contain

Four Additional Stamps,

which means that every reader of next week's issue of the MAGNET will have a four points lead over his rivals!

Start collecting RIGHT AWAY, chums; I want readers of the MAGNET to head the list of prizewinners. And just think of the useful prizes there are

Waiting To Be Won,

irrespective of the fifteen first prizes of "Hercules" bikes—cameras, roller skates, footballs, etc.

Naturally enough, next Saturday's MAGNET will be well up to standard. In it you will find another super story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, dealing with the further exciting adventure of the Greyfriars chums way out in the Wild West, and another topical issue of the "Greyfriars Herald."

Here's hoping that you will win a prize in our Great Armaments Race. All the best until next week,

YOUR EDITOR.

KEEP THESE STAMPS!

Have you seen the details of the Great Armaments Race on page 2?

Below are eight more stamps to help swell your total—snip them out and keep them in a safe place!



MORE STAMPS in Next Saturday's MAGNET— BE SURE YOU ADD THEM TO YOUR COLLECTION!

that hope strong in his heart when the Indians halted at nightfall—and he was taken, with tired and aching limbs, from the back of the mustang. But after he had been given food he was bound again, and the Apaches slept round him in their blankets; and when the dawn came they were riding again; the junior once more bound on the horse.

And hope wavered and almost died. His eyes were haggard as he looked about him—no longer swathed in the blanket, for there was no danger of observation now. Looking back, he saw that the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain had sunk out of sight in the

was something very like despair in the heart of the Bounder of Greyfriars

THE END

(Barney Stone's scheming has met with success at last—Vernon-Smith is a prisoner in the hands of the Indians! But Harry Wharton & Co. are determined to beat the rascally ranch foreman—somehow! Watch out for: "A PRISONER IN THE DESERT!" the next story in this thrilling Wild West series. You'll find it in next Saturday's MAGNET. Don't forget, this issue will contain more stamps for your collection!)

Don't forget to ask your shop for XLCR STAMPS, ALBUMS & OUTFITS! If any difficulty write THOMAS CLIFFE RHYL

BE TALL Your Height Increased in 14 days or Money Back. Amazing Course, 5/-, Send STAMP NOW for free book.—STEBBING SYSTEM (A), 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.

TRIANGULAR PKT. FREE Holland Triangular, Estonia, Luxembourg, 56 diff., GREECE, Bohemia, South Australia, Centenary. Postage 2d.; request approvals.—ROBINSON BROS. (A), MORETON, WIRRAL.

BLUSHING.—FREE to all sufferers, particulars of a proved home treatment that quickly removes all embarrassment, and permanently cures blushing and flushing of the face and neck. Enclose stamp to—**Mr. A. TEMPLE (Specialist), Palace House, 128, Shaftesbury Avenue (2nd Floor), London, W.1.** (Established 37 years.)

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STAMPS 300 DIFFERENT, incl. Airmail, Beauiful Uncommon Sets, Pictorials, Colonials. Price 6d. (Abroad 1/-).—**WHITE, ENGINE LANE, LYE, WORCS.**

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

SHARING OUT THE TUCK!

Amusing and Amazing School Yarn of Jack Jolly & Co., of St. Sam's.

By DICKY NUGENT

"Muggleton Station! Alight here for St. Sam's!"

The grate express clattered into the station, almost drowning the aged porter's piping words. With a screeching of brakes, it stopped dead; and instantly the platform became alive.

Boys of all sizes and ages poured out of the train. It was the first day of the new term at St. Sam's, and the fellows were all delighted to see each other again.

Most prominent of all in the seething crowd was the bearded figger of Doctor Birchermall, the revered headmaster of St. Sam's. The Head, who seemed to have put

on quite a lot of weight during his stay at the Honorable Guy de Vere's ancestral home, was grinning cheerfully, as he barged his way through the crowd.

"Mind your backs, boys!" he cried humorously. "Make way for a gentleman!"

"Plezzure, sir!" grinned Burleigh. "Where is he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" rapped out the Head, frowning slightly at Burleigh's little Sally. "And mind how you handle those tuck hampers of mine. I don't want to find the contents damaged when I open them."

Jack Jolly, who was

following the Head with a large hamper held in each hand, grinned reassuringly.

"Rely on me, sir!" he said. "I never believe in letting tuck get damaged—even when the owner happens to be a stingy old fogey like you!"

"What!"

"Er—I mean, especially when the owner happens to be a generous-hearted gentleman like you!"

"That's better!"

to swim back to his pals with a lifeline.

The fishermen on the beach told him it was madness and that he would never come back alive. But nothing they said would stop him, and off he went once more into the raging sea. Needless to say, none were happier than the fishermen when their forecasts proved wrong and Redwing reached his goal safely.

The perilous job of hauling in the fellows



from the wreck went off without a hitch. Redwing was last man back and the boat was battered to pieces shortly after he had reached the shore.

That's all! And it only remains for us when we start school again to show the hero that Greyfriars is proud of him. If we're anything like prophets, Tom Redwing is in for a hectic time on the first day of the new term!

