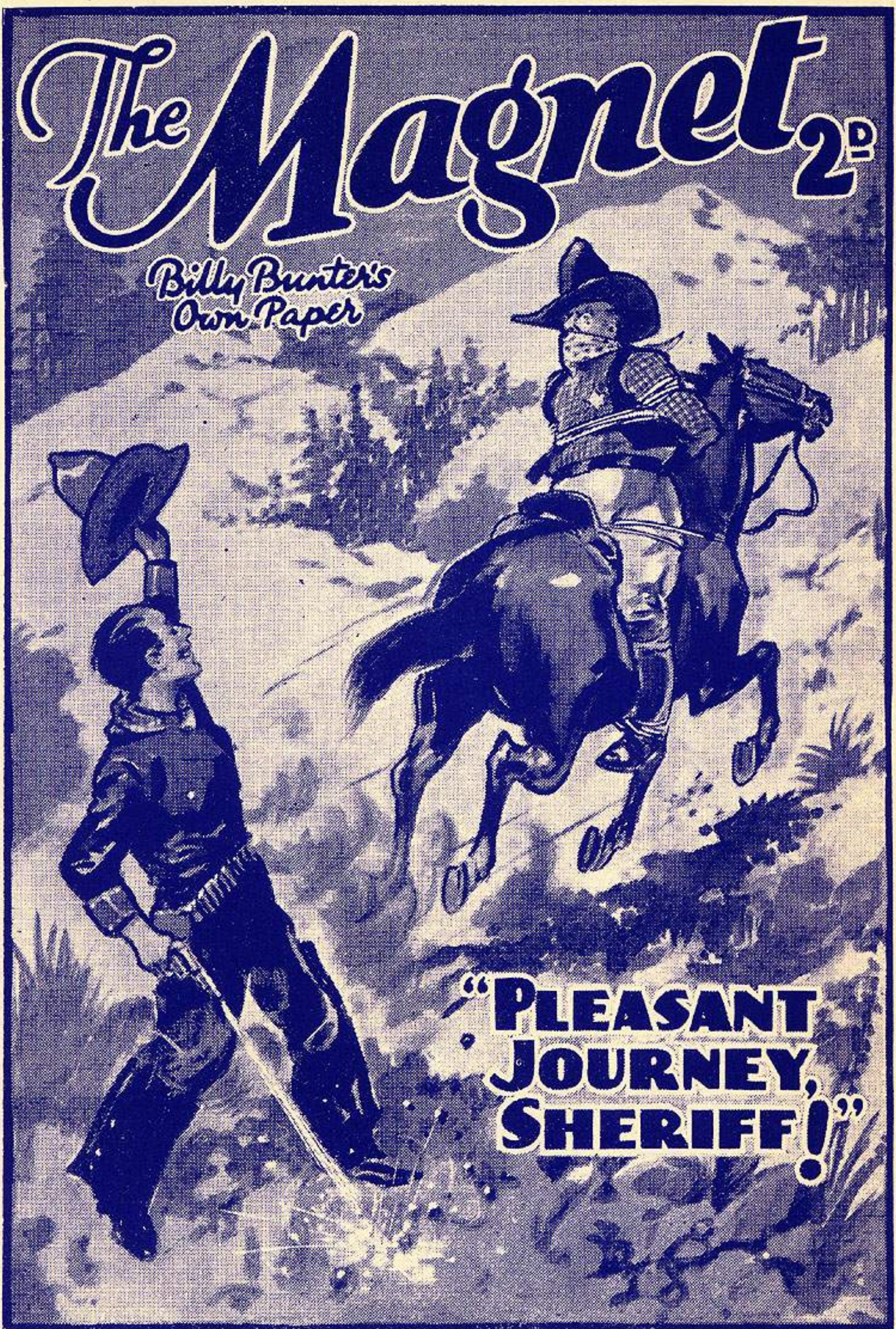


“ THE TRAIL-THIEF’S SECRET ! ” Wild West Thriller, Starring Harry Wharton & Co.

The Magnet ^{2^D}

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



“ PLEASANT
JOURNEY,
SHERIFF ! ”

THE GREAT ARMAMENTS RACE

10 More First Prizes of New Bikes!

4,000 Other Grand Prizes Still to be Won FREE

MORE Prize News for you, pals! We're all set for the second month's lap in our Stupendous Stamp-Collecting Race. There are still Ten More "Hercules" Bikes, and 4,000 other super Prizes to be won. They're FREE, too!

Every week in MAGNET we are continuing to print Free Armaments Stamps—BATTLESHIPS, SEARCHLIGHTS, GUNS, and so on. There are now six different kinds to be collected. Just cut them out and stick to as many others as you can get hold of. And remember, pals, all the stamps you collected last month (except Bombers and Submarines, which we called in) can be used for this month's contest as well.

There are twenty stamps in all on this page, while if you also read other popular boy's papers like "Modern Boy" and "Gem" you will find more of these stamps in them to help give you a big total.

At the end of June we shall again ask you how many of one or more kinds of stamps you've collected. Which stamps we shall ask for will be a close secret until then.

So go all out to get as many of these stamps as you can. Get your pals to do it, too—swap stamps with them if you like and make the "race" more exciting for everybody.

At the end of June, another Five Bikes and up to 2,000 of the other prizes will be given away! The biggest collections of stamps called for will win—and readers will be asked to say which prizes they want, too!

SAVE THESE STAMPS, PALS!



No stamps to be sent in yet—we will tell you how and where, when the time comes!

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!

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 (given at the end of each month): 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 Armaments Stamps with pals who read "Gem," "Modern Boy," "Detective Weekly," "Triumph," "Thriller," "Sports Budget," "Champion," and "Boy's Cinema."



ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD for the capture, dead or alive, of the mysterious marauder who, disguised in a flour-bag, shot a bank messenger from Prairie Bend and got away with twenty thousand dollars! All Packsaddle believe that the Rio Kid is the hold-up man. But Harry Wharton & Co. know otherwise. Thanks to Billy Bunter, they are wise to—

The TRAIL-THIEF'S SECRET!

By FRANK RICHARDS



"Now, ain't it pleasant for old friends to meet this-a-way?" said the Rio Kid, smiling over his six-gun. "Don't you worry, sheriff—I ain't going to spill your juice, not if you're a good baby!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows How!

"BURNING daylight!" roared Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter woke up quite suddenly.

Bunter was not easy to wake. When it came to sleeping, Rip Van Winkle himself had nothing on Billy Bunter.

But Bob Cherry of the Greyfriars Remove had a powerful voice. His friends had compared it to the dulcet tones of the Bull of Bashan, who was famed for his roaring. When Bob bent over Bunter's fat head and bawled into a fat ear, even Bunter had to wake up.

Two little round eyes opened and blinked peevishly at Bob's ruddy, cheery face.

"Beast!" was Bunter's first remark.

"Roll out, old fat man!" said Bob.

"Tain't rising-bell!" hooted Bunter.

Bob chuckled.

Emerging from the mists and shadows of sleep, the fat Owl of the Remove did not remember for the moment that he was some thousands of miles from Greyfriars School.

"Past rising-bell, old porpoise!" said Bob.

"Well, I never heard it!" yapped Bunter.

"You hardly would, old bean!" chortled Bob. "You've got a good size in ears, but you won't hear the Greyfriars rising-bell across the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico!"

Billy Bunter groped for his spectacles, jammed them on a fat little nose, and gave Bob Cherry a devastating blink.

"What's the time?" he demanded.

"Nine o'clock!"

"Think I'm getting up at nine o'clock on holiday?" roared Bunter. "Wharrer you mean, you beast? Gerrout, and leave a fellow alone!"

"But we want you, old fat man!" urged Bob. "Any other day you can sleep the clock round if you like. But we want you to-day. Fancy anybody wanting you, old bloated bean? Docsn't that buck you?"

Billy Bunter did not look bucked; he looked exasperated.

Hitherto, while the Greyfriars fellows

It's thrills, thrills, and STILL MORE THRILLS for HARRY WHARTON & Co., 'way out in Texas!

had stayed at Kicking Cayuse Ranch, nobody had bothered whether Bunter turned out before or after noon, or whether he turned out at all.

In fact, the later he stayed in bed, the less the other fellows saw of him, which really was so much to the good.

Bunter did not think much of Texas or of Kicking Cayuse Ranch; but there was, at least, one solid comfort—he could stay in bed as late as he liked at the rancho in the Frio valley.

Now—for the first time in history, so to speak—he was wanted. Owing to a

strange conjunction of circumstances, Billy Bunter was the "goods" on that particular morning.

But if Harry Wharton & Co. fancied that Bunter was going to turn out early just because they happened to want him for once, the famous Co. had another guess coming. Bunter wasn't!

"We're all ready to ride over to Packsaddle to see the sheriff," Bob explained. "No good going without you, Bunty. You're wanted, old fat man! Up you get!"

"Beast!"

"Smithy's getting his hair off already, and—"

"Blow Smithy!"

"Blow him as much as you like," agreed Bob, "but turn out!"

"I'm not going to turn out for another hour yet!" grunted Bunter. "And after that I shall want brekker! Better leave it till this afternoon, I think."

"Think again!" suggested Bob.

"Now shut up while I go to sleep!"

"Like me to help you out?" asked Bob.

"If you touch those bedclothes, you rotter, I'll— Yoo-hoop! Leave those blankets alone! Beast!" roared Bunter, as his bedclothes went.

Billy Bunter sat up in his pyjamas—or, to be more exact, a suit of Frank Nugent's pyjamas. He sat and glared, but he did not roll out. If anything could have made Billy Bunter more determined to stay in bed, it was the fact that he was wanted to turn out! Bunter being, for once, a fellow who

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was urgently wanted, Bunter was the fellow to take full advantage of that circumstance, and to throw his weight about to an unlimited extent.

"Gimme those bedclothes!" he hissed. "Now, look here, old porpoise—" urged Bob.

There was a footstep on the landing outside—or, rather, a stamp. It sounded like the tread of a fellow who was very impatient. Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in at the doorway.

"Isn't that fat fool up yet?" he snapped. "Bunter, you lazy fat ass, we're ready to ride over to Packsaddle, and—"

"Ride, and be blowed!" retorted Bunter.

"You've got to come with us, you podgy piffler!" exclaimed the Bounder of Greyfriars angrily. "What's the good of us going without you when it's you that's got information for the sheriff?"

"I'll go this afternoon—" "You'll go this morning!" hooted the Bounder. "Roll off that bed, you fat slacker, or I'll come and roll you off!"

"That's the way you treat a guest here, is it?" sneered Bunter. "Not the way I talk to a guest at Bunter Court, Smithy!"

"Are you getting out?"

"No, you beast!" Vernon-Smith strode into the room, grabbed the fat Owl of the Remove by a fat neck, and rolled him bodily off the bed.

Bunter landed with a bump and a yell.

Bob Cherry grinned.

It was unusual, no doubt, for a host to handle a guest in that unceremonious manner, and Billy Bunter, as well as the Famous Five, was a guest at Kicking Cayuse. Moreover, he was—in his own esteem, at least—the most distinguished and important of Smithy's guests at the Texas ranch.

But the Bounder of Greyfriars, never very patient, had no patience at all to waste on that particular guest. Billy Bunter had hooked on to the party for Texas, and never till now had Smithy wanted him. Now that he did want him, Bunter was not going to be allowed to say nay.

"Now, get dressed!" snapped the Bounder.

"Shan't!" shrieked Bunter.

"Go it, old fat bean!" urged Bob Cherry. "You're the goods to-day, Bunter, old frog! You spotted that hold-up man in the flour-bag, with the flour-bag off his chivvy. You can tell the sheriff about it. You're a fearfully important chap for once, old porpoise! No other man of any use at all! Think of that!"

"Beast!"

"Now," said Vernon-Smith, "I'll give you five minutes, Bunter! If you're not down in five minutes, I'll come up again and roll you down the stairs just as you are! Mind, I mean that!"

"Rotter!" gasped Bunter. "I'll jolly well lock you out!"

"Will you?" said Vernon-Smith. He jerked the key out of the lock. "We'll see about that!"

"Yah! Cad!" roared Bunter, as the Bounder stamped out, with the key in his hand.

Bob Cherry followed him. But in the doorway he turned to urge the fat Owl once more.

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Beast! Gerroul!"

"Well, Smithy means it," said Bob.

"Better come down, or you'll be rolled down like a barrel!"

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And Bob followed the angry Bounder down the stairs.

Billy Bunter was left snorting with rage.

He did not turn back into bed. It was no use turning back into bed, to be yanked out five minutes later by that unspeakable beast, Herbert Vernon-Smith. Neither could he lock Smithy out with the key gone. Billy Bunter was more determined than ever not to turn out, but he was quite at a loss for a few minutes.

Then he grinned a fat grin.

He could not lock his own door, but there were other doors he could lock. He put his head out of the doorway and blinked towards the stairs. From below, in the hall-way of the ranch-house, came a buzz of voices.

Bunter rolled out, and rolled rapidly into the next room, which happened to be Johnny Bull's. Bunter did not mind whose room it was, so long as he could lock himself in it.

He slammed the door, turned the key, and chuckled.

"He, he, he!" Then he parked himself in Johnny Bull's bed.

With a grunt of fat contentment, he drew blankets over him, and settled down to repose. And in less than a minute, a rumbling snore announced that once more slumber's chain had bound him!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Wrathy!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. smiled. The Bounder scowled.

The six Removites of Greyfriars were waiting in the hall-way—for Bunter!

Vernon-Smith had his eye on the clock in the living-room, through the open doorway. He was giving Bunter five minutes, as he had said. If Bunter did not arrive at the expiration of the fifth minute, the Bounder's expression indicated that something drastic and unpleasant was going to happen to Bunter.

As the son of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the owner of the ranch, Smithy was host, and had to do the honours of Kicking Cayuse. The way he did the honours, so far as Billy Bunter was concerned, made the Famous Five smile.

They were as keen to get off to Packsaddle as the Bounder was, but they were rather more patient and good-tempered. There was not a lot of time to lose, as the cow town was fifteen miles away. They wanted to see Sheriff Lick, of Packsaddle, at the earliest possible moment.

On any other occasion they would have been glad enough to leave Bunter in bed, while they enjoyed a gallop across the Texas prairies. A ride with Bunter had to go to slow time! A gallop with Bunter, would have meant frequent halts, to pick him up and stick him on his horse again. They did not expect to enjoy a ride with Bunter! But Bunter, whose unimportance was generally unlimited, was now, as it happened, indispensable.

Bunter—and only Bunter—had seen the face of the mysterious trail-thief, who disguised himself in a flour-bag, and who had held up the hack from Prairie Bend, shot the bank messenger, and got away with twenty thousand dollars!

Hidden in a thicket, the fat Owl had seen, with his own eyes, and his own spectacles, that mysterious marauder

remove the flour-bag from his head, and disclose his unknown features!

His description of the man was vague. Bunter was not good at description! But there was no doubt that he would know the man again, if he saw him! And he could, at least, state definitely to the sheriff that the man was not, as all Packsaddle believed, the outlaw who was known by the name of the Rio Kid.

That was an unimportant point, for the sheriff and his deputies were hunting the Rio Kid: while the actual trail-thief skulked unsuspected in security—with twenty thousand dollars in his pockets.

As those stolen dollars were the property of Smithy's father, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, it was no wonder that the Bounder was keen, and impatient, and eager to lose no time.

Certainly he was not likely to wait patiently while Billy Bunter spent another hour in bed, and a further hour over breakfast—and then left the ride till the afternoon, in order not to miss dinner!

"The fat frump!" muttered the Bounder. "The lazy fat blighter! If he doesn't come down, he will do that staircase in one!"

"Give him a call!" suggested Harry Wharton.

"I'm going up to fetch him, in exactly another minute!" snorted the Bounder.

Johnny Bull stepped to the foot of the stairs.

"Bunter!" he shouted.

There was no answer from above.

"Buck up, Bunter," called out Frank Nugent, "we're waiting!"

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" called out Hurree Janset Rant Singh.

"Get a move on! The absurd Smithy is getting terrifically infuriated."

No reply from Bunter.

"The fat rotter!" breathed the Bounder. "Isn't it like him, to put on roll, just because he's wanted for once? That fool, Lick will be riding out—hunting for the wrong man! There's half a dozen parties out hunting him, while Bunter can tell the silly fools that he's not the man. And all the time that hold-up man is laughing up his sleeve with my father's roll of notes in his pocket."

"Come on, Bunter!" shouted Harry Wharton.

But Bunter did not come on, and he did not reply. Bunter passed the calling voices by, like the idle wind which he regarded not.

The Bounder set his lips.

"Every hour's precious!" he said. "If we don't get that roll of dollars back, I shall have to cable to my father for another lot. I've fixed it now to buy Jad Blake's ranch, and I couldn't back out, even if I wanted to. It's a bargain at twenty thousand dollars—but if the pater has to pay twice over, he will wish that I'd never heard of it. The Circle O's not worth twice twenty thousand dollars, or anything like it! We've got to get hold of that thief, and get the dollars back."

Harry Wharton & Co. could quite understand and sympathise with, the Bounder's feelings on the subject.

The Circle O was for sale, and it adjoined the Kicking Cayuse: and as Jad Blake, the owner, was a reckless gambler in pressing need of money, he was letting his ranch go at a bargain price.

Smithy had been quite bucked, at securing that handsome bargain for his father: and Mr. Vernon-Smith who had full reliance on his son's judgment, had cabled out the cash without question.

But he was likely to take quite a different view, if he learned that that cash, instead of being paid over in the lawyer's office at Packsaddle for the Circle O ranch, had disappeared into the pockets of a masked trail-thief.

He could not be expected to feel pleased, if he had to cable out a similar sum over again! At twenty thousand dollars, the Circle O was a bargain. At forty thousand dollars it most decidedly was not.

Smithy was fiercely anxious to get back the plunder, if he could, instead of reporting that heavy loss to the millionaire at home.

His eyes were on the clock! He was not giving the fat Owl an additional second.

"Time's up!" he snapped: and he tramped savagely up the stairs.

Bob grinned.

"Better go up, too," he remarked.

"Bunter's an exasperating ass—but we can't let Smithy slaughter him."

And the Famous Five followed Vernon-Smith up the stairs.

They arrived on the landing as the Bounder was stamping into Bunter's room.

"Now, you fat rotter—Oh, gad! Where is that fat slug?" exclaimed the Bounder, in tones of intense exasperation.

"Isn't he there?" asked Bob Cherry, glancing in.