The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 291.

EDITED BY LICK RAKE

May 7th, 1938.



YOUR EDITOR CALLING!

With the holidays passing and Wharton and his pals still in Texas, Remove chaps who run into each other are asking what sort of a cricket team we can muster up if we start the new term with out them.

It goes without saying that their absence will make a big difference to the Remove team. Wharton and Smithy are two of the best bats in the Form—or in the school, some of us think! As for Hurree Singh, his demon bowling knocked the stuffing out of many a strong team last season. Bob Cherry and Bull, too, are good all-rounders. Nugent, though a fair bat, is hardly in the front rank.

Bunter will not be missed except by those who roll up to Compulsory Practice for free entertainment!

What it amounts to, I think, is that if we do have to play a match or two before the wanderers return, we shall have to make up for the loss of Wharton, Smithy, Luky, and Bob. Can it be done?

In the opinion of some, it can be done very easily; but fellows who hold that opinion are invariably disgruntled players who think their names should figure in the eleven more frequently!

My own opinion is that even without the four top-liners I have named we can get together a team that will put up a good fight against any of our regular opponents.

Here, for instance, are half-a-dozen fellows who have rarely played for the Remove, but who can be relied on for good average cricket: Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Vivian, Morgan, Bolsover and Lord Maulverer.

I feel quite certain that these chaps would be worth a place in almost any Form team of our average age. The reason they are not regular players for the Remove is that we happen to have exceptionally good talent at our disposal.

I'm not saying that they are anything like the absentees; but they are all sound men, and in most cases their keenness to give a good account of themselves might make up for their deficiencies.

In the case of Mauly, a pin, stuck in him at regular intervals, would bring him up to scratch!

I don't think there is any need for despair if we start the season without the absent giants. But let's hope they will be back in time, all the same!

Cheerio till next week, chums!
DICKY NUGENT.

Hazeldene wants to know why he has twice as many visitors during vac. as any other Greyfriars fellow. We advise him to ask his sister Marjorie.

GREYFRIARS FROM FRESH ANGLES

Says BLOGG, the Postman

There's one good thing about being a postman and that is, you're popular. And there's no place on my round where I'm more popular than at Greyfriars.

It's not because I'm over-polite with the young gents, either. I'm very much the opposite sometimes, when they swarm round me, asking what I've got for them. They know as well as I do that I'm not supposed to hand over letters to individuals. But that don't stop them; not a bit of it! Some of the young gents make me laugh. There's Master Bunter for ever expecting a postal order; but, as I've pointed out to him more than once, folks don't send postal orders pinned to post-cards. And post-cards from home are about the only deliveries I ever have for young Fatty! Then there's Master Loder, with a shifty look in his eyes, always trying to snatch his letters before they get into the school. Of course, I wouldn't dream of suggesting they are accounts from Mr. Banks, the book-maker. But some of Greyfriars!

WANDERING GIPSIES—NEW STYLE!

Temple & Co. Revel in "Wild" Life!

"Mo for the primitive life, this vac!" remarked Temple, just before breaking-up. "I'm turnin' my back on civilisation an' returnin' to the simple life of a nomad!"

"Wandering gipsy stunt, eh?" suggested our reporter, to whom Temple was talking; and the posh leader of the Upper Fourth nodded.

"Just that. A care-free tour through the country, far from the maddin' crowd."

It was a surprise to hear of Temple going in for a holiday of this kind. But any doubts our reporter might have had were set at rest when he actually ran into Temple with his caravan in a country

ne in Hampshire.

True, the caravan was not exactly primitive. On the contrary, it was a super-caravan of enormous size attached to a big car piloted by a liveried chauffeur. But a caravan it was right enough.

Temple didn't exactly look blissfully happy over his lapse into primitive barbarism, either. There was a worried frown on his face and he kept on looking at his watch.

"In a hurry?" the "Greyfriars Herald" man asked.

"The Head cooed. 'Ahen! I used the hampers to put some of my clothes in, as a matter of fact, Jolly. Nevertheless, there is some tuck underneath. Half-a-jiffy!'"

He dived into the hampers one at a time, and, after a grate deal of trubble, found what he was seeking. When he brought his finds to light, they were greeted by the Fourth Formers with a yell of rage.

"Two penny bars of chocolate!"

"Oh, rather! We've got a date for a dance this evenin' at Lantham."

"Lantham? Why, it's about seventy miles away!"

"Yes, that's the worst of it," said Temple, regretfully. "I seem to have mapped out too big a programme. We went to a show at Southsea yesterday. Now it's

"The hotel we choose for campin' in, dear man. We always make a point of campin' out in the grounds of an hotel. It simplifies things, you see. The hotel servants can bring us our meals without havin' a long way to come."

"Great pip! And do you like this—this return

Lantham to-night. Then I fixed up to meet some chaps for an evenin' out on the other side of London the followin' day. An' then—"

"But didn't you mention something about the primitive life, old bean?"

"Oh, rather! We're right back to Nature, you know. We camp out every night in this caravan just like real gipsies."