"Can't you see he isn't?" snapped Vernon-Smith. "What the thump—he hasn't come down—where—"

"Listen to the band!" grinned Bob.

Snore!

That unmelodious sound floated out over the landing. It came from the room adjoining Bunter's.

The fat Owl evidently was asleep again—but not in his own room! He had taken advantage of the respite to change his quarters.

The Famous Five grinned—they could not help it! But the Bounder did not grin! He scowled savagely, as he tramped to the door of Johnny Bull's room, and turned the handle.

The door did not open!

Vernon-Smith rattled the handle furiously.

"Bunter!" he roared.

Snore!

"You fat scoundrel, come out!" yelled the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy. I wish you'd keep quiet!" came a peevish voice from within. "I haven't got your room. You made an ill-bred fuss the time I took your room. I'm all right here! But do keep quiet!"

"We're waiting for you, Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Wait, and be blowed!"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—"

"Shut up, Inky!"

"Will you come out?" roared the Bounder.

"No, I won't!"

"You've got to come over to Packsaddle with us!" yelled Smithy.

"I'll come this afternoon."

"You'll come this morning!"

"Shan't!"

The Bounder stood breathing rage. He kicked the door—uselessly. Strong pine-wood easily resisted the heftiest kick. He glared round at the Famous Five, who tried to suppress their smiles. They could not help being entertained by the antics of the fat Owl of the Remove: but it was clear that Herbert Vernon-Smith was not in the least entertained.

"You fat rotter!" roared the Bounder.

"If you don't come out, I'll have the door broken in."

Snore!

"Do you hear, you footling fathead?"

Snore!

Billy Bunter was snoring—whether he was asleep again or not. The Bounder choked with rage.

"I—I—I'll smash him!" he gasped.

"The fat, blithering bloater!" He tramped down the stairs again, the Famous Five grinning as they followed, and, in the hall-way, he shouted for the choreman, "Chick!"

Chick, the plump choreman of Kicking Cayuse, put his face out of the kitchen doorway. He glanced inquiringly at the enraged Bounder.

"Shoot!" said Chick.

"That fat fool, Bunter, has locked himself in Bull's room! Get an axe and break in the door!" snapped the Bounder.

"Smithy, old man—" murmured Bob Cherry.

"My dear chap—" said Harry Wharton.

"My esteemed Smithy—"

"Can it, you!" snapped the Bounder.

"Do you hear me, Chick? Get that fat fool out, and when you've got him, sling him down the stairs."

"I should smile!" said Chick, grinning from ear to ear. And he went back into his kitchen to sort out implements.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stamped out of the rancho. And the Famous Five, with rather expressive expressions on their faces, followed him out.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Surprise for the Sheriff!

SHERIFF LICK of Packsaddle, glanced out of the open doorway of his office into the sunny plaza of the cow town.

The bronzed, bearded face of the Texan sheriff was grim that morning.

In the plaza—the square still called by its old Spanish name—horsemen were gathering; and every man among them packed a rifle as well as a Colt. They were the sheriff's "deputies"—called up to take the trail; and most of them keen enough for that trail. The cow town of Packsaddle was seething with excitement from end to end—and on every tongue was a name that was known throughout Texas—the name of the Rio Kid.

That morning the sheriff's posse were going to "comb" Squaw Mountain for the elusive Kid; and if they found him there, it was likely that the wild career of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande would come to a sudden termination by means of a rope and a branch.

But whether even a dozen determined hunters would find the Kid was dubious, and the sheriff of Packsaddle would have given much to get a "line" on his hide-out. Anyhow, he was going to hunt the Kid, and hunt him hard.

From the prairie trail, a horseman rode into the cow town, and the sheriff's glance turned on him for a moment. Punchers were coming in from the neighbouring ranches to join the posse. But this was not a puncher—the newcomer wore a tattered scrape folded round him, and an immense sombrero that hid his face down to the chin, the brim being turned down. He looked like a Mexican from his garb, and there were no "greasers" in the sheriff's posse, so Mr. Lick gave him only that one careless glance, and then disregarded him.

But the horseman rode direct to the sheriff's office. He drew rein there, and sat his horse—an Indian mustang with a white nose—looking at the bunch gathering in the plaza. Then he looked

at the sheriff in the doorway of his office.

"Senor Lick?" he asked.

Mr. Lick glanced round again. Under the big sombrero, he saw the horseman's chin—with a black beard on it.

"Yep!" he grunted.

"I have news for you, senor."

Sheriff Lick gave keen attention at once. If "news" meant news of the man he was hunting, Mr. Lick was extremely keen to hear it. On that particular morning, Mr. Lick had no use for any other news.

"You go in search of the Rio Kid, senor?"

"Sure!" exclaimed the sheriff. "By the great horned toad, if you got a line on him, greaser, spill it pronto. Mebbe you know there's a thousand dollars reward on that firebug! You step right in!"

The Mexican—if he were a Mexican—dismounted, hitched his horse to the post, and followed the sheriff into his office.

Sheriff Lick eyed him eagerly. He had no particular use for greasers, but if this greaser could put him on the trail of the Rio Kid, Mr. Lick was prepared to welcome him like a man and a brother.

"You've seen that firebug?" he asked.

"I have seen him."

"On Squaw Mountain?"

"In his hide-out on Squaw Mountain, senor!"

Sheriff Lick breathed hard and deep.

"By the great horned toad," he said, "you allow you can put your finger on the Rio Kid's hide-out?"

"I know it as well as the Kid does, senor!"

"Shoot!" said Mr. Lick eagerly.

The man in the sombrero and the black beard glanced out of the doorway. Then, to the sheriff's surprise, he caught the door and flung it to.

But the next moment the sheriff of Packsaddle was still more surprised. From under the voluminous scrape that was belted round the newcomer a hand lifted, with a six-gun in it.

That six-gun looked the sheriff of Packsaddle fairly in his astonished face. And from under the slouched sombrero came a voice in quite a different tone—clear and terse.

"Hands up, sheriff!"

Like a man in a dream, Sheriff Lick lifted his hands over his head, staring blankly at the stranger. The levelled Colt was not six feet from him, and there was a finger crooked on the trigger. Outside the office his men were parading in the plaza, some of them hardly a dozen yards distant. But the door was shut, and no eye could fall on what was passing in the sheriff's office.

With the gun steady as a rock in his right, the "Mexican" pushed up the slouched brim of the sombrero with his left.

The sheriff's starting eyes fixed on his face.

The black beard on the chin was matched by a black moustache on the upper lip, and heavy black eyebrows. But now that he could see the face clear of the shadow of the hat, the features seemed familiar to Mr. Lick. Anyone passing that "guy" on the street would have taken him for a Mexican; but at a close inspection, with his hat pushed back, it could be seen that the features were not in the least Spanish in cast, and the eyes were a deep, clear blue.

There was a cheery grin on the face.

"Keep 'em up, sheriff!" said the voice—a pleasant, drawling voice quite unlike that in which the newcomer had first spoken. "I guess I've horned in

to chew the rag with you a piece; but I sure don't want to spill your vinegar over the floor of this here office if you're good."

Sheriff Lick gasped.

"Not the Kid?" he breathed.

But he knew that it was the Kid—he knew those clear blue eyes and handsome features now, in spite of the black eyebrows and moustache and beard. It was the Rio Kid—the man he was going to hunt—here, in his office in Packsaddle, with his men within call! Well, he knew the Kid's wild and reckless reputation—but this took his breath away. He stared at the Kid—he goggled at him—and the Kid grinned back at him over the gun.

"You said it!" he agreed.

He laughed.

"Keep on reaching for the roof, sheriff! And don't let out a yaup—unless you're honing to squeak your last squeak! I sure have no hunch for meeting your galoots yonder, this minute."

The sheriff put his hands up. His eyes were on the door. Any minute his chief deputy, Mike Hilligan, might come in, to tell him that his men were ready to ride—or any of the posse might enter. Sheriff Lick lounged and yearned to see the door open.

The Kid, smiling, backed a little, so that he could keep an eye on the door, as well as one on the sheriff.

"You doggoned firebug!" said Mr. Lick hoarsely. "What are you doing here?"

"Jest at the moment, I'm holding up a big stiff, name of Lick!" said the Kid cheerily. "But I ain't come a-shooting, sheriff! I jest want to chew the rag with you a piece. I reckon you're aiming to trail down this baby, but I don't figure that you're going to have a heap of luck. I've jest horned in to put you wise, and warn you off."

The sheriff eyed him almost wolfishly.

"They put a heap down to me," went on the Kid. "But I'm telling you, sheriff, that since I rode into Frio valley, there ain't any guy in this section that's been the worse for it. I jest landed hereabouts for a rest from the Texas Rangers. Now they've gone off on a false trail, and I got an easy time—if you let me alone, Lick! Me, I'm as harmless as a baby, if I ain't crowded."

"Why, you doggoned firebug and hoodlum!" said the sheriff. "Only yesterday you held up the hack from Prairie Bend, and shot the bank messenger, and got away with twenty thousand dollars. What you giving me?"

"The goods, sheriff!" said the Kid quietly. "That galoot who held up the hack and shot Bud Carter had his face covered by a flour-bag, and I guess I ain't wise to him any more than you are. But it was not this infant, sheriff."

The sheriff gave a contemptuous snort.

"I guess it's too late to spin that tale, Kid!" he snapped. "Why, you gave your name to Andy Jones, who drove the hack when you halted him on the trail. Old Wash was in the hack, and he heard you. I guess you can't go back on that."

"You sure are a bonehead, Mr. Lick," said the Kid. "I'll say I've never covered my frontispiece with a flour-bag in my life—I sure ain't afraid to be seen. That guy that stopped the hack was some doggoned scallawag who figured on keeping clear by sending you and your deputies hunting the wrong man—jest what you're doing, sheriff!"

"Aw, can it!" snapped the sheriff.

"You believe that?" asked the Kid.

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"Not so's you'd notice it!" answered the sheriff sarcastically.

"I ain't the man, sheriff!" said the Kid earnestly. "There sure is a guy cavorting around, holding up galoots on the trails and calling himself the Rio Kid, jest to keep you fooled. I reckon if you saw his face without the flour-bag over it you'd mebbe see a guy you know in this here cow town."

"Pack it up!" said the sheriff.

"I come here to put you wise, sheriff," said the Kid. "I guess I could ride out of this valley of the Frio, and you and all your bunch couldn't stop me—but I ain't going, and leaving that guy gunning around in my name! That game's been played afore, sheriff, and I sure put paid to it—and I aim to do the same here at Packsaddle. I'm going to get that guy, sheriff."

"You ain't going to string me along with a tale like that!" said the sheriff. "You got me under your gun, Kid; but I guess you won't get out of town easy. I'm telling you you're going up on a rope for shooting up that Prairie Bend guy when you held up Andy's hack."

"I'll say you're Texas' prize boob, Lick!" said the Kid. "I've horned in here to put you wise and keep you off my trail. I ain't come to the Frio valley a-shooting, but there sure will be powder burned if you crowd me."

"Mebbe!" said the sheriff. "But I'm going to crowd you, good and hard, Kid—and I'm telling you so, under your gun."

"I guess I've wasted time on a bonehead like you!" grunted the Kid. "I sure fixed myself up in Mexican whiskers and painted my cayuse's nose white, jest to call in and put you wise! And you ain't taking it in?"

"Not by a jugful!" said the sheriff.

There was a step outside.

The sheriff, still with his hands up, caught his breath, and his eyes gleamed, as the latch lifted.

The Rio Kid's second gun whipped out from under the Mexican serape, and it whipped to a level as the door was thrown open and a man strode in. The man who entered was Jad Blake, rancher of the Circle O.

"Say, sheriff—" he began.

Then, as he broke off, staring in surprise at the sheriff with his hands in the air, a soft voice spoke.

"Hands up, feller! Pronto!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Kid's Way!

JAD BLAKE stared, blankly.

He was taken utterly by surprise. His right hand made an instinctive movement towards the butt of the Colt in the holster at his belt. But he checked himself at once. He was covered by the six-gun in the hand of the man who looked like a Mexican. Slowly, in angry amazement, the rancher of the Circle O raised his hands above his head. He stared at the Kid, and he stared at the sheriff. He seemed dumbfounded.

"What—" he stuttered.

"It's the Kid!" breathed the sheriff.

"The Rio Kid?"

"Sure!" smiled the Kid. "Kick that door shut behind you, Mr. Blake—I ain't honing to see any more visitors."

Blake hesitated—but he kicked the door shut. The sheriff's brief hope had vanished. The newcomer had entered without the slightest suspicion of what was going on in the sheriff's office; the Kid had him covered, and he was as powerless as the sheriff. For the moment,

at least, the boy outlaw held all the cards—both of them at his mercy.

"By the great horned toad!" breathed Jad Blake. "You won't get by with this, Kid! There's a dozen guys outside—"

"I ain't staying long!" grinned the Kid. "I jest horned in to explain to the sheriff that I ain't the guy he wants—but it sure ain't no use talking horse-sense to that big bonehead. Mebbe you'll oblige me, Mr. Blake, by walking across to the sheriff and standing back and back to that galoot."

Again Blake hesitated, but the levelled Colt and the blue eyes gleaming over it enforced obedience.

Blake, breathing hard, stepped to Mr. Lick, and backed against the sheriff's back. Standing back to back, with their hands in the air, they were both under a gun—and the Kid slipped one of the Colts under his serape. Then with his left hand he jerked a looped cord from under the cloak.

Two faces were red with rage as he threw the loop over the four hands that were in the air.

But neither the sheriff nor the rancher ventured to make a movement to resist. They were glad enough that the outlaw took this method of securing them, instead of burning powder.

The Kid jerked the loop tight.

Four wrists were bunched together in the cord, over the heads of the rancher and the sheriff.

Then the Kid, grinning, holstered his gun, and knotted the cord.

He stepped back and surveyed the two, with cheery amusement. They were panting with rage. But they were quite helpless.

"I guess I'll be hitting the horizon," drawled the Kid. "Mebbe your side-kickers will be looking in soon, sheriff—and I'll say they'll get a big laugh when they find you fixed up that-a-way!"

"Doggone you!" hissed the sheriff.

"Jest once more, sheriff. I'm telling you that I ain't the man you want—you sure got to root over Packsaddle for that guy in the flour-bag!" said the Kid. "Chew on it, sheriff—and don't come gunning after this baby! I reckon this here cow town may want a noo sheriff if you do."

The Kid waited a moment for a reply; but only an enraged glare from the sheriff answered him. He shrugged his shoulders, and, taking the sheriff's neck-scarf, twisted it round the two heads, over the two mouths, and knotted it, effectually gagging both the sheriff and the rancher.

Over the gagging neck-scarf the two prisoners glared with fury. The Kid gave a low laugh.

"Yep!" he remarked. "I guess them guys yonder will get a big laugh when they rouse you out, sheriff!"

He turned to the door, still laughing, opened it, and stepped out, shutting the door after him.

Sheriff Lick almost choked, in his attempt to utter a yell, in spite of the gagging scarf.

He was able only to utter a suffocated mumble.

The Kid was going! With his outward aspect of a Mexican, he was free to ride—under the very noses of the sheriff's posse, and not a hand would be raised to stop him.

Sheriff Lick gurgled with rage.

There was a clatter of hoofs in the street outside! The Rio Kid was riding away to the prairie!

The sound of his mustang died away. He was gone.

In the sheriff's office the two men wriggled and wrenched, in silent fury. But there was no chance of getting loose. They could not get their hands down—



Taking the sheriff's neck-scarf, the Kid twisted it round the two heads, over the mouths, and knotted it, effectually gagging both the sheriff and the rancher. "I guess them guys at Packsaddle will get a big laugh when they rouse you out, sheriff!" said the boy outlaw.

their wrists were bunched together over their heads, tied in a bunch. There was no escape for them, till someone came into the office.

That was not likely to be long; but, frantically eager as the sheriff was to get loose and get after the Kid, he fairly cringed at the prospect of being found in that ridiculous posture.

But there was no help for it. Five minutes of wrenching and wriggling and suffocated gurgling had passed, when the door was opened and Mike Hilligan came in.

"The boys sure are waiting, sheriff," said the deputy, as he entered. "We—Thunder! What the great horned toad—"

He broke off, staring at the sheriff and the rancher. For a moment or two there was blank amazement in his face. Then he roared.

"Haw, haw! Say, what's the game? Who fixed you up that-a-way, sheriff?"

Sheriff Lick could not speak. But his look was eloquent. The rage in Jad Blake's face was almost demoniac.

Mike, still chuckling, stepped to them, and dragged away the gagging neck-scarf. Two or three faces looked in at the doorway—and then a dozen others joined them.

There was a buzz of voices outside the sheriff's office—and a ripple of laughter.

Who had done this, was as yet unknown; but it was clear that there had been a hold-up, in the sheriff's office; and the way Mr. Lick and Jad Blake had been left fixed up struck the Packsaddle men as funny.

The sheriff's face burned as he heard the laughter.

"Git me loose, Mike, you doggoned stiff!" he hissed, as soon as he could speak. "You big bonehead, git me loose!"

"Sure!" gasped Mike. He whipped out a knife to cut the cord, still grinning. "Say, sheriff, who—"

"The Kid!" hissed the sheriff. "The Rio Kid's been here, you goob, and you've let him ride off under your fool nose!"

"Search me!" gasped Mike.

"Git my cayuse!" roared the sheriff. "I guess he ain't a mile off yet. Mebbe we'll get him before he gets to Squaw Mountain. Hustle, you sniggering gecks! Did I say hustle?"

The sheriff's men, still grinning, hustled. Hardly a minute after Mr. Lick and the rancher were freed they were riding out of Packsaddle at the head of the posse, burning with rage and the thirst of vengeance. The hunt for the Rio Kid was up once more.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Pursuit On The Prairie!

"I 'LL tell a man!" ejaculated Bill Buck, foreman of Kicking Cayuse.

Bill stood in the gateway at Kicking Cayuse, staring across the prairie to the northward. Yuba Dick and Frio Pete, and Cactus, the horse-wrangler, and two or three more of the outfit, stood round him, also staring.

Harry Wharton & Co., coming out of the ranch-house, glanced towards the group and came over to see what was going on.

Faintly, from a far distance, came a crack, crack, crack of firearms, borne on the wind.

"Shooting!" said Vernon-Smith. "Who—"

"I guess some guys are burning powder, Mister Vernon-Smith, sir!" said Bill. "I'll say it's some rookus! I'll tell a man!"

The juniors looked across the sea of waving grass that extended from the ranch seemingly to the rim of the blue

sky. Far away, moving dots might have been stetson hats on the heads of riders, but they were too far off to be made out clearly by the keenest eyes.

But the sound of firing, though distant, was unmistakable. The sound was moving westward, towards the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain, that barred the western sky.

"I guess that's the sheriff's bunch after the Rio Kid!" remarked Yuba Dick.

"You said it!" agreed Bill.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob.

Vernon-Smith set his lips.

"Fools!" he grunted.

He had no doubt that Yuba had guessed right. Ever since the holding-up of the hack and the shooting of the bank messenger from Prairie Bend the hunt for the Rio Kid had been fast and hot. All Packsaddle believed that the Kid was the hold-up man, though the Greyfriars fellows knew otherwise.

The Famous Five, as they watched across the sea of grass, had rather anxious faces.

They could not wish the sheriff luck in his pursuit. Not only because they knew that he was after the wrong man, but for other reasons.

Whether the Rio Kid had held up the hack or not, he was an outlaw, hunted by sheriffs and rangers, and it was Mr. Lick's duty to rope him in, if he could. But it was the Kid, hunted outlaw as he was, who had saved Vernon-Smith from death in the wild waters when he was being swept over the fall in the Squaw River, on the rocky side of Squaw Mountain. Smithy was hardly likely to forget that the outlaw's lasso had plucked him back from death—neither were Smithy's friends.

"They're sure after him!" said Bill, with a nod. "Mebbe he's been shooting up the town agin, like he did afore."

That Kid sure is a lively guy, and he does hunt for trouble."

The distant moving dots were passing westward, from the direction of Packsaddle, which lay to the east, towards Squaw Mountain. If it were, indeed, a chase of the Rio Kid, it looked as if he had been at the cow town. But the riders were too far off to be seen, and the sound of firing faded away across the western prairies.

Bill went back to his occupations; but the Greyfriars fellows remained at the gateway, watching the distant prairie. From the direction of the ranch-house came an echoing sound of banging, which sounded as if Chick, the choreman, was carrying out Vernon-Smith's instructions.

But the juniors did not heed it. They could not help thinking of the handsome, sunburnt young Texan they had met on Squaw Mountain, whom, outlaw as he was, they liked and admired. The Kid had told them—and they fully believed him—that he had been outlawed for no fault of his own, though many a wild and reckless act since had made it impossible for him to get back. Now he was hunted for another man's crime. It was even possible that the very man who had worn the flour-bag and held up the hack was riding in the sheriff's posse, unknown and unsuspected.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly.

A stetson hat nodded into view, coming through the grass towards the ranch. It was not on a horseman, and the juniors, surprised to see a man on foot on the plains, stared at it as it approached.

"Blake!" exclaimed the Bounder as he saw the face under the stetson.

"The chap whose ranch you're buying, Smithy!" said Nugent.

"That's the chap—Poker Blake!"

Blake, as he came nearer, could be seen to be panting for breath, and the expression on his face was savage, and positively evil. He panted, and panted as he came up to the ranch, and arrived on the spot where the schoolboys stood.

"Lost your horse?" asked the Bounder, puzzled.

No man in the Packsaddle country ever went afoot, and Blake had a saddle under his arm.

"I guess that doggoned outlaw shot it under me!" answered Blake, his voice coming in a hoarse gasp of rage. "I've hit this ranch to get a cayuse!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Smithy. "You've been riding with the sheriff's posse?"

"You said it."

"After the Rio Kid?"

"Sure! Where's Bill Buck? I guess he will fix me up with a hoss." The young rancher panted, with fatigue, and dust, and rage. "I'm getting after them, and mebbe I'll be in at the death if they corner him on Squaw."

"How did you get sight of the Kid?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Has he been to Packsaddle again?"

Blake gritted his teeth.

"Ho sure has, doggone him, and he held up the sheriff in his office, under his gun, and got a gun on me when I went in to speak to Lick!" he gritted. "But I guess I ain't got no time to chew the rag! I want a critter."

He tramped in, calling to Bill.

Bill was in the corral busy with horses, with the horse-wrangler. Blake heard his answering voice and went into the corral. He was muttering curses as he went. A tramp of nearly a mile across rugged, dusty prairie, carrying

a saddle and bridle, was enough to "get the goat" of any man in the cow country, and Blake was plainly in the bitterest and blackest temper.

Harry Wharton & Co. had little sympathy to waste on him, however. The sheriff and his men were doing their duty, but they had a very clear idea why Poker Blake had joined in the hunt—he was thinking less of the cause of law and order than of the thousand dollars reward offered for the Rio Kid. The schoolboys certainly hoped that Jad Blake would never lay his hands on that reward.

"I say, you fellows!" came a loud, indignant squeak.

The Famous Five glanced round towards the ranch-house.

From an upper window, of which the shutters had been flung open, a fat face and a big pair of spectacles looked out from Johnny Bull's room.

Billy Bunter waved a fat hand and yelled.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared back Bob Cherry. "Woke up, Bunter?"

"I say, you fellows, come and stop that beast, Chick!" yelled Billy Bunter. "He's bursting in the door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter. "I tell you he's banging at my doot, and he woke me up!"

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

"Will you come and stop him, Smithy?" howled Bunter.

"Hardly! I told him to do it."

"Why, you beast! You awful rotter!" gasped Bunter.

"Bang! Crash!" sounded from the rancho, louder now that the window was open. The choreman was evidently very busy.

Even Billy Bunter could not sleep with that banging at his door. And it was not likely to be long before the choreman got in!

Bunter's very spectacles gleamed with indignation as he glared at the laughing juniors.

"Will you come and stop him?" he yelled.

"No fear!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Blake!" murmured Bob.

Jad Blake came back from the corral, leading a bronco, on which his saddle and bridle had been placed.

The Owl of the Remove, from the distant window, blinked at him, and blinked again.

The short-sighted Owl was too far away to make out Blake's features, but he seemed to discern something familiar, and he blinked at him curiously.

But Blake did not linger; he threw himself into the saddle and rode away at a gallop, heading for Squaw Mountain, in the hope of overtaking the sheriff and his men, and being in "at the death."

But if Billy Bunter was interested in Jad Blake, he forgot his existence the next moment, as the door behind him flew open with a crash.

Chick had got through.

"Beast!" came Bunter's roar. "Ger-rou!"

The juniors, grinning, watched the window. They sighted Chick there for a moment—but only for a moment—for he grasped the fat Owl, and jerked him away. A yell floated out of the window as Bunter disappeared.

The Bounder laughed.

"We'll get off now," he said. "We shall have to crawl with that fat fool along. We'll hit Packsaddle by the time old Lick gets back after making a fool of himself."

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And the juniors went to the corral to saddle up their own horses, and Bunter's, for the ride to the cow town.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Hitting Back!

BILLY BUNTER breathed wrath. Sitting in the saddle of the quietest, tamest bronco that could be found on Kicking Cayuse, Bunter rode at an easy amble, the rest of the party accommodating their pace to his.

He breathed wrath as he rode.

Every now and then he glanced at Herbert Vernon-Smith, with gleaming eyes behind his gleaming spectacles. He gave the Bounder looks of ineffable wrath and scorn.

The wrath of Achilles, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered, had nothing on the wrath of William George Bunter just then.

This was how Smithy treated a guest!

Hooked out of Johnny Bull's room, Bunter had had the choice of dressing, or of being slung downstairs in his pyjamas. He had dressed.

But that was not the worst. As Shakespeare has remarked, thus bad begins, but worse remains behind. Bunter had been allowed ten minutes—no more—for brekker.

Bunter was a quick worker at packing foodstuffs. But in ten minutes, even Bunter could not pack in more than enough for two fellows. So he was still hungry when Vernon-Smith ran him out to mount his horse.

It was useless to raise objections. The fact that Bunter was his guest—a distinguished guest—did not prevent Smithy from landing his boot on Bunter's trousers. It did not prevent him from landing it hard.

So here was Bunter, riding, and frowning to such an extent, that he seemed to be understudying the "frightful, fearful, frantic frown" of the Lord High Executioner!

"Beast!" said Bunter, for the umpteenth time.

"Shut up, idiot!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Cad!" said Bunter. "Swab!"

The Bounder looked disposed to handle his quirt. However, he shrugged his shoulders, and rode on a little ahead. Smithy was not in a good temper, and the pace at which the party had to ride, did not improve his temper.

Bunter, certainly, had a belief that he could ride any other fellow's head off; but the other fellows were aware that if they put on speed, the fat Owl was more likely than not to sail backwards over his horse's tail, or to take a nose-dive over its ears. So they set a moderate pace, which made the fifteen miles to Packsaddle seem almost endless.

Still, it was no use arriving there without Bunter. Amazing and unusual as it was, Bunter was the most important and indispensable member of the whole party. The fat Owl was the "goods"—positively for one occasion only, as it were.

Only Bunter had seen the hidden face of the mysterious trail-thief. Only Bunter could tell the sheriff, as a positive fact, that the man was not the Rio Kid. Only Bunter could identify him, if he walked the street of Packsaddle. He was safe from all eyes but Bunter's.

It was due to the happy chance that

Bunter had been hidden in that patch of chaparral on the prairie when the man in the flour-bag had hunted cover there, to remove his disguise and hide it, after stopping the hack on the stage trail. Bunter, and Bunter alone, spelled danger to the unscrupulous rascal who had borrowed the name of the Rio Kid, and set all Packsaddle hunting the boy outlaw.

Bunter was on his way to the cow town, and his wrath and indignation made no difference to Smithy. He did not guess the deep, dark thoughts that were working in the fat brain of the Owl of the Remove.

It was said of old that a horse could be taken to water, but could not be made to drink. Smithy was hiking Bunter off to the cow town, without giving him even time to park his breakfast. Bunter was not going to arrive at the cow town. He was going to give the party the slip.

"I say, you fellows, what are you crawling like this for?" asked Bunter, when about five miles had been covered.

"To keep you from falling off your gee-gee, fathead!" answered Bob Cherry.

Bunter's fat lip curled.

"I'm accustomed to jealousy," he remarked. "If you fellows could ride like I can, you'd look rather less like sacks of coke. I'll race you to Packsaddle, if you like."

"Oh, do!" grinned Bob. "I've brought my lasso this time, in case your horse gets away as he did yesterday. But Texas is rather hard to hit. Fall on your head, if you can—it will be something soft to fall on."

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. "Well, if you fellows are going to crawl, I'm not! For goodness' sake, don't be so funky! Put on a spot of speed!"

"You fat ass!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Beast!"

"Well, we might accelerate a little, if Bunter's willing to risk it," remarked Frank Nugent. "We shall be late in for dinner at Pop Stork's hotel, anyhow. Come on!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Famous Five were glad enough to put on a little speed. They rode faster, joining the Bounder, who was ahead.

Billy Bunter fell behind them. There was a sly twinkle in his little round eyes behind his big, round spectacles.

Bunter was being very deep.

Having got clear of his companions, he was safe from a grab at his bridle, or a whizzing lasso, when he carried out his vengeful scheme. There was nothing to stop Bunter now from wheeling his horse, and dashing back to the ranch at a gallop. That was how Bunter was going to hit back.

They could gallop after him, if they liked. Bunter was prepared to show them what horsemanship was like, and to lead them a dance.

Bunter fancied he could show them what riding was like. It was rather unfortunate, for the success of his plans, that it was only fancy.

He slowed down as the juniors accelerated, and was about thirty yards behind, when Bob looked and roared:

"Buck up, Bunter! Is that what you call racing?"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

And, having gained a start, Bunter wheeled his horse, gave it a whack with the quirt, and a jab with the

spurs, and dashed back towards Kicking Cayuse at a gallop.

"Bunter!" roared Bob.

"You fat fool!" yelled the Bounder. "What are you up to? By gum, I'll quirt him all over Texas! After him!"

"The howling ass!" gasped Bob. "He's trying to give us the slip!"

"After him!"

The juniors wheeled their broncos, and dashed in pursuit.

Had Billy Bunter been the rider he fancied he was, the start he had gained would have done it. He was well ahead, and no doubt he would have kept ahead all the way back to the ranch.

But Bunter was not the rider he fancied he was. He made that discovery less than a minute after he had started to gallop.

How and why he lost his stirrups and his reins, Bunter did not know, any more than he knew why he landed suddenly on the grassy prairie, and sat there yelling, while his horse careered onward.

He did not know how, or why it happened. But he knew that it did happen; for there he was, bumped and bewildered, with hardly breath enough left in him to yell, though he managed to yell, and quite loudly.

"Oh! Ow! Yoo-hoop! Oh crikey! Wow!" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry dashed on, whirling his lasso, and dropping the loop over the head of Bunter's horse. The other fellows reined in round Bunter.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows—ow! I'm hurt! Wow! I say—yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up, you fat chump!" snarled the Bounder.

"Ow! I can't! Wow!"

Vernon-Smith leaned, and made a cut at the fat Owl with his quirt. The roar that answered from Bunter woke most of the echoes of the Frio Valley. Bunter found that he could get up. He got up quite suddenly. He fairly bounded.

"Beast!" he roared. "Ow! Beast! Rotter! Wow! Ow!"

Bob Cherry came riding back, leading Bunter's horse on the rope. The Bounder glared at the fat Owl.

"Get on!" he snapped.

"Shan't!" yelled Bunter. "I'll do as I jolly well like, see? And if you think you're going to give me orders, Herbert Vernon-Smith, I can jolly well say—Yarooop! Stoppit, you beast!"

The quirt cut again.

"Ow! Stoppit!" raved Bunter. "Hold that beastly horse for me, and I'll get on again! I—I'm waiting to get on! Ow! Keep off, Smithy, you beast!"

The horse was held, and Billy Bunter climbed on board again. He gave the Bounder an inimical glare.

"Are you coming?" snapped Smithy.

"I'll come when I please—I mean, I'm coming, you beast—keep that quirt away!" yelled Bunter. "Yah! Beast!"

And Bunter came. The ride to Packsaddle was resumed—Bunter frowning more frightfully, fearfully, frantically, than ever. He had gathered some aches and pains from sitting on Texas so suddenly. But he was not thinking any longer of giving the juniors the slip and dashing off at a gallop!

Lessons never lasted Bunter long—but that bump on the hard unsympa-

thetic prairie lasted him during that morning's ride—and a grizzly bear behind him would hardly have made Bunter break into a gallop again.

He was still frowning frightfully, fearfully, and frantically, but he was still with the Greyfriars party when they reached Packsaddle and rode into the plaza of the cow town.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

No Luck for Mr. Lick!

NIGHT had fallen on the valley of the Rio Frio; the naphtha lamps at the Red Flare shone out of the dusky plaza of Packsaddle, when Sheriff Lick rode in from the prairie, dusty and weary, on a dusty and weary horse.

Three or four of his followers trailed in with him, as dusty and weary as the sheriff. The rest of the posse had dispersed on their various ways—ranchers and punchers riding home, to ranch-house or bunkhouse, after a long, hot, weary day combing the rocky wilderness of Squaw Mountain.

There was no need for any Packsaddle guy to ask the sheriff how he had fared on the trail. His grim, disgruntled look answered the question before it was asked. Many eyes turned on Mr. Lick as he rode up the rugged street to his office on the plaza, and every eye read failure in his grim, frowning face.

From the piazza of the Pack Hotel, Harry Wharton & Co. watched him; and they, at least, could not feel sorry that Mr. Lick had failed to "cinch" the outlaw he had hunted.

Mr. Lick dismounted at his office, his remaining followers going their own ways; and he went grimly and savagely in, Mr. Lick's "office" being the front room of his dwelling. The door banged on him. The juniors heard the bang along the plaza as far as the hotel—and smiled. The Packsaddle sheriff, only too clearly, was not in a good temper.

He had cause to feel disgruntled. The pursuers had sighted the Rio Kid on the prairie, in the fresh early morning, and exchanged shots with him. But the range had been too long for much damage—Jad Blake's horse had gone down, and the sheriff had had a patch of his beard clipped off by a bullet; but the Kid's mustang had shown clean heels to the posse, and he had disappeared well ahead of them into Squaw Mountain. And so long as daylight lasted they had hunted him—in vain! Weary and worn, choked with dust, aching with fatigue, Sheriff Lick had got back to Packsaddle in the worst temper ever.

"The old ass!" grunted the Bounder. "He most likely had the right man under his silly eyes all the while he was hunting the wrong man. Shall we go along and see him now, or wait for him to come here?"

The juniors had learned that Mr. Lick was accustomed to come to the Pack for "cats."

"Better give him a rest!" said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "We've waited all the afternoon—it won't hurt us to wait a bit longer."

Smithy nodded assent to that. Mr. Lick looked as if he needed a rest, and time to cool down, before he was interviewed. So they waited.

It had been rather a tiresome afternoon for the Famous Five and the Bounder. After dinner at the cow town hotel, they had waited for the sheriff to ride in—and it had been a long wait. Billy Bunter pointed out, with sarcasm, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,581.

that they needn't have been in such a fearful hurry, as they had had to wait, after all, hours and hours. But the sheriff, of course, might have turned up any time, and it was necessary to be on the spot to catch him when he did.

Bunter had not found the afternoon tiresome at all.

He had spent it in a rocker, in the hotel piazza, watching the plaza through his big spectacles, and refreshing himself, at intervals, from a large box of candy from Wash's store.

It was quite a happy afternoon for Bunter. The frightful, fearful, frantic frown had quite disappeared from his fat visage. Sitting in the shade, resting his fat limbs, and eating candy, agreed with Bunter.

The other fellows had strolled about the town, looking in at the stores, killing time as best they could. Bunter found the time pass quite pleasantly.

For once, Bunter was in full agreement with the other fellows! He wanted to sit in the shade of the piazza, and they wanted him to sit there! Bunter was on the watch!

From the hotel piazza he had the plaza under his eyes, and his spectacles, and saw all who came and went. Every citizen of Packsaddle was to be seen, at one time or another, in the plaza, as well as the men who rode in from the ranches.

Bunter blinked at every face that passed—to spot, if he could, the face he had seen in the chaparral, when the trail-thief had discarded the flour-bag.

All the juniors were assured that the mysterious trail-thief was a local man; in which case it was fairly certain that, sooner or later, he would be seen in the plaza of the cow town. Bunter, the only fellow who knew what he looked like when the flour-bag was off, was the fellow to spot him—if he turned up!