"The chauffeur, too?"

"Well, no," admitted Temple. "He sleeps in the hotel."

"What hotel?"

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granted Doctor Birchermall. "Now let's hurry, boys, or somebody will bag the station hack before we can get it."

He led the way through the barrier, and Jack Jolly & Co. and the Honorable Guy followed him. If the Head was going to sport a cab, they were quite willing to have a ride up to the skool with him at his expense!

Quick as he was, the Head found that somebody had been quicker. Bounder of the Sixth was standing beside the hack, watching the old cab-driver pile up his luggage on to the roof.

But Doctor Birchermall soon dealt with Bounder. "Do you mind unloading your luggage and waiting till the next trip, Bounder?" he asked.

"Thanks, a wfully! That's what I call decent of you!"

"But look here, sir, I—"

"It is plezzant in these days to meet a boy who is polite to his elders," grinned the Head, as he helped the cabby down with one of Bounder's boxes. "Usually, I have to birch a boy black and blue before I can get him to treat me politely. You're sure you don't mind, Bounder?"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Bounder. "Not at all!"

"Good! Help the cabby to remove the Bounder's belongings, boys!"

Jack Jolly & Co. obeyed that order with grate cheerfulness, and in a couple of jiffies they had piled up their own luggage in place of it and were rattling over the cobblestones on their way to St. Sam's.

Doctor Birchermall was the first to get out at the other end. As he seemed to be walking in without paying, Frank Fearless drew his attention to the oversite.

"Ahem! Haven't you forgotten the fare, sir?" he asked.

The Head frowned for a moment; then he grinned a somewhat shifty grin.

"Bless my sole! So I have! I am afraid that I am rather in-

clined to overlook these minor details, Fearless. Can you change a five-pound note, cabby?"

"Yessir!"

Doctor Birchermall cooed.

"Er—as a matter of fact, I really meant a ten-pound note. Can you manage a ten-pound note, cabby?"

"No, sir; I'm afearid I can't."

"Well, never mind," grinned the Head. "After all, it's a meer trifle. You boys pay instead!"

"My hat!"

While the chums of the Fourth had a whip-round to pay the meer trifle of ten shillings which the cabby charged, the Head galloped up the steps to greet Mrs. Buxom, the House-dame.

He was grinning all over his face, as he shook hands with the old lady. But Mrs. Buxom's first words soon changed that grin.

"Dearie me, sir, whatever shall we do?" she cried. "I've forgotten to get in the supper!"

At this announcement, Doctor Birchermall reeled as from a blow. He stared at the House-dame with eyes that almost bulged out of their sockets.

"You—you've forgotten to get in the supper?" he gasped.

"Bless my sole! What ever next? Surely there's something for me?"

"Not a sossidge, sir!"

A garstly pallor spread over the Head's feetchers.

"Something must be done about it at once!" he cried. "Why, I'm simply famished after the jerney. Tellyfone to the Muggleton bunshop for a consignment of tuck to be delivered at once!"

But Mrs. Buxom only wrung her hands despairingly.

"I'm dreadful sorry, sir; but it can't be done!" she wimpered.

"You see, sir, it's early-closing day, and the shops are all shut!"

"Ye gods!" breathed the Head.

His rage was terribul to behold. He tugged at his beard and bit at his nails.

Jack Jolly and his

pals, having settled up with the cabby, turned their attention to the Head. They couldn't help laughing when they saw how upset he was.

"Why worry, sir?" asked Jolly, cheerfully. "Most of the chaps have brought back tuck-hampers, so nobody will go short."

"But what about me?" roared Doctor Birchermall.

The kaptin of the Fourth larfed.

"Surely you're all right, sir! Have you forgotten the two tuck-hampers I've been carrying for you?"

Doctor Birchermall frowned. For some reason he seemed to get no satisfaction out of the mention of his tuck-hampers. Then he pondered deeply; and finally a crafty smile appeared on his face.

"Have you boys brought back anything with you?" he asked.

"Yes, rather, sir! We've got a tuck-hamper apiece!"

"Good! Then the situation is saved!"

grinned the Head. "In this dilemmer, boys, we will stand in together. Let's pool our resources and share and share alike. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Oh, quite, sir!"

"Then let us adjern at once and share and share alike!" said the Head. "After we have done the sharing-out stunt, we can eat our respective shares later at our lezzure. Bring all your hampers along to my study, boys!"

Forthwith, the hampers were carried along to the Head's study.

Jack Jolly & Co. opened their hampers to reve tippin' assortment of eatables, which they laid out on the Head's table.

Then Doctor Birchermall opened his.

Jack Jolly & Co. blinked at those two hampers and gasped.

It was not tuck that was revealed inside them—but a collection of shirts and collars and other articles of wearing apparel!

"My hat!" cried Jack Jolly. "Where's the tuck, sir?"

"The Head cooed. 'Ahen! I used the hampers to put some of my clothes in, as a matter of fact, Jolly. Nevertheless, there is some tuck underneath. Half-a-jiffy!'"

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