Bunter was quite prepared to keep up his watch, so long as he could do it sitting in the shade and eating candy!

But that day, at least, the man whose hidden face he knew did not appear on the plaza. Some hundreds of faces passed under Bunter's spectacles, but not the face of the man who had worn the flour-bag.

With the fall of night, Packsaddle woke up, as it were, and became more lively. Crowds poured into the Red Flare and the other saloons round the plaza.

After supper there were a good many citizens smoking in the piazza, or lounging by the steps in front of it. Bunter's vigil was interrupted by supper—rather a long interruption—but he returned to it when he had "packed the cats"—but in the thickening crowd now to be seen, he saw no one resembling the man in the flour-bag.

Mr. Lick was not long in arriving at the Pack for "cats." He had stayed only to clean off the dust of the trails. Probably he had brought back a good appetite from Squaw Mountain.

The juniors watched him, from a respectful distance, at supper. When he lighted a cigar and strolled back to his office they followed—Bunter unwillingly heaving his weight out of the rocker.

They joined the sheriff at the door of his office.

Mr. Lick glanced round at them and gave them a nod. Supper had had a mollifying effect on him, and he looked rather less disgruntled.

"We ain't got him yet, Mr. Vernon-Smith!" he said. "But I'm telling you there's a chance of getting back them dollars. I'll say the Kid can't spend them dollars on Squaw Mountain, and if we get the Kid, we get the dollars."

"We've been waiting to see you, Mr. Lick," said Smithy. "We've got some information to pass on to you."

"Spill it!" said the sheriff tersely.

"The man you've been after was not the man who held up Andy Jones' hack—"

Mr. Lick raised a hand.

"You can can that!" he interrupted. "I've heard that from you before, and I'll mention that I don't want to hear it again!"

The Bounder breathed hard.

The belief was fixed in Mr. Lick's mind, as in most minds in Packsaddle, that the hold-up man was the Rio Kid. And, after what had happened in his office that morning, and after a long and weary day on an unsuccessful trail, Mr. Lick was not in a mood to hear a word in the Kid's favour.

"We've got proof!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Sez you," remarked Mr. Lick.

"There's a fellow here who saw the man's face, when he took off the flour-bag, after robbing the hack—"

"I guess if he did he saw the Kid's frontispiece!" said Mr. Lick.

"He saw a face nothing like the Kid's!"

Mr. Lick grunted. He was not much impressed—that was clear! Still, as sheriff, he had to listen.

"Who's the guy that saw him?" he asked, glancing round at the school-boys.

"Bunter! Here, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter, pushed forward, with a self-important and self-satisfied smirk on his fat face. Bunter was the "goods," and Bunter knew it, and was not likely to conceal that he knew it.

"I'm the man, Mr. Lick!" said Bunter. "I can tell you all about it! Nobody knows anything but me."

Mr. Lick gave another grunt—a more expressive one. Whether the Bounder's statement had impressed him or not, he was clearly not in the least impressed by the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove.

"I guess you know a heap!" he said sarcastically. "I'll say you look it! Yep! I'll tell all Texas that you got the whole bag of beans!"

He gave another grunt, still more expressive.

"I guess I'll hear you!" he said, and he threw open the door of his office.

The Greyfriars fellows followed him in—Billy Bunter with his fat little nose in the air, as became a fellow who knew what an extremely important fellow he was!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Fellow Who Knew!

MR. LICK lighted a kerosene lamp, threw himself into his official chair at his official desk, stretched out his long legs, pushed back his stetson, and fixed his eyes on Billy Bunter.

"Shoot!" he said, or, rather, grunted.

Bunter blinked at him. Important fellow as he was, and important as was the information he had to give, he could discern that the sheriff was not in the least anxious to hear it. Mr. Lick was simply going to listen, because it was his duty so to do.

Bunter could not help feeling indignant. However, he proceeded to shoot, as the sheriff bade him.

"You see, I was on the spot," he said. "It was through Smithy playing a rotten trick on me and making me lose my horse, and I stayed in the place—"

"What place?" barked Mr. Lick.

"A spot of chaparral about a mile from the stage trail towards Kicking

Cayuse." said Vernon-Smith. "We left Bunter there while we got him another horse."

"You needn't interrupt me, Smithy! I'm telling Mr. Lick about this!" said Bunter warmly. "If you're going to keep on interrupting me—"

"Get on, you fat ass!"

"Look here, Smithy—"

"I ain't sitting here all night!" said Mr. Lick. "If you got anything to spill, you Bunter, spill it pronto!"

"I'm telling you as fast as I can, only Smithy will interrupt me! I was there, you know, and when I heard that beast coming I thought it was one of the fellows coming back for me, and I looked out, and then I saw that he had a flour-bag over his face, so I knew that—"

"You saw that guy in the flour-bag?" Mr. Lick took a little interest now.

"Yes, I jolly well did! I got out of sight—not because I was funky, or anything like that, of course—"

"You wouldn't be!" said Mr. Lick with grim sarcasm. "Not you! I'll say you never let that guy spot you, though."

"Well, you see, I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought!" interrupted Mr. Lick. "What did you see?"

"I saw him take off the flour-bag and the cloak!" snorted Bunter. "Right under my eyes, only he didn't know I was there. I saw him counting over a lot of money, too."

Mr. Lick sat up in his chair and fixed a very penetrating look on Bunter's fat face.

"You saw his face?"

"Yes, as plain as I see yours now."

"You ever see the Rio Kid?"

"Yes; I saw him once at Kicking Cayuse—"

"Was it the same face?"

"No!"

Mr. Lick sat back in his chair. The juniors eyed him rather anxiously.

If he gave due heed to Bunter's statement, it meant that the hunt would cease to dog the heels of the Rio Kid and turn in another and more hopeful direction. But it was rather unfortunate that it was Bunter who had this valuable information to give. His fatuous fatheadedness was only too evident; and if ever there was a fellow who looked likely to make idiotic mistakes, Bunter was that fellow.

It was probable that it would require more credible evidence than Bunter's to root a fixed belief out of the sheriff's mind.

The Greyfriars fellows had a strong predisposition in favour of the Kid. The sheriff had a deep and bitter prejudice against him. That was likely to make a lot of difference in their respective points of view.

Vernon-Smith, who had a bundle under his arm, stepped forward and placed it on the sheriff's desk.

"The man left that behind!" he said, unwrapping the parcel.

Mr. Lick sat up and took notice as he stared at a dark horseman's cloak and a flour-bag which was slit with eyeholes and an opening for breathing.

"By the great horned toad!" he ejaculated. "How'd you get hold of that?"

"He left it—"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I was just going to tell Mr. Lick—"

"You fat chump—"

"Look here—"

"Who's telling me this?" asked Mr. Lick sarcastically.

"I am!" said Bunter, while the Bounder glared at him as if he could have bitten him. "You see, Mr. Lick, after taking those things off he shoved

them out of sight in the bushes just where I was standing!"

Mr. Lick took the flour-bag and examined it curiously.

He could not doubt that it was the disguise worn by the trail-thief. The stage-driver's description of the hold-up man left no doubt on that point. The sheriff had to believe that Bunter really had seen the man, and that he had seen him take off his disguise in cover of the chaparral, and that he had seen his face.

He laid down the flour-bag at last and fixed his eyes on Bunter.

"We got this far," he said. "You seen the galoot's face! You say it wasn't the Rio Kid's face?"

"Nothing like it!" said Bunter.

"Mebbe you know the Kid's face well?" asked Mr. Lick. "I guess I dunno how you'd get close acquainted with that firebug. How often you seen the Kid?"

"Once," said Bunter.

"How come?"

"He gave me a lift on his horse when I was a long way from the ranch—"

"Yep, that's sure like the Kid!" assented Mr. Lick. "I'll say he always was a good-natured guy, though too free with his guns. You only seen him once—you noticed his looks special?"

"Eh? No! Why should I?" asked Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. listened in silence. They could see what the sheriff was driving at, though Bunter could not. If Bunter did not remember what the Kid looked like, his evidence was not worth much.

"When you seen him?" asked Mr. Lick.

"Two or three weeks ago."

"You seen the Kid once, two or three weeks ago and never noticed his looks special?" asked Mr. Lick. "Sure! Mebbe you didn't know him agin when you saw him take that flour-bag off'n his frontispiece."

"Oh, I'd have known him all right!" said Bunter cheerfully. "The man I saw wasn't the Kid."

"Mebbe, and mebbe not!" said Mr. Lick. "Well, I know what the Kid looks like, doggone him, and if you give me a line on the guy you saw mebbe I'll be able to say whether he was the Kid or not. The Kid's eyes are blue—jest as blue as the Texas sky. What colour was that guy's eyes?"

"I don't know!"

"The Kid's got a dandy nose—straight as a string! What sorta nose did that guy carry?"

"I never noticed."

"The Kid's got a small size in bully-beef traps, and a set of teeth like a girl's! What sorta mouth and teeth you see when that guy got the flour-bag off?"

"I didn't see his mouth—at least, I never noticed it."

"The Kid's got dark hair—what sorta hair you see on that guy?"

"I never looked at his hair."

"The Kid's five feet eight," said Mr. Lick patiently. "How high was that guy you was watching in the chaparral?"

"I didn't think about that."

"Search me!" said Mr. Lick. "The Kid wears a dandy size in riding boots, with silver spurs. What sorta boots and spurs?"

"I couldn't see his feet in the ferns and things," answered Bunter. "Besides, I never looked."

"The Kid's got small ears—sorta pink! Did you see his ears?"

"No!"

Mr. Lick drew a deep, deep breath. The juniors did not interrupt Bunter—even the angry Bounder kept silent.

But they could easily understand the effect of evidence like this on the sheriff. They listened in dismay.

Bunter had seen the man in the flour-bag. But he had not noticed or did not remember a single characteristic by which he might be described. No doubt he would know the face again if he actually beheld it! But that was Bunter's limit.

"I'll say," remarked Mr. Lick, "that I met up with a heap of goobs in my time, but I ain't never met up with a goob of your heft, Mr. Bunter. I'll say you're the prize goob from Goobsville! And then some!"

"Oh, really, Mr. Lick—"

"You seen a man, and you ain't a small piece of an idea what he looks like," said Mr. Lick. "It might have been any guy between the Rio Grande and the Staked Plain, for all you can spill about him! How'd you know it wasn't the Kid—a galoot you'd seen once and never noticed special? You doggoned stiff, of course it was the Kid!"

"It jolly well wasn't!" declared Bunter. "I should have known at once, if it was the chap who gave me that lift on his horse. It was quite a different man. I should know the Kid again if I saw him, and I should know that man again if I saw him. I'm pretty sharp, I can tell you."

"I guess a Injun's scalping-knife ain't got nothing on you, Mister Bunter," said the sheriff, with withering sarcasm. "Waal, you've said your piece, and I guess you can pack it up now."

He rose from the chair.

"You Mister Vernon-Smith," he grunted, "I guess you're sore about them dollars being cinched, seeing that you was going to buy Jad Blake's ranch with them for your popper over the pond. I'll say it's tough! But it won't buy you anything to bring a fat goob hero to talk guff! I'm telling you! That gol-darned stiff was too scared. I reckon, to see what the guy was like at all—he don't know nothing about his looks, as you've jest heard, same as I have! Not a single thing he don't know—nor I guess he wouldn't know the Kid agin if he saw him, neither. I'll tell you, you wasted enough of my time with this bunk, Mister Vernon-Smith."

With that, the sheriff threw the door open.

With deep feelings, the Greyfriars fellows went out.

Bunter rolled after them, and the sheriff banged the door.

Billy Bunter's evidence, on the subject of the man in the flour-bag, had produced precisely no effect whatever. The juniors, having listened to it, could hardly wonder at that result, but it was dismaying. The sheriff was left with his belief absolutely unchanged and unshaken. Indeed, but for their own personal liking for the Kid, they could not help wondering whether they would not have taken the same view as the sheriff!

They walked in silence back to the Pack Hotel—the Bounder, with very great difficulty, refraining from kicking Billy Bunter all the way.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Boot For Bunter!

KNOCK!

"Bunter!"

Snore!

"You fat rotter!"

Snore!

Herbert Vernon-Smith breathed hard. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,531.

It was the following morning. The Greyfriars fellows had stayed the night at the Pack Hotel, and six of them had turned out early.

Bunter hadn't! And Bunter had taken the precaution of locking his door over-night!

In the Pack Hotel, at Packsaddle, Smithy could hardly think of using the methods he had used at the ranch for rousing Bunter out. So the fat Owl had to be left to snore in peace when the party went down to breakfast.

All the juniors agreed that it was a good idea for Bunter to remain at the cow town hotel for a few days, in the hope that he might be able to spot the man who had worn the flour-bag. Smithy—who had, perhaps, an eye on the livelier side of Packsaddle life—was going to stay along with him.

The Famous Five were going to ride back to the ranch later in the day. They found no great attraction in Bunter's company, and they certainly did not share the Bounder's desire for a game of draw-poker with some sportive citizen of Packsaddle.

The sheriff had utterly disregarded Bunter's tale. He had snorted at it with scorn. But if the fat Owl actually recognised the man he had seen, it would be a different matter. And surely, if he belonged to the district at all, he would be seen, sooner or later, in the cow town!

Bunter was quite prepared to carry on. So long as his bill was paid, and the supply of candy did not run out, Bunter was ready to oblige. Indeed, he was rather keen to show Mr. Lick what a silly ass he was by actually pointing out and denouncing that man in the flour-bag.

But not for that purpose, or for any other purpose, was Bunter prepared to turn out early in the morning. And he snored on while the other fellows breakfasted, and long after.

After breakfast, the juniors went into the piazza, and Vernon-Smith scowled, as he glanced at passing faces. Any one of them might have been the face of the wanted man, but Bunter, still snoring in his room, was not there to identify the man if he turned up.

"The fat freak!" muttered the Bounder. "If he had been anything but a born idiot, he could have described the man, and the sheriff might have known him! I'll bet you the sheriff does know him—if he only knew he knew!"

"Ten to one!" agreed Harry Wharton. "The way the man picked up the news, shows that he puts in time in Packsaddle. Might be one of those fellows walking under our noses this minute."

"And that fat brute snoring in bed!" growled the Bounder. "I hear that old Lick's going on the warpath again this morning. I shouldn't wonder if one of the men riding with him was that flour-bag sportsman. It would be his game to keep on the right side of the sheriff, and to shout out loudest of all that the hold-up man was the Rio Kid."

"Well, you can't bust in Bunter's door here, old bean!" said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle.

The Bounder grunted angrily.

"They'll be starting early, and if that fat pig was here, he could give them the once-over! Blow him!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's the hack!" said Bob.

Andy Jones drove the hack round from the back of the hotel, and halted it in front. The stage was on its return trip to Prairie Bend, after going to the cow towns farther up the river, and had stopped over-night at Packsaddle.

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Leaving it standing, Andy went into the building, probably for refreshment before he started, and two or three passengers gathered by the piazza steps.

Horsemen were riding into Packsaddle—gathering to ride with the sheriff on the trail of the outlaw of the Rio Grande. Among them, Jad Blake, the rancher of the Circle O, rode up to the timber hotel, and dismounted there.

But the young rancher, it seemed, was not riding with the sheriff's posse, as he had done the previous day.

His horse was taken round the building, and he joined the passengers who were waiting for the hack to start. Apparently he was going in the hack.

He glanced at the Greyfriars fellows in the piazza and gave them the briefest of nods.

Andy came out, wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve, and the passengers took their places in the hack.

Blake was stepping towards the vehicle, when the sheriff appeared from the door of his office.

"Say, Blake!" he called.

The rancher glanced round.

"Mornin', sheriff!" he said.

"You ain't going with Andy?" asked Mr. Lick. He made a gesture towards the horsemen gathering in the piazza. "I guess I'd be glad to have you along, Blake, hunting that doggoned Kid."

"I got to hit the railroad to-day," answered Blake. "I got business along to Red Bluffs."

The sheriff grunted.

"Aw, I guess you can give the poker sharps at Red Bluffs a rest," he said gruffly.

"It's business!" answered Blake curtly.

"You ain't buying cows, I reckon!" said Mr. Lick sarcastically.

All Packsaddle knew that the "business" to which Poker Blake chiefly attended was the game of draw-poker, and that his ranch had gone to rack and ruin owing to his unswerving devotion to that fascinating but uncertain game. Mr. Lick apparently doubted whether Blake was, for once, giving his attention to business.

"No, I ain't!" snapped Blake. "If you hone to know, sheriff, I got to raise the wind seeing that the sale of the Circle O has been held up through the Rio Kid cinching the money that was coming over to buy it. I guess I got to wait till that deal can be put through now."

"If we get the Kid we get back the dollars for young Mister Vernon-Smith, and that will be O.K. for you, Blake!" said the sheriff.

"Forget it," retorted Blake. "If you get the Kid, you won't get the dust—I'll say that young scallawag's parked it safe. I guess he won't carry it around to be cinched along with him."

"Mebbe!" admitted the sheriff.

"I guess I'll be back in two days," said Blake. "If you ain't got the Kid by then, count on me. But I got to put this business through."

He nodded to the sheriff, and stepped into the hack.

Andy Jones cracked his whip, and drove away on the long trip down the Rio Frio to Prairie Bend.

The sheriff grunted, and went for his horse.

Vernon-Smith's lip curled. Blake had spoken in the hearing of the juniors and others who were in the piazza; he did not seem to care if all Packsaddle knew that he was hard up, and going to a town up the railroad to "raise the wind" to see him through till the Circle O was sold.

Still, there was not much of a secret about Jad Blake's financial position.

Everybody knew that he had gambled away his inheritance, and that when the Circle O was sold he would have nothing left but what he stood up in. It was no secret that he owed money right and left in Packsaddle—indeed, a good many "guys" had surmised that that was one reason why he had been so keen to cinch the Rio Kid and the reward of a thousand dollars offered for the capture.

Sheriff Lick joined the riders who were parading the plaza. He had a stronger force this time; more than twenty men had gathered to ride with him. The Bounder gritted his teeth as he watched them.

It was quite probable that Smithy was right, and that the man in the flour-bag was one of the horsemen who rode with the sheriff. This was a chance for Bunter to spot the man—if he was there.

But Billy Bunter was still snoring, and the sheriff and his posse rode out of Packsaddle and disappeared.

It was about an hour later that the Famous Five went out to their horses to ride back to Kicking Cayuse. They had nothing to do in Packsaddle, and they preferred punching cows with Bill to loafing about the cow town.

As they mounted their broncos they heard a sudden anguished yell from the Pack, and looked round.

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter, it seemed, had come down at last. Vernon-Smith, it also seemed, had been waiting for him—not in a good temper. Bunter came scudding out into the piazza—in such a hurry that it was evident that he was receiving assistance from astern.

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Leave off kicking me, you beast! I say, you fellows, stop him! I say—Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter dodged along the piazza, Smithy in pursuit, still landing out with his boot. And the Famous Five, chuckling, rode down the street and left them to it.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Sheriff's Ride!

"MORNIN', sheriff!"

Sheriff Lick gave a violent start.

The voice that addressed him was soft and pleasant, with the lazy Texas drawl, quite agreeable to the ear. But it produced an effect on the sheriff of Packsaddle such as the deep-toned growl of a grizzly-bear might have produced.

Mr. Lick at the moment was sitting in the shade of a big rock in a gulch on Squaw Mountain, fanning his heated face with his stetson hat.

Far and wide over the rugged, rocky mountain, amid innumerable gulches and draws and canyons and gullies, his men were scattered, hunting for sign of the Rio Kid's hideout.

Mr. Lick, after hours of it in blazing heat, had stopped for a rest. None of his men was in sight at the moment, though some of them were not far away. Mr. Lick had thrown the reins of his bronco over a point of rock and sat down in the shade, fanning his burning face, and refreshing himself with draughts from a flask that contained something considerably stronger than water.

He dropped the flask and he dropped the hat as that soft, pleasant, drawling voice fell on his ears. His right hand shot to his belt.

"Don't!" drawled the Rio Kid,



"The trail-thief left these behind, sheriff!" said Vernon-Smith, unwrapping the parcel and displaying its contents. Mr. Lick sat up and took notice at the sight of a horseman's cloak and a flour-bag with eye-holes and an opening for breathing. "By the great horned toad!" he ejaculated. "How did you get hold of these?"

And the sheriff didn't. He could not for the moment see the Kid, but he did not need to see him to know that the Kid's gun was looking at him. Mr. Lick had no desire whatever to put the cow town of Packsaddle to the trouble of finding a new sheriff. He sat still.

But his bronzed face worked with rage as a graceful figure, in stetson and chaps, stepped from behind a rock and smiled at him over a six-gun.

He had been hunting the Rio Kid, and now he had found him. But he had not found him exactly as he had wanted to find him. The smile on the Kid's handsome, sunburnt face found no reflection on the sheriff's. Mr. Lick breathed rage.

"You!" he muttered.
 "You said it!" agreed the Kid. "Pleased to meet up with you, sheriff! You don't want to reach for your hardware! You want to reach for the sky!" Sheriff Lick, with deep feelings, reached for the sky.

"Now, ain't it pleasant and all hunky for old friends to meet up this a-way?" said the Kid. "Don't you worry, Lick; I ain't going to spill your juice, not if you're a good baby!"

The sheriff of Packsaddle did not look a "good baby" at the moment. He would have given all the cows in the Frio valley just then to pull a gun on the smiling Kid.

"You ain't forgotten," said the cheery Kid, "what I spilled when I horned into your office, sheriff. I'm jest going to tell you agin that I ain't that dog-goned trail-thief that hid his face under a flour-bag. Mebbe you'll believe me now I confide it to you all over again."

"Not by a jugful!" said Mr. Lick. "They didn't make you sheriff on your brains, Lick!" remarked the Kid, with a shake of the head. "They sure did not! Why, you big stiff, what'd I want to string you along for? Ain't

there enough agin me for one little piece more not to matter if I was that guy you want? I'm telling you, Lick, that I never stopped no hack, and I never even seen the guy that was shot up."

Mr. Lick shrugged his brawny shoulders.

"You ain't getting it down?" asked the Kid.

"Not so's you'd notice it," said the sheriff. "You got me, Kid, and I guess you can hand over my ticket for soup if you want. But you ain't fooling me!"

The Kid laughed.
 "I guess I wouldn't waste a cartridge on a bone head like yours, Lick!" he said. "But I ain't letting you run on gunning after me! I'm sure locating in this section till I get that scallawag that's handling my name so free; but I don't want you around, sheriff! I'm going to send you home!"

The Kid stooped and jerked away the sheriff's Colt. He dropped it into a crevice in the rock. Then he made a motion with his own gun.

"Git up!" he said.
 The sheriff got up.

"I guess I'm going to borrow your neck-scarf, Lick, like I did in your office. You ain't got no objection?"

Mr. Lick did not raise any objection. His look spoke volumes, but he uttered no word. The Kid jerked away his neck-scarf and placed it round his head, over his mouth, evidently for use as a gag.

For one moment Mr. Lick was tempted to set his life on a cast and shout. It was quite likely that some of his men, though out of sight, were within hearing.

The Kid, reading his thoughts, smiled, but the glint in his eyes belied the smile. "Forget it, feller!" he murmured. And the sheriff forgot it.

A few moments later it was too late; the neck-scarf, bound over his mouth, enforced silence. Then, with a length of rope, the Kid knotted his brawny wrists together.

"Now I guess you're going to take a little pasear with me, Lick!" said the Kid. "I'm jest keeping you quiet, Lick, to save your life, being a good-natured and friendly cuss! I sure should hate to shoot up the gol-darndest bonehead in Texas! Stop out!"

The sheriff, in silent rage, stepped out. The Kid walked with him, leading Mr. Lick's horse. His own horse was not to be seen.

What his game was the sheriff could not guess—unless it was to lead him, a prisoner, to his hideout. But he soon discovered that that was not the Kid's object.

By devious ways, watchful as a cougar, the Kid walked him on, eyes and ears on the alert for a foe. But in a short time he was out of danger from the sheriff's posse, for the way he followed led him down the rugged mountain towards the plains that stretched away to Packsaddle and the Frio river.

He was leaving the mountain behind him, and it was in the rugged recesses of the mountain that the sheriff's men were seeking.

It was a long tramp, but at length they left the rocks of Squaw behind and trod the grassy prairie. Then the Kid at length halted.

"Git on your cayuse, feller!" he said. "No, not that a-way! I guess you're going home looking at your critter's tail!"

The sheriff's face crimsoned with rage. He understood now. The Kid had said that he was going to send him home.

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(Continued from page 13.)

That was how he was going to send him.

The Kid grinned cheerily.

"I guess," he remarked, "that that doggoned cow town will be put wise jest how much I worry about their doggoned sheriff when they see you amble in. Lick! What you figure?"

The sheriff choked.

"You getting on that cayuse?" inquired the Kid. "I guess he'll find his way home, O.K., Lick, and take you safe to your little bunk! I'll lend you a hand, old-timer, seeing how you're fixed! But you gotta hump yourself, Lick—less you want a few with a quirt!"

The Kid was smiling and good-humoured, but he was ruthlessly determined. Mr. Lick did not want a few with a quirt. Breathless with fury, with the Kid's assistance, he clambered on the horse, with his hands bound, and sat in the saddle, with his face to the tail.

It was not a comfortable seat. It was very uncomfortable. But there was no help for the sheriff of Packsaddle.

With a length from a trail-rope, the Kid tied his feet together under the horse. Then he smiled up at the red, infuriated face that glared down at him backwards on the bronco.

"You figure that they'll smile a few when you horn in that-a-way, sheriff?" he asked.

Lick's eyes burned down at him.

"Mebbe you'll quit trailing a guy that don't ask anything but to be left quiet and peaceable?" grinned the Kid. "You sure will get a big laugh when you hit your home town, sheriff! S'long!"

The Kid set the horse's head towards distant Packsaddle and gave the animal a lick with the quirt. The bronco started at a gallop.

That bronco, in the way of horses, knew his homeward way; there was no danger of the hapless sheriff getting lost on the rolling prairies.

That bronco, having started, headed for home, and as his rider had not the slightest chance of controlling him in any way, he had to be allowed to head for home. Unless the sheriff was sighted by some stray puncher on the plains, that was how he had to arrive in Packsaddle—tied backwards on his horse! He would almost have preferred the Kid to drive a bullet through him.

The Kid grinned and waved his hand in farewell.

Owing to his backward position on the horse, the sheriff looked back as he rode onward—at the grinning Kid and at Squaw Mountain, where his men were combing rocky gulches and gullies in vain search, little guessing what was happening to their leader.

Sheriff Lick's face was expressive as he went. The Kid waved his hand, and then his hat; and then, laughing, turned to tramp away. He disappeared from Mr. Lick's eyes.

The sheriff rode on. The bronco, at

an easy gallop, headed for home, and the sheriff, riding east, looked west, and no words, in any language, could have expressed his feelings as he rode on and on, his face to the whisking tail of the bronco.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Lucky for Lick!

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill Buck. "What the thump—" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Who the dickens—"

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five were cowpunching with Bill. It was Bill who sighted the strange figure on the prairie, and he pulled in his horse and fixed his eyes on it in wonder. And the chums of Greyfriars, following his amazed stare, sighted it, too, and also wondered.

They were taking a herd of cows northward to a new rango on the wide plains that lay between Packsaddle and Squaw Mountain. It was in the direction of the mountain that the strange and startling figure came in sight—a rider, but such a rider as the foreman of Kicking Cayuse had never seen before, and the schoolboys had never seen outside a circus.

A man riding with his back to his horse's head and his face to his horse's tail was enough to make any observer wonder.

"Search me!" said Bill. "I guess that guy is loco—plumb loco! I'll say I never seen no guy ride that-a-way afore!"

"What the thump is he doing it for?" asked Frank Nugent, his eyes fixed on the distant figure in amazement.

"Got me guessing!" said Bill. "Loco—plumb loco!"

At the distance it could not be seen that the rider was bound to the horse. And why a rider was riding backwards on the prairie was a great mystery. Really it looked as if that rider must be loco.

The horse was coming on at a steady trot, apparently heading for Packsaddle, which was a good distance away. The reins hung on its neck, leaving the bronco to its own guidance. Who the rider was, was impossible to say—he could not be identified by his back.

"Well, that beats the band!" said Bob Cherry. "Why the thump—"

"The whyfulness is terrific."

"Must be fixed like that!" Johnny Bull was the first to guess. "Somebody's been larking with that merchant and fixed him like that."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That's it!"

Bill chuckled.

"Mebbe!" he said. "Mebbe! Git on!" he added, addressing the cows, and he cracked his quirt.

The juniors exchanged glances. Bill was attending to the business in hand—driving cows. But if some unfortunate guy had been tied to his horse in that ridiculous way and left adrift on the plains the schoolboys were inclined to go to his aid.

"Might lend him a hand, Bill," said Bob Cherry.

"Sure, if you want!" said Bill. "I guess I'm driving cows; but you young geeks can go arter him if you feel that way, and put in some practice with your ristas. Git on!"

Bill rode on after the cows, cracking his quirt. Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled their horses westward to ride towards the oncoming horseman. They unhooked their lassos from their saddles as they went. The juniors were getting

quite expert in the use of the "rope" by this time, and they had no doubt of being able to capture the bronco and his weird-looking rider.

They went at a gallop, and as the horse was coming towards them at a trot they rapidly neared it.

As they neared, something familiar in the burly figure on the bronco struck their eyes, though they could not see yet who it was.

But the sound of galloping hoofs appeared to reach the ears of the strange rider, and he twisted round his head to look behind him over the bronco's ears.

The juniors stared in amazement at a face that was half-hidden by a knotted neck-scarf.

The upper part of the face seemed familiar, however.

"Is that Lick?" gasped Bob.

"Great pip! The sheriff!"

"Oh, my hat!"

They whirled their lassos as they rode nearer. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was first to make a cast, but the loop missed and struck the horse's head, instead of dropping over it.

The bronco shied and squealed and swerved off at a gallop. Two more lassos fell short as it went.

"After him!" exclaimed Harry.

The Famous Five dashed in pursuit, three of them coiling up lassos as they rode. The knock from Hurree Singh's rope had startled the bronco and set him in flight, and the galloping hoofs behind spurred him on. He broke into a swift gallop, and the juniors had to ride hard to keep up.

Now, directly behind the strange rider, they had a full view of him; and, in spite of the neck-scarf over his face, they were sure that it was the sheriff of Packsaddle.

They were going to help him out of that peculiar fix, but they could not help grinning. Aware that the sheriff had set out that morning on the hunt for the Rio Kid, they could form a guess at the cause of his extraordinary predicament. It looked to them as if he had found the Kid—and found him in a playful mood!

Harry Wharton dashed ahead of his comrades and whirled his lasso. The forty-foot rope uncoiled and flew. Wharton was coming at the fleeing bronco from the right, and the lasso was aimed to drop over the tossing head behind the sheriff's back; but, as if the wary bronco knew that it was coming, he leaped into faster speed. The lasso whizzed behind the tossing head and banged on the sheriff's ear and dropped.

A mumble came from under the neck-scarf; it was all the hapless sheriff could do in the way of a yell as the rope banged his ear.

Wharton reined in to gather up his rope; and Bob Cherry dashed past him, riding closer in before he made his cast.

This time the loop dropped over the bronco's head; it gripped there and the horse was roped.

Bob was careful not to halt and put a pull on the rope, as he would have done in case of lassoing a cow or a riderless horse. A fall of the bronco might have meant bad damage for a rider who was tied on and could not jump clear.

He rode on, slowly gathering in the rope and gradually drawing the runaway to a stop.

It was some minutes before he was riding close enough to catch at the dangling reins.

But he caught them at last and drew the bronco to a halt. His friends rode up and surrounded the hapless rider.

Suppressing their smiles as well as they could, the chums of Greyfriars hastened to render first-aid. Harry Wharton grabbed at the neck-scarf and got it off.

Sheriff Lick gasped. His rugged, bearded face was crimson with rage and humiliation.

He was glad—deeply glad—to get out of this fix before he hit Packsaddle. It was better for these schoolboys to find him thus than to have the whole population of the cow town “rubbering” at him. But it was humiliating, all the same; and he was well aware of the amusement that the juniors politely tried hard to conceal. Glad as he was, he did not seem very grateful; he glared.

“Git me loose!” he hissed as soon as he found his voice. “You young ginks, ain’t you got a knife about you to cut a guy loose?”

“Oh, certainly, Mr. Lick!” said Harry Wharton. “We’ll have you loose in a jiffy.”

“Get to it!” snarled Mr. Lick. Johnny Bull opened a knife and sawed at the rope that fastened the sheriff’s feet under his bronco. Nugent sawed at the rope round his wrists. Bob held the bronco steady.

In a few minutes Mr. Lick was released. He rolled off the saddle, in great relief. He had covered a good many miles in that extremely uncomfortable attitude, and it was an immense relief to get out of it.

“Who fixed you up like that, Mr. Lick?” asked Bob.

“Grunt!”

“Anything more we can do?” asked Harry politely.

“Only git out!” granted the sheriff. “Seen anything of the Rio Kid on Squaw Mountain?” asked Bob innocently.

Mr. Lick did not answer that question. His crimson face became, if possible, redder, and he made a step towards Bob, with the obvious intention of landing a smack with a heavy, horny hand. Bob jumped away just in time.

“You doggoned young gink!” snorted Mr. Lick. “If I had my quirt with me, I’d sure lam you a few!”

Bob jumped on his bronco. “Come on, you men,” he said, “we’ve got to get after Bill, and we needn’t stay to listen to Mr. Lick’s thanks.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The Famous Five remounted their broncos and dashed away after Bill and the herd, chuckling as they galloped. Mr. Lick was left glaring after them, with a concentrated and infuriated glare.

He was certainly glad to be released; there was no doubt about that. But gladness was not expressed in his looks. He looked as if he would have liked to lay a heavy quirt, with a heavy hand, round the cheery schoolboys.

Going at a gallop, the Famous Five soon overtook Bill and the herd.

The Kicking Cayuse foreman glanced round at them as they came.

“Got that guy?” he asked.

“Sure thing!” answered Bob.

“Who was it?”

“The sheriff!” chuckled Bob.

Bill almost fell off his bronco.

“The sheriff!” he gasped. “I’ll tell a man! I’ll surely tell a man! How’d the sheriff get fixed up that-a-way?”

“I fancy he must have met the man he was after!” said Harry Wharton, laughing.

“Search me!” gasped Bill. “Yep—I’ll say he met the Kid! Haw, haw, haw!” Bill roared and roared again; and for quite a long time, as they rode with the cows, explosive chuckles came from the Kicking Cayuse foreman.

Sheriff Lick, left on the prairie, stood beside his horse, far from chuckling.

Seldom had a man been so deeply and desperately enraged as the sheriff of Packsaddle was just then. His first impulse was to mount the bronco and ride back to Squaw Mountain; to get after the Kid and exact vengeance. But Squaw Mountain was ten miles away—Packsaddle was very much nearer—and the sun was setting over the summit of Squaw. By that time his men would be giving up the hunt and hitting the homeward trail. And, enraged and vengeful as he was, perhaps Mr. Lick had had enough of the Rio Kid to last him for some time!

Anyhow, when he mounted his bronco again—this time with his back to the tail—it was towards Packsaddle that he rode. And—though he was still disposed to lay a quirt round the young ginks who had been entertained by his predicament—there was no doubt that he was glad to ride into the cow town face foremost! That meeting with the Famous Five on the prairie had undoubtedly been lucky for Mr. Lick.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

More Boot for Bunter!

SNORE!

Billy Bunter was sitting, or rather sprawling, in a rocker, in the piazza at the Pack Hotel in Packsaddle.

It was the following day, and dinner at the Pack was over. The fare at the cow town was not, perhaps, delicate or elegant; but it was ample, and Billy Bunter, as usual, had surrounded quite a lot of it.

After which, it was only natural for Bunter to desire a refreshing nap—in which he was now indulging.

In that rocker on the hotel piazza, the fat Owl of the Remove was fast asleep; his mouth was open, but his eyes were shut fast behind his big spectacles.

Had Vernon-Smith been present, the fat Owl would have been awakened with great promptness, and probably not gently. But the Bouncer was tired of loafing about the hotel, and he was not there.

For a whole day, and now for the best part of another day, Billy Bunter had adorned that piazza with his fat person, his eyes and spectacles on the alert—more or less—for the man who had worn the flour-bag.

But the man had not appeared—at least, while Bunter was on the watch!

The Bouncer had stayed in Packsaddle with him, in the hope—indeed, almost with the certainty—that the man would show up in the cow town sooner or later.

But it looked as if it was likely to be later, rather than sooner.

Smithy, who had been rather a “bad hat” at Greyfriars, had not changed his manners and customs since coming to Texas; and he had killed time with draw-poker and a flutter on the faro-table at the Red Flare. But on the whole, the Bouncer would rather have been riding the ranges with the Famous Five and Bill—and he was getting more and more fed-up.

In Packsaddle, Pop Stork’s Hotel was a general meeting-place for loungers, and there was generally a little crowd in or about the piazza; but the Owl of Greyfriars blinked at them in vain. At the present moment, however, the man who had worn the flour-bag might have walked past under Bunter’s fat little nose and would have been in no danger. The fat Owl’s eyes were glued shut behind his spectacles.

There was a bustle outside the timber

hotel as the hack came in—Andy Jones back again from Prairie Bend. The arrival of the stage, which came only three times a week, was rather an event at the cow town on the Rio Frio.

But the hustle and bustle did not disturb Billy Bunter. He snored on regardless.

Two or three passengers alighted, among them, Mr. Blake of the Circle O. The rancher had been away nearly two days—he was back again from his trip on the railroad.

He came into the hotel through the piazza, and glanced round, at a sound like the rumble of distant thunder.

It was only Bunter’s snore!

Blake stared at him for a moment, smiled a contemptuous smile, and passed into the hotel. He was stopping there for “cats” before he called for his horse to ride home to his ranch.

Bunter snored on.

The hack remained standing while horses were changed and Andy Jones parked refreshments. Then Andy took his place again, and the vehicle rolled on, en route for the towns up-river.

Bunter still snored. Every other inhabitant of Packsaddle was interested in the coming and going of the stage; but the fat Owl of Greyfriars remained blissfully unaware that it had come, and that it had gone.

Deep in happy slumber, Bunter was dreaming of a spread in Lord Mauleverer’s study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars School. He smiled in his slumber!

From the Red Flare, across the plaza, Vernon-Smith lounged out into the sunlight. The Bouncer had been killing time again with a game of draw-poker.

But he was fed-up with the Red Flare and its atmosphere of tobacco and “hooch,” and he had made up his mind that if nothing turned up on the morrow he would “chuck” it and ride back to Kicking Cayuse.

He was bitterly angry and disappointed. Certain as he was that the trail-thief was a Packsaddle man, he had counted almost with sureness on Bunter spotting him. On the other hand, the man might have appeared before the lazy fat Owl was up in the morning, and the chance might thus have been missed. The thought of that possibility made the Bouncer grit his teeth. And it was likely enough.

He gritted them again as he came into the piazza and Billy Bunter’s unmusical snore fell on his ears. He stood looking at the sleeping beauty with concentrated rage.

This was how Bunter was keeping on the watch!

It was a couple of hours since Smithy had left him there! As likely as not the fat Owl had been asleep all the time! The trail-thief, whose face only Bunter knew, might have passed and repassed.

For a long moment Vernon-Smith stood looking at Bunter, with an expression on his face that would have terrified the fat Owl had his eyes been open. But Bunter’s eyes were closed, and he snored on happily.

Then the Bouncer strode at him.

Bunter came out of that happy slumber with startling suddenness—as the rocker was up-ended, and he went sprawling headlong on the hard pine planks of the piazza floor.

Bump!

“Ooooo-oooo-oop!” spluttered Bunter. He sat and roared, blinking wildly over the spectacles that had slid down his fat little nose.

But he did not sit long! The Bouncer’s boot reached him and stirred him into swift activity.

Thud, thud, thud, thud!

Bunter bounded.

He bellowed as he bounded! He roared, he howled, he whooped! He jumped and he dodged! But the infuriated Bounder followed him up, kicking and kicking, with concentrated force and fury. If, indeed, the wanted man had passed under Bunter's eyes while they were shut, the fat Owl was suffering for his sins!

A score of faces were turned on the startling scene.

Vernon-Smith did not heed. A final kick landed on Bunter, as he leaped for the piazza steps, and shot down them to the street, to escape.

Crash!

Bunter landed in a heap.

"Say, what's that game, buddy?" drawled Jad Blake, looking out from the building into the piazza, a sarcastic grin on his face.

Vernon-Smith did not answer. He swung away with a black brow. Perhaps he realised that he had made rather an exhibition of himself, under so many staring eyes. He tramped down the steps—and at the sight of him Billy Bunter bounded to his feet, and flew.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Face of the Flour-Bag Man!

"**B**EAST!" breathed Billy Bunter. "I'll show him!"

Bunter was feeling sore—in a double sense.

Bunter had often been kicked—but seldom, or never, had he had such a booting as the angry Bounder had bestowed on him that afternoon. Half an hour after the last kick had landed, Bunter was still wriggling.

His indignation was deep and intense. He could guess that it was because Smithy had found him asleep, that he had booted him! As if a fellow hadn't a right to forty winks after lunch! As if a fellow couldn't jolly well do as he jolly well liked!

Bunter was going to show him!

He had dodged round the building to steer clear of the angry Bounder. To his great relief, Smithy did not follow him round. Now Bunter was blinking into the stable behind the Pack Hotel.

His horse was there. Bunter was going to take his horse, and ride home to the ranch. If Smithy fancied that he was going back to the hotel piazza to keep watch—at the risk of a booting every time he closed his eyes behind his spectacles—Smithy was jolly well mistaken. When he looked for Bunter, he would jolly well find him missing! If he wanted fellows to do him favours, he could jolly well be civil!

But the unspeakable beast was so beastly high-handed, that he was capable of collaring Bunter, if he found him getting away. The fat Owl realised that he had to be cautious.

He asked the stableman to get his horse ready, and led it into the street, with stealthy blinks to and fro, through his big spectacles. Smithy was not to be seen.

Smithy, as a matter of fact, was now inside the hotel, sitting in a quiet corner with Mr. Jad Blake, and playing poker. Blake was going back to his ranch that afternoon; but he was more than willing to linger for a game of draw-poker with the millionaire's son.

Mr. Blake, apparently, had "raised the wind" on his visit to the town up the railroad, for he was provided now with hundred-dollar bills, as well as smaller notes, and he played with his

usual recklessness. Smithy, schoolboy as he was, played with hard-headed coolness and if Jad Blake expected easy work with a schoolboy, he had a disappointment.

Smithy was sitting where he could keep an eye on the piazza, and he had that eye open for Bunter. He expected the fat Owl to return—and he expected, too, that after that severe booting, he would keep his eyes open.

Probably he would not have lingered over the card-table with Mr. Blake had he guessed how Bunter was actually occupied.

Bunter, like Moses of old, looked this way and that way; and saw no man—at least, not the man he dreaded to see. Smithy, wherever he was, was out of sight.

Reassured, the fat Owl clambered on his horse, and trotted away down the plaza, and the street beyond, to the prairie trail.

He would rather have liked to gallop, being in dread every moment of hearing Smithy's voice behind him; but his experience of a couple of days ago had not yet worn off, and he did not venture to gallop.

But there was no sound of pursuit, and the fat Owl rode out of Packsaddle and hit the trail for Kicking Cayuse.

It was a long ride, and Bunter's pace was leisurely; but there was plenty of time to get in before dark, and—still more important—before supper. So the fat Owl trotted off quite cheerfully.

He chuckled as he trotted.

That beast Smithy would look for him, of course. Probably he would not guess, at first, that Bunter was gone. Bunter hoped that he would hunt for him for hours—in fact, hours and hours and hours!

He would guess, sooner or later, that the fat Owl had shaken the dust of Packsaddle from his feet! The thought of his rage was amusing to Bunter—now that he was safe out of range of the Bounder's boot.

In his room at the Pack, Bunter had left his belongings—but he was not bothering about them. Bunter's belongings only belonged to him by the right of borrowing! He really was not going to worry about what might become of Nugent's pyjamas, and Wharton's slippers, and Bob Cherry's comb, and Johnny Bull's hair-brush, and Hurree Singh's silk muffler. He would have to borrow a few things when he got back to the ranch—that was all, and that was that!

It was quite a pleasant ride—on that quiet horse that Bill had specially selected for him, and that even Bunter could ride, so long as he did not attempt to put on speed—all the pleasanter for the thought of the Bounder's rage when he discovered that he had gone!

Miles glided under the leisurely trotting feet; and Bunter passed the big timber-island that lay half-way to the ranch. Beyond that spot, the well-marked trail ran on towards Kicking Cayuse—so plainly marked, that even Billy Bunter could not miss it. But, a couple of miles farther on, he checked his horse, and blinked round him uneasily.

At this point there was a fork in the trail.

The lazy fat Owl had not explored the country like the other fellows, and he had seldom ridden out alone; and when he was out on a ride it was not his way to take heed of his surroundings.

So far, he knew that he was right—the timber-island he had passed was prominent enough for even Bunter to have noticed and remembered it. But

he had never noticed this fork in the trail before.

Far away to the west, Squaw Mountain barred the red sky. Kicking Cayuse lay towards Squaw Mountain. But so did several other places. Both the trails in front of Bunter led westward—left and right, the left bearing to the south, the right slightly to the north; but both leading towards the setting sun.

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter.

In point of fact, the left-hand trail led to Kicking Cayuse; the right-hand one led to a long spur of Squaw Mountain, across which lay the way to the Circle O and other ranches farther to the west.

That was the fact; but as Bunter did not know it, it was of no use to him. He pulled in the bronco and sat blinking in a state of irritated uncertainty.

"Beasts!" he repeated.

Really, had Bunter kept his eyes open on occasions when he had ridden home from the cow town with the Famous Five, he would have noticed that fork in the trail, and would have been in no doubt. It was not Bunter's way, however, to lay any blame to his own account! Whenever anything amiss happened to Billy Bunter, it was always somebody else's fault.

But for those beasts, and especially that beast Vernon-Smith, he wouldn't have been riding home alone! Now he was—and he didn't know which trail to take! He could see both, plainly marked—but which led to Kicking Cayuse, and which didn't, was a problem without an answer.

The fat Owl blinked back along the trail by which he had come. That trail was used by everyone who came and went from the ranch; and it was possible that some Kicking Cayuse guy might be on his homeward way.

To his immense satisfaction, Bunter sighted a stetson hat bobbing in the distance.

A horseman was coming from Packsaddle at a steady trot.

Whether he was a Kicking Cayuse man or not, he would know the way, and he would tell Bunter. All the fat Owl had to do was to wait at the fork till he came up, and call out to him. Which-ever trail he was going to take, left or right, he had to pass Bunter, at the parting of the ways.

Bunter had not long to wait. The horseman rapidly overhauled the fat junior. It was probable that he had left Packsaddle a couple of hours later than Bunter; but the fat Owl had taken his time over the miles he had covered.

Thud, thud, thud! came the beat of the horse's hoofs. Sitting his horse at the fork, Billy Bunter watched the rider as he came.

He was little more than a blur, at first, to the short-sighted Owl; but as he drew nearer, something vaguely familiar about him struck the fat Owl. He fancied he had seen the man before.

The horseman glanced at Bunter, but took no other notice of him. He rode on, evidently intending to take the right-hand trail ahead. Bunter waved a fat hand.

"I say—" he squeaked.

He was afraid that the horseman might pass him, without telling him what he wanted to know. The man did not check his speed.

Bunter pushed towards him, to intercept him before he reached the fork. Then the rider checked speed a little, Bunter being in his way.

"I say—" began Billy Bunter again.

He broke off suddenly.

He was near enough now to see the horseman's face; the man was looking



"What's got that guy?" asked Jad Blake in wonder, as Wharton hooked the terrified Billy Bunter through the doorway. "Does that fat geck figure I'm going to eat him, body and boots?" "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "He—he's the man who was disguised in the flour-bag!"

at him as he came, and his face showed clearly under the stetson, in the red sunset from over Squaw Mountain.

Bunter's heart stood still.

He knew that face!

He had not seen it since the day he had seen the trail-thief, skulking in the chaparral, take off the flour-bag that hid it. Now he saw it—and knew it. It was the face of the man in the flour-bag!

Bunter's fat and ruddy face went white as chalk.

For a spellbound instant he stared at that terrifying face—the face of the man who had shot the bank messenger on the hack, the desperado who had ridden off with twenty thousand dollars—the man he had watched for, but had never seen, in Packsaddle! Terror struck him dumb.

But he woke to action. With a frantic drag on the reins, he dragged his bronco round, and, scarcely knowing what he did, cut at it with his quirt and tore away at a wild gallop.

The horseman stared at him blankly. He could not have failed to see the speechless terror in Bunter's face; but he could not have been able to make the remotest guess at the cause of it.

Thud, thud, thud! went the racing hoofs of Bunter's bronco. Bunter did not fall off, for a good reason. His fat arms clung to the bronco's neck, and he clung to that neck like a limpet to a rock.

Where the horse went, Bunter did not care. All he cared for was to get away from that terrifying desperado, the flour-bag man.

But the horse—gifted with the horse-sense which Billy Bunter sadly lacked—took the homeward trail, as a matter of course, and galloped on towards the distant ranch, with the fat junior clamped to the back of his neck.

The horseman at the fork in the trail stared, and stared; but he did not draw rein. He rode on by the right-hand trail, towards Squaw Mountain, and in a few minutes the rugged folds of the intervening prairie shut off Bunter from his sight.

Bunter's bronco thundered on. For a good mile the fat Owl clung on desperately, then he rolled off.

There was a bump, that shook Bunter—and almost shook Texas. The bronco, probably glad to be relieved of the weight, galloped on to the ranch—minus Bunter!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Chance at Last!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! That's Bunter's gee!"

"The fat ass!"

"The terrific fathead!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had been cow-punching that afternoon. They were riding back to Kicking Cayuse at a leisurely paco in a cheery bunch, and had almost reached the gate when a riderless horse came trotting down the trail.

They knew Bunter's steed—and as it was Bunter's, they were not greatly surprised to see it riderless. Still, they were surprised to see it on the home trail, as Bunter was supposed to be staying at Packsaddle.

"The fat chump!" said Johnny Bull. "He must have started back, or the horse wouldn't be here. The gee's dropped him somewhere on the trail."

Bob Cherry whirled his lasso and rode at the horse. He roped it in promptly and efficiently.

"Better go and pick up Bunter!" he remarked.

"The betterfulness will be terrific, for

the esteemed and idiotic Bunter," grinned Harree Janset Ram Singh.

"The blithering idiot!" granted Johnny Bull. "He was to stay at Packsaddle as long as Smithy did—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Judging by the way we left them yesterday morning, he may have got fed up with Smithy, and started home," he said. "Anyhow, he must have started, and his bronco's dropped him on the trail. Come on!"

It was clear, at all events, that the bronco had dropped Bunter, and that the hapless fat Owl had been left, on foot, on the trail, somewhere between the ranch and the cow town.

So the Famous Five set off, at a gallop, to find him, Bob Cherry leading the riderless horse on the rope. The Famous Five had done a good deal of riding that day, but they had to do some more; certainly, they could not leave Bunter distributed on the prairie. But they really hoped that they would not have to ride a dozen miles to pick him up.

But it was not so bad as that. Only a few miles from the ranch, Bob Cherry waved his quirt and pointed at a fat figure in the trail. A big pair of spectacles flashed back the red glare of the setting sun as that fat figure toddled wearily towards them.

"Jolly old Bunter!" said Bob.

The juniors dashed on, and Bunter, as he sighted them, came to a halt. He had done about three hundred yards on foot, which was two hundred and ninety-nine yards too many for Bunter's comfort. He stopped, and stood panting as the Famous Five rode up, and reined in their horses.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" sang out Bob cheerily.

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"I say, you fellows, is he after me?"
 "He—who? Smithy?" asked Bob.
 "Ow! No. That beast—that villain—oh crikey! I say, you fellows, gimme my horse! I say, keep up with me. I say, have you got your rifles? I say, watch for him. Oh crikey!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Can you see him?" gasped Bunter. "I've been looking back all the time, but I haven't seen him. Can you see him?"

"There's nobody on the trail," answered Harry.

"Sure?" gasped Bunter.

"Quite, fathead! Have you seen anybody—"

"That man!" groaned Bunter.

"What man, you ass?"

"Him!" gasped Bunter.

"There's a lot of him in Texas, old fat man," said Bob. Then he started.

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do. Oh crikey!"

"Not the flour-bag man?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Oh dear! Yes."

"At Packsaddle?" exclaimed Wharton.

"No, you ass! I wouldn't have minded seeing him at Packsaddle," groaned Bunter. "I'd have pointed him out fast enough. Oh crikey! Oh lor'!"

"Then where did you see him?" asked Johnny Bull.

All the Famous Five were keenly interested now. The terror in Bunter's fat face told its own tale. He had seen the desperado who had worn the flour-bag, and he had been frightened out of his fat wits.

"There's a beastly place where there's two beastly trails!" gasped Bunter. "I didn't know which to take, and then I saw him coming, and thought I'd ask him. And then"—Bunter shuddered—"as soon as I saw his face, you know, I—"

"He hadn't another flour-bag on?"

"Eh? No. I saw him, and—oh crikey! I—I galloped off," gasped Bunter, "and—and then I fell off the horse, somehow—"

"You would!" agreed Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"He must have taken the other trail," he said. "He was coming from Packsaddle, Bunter?"

"Yes; coming along as cool as you please!" gasped Bunter. "I never dreamed it was that beast, of course, seeing him coming—till I saw his face. Oh lor'!"

"He doesn't know that his face is known, fathead. Nobody knows him, but you, and he doesn't know that you know him," said Bob. "He rides around like any other man in Packsaddle. Must have surprised him if you bolted at the sight of him."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "I—I suppose that's why he hasn't come after me. But if he knew—"

"Lucky for you he didn't!" said Johnny Bull. "What the thump are you doing, coming back alone? Where's Smithy?"

"Blow Smithy! The beast kicked me because I was having a nap after lunch and—"

"Stick that fat ass on his gee, and come on!" said Bob Cherry. "How long is it since you saw him, Bunter?"

"I don't know."

"You wouldn't," snorted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"It can't have been very long," said Bob. "Only as long as it took Bunter's

brone to get to the ranch, and it was going pretty fast. Here's your gee, Bunter. Coming with us, or going on to the ranch?"

"I say, you fellows, you'd better come with me!" said Bunter, anxiously. "I—I'm not nervous, you know, or—or anything of that sort, but—but I'm afraid you'll be late for supper—"

"Fathead!"

Bunter was helped on his horse—turned in the direction of Kicking Cayuse Ranch. The Famous Five were keen and eager to get on the track of the flour-bag man—Bunter did not share their keenness and eagerness in the very least. Pointing out the man in a crowded cow town was one thing—but meeting him on lonely prairie trails was quite another. Untold gold would not have induced Billy Bunter to join in that pursuit.

"Bunter ought to come!" said Johnny Bull. "He's the only chap who knows the man by sight—"

"I'll watch it!" snorted Bunter.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Beast!"

"If Bunter comes, we shall have to crawl, and there won't be a chance of seeing the man at all!" said Harry. "Roll off, Bunter!"

Bunter settled the matter by starting for the ranch. Billy Bunter had seen all he wanted to see of the flour-bag man—and some over.

"We've got a chance, if we put it on, you fellows," said Harry Wharton. "The man must have taken the Circle O trail, as Bunter saw him at the fork, and he hasn't come this way! No need for us to ride to the fork—we can cut across the prairie to the other trail—it's rough going, but we can do it all right."

"But we shan't know the man if we see him!" said Johnny Bull. "Only Bunter knows him—"

"If we spot a man on that trail, it will be odds that it was the man Bunter saw at the fork," answered Harry. "We can't accuse him on that of course—but we can jolly well see what he looks like, and find out who he is—and once we know that, we can get Bunter to spot him another time."

"What-ho!" said Bob. "Come on!"

The Famous Five lost no time. They turned their broncos northward, and left the trail. It was rough going, across the rugged prairie: but the chums of the Remove were used to rough riding by this time. They put the broncos to the gallop, and rode almost like the wind.

The miles flew under the racing hoofs. At a breathless pace, they cut across the rugged prairie that intervened between the two trails: and in a very short time, struck the Circle O trail.

Without drawing rein, they wheeled into it and rode westward.

The man they wanted had, no doubt, passed that point long since: but unless he was riding very hard, they had a good chance of overtaking him, going all out. And as he could not have the remotest suspicion that anyone was pursuing him, there seemed no reason why he should be putting on unusual speed. The Famous Five were putting on very unusual speed—urging on the swift broncos with whip and spur—riding as if for their lives.

And suddenly, Bob Cherry gave a breathless whoop, and pointed with his quirt.

Far ahead of the juniors, but visible in the red sunset, a stetson hat bobbed over the grass.

There was a horseman ahead on the trail, riding towards Squaw Mountain. Was it the man who had passed Bunter at the fork? It was almost a certainty—and with fierce determination, the

Famous Five urged on their broncos, determined to ride the horseman down, and discover who he was, if horseflesh could do it.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Man on the Trail!

GALLOP! Gallop!
 The rapid hoofs rang on the hard-beaten trail.

The Greyfriars juniors were going all out: and the wind from Squaw Mountain stung their face as they dashed on, the red sunset in their eyes.

Harry Wharton was a little ahead—Bob Cherry next—Frank Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Johnny Bull bunched behind—each fellow getting all he could out of his horse.

The stetson hat on the trail ahead was plainer to the view: and they made out the figure of a rider under it, and the horse he rode. They were gaining at every stride of the broncos.

They were, in fact, putting on twice the speed of the man ahead. He was riding at a rather rapid, but steady pace: like a man who did not want to lose time, but who had no occasion for undue haste.

Obviously he was not in flight, and did not think that he had any reason for flight. A puncher, or a rancher, riding at his usual speed on his homeward way, was what he looked like—and that, no doubt, was what he was. Was he also the man who had worn the flour-bag and robbed the Prairie Bend hack? That was what the juniors wanted to know.

Fast as they rode, they kept their eyes open, on the alert.

On the trail, and on the surrounding plains, they sighted no one else. The chances, therefore, were that the man ahead was the man who had passed Billy Bunter at the fork of the trails.

They could not, of course, be sure. It was possible that the man who had passed Bunter, had left the trail before they reached it and ridden away on the plains. In which case they had lost him, and now were simply riding after some other man who happened to be jogging along on his homeward way by that trail.

That was quite possible. Nevertheless, the chances were that this was the man—and they meant to have a good look at him, register his face in their memory, and if possible learn his name—if he was a stranger to them.

Having learned where he was to be found, at another time, it would be quite easy to lay plans for Bunter to see him later: which would settle, beyond doubt, whether he was the man in the flour-bag or not.

As they drew closer, it occurred to all the Famous Five that this horseman ahead was not a stranger to them—that he was some Packsaddle man whom they had seen before.

There was something familiar in the figure of the rider, though so far they could only see his back. He was a man of athletic frame, well dressed, and rode well. All the juniors had an impression that they had looked after that same figure, riding away from them, not very long ago.

The horseman did not seem aware, so far, that they were behind him. Certainly, whether he was the flour-bag man or not, he could not have guessed that he was intentionally pursued.

He did not look back; but kept on at the same steady pace, heading for the spur of Squaw Mountain that stretched away from the mighty mass

to the south-east. He had to cross that spur if he was going to Circle O or beyond.

"By gum!" breathed Bob Cherry, suddenly.

It flashed into Bob's mind where he had seen that figure riding away, and gazed after him as he went—it had been at the gate of the Kicking Cayuse, a few days ago—when Jad Blake had ridden away from the ranch on a borrowed horse.

Harry Wharton glanced round. The same thought had come into his own mind.

"Blake!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Looks like him! Going home to the Circle O—this is his way home from Packsaddle."

"Oh!" breathed Harry.

He remembered having seen Blake take the hack for Prairie Bend, and having heard him mention to the sheriff that he would be back in a couple of days. If this was Blake, evidently he had come back in the hack that afternoon, and was now riding home from Packsaddle.

It was Blake—a few moments later there was no doubt about that for the horseman, as the juniors drew nearer, heard the thump of hoofs behind him, and turned his head to glance back.

The Famous Five were near enough now to make out his face, as he turned it—and they all knew Blake, at once.

"Blake!" exclaimed Johnny Bull, blankly.

"The esteemed Blake!" ejaculated Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, my only hat!" exclaimed Nugent.

Blake's backward glance was careless. Perhaps he was surprised to see the schoolboys galloping towards the lonely wilderness of Squaw Mountain, at the fall of evening: but if so, he was not interested. He had simply glanced back on hearing the hoof-beats: but after that momentary glance, he rode on again as before, at the same pace. Clearly it did not cross his mind that the presence of the Greyfriars fellows had any connection with himself.

Bob Cherry grinned a little.

"We've lost our man!" he remarked. "He must have left the trail before we hit it—and we've followed Blake instead."

"We can ask him if he's seen anyone on the trail!" said Harry.

"Yes, that's so," agreed Bob. "He must have come along about the time—ten to one, he may have seen the man who passed Bunter."

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

His thoughts were rather in a whirl since he had recognised the man ahead. At the sight of Blake, his friends concluded that they had missed the man Bunter had seen. Wharton did not feel so sure.

"Not a word about the flour-bag man, you fellows!" said Harry suddenly. "We can ask him questions without mentioning who we're after. No need to tell Blake anything about it."

"Not a word!" agreed Bob.

It had already been settled that nothing was to be said, except to the sheriff, on the subject of what Bunter knew. Talk on the subject might have reached the ears of the unknown desperado, and warned him that there was one person who knew what he looked like without the flour-bag.

And, with the strange, startling thoughts that were now rising in his mind, least of all did Harry Wharton want Blake to hear a word about it.

Up to the moment when they had recognised Blake, the juniors had thought it ten to one that the man

ahead was the flour-bag man. Recognising the Circle O rancher, four members of the Co. dismissed that idea automatically, as it were.

Harry Wharton did not dismiss it.

He was certain—they were all certain—that the flour-bag man was a Packsaddle man, probably well known in the locality. Why not Blake? Why not, as much as any other Packsaddle man?

As likely as any other; more likely, indeed, as the man was a desperate gamester, who had lost almost all he had, and was well known to be hard pressed for money.

With a clatter of hoofs, the Famous Five rode up round Blake. The young rancher had neither increased nor diminished his pace, taking no heed whatever of the schoolboys after that one careless, backward glance.

But he looked at them now with a careless inquiry as they rode round him and checked their horses to his speed.

"Good-evening, Mr. Blake!" Bob Cherry greeted him breathlessly.

The rancher gave him a nod. He did not check his horse, and the juniors rode on with him. It was quite plain that Mr. Blake did not want their company.

"Have you seen anybody on this trail, Mr. Blake?" asked Bob.

"No!"

"We're looking for a fellow——"

"I've passed nobody on this trail."

Blake's answers were curt.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"Nobody since you left Packsaddle, Mr. Blake?" he asked.

"Only a fat gink at the fork of the trails," answered Blake. "If you're looking for that geck, I guess he went by the other trail, if his cayuse hasn't thrown him off."

The rancher rode on, but the Famous Five no longer rode with him. They drew rein, halting in the trail, fairly dumbfounded.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Swipe!

BILLY BUNTER stood in the gateway at Kicking Cayuse, leaning on the post, his eyes and his spectacles fixed on the dusky prairie.

Bunter's feelings were deep and bitter.

He had arrived at Kicking Cayuse in time—in good time—for supper. Now it was long past supper-time.

But supper was still only a tantalising vision.

That boast—that cheeky choreman—that unspeakable swab, Chick, was cheeky, as usual. It had happened before. Now it had happened again. Chick was going to hand out supper when the Famous Five came in. He

was not going to hand it out before that. The fact that Bunter was hungry only seemed to afford that iniquitous choreman a sort of fiendish amusement.

Billy Bunter rather regretted that he had not, after all, stayed at Packsaddle.

Smithy was a beast, and it was very agreeable to let Smithy down and leave him hunting at the cow town for a fat

Owl who was not there. On the other hand, "eats" at the Pack Hotel were prompt and ample.

But Bunter was at Kicking Cayuse now, and had to make the best of that. When he told Chick, at the kitchen door, what he thought of him, Chick pelted him with beans till he rolled away in haste.

So here was Bunter, leaning on the gate-post, watching the darkening prairie with longing eyes and spectacles.

At last, at long last, came a thudding of hoofs, and a horseman rode up to the gate. But it was only one rider, and it was not one of the Famous Five. It was Herbert Vernon-Smith, back from Packsaddle.

Bunter gave him a morose blink.

Smithy glanced at him, dismounted swiftly, and gripped his quirt. The look on Smithy's face was most unpleasant.

His temper was even more unpleasant than his look.

After his game of poker with Jad Blake, the rancher had ridden out of Packsaddle on the homeward trail, and Vernon-Smith had looked for Bunter, angrily wondering what had become of the fat ass.

It did not occur to him at first that Bunter had cleared off, and for a good hour he looked up and down and round about for him, in vain. Then, suspecting the truth, he inquired at the stable, and learned that the fat Owl had taken his horse hours ago and gone.

Smithy's feelings were deep when he learned that.

Two nights and two days had been spent in the cow town for the special purpose of Bunter keeping his eyes open for the face of the flour-bag man. Nothing had come of it—as likely as not owing to Bunter's own inimitable methods of keeping watch—and now the fat frump had cleared off and thrown up the whole thing!

It was useless to remain in Packsaddle without Bunter. Smithy called for his horse to ride home.

On the way back to the ranch he swished his quirt in the air a good many times with the thought of what he was going to do with it when he reached Kicking Cayuse and found Bunter.

Now he had reached Kicking Cayuse and found Bunter!

He lost no time.

Swipe!

Bunter did not seem to have expected that. Bunter seldom expected anything till it happened.

He gave a fearful roar and bounded clear of the ground.

Swipe!

"Yarooop!"

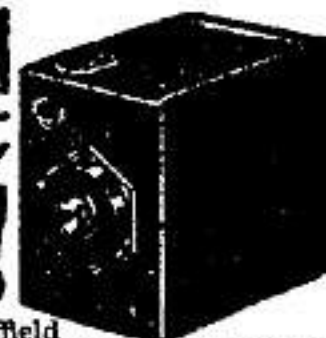
Swipe!

(Continued on next page.)

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"Why, you beast!" yelled Bunter. "Wharrer you up to? Leave off! Oh crikey! Stoppit! Yaroooh!"

Swipe!
The fat Owl, yelling, turned and fled for the ranch-house. After him rushed the Bounder, still swiping with the quirt.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!
Billy Bunter's wild howls rang far and wide. Punchers stared, grinning, out of the bunkhouse. Bill, who was smoking a pipe by the corral wall, stared over the pipe. Chick looked out of the rancho, grinning.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!
"Yaroooh! Help! Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter.

He flew up the veranda steps, the swiping quirt just behind him.

Chick, looking out of the doorway of the living-room, chuckled. Chick, for some reason unknown to the fat Owl, did not like Bunter. He seemed to derive immense entertainment from the sight of the hapless fat Owl fleeing from the swiping quirt.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Chick, and he fairly doubled up with mirth in the doorway.

The next moment he roared again—a different kind of roar. Bunter, bolting across the veranda to escape, did not even see Chick in the doorway. He did not know that Chick was there till he crashed.

He crashed like a battering-ram. Chick, roaring, but not with mirth, went over backwards into the living-room, where the back of his head tapped hard on a hard pinewood floor.

Bunter crashed down on Chick. He crashed hard, and he crashed heavy. He drove every ounce of breath out of the wretched Chick. The choreman, spread-eagled on his back, gurgled horribly.

Planting a fat knee on Chick's face, Bunter heaved himself to his feet and rushed on, dodging out by the inner door to the hallway.

The next moment the Bounder flew in from the veranda. Chick's agonised gurgle changed to a moan, as the Bounder trampled over him, stumbled, and fell on him.

It was rather fortunate for Bunter. It gave him time to do the stairs and bolt into his room. It was not fortunate for Chick. The unhappy choreman moaned feebly under the falling Bounder.

"Oooooogh!" came in a faint squeak from Chick.

The Bounder panted.
"You fool! What are you sticking there for? Where's Bunter?"

"Wooooogh!" moaned Chick.

The Bounder jumped up and rushed across the room. He reached the hallway in time to hear a door slam above, followed by the click of a key. He ran up the stairs and kicked at a locked door.

"Beast!" came from within. "Cad! Swab! Low rotter! Yah!"

Vernon-Smith tucked the quirt under his arm and tramped down the stairs. Billy Bunter was safe out of reach—for the present, at least. With knitted brows the Bounder tramped back into the living-room.

He had expected to find the Famous Five at the ranch, but they were not to be seen. He stared at Chick, who was sitting up, with both hands pressed to the widest of part of his circumference, gurgling for breath, and uttering moans that might have touched a heart of stone.

"Where are my friends?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Oooooogh!" moaned Chick.
"Have they gone out?"
"Oooooogh!"
"You gurgling idiot, where are they?"
"Urrrrggh!"
"Will you answer, you fathead?"
"Gug-gug-ug!"

The Bounder tramped out of the rancho, leaving Chick to moan and gurgle.

"I guess they been punching cows," said Bill, when Smithy inquired of the foreman. "They ain't hit the ranch yet. They sure are late."

The Bounder, with a grunt, went down to the gate.

It was half an hour later that a thudding of hoofs, and a jingle of bridles, announced the arrival of the Famous Five.

Vernon-Smith gave them a far from amiable look as they rode in at the gate, in a tired and dusty bunch.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Smithy's here!" exclaimed Bob. "You've come back from Packsaddle, old bean?"

"Yes!" snapped the Bounder. "That fool Bunter—"

Bob chuckled.
"We've seen Bunter. And we've got news for you, old man."

The Bounder, staring at the Famous Five in the dusk, could read the excitement in their faces.

"We've got him, Smithy!" breathed Bob, as he dismounted.

"Got him?" repeated the Bounder.

"I mean, we can put our finger on him when we like."

"Who, you ass?"
Bob lowered his voice:
"The man in the flour-bag!"

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wanted Man!

"BLAKE?"

"Blake!"
The Bounder whistled.

Harry Wharton & Co. had said no more until they were in the rancho. It was not a matter for other ears to hear. The Famous Five had returned to Kicking Cayuse, after that meeting on the Circle O trail, deeply excited, and absolutely certain. What Wharton had guessed, his comrades knew, when Jad Blake had uttered his last words, and ridden on and left them. There was not a spot of doubt left in their minds.

In the rancho Chick had retired to his kitchen. He could still be heard, gasping. Bunter was locked in his room, fearfully hungry, but afraid to venture forth. Supper was very late. But none of the juniors gave a thought to Chick, or Bunter, or supper. Vernon-Smith led the way to his room, and lighted a lamp. The door was closed; and then they told him. The Bounder listened, and whistled.

"Blake?" he repeated. "By gad! Why didn't I guess it?"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"None of us guessed it, Smithy, or thought or dreamed of it. Even when we found him on the trail, we thought very likely we'd missed our man, and Blake might have seen him."

"That was what I thought," said Bob. "But when he told us that he'd passed Bunter at the fork of the trails, we—"

"He never knew what he was telling us," grinned Johnny Bull. "By gum, it made me jump when he said it! I never dreamed—"

"Same here!" said Frank Nugent,

"And yet we might have. We jolly well knew it was a Packsaddle man, and one who was hard up."

"We ought to have guessed," said the Bounder quietly. "I wonder I didn't. Why, now we know, everything points to it. But—there's no doubt now—if Bunter saw the flour-bag man at the fork, and Blake said he passed Bunter there, that fixes it."

"Of course, he hasn't the remotest idea that Bunter knows his face, or that anybody does," said Wharton. "He never dreamed that when he told us he passed Bunter at the fork, he was telling us that he was the flour-bag man."

The Bounder laughed.

"That fat fool!" he said. "I've quirted him, for leaving me in the lurch at Packsaddle. And he's done the trick, after all. The fat idiot! Blake must have passed right under his nose this afternoon when he got off the hack, but the blithering idiot had gone to sleep!"

Vernon-Smith walked about the room, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his eyes shining with excitement. All his ill-humour was gone now. The news had bucked the Bounder tremendously.

"We ought to have guessed," he repeated. "I tell you, now we know, everything points to Jad Blake."

"Now we know," agreed Bob.

"But not before the knowfulness," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"I tell you, it was plain enough, if we'd only thought it," said Vernon-Smith. "You remember the first time the flour-bag man showed up—that was before any of us had met Blake. I was going over to meet him at the Pack, make his acquaintance, and talk about buying his ranch."

"And I went because you'd crooked your leg," said Bob. "And the flour-bag man stopped me on the trail with a gun, thinking I was you."

"We thought, at the time, that he must have heard the appointment spoken of. I dare say a lot of Packsaddle people knew," said the Bounder. "But it's plain enough now. The flour-bag man expected to see me at that time on that trail, because he was—Blake!"

"Plain enough now," said Nugent.

"And the next day we went over to the Circle O to see him, and the flour-bag man held me up on Squaw Mountain, and robbed me of a thousand dollars." The Bounder's eyes gleamed. "How did he know? I thought at the time that Bob must have given Blake my message, in the hearing of others; but we know now—it was Blake who held me up on the mountain. You remember he joined us on the trail before we got to his ranch."

"All clear now," said Johnny Bull.

"And it was Blake—Jad Blake—who stopped the hack, and robbed the bank-messenger, and shot him up, and laid it to the account of the Rio Kid," went on Smithy. "We never dreamed that he was Blake when we spotted him in the flour-bag, and chased him; and he got away by leaping the baranca. We might have—we ought to have! How did the flour-bag man know the dollars were on the hack? Blake knew, because the money was coming to pay for buying his ranch. I've wondered a hundred times how the trail-thief knew. I ought to have guessed."

The Bounder gave an angry grunt. But the Famous Five shook their heads.



"You doggoned young piecan!" roared the sheriff, striding between Jad Blake and Vernon-Smith. "You figure that you can hold up a guy in my office, agin my orders! Pack that gun, and beat it out this office!" The Bounder's eyes blazed. "Stand aside, you old fool!" he roared.

Now that they knew at last the real identity of the man in the flour-bag, many circumstances cropped up in the minds of the juniors—pointing to Poker Blake.

But those circumstances cropped up, only because they now knew the truth. They could never have guessed the trail-thief's secret.

"Just the man, too," went on Smithy. "A spendthrift rotter, who has gambled away nearly everything he has; sold everything off his ranch, and now selling the ranch itself, to get more money to chuck away at poker and faro. Just the man, if we'd thought of him."

"Only we didn't," murmured Bob. "We guessed, too, that the flour-bag man would ride with the sheriff, and shout out his loudest that the trail-thief was the Rio Kid," continued Smithy. "Exactly what Blake did. Yet we never guessed."

"Well, plenty of the other men rode with the sheriff, and shouted out the same thing," said Bob. "We couldn't guess."

"If Bunter had ever met Blake, he would have known at once when that blighter took the flour-bag off," said the Bounder. "And if the fat fool had had sense enough to give anything like a description—"

"Well, he knows him again all right, at any rate," said Bob.

"Another thing," said the Bounder, "you heard what he said to the sheriff, when he was taking the hack to Prairie Bend yesterday morning. He didn't care if the whole town heard him say that he was hard up, and going to Red Bluffs to raise the wind till he could get the money for his ranch. Of course, that was what he wanted. With my father's twenty thousand dollars in his pockets, he

wanted to be supposed to be as hard up as usual."

"Right on the wicket," agreed Bob. "We can think of a lot of things, now we know."

"And that's not all," said the Bounder, with a glitter in his eyes. "Why did he make that trip on the railway? Not to raise the wind, when he had the twenty thousand dollars he shot up the bank-messenger for. The money was in large bills. And he didn't want to be seen changing large bills in Packsaddle, where he was known to be short of small bills."

"By gum!" said Bob. He whistled. "That railroad trip was to get rid of the loot, in a place where he wasn't known."

"And he's got rid of it!" said the Bounder savagely. "He had tens and fifties and hundreds this afternoon in Packsaddle—as I happened to notice." Smithy did not mention that he had noticed it over a game of poker at the Pack. "He won't be so keen on selling the ranch now—now that he's got the twenty thousand dollars for nothing."

Herbert Vernon-Smith clenched his hands.

"The pater knows nothing of it as yet," he said. "I was hoping we should get the man and get the loot back. Now he's got rid of it—not at Red Bluffs, either—he wouldn't have mentioned where he was really going—most likely some town hundreds of miles up the railroad, outside the cow country. But if a large sum is found on him, it comes to the same thing. Everybody knows that he couldn't raise a thousand dollars to save his life—except by selling what's left of his ranch."

"That will fix him!" said Bob, with a nod.

"Money doesn't last that kind of man long, though!" said Vernon-Smith, with

a contemptuous sneer. "It will go at poker and faro, if we give him time. We've got to get him—and get him quick!"

"Now we know——" said Harry.

"Now we know Bunter's got to identify him in the presence of the sheriff!" said Vernon-Smith. "Even that bonehead Lick will have to sit up and take notice, when his man's actually pointed out to him. We'll get the man, and we'll get back what's left of my father's dollars—and the dollars will prove it on him."

And, the matter having been discussed and settled, the juniors remembered supper, and went down to the same.

Chick, still in a rather gasping state, served the supper; but Billy Bunter did not arrive.

"Where's that fat ass?" asked Bob, looking round.

"Upstairs," answered Vernon-Smith, "behind a locked door."

"Tell him it's all serene," said Bob.

The Bounder laughed.

"O.K.!" he said. "I'll fetch him."

He went up the stairs again and banged at Bunter's door.

"Beast!" came from within.

"Supper!" called out the Bounder.

"All serene, you fat Owl—you can come out! Pax!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Bounder having made it "pax," Bunter ventured forth. He blinked suspiciously at the Bounder as he went downstairs. But Smithy no longer carried the quirt. And when he got into the living-room and sighted the supper, Billy Bunter forgot all about the quirt and quirting. At last—at long, long last—Bunter was able to fill the aching void in the inner Bunter—and for the next hour foodstuffs occupied his fat mind, and, at a rapid rate, occupied his fat circumference.

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THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Sheriff's Office!

SHERIFF LICK grunted. Sitting in his office, in the sunny morning, the sheriff of Packsaddle was looking out on the dusty plaza, with a grim and gloomy eye.

Every now and then his glance turned to the summit of Squaw Mountain, barring the blue sky in the west, visible through the open doorway.

Somewhere in that rocky wilderness the Rio Kid had his "hide-out"—but the sheriff and his men had been unable to discover it.

Mr. Lick was tired of combing sun-baked rocks and struggling through steep gulches in search of that elusive outlaw. Perhaps, too, he was tired of riding a bronco with his face to the tail, and realised that if he hunted the Kid in that rocky wilderness, he was less likely to find him than to be found by him! He had given up the hunt—hoping to resume it if he received some news of the Kid's next activities.

But his failure did not please Mr. Lick—he was angry, and grim, and disgruntled. Bud Carter, of Prairie Bend, lay in the doc's shack at the cow town, sorely wounded—shot up, as the sheriff believed, and all Packsaddle believed, by the Rio Kid. Mr. Lick would have given much to get a "line" on the outlaw of the Rio Grande.

He grunted—expressively—as a bunch of riders came in from the prairie trail and pulled in opposite his office on the plaza. He was not in the least pleased to see the Greyfriars party from Kicking Cayuse.

But whether he was pleased or not, he had to see them—for they had evidently arrived to call on him. Leaving their horses hitched, they came into the office in a body—Vernon-Smith, the Famous Five, and Billy Bunter.

Mr. Lick greeted them with a grim stare.

If they had come there to spill any more "guff" about what that fat gink fancied he knew, the sheriff was prepared to cut them very short. He had

heard all he wanted from that fat gink—and a little over!

"Morning, sheriff!" said Vernon-Smith cheerily.

Grunt!

"News for you!" said the Bounder.

Grunt!

The juniors smiled faintly. Sheriff Lick was, evidently, not in a mood to welcome any more news from the Greyfriars fellows. But he was going to have it, all the same.

"You remember what Bunter told you the other day, Mr. Lick—" went on the Bounder quietly.

"I guess I don't want to hear all that bunk agin!" growled the sheriff.

"He's seen the man!"

"You're telling me!" grunted Mr. Lick.

"And identified him—"

"Sez you!"

"And he's coming here—"

"The Rio Kid?" jeered the sheriff.

"No!" said the Bounder. "Not the Rio Kid, sheriff, but the man in the flour-bag, who held up Andy Jones' hack and shot the bank messenger. We've spotted that guy, sheriff, and we call on you, as sheriff of Packsaddle, to see him identified, in your presence, and to arrest him."

The sheriff drew a deep breath.

He was, in spite of himself, impressed by that plain statement. He did not doubt that Bunter had actually seen the man in the flour-bag—but his belief was that the "fat gink" had been too frightened to notice what he was like, and that the man was, in point of fact, the Rio Kid.

Still, if Bunter had seen a man whom he declared to be the man who had taken the flour-bag off his face, after the robbery of the hack, Mr. Lick really had no choice but to go into the matter.

He had his duty to do, though his fixed belief was not in the least unchanged—so far, at all events.

"Put it plain!" he grunted. "That geck makes out he's seen a man that's the guy he saw taking off the flour-bag?"

"I jolly well did!" declared Bunter.

"Where you see him?"

"On the Packsaddle trail yesterday," answered Bunter. "He came up to the fork of the trail when I was going back to the ranch. I was going to ask him the way—and then I recognised him—"

"The Kid, I reckon, if you did!" said the sheriff.

"It jolly well wasn't!" hooted Bunter. "Think I don't know one face from another, Mr. Lick?"

"I'll say you don't know enough to go in when it rains!" grunted the sheriff. "If there's a boob in Boobsville that's got anything on you, I'd like to see the colour of his hair."

"Look here—"

"Aw, can it!" snapped the sheriff. "If you got anything to spill, spill it! Where's the man, if you seen him?"

"How should I know?" grunted Bunter. "I haven't seen him since he passed me at the fork of the trail yesterday, and I don't know who he is, except that he's the man who took off the flour-bag."

"That's all Bunter knows!" said Harry Wharton. "But he's ready to identify the man, Mr. Lick, as soon as he sees him here."

"Here?" repeated the sheriff, with a stare. "You figure that the Rio Kid will ride into Packsaddle?"

"The man's not the Kid, or anything like him!" said Bob Cherry hotly.

"Well, if he ain't, he's a trail-thief, and wanted for shooting up Bud Carter," said the sheriff. "He ain't likely to come here, I reckon. What you mean?"

"We mean this," said the Bounder quietly—"we know who the man is, though Bunter doesn't. He's a man you know, sheriff, and who's known to all Packsaddle—with his flour-bag off. He's a man who's ridden with you hunting the Kid. And he's coming here for Bunter to identify him in your presence—not knowing that we know him."

"I don't get you!" grunted the sheriff. "Who's the guy, anyhow?"

"We can't give his name till he's been identified by the fellow who knows his face!" answered the Bounder.

"Nope!" agreed the sheriff. "I guess you better not spill a guy's name unless you got proof. But how you getting the man here for that fat gink to give him the once-over?"

"I sent him a message last night from the ranch," answered Vernon-Smith. "It was a message that will bring him to your office before midday, sheriff."

"Search me!" said Mr. Lick, staring.

"We want Bunter to be in your office to watch any man that comes in," went on Smithy. "As soon as he sees the face he knows, he will point him out to you. Isn't that good enough?"

Mr. Lick was silent and thoughtful.

He was unwilling to give up his fixed belief that the hold-up man was the Rio Kid—all the more, no doubt, because of that backward ride on his bronco. He was unwilling to admit that he might have been mistaken and that he had spent days of weary riding, hunting the wrong man. Nevertheless, if actually the trail-thief was another man, not the Kid, Mr. Lick wanted to rope in that man. He did not believe that Bunter could identify any man as the trail-thief unless it was the Kid. But clearly he had to give Bunter the chance to do so.

He nodded at last.

"I guess," he said slowly, "that the gink can roost here a few if he wants and give every guy that comes in the once-over. I ain't saying nope to that. Set around if you want."

"That's good enough!" said Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton & Co. on a Barren Isle!

"THE GREYFRIARS CRUSOES!"

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20
MORE
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"I—I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter looked a little dubious. "I—I'm ready to point out that villain if he comes here, of—of course. But I—I'd rather not have any trouble with him, you know."

The sheriff grinned.

"You fat ass!" said Bob Cherry. "The sheriff's here to look after him, and we're going to be here! All you've got to do is to squeak when you see him."

"I mean to say, if he's got a gun, you know—"

"He won't have a chance to pull a gun!" said Vernon-Smith grimly. "I'm going to get him covered, old fat man. Don't you worry."

Billy Bunter seemed a little worried, all the same. He was willing—indeed, keen and eager—to distinguish himself by pointing out the flour-bag man and getting him arrested. At the same time, he was deeply scared by that flour-bag man.

In the presence of the sheriff and the six Greyfriars fellows it seemed a safe proposition. Still, Bunter seemed worried. He blinked at the inner door, which was half-open.

"I—I—I say, suppose—suppose I step into that room?" suggested Bunter. "I—I could see him from round the door, you know."

"You fat ass!"

"I—I say, you—you don't mind if I—I step into that room, Mr. Lick?" asked Bunter, blinking anxiously at the sheriff.

Mr. Lick snorted.

"I guess if you git outer sight it will improve the landscape around here!" he answered.

It was not a gracious permission; but Bunter did not mind that! He rolled into the inner room, leaving the door an inch open behind him.

Mr. Lick gave another snort and settled down in his chair with his feet on his official desk. The juniors remained in a group by the window, watching the street.

During the next hour several people came in to see the sheriff—Packsaddle men who had business with him. But there came no denouncing squeak from the inner room.

It was close on midday when the juniors, from the window, saw a horse-man ride in from the prairie trail, and exchanged glances. The Bounder shifted the butt of his revolver nearer to his hand.

Harry Wharton gave a quick look at the inner door, open about an inch. But the fat Owl's spectacles were no longer glimmering at that narrow aperture. Billy Bunter, no doubt, was getting tired and he had sat down in the inner room.

But he was there, and a call would be enough when the suspected man stood in the sheriff's office. The juniors breathed quickly, and their hearts beat fast as the horseman rode up to the sheriff's office and dismounted.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

"Hands Up!"

JAD BLAKE hitched his horse and strode into the office of the sheriff of Packsaddle.

Mr. Lick, without removing his feet from the desk, or the cigar from his mouth, gave him a nod.

"Mornin', Blake!" he said.

The rancher glanced at the group of juniors, probably surprised to see them waiting there. But he gave them no other heed.

"Mornin', Lick!" he answered. "I got your message. What's wanted?"

The sheriff raised his eyebrows.

"You got my message?" he repeated.

"Sure; at the Circle O last night."

"You got me guessing, Blake," answered the sheriff in astonishment. "I sure ain't sent you no message."

The rancher stared at him, and his brow darkened.

"What you giving me, Lick?" he exclaimed. "A Kicking Cayuse puncher rode over to the Circle O last evening and gave me your word. He allowed that it was a special message, that you wanted to see me this morning on business that couldn't wait."

"Search me!" said the sheriff blankly. "I'll say that puncher was stringing you along, Blake! I'm telling you I ain't sent no message."

Blake set his lips.

His glance turned from the sheriff to the group of Greyfriars juniors and fixed on Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"I guess I want this explained, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he said grimly. "Yuba Dick, from your ranch, hit the Circle O last night with that message. He allowed that you had handed it to him after coming back from Packsaddle."

"Correct!" said the Bounder coolly. "I sent Yuba over to the Circle O with exactly that message, Mr. Blake. Yuba figured that it came from the sheriff—but it came from me."

Blake stared at him, angry, but more puzzled than angry.

"Waal, what you mean?" he snapped. "You stringing me along to give me a ride into town for nothing? You playing schoolboy jokes on me?"

"Not in the least! There's no joke in the matter!" said the Bounder. "Mr. Lick does want to see you on special business that can't wait, that's why I sent the message."

"I don't get you!" snapped Blake. "If Lick wants to see me I guess Lick knows."

"Search me!" said Mr. Lick.

"Mr. Lick doesn't know yet—but he's going to!" explained the Bounder with icy coolness. "You're wanted in this office, Mr. Blake, on business that can't wait—and that message was sent to bring you here."

Blake's eyes glittered under his knitted brows.

"You better make it clear, and you better make it clear quick!" he snapped. "I guess I ain't a man to be fooled by a schoolboy!"

At that moment the inner door opened. A fat face and a large pair of spectacles looked out.

"I say, you fellows, I'm getting hungry!" said Bunter. "I say, what about getting some dinner at the Pack and coming back afterwards? I—Oh!"

Bunter broke off as his eyes fell on Blake.

"Oh crikey! Ow! Keep him off, you fellows!" yelled Bunter, and he jumped back into the inner room and slammed the door.

Blake stared in blank astonishment. The sheriff stared, bewildered. Blake had no clue to the fat junior's terror. But the sheriff had, and Mr. Lick understood the next moment.

"By the great horned toad!" he gasped. "Not Blake!"

"Yes," said Vernon-Smith, "Blake!"

"You locoed young geck!" gasped Mr. Lick. "You figuring that it was Blake—a guy all Packsaddle knows! Aw, can it!"

"It was Blake, Mr. Lick," said Harry Wharton, "and Bunter knows him! Surely you can see that for yourself."

Blake, in bewilderment and rage, stared round from face to face.

"What's this game?" he exclaimed savagely. "You got a guy here to make a fool of him, or what? What does this mean, Lick?"

The sheriff grinned. Only too plainly he did not believe a word of it; believed nothing except that a ludicrous mistake had been made by a fat gink who did not know enough to go in when it rained!

"Bring him here!" he gasped. "Corral that fat guy and roll him out. I guess this is going to make you snicker, Blake. You don't want to get your mad up, old-timer! That fat geck sure is loco."

Harry Wharton threw open the inner door. There was nothing to be seen of Billy Bunter for a moment. Then Wharton grabbed a podgy ankle and hooked Bunter out from under a table.

"You fat ass!" he roared. "Come into the office!"

"I—I—I say—" stuttered Bunter.

"Come on, fathead!"

Wharton shifted his grasp to Bunter's collar and booked him through the doorway.

Blake stared at him. The fat junior's terror of him was only too clear, but he did not yet understand the cause.

"What's got that guy?" he asked, in wonder. "Does that geck figure I'm going to eat him, body and boots? That's the gink I passed on the trail yesterday, and he vamoosed like he'd seen a Wolf-Apache on the warpath. What's got you, you locoed bonthead?"

"Spill it!" gasped the sheriff. "Tell Mr. Blake who you think he is, you pesky piecan!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Cough it up, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I—"

"I guess you can see that Bunter recognises the man and identifies him, Mr. Lick!" said Vernon-Smith.

His hand was on the butt of his Colt.

"Let him spill it!" said Mr. Lick. "You know Mr. Blake—you, Bunter?"

"I—I didn't know his name was Blake!" gasped Bunter.

He parked himself carefully behind the Famous Five as he answered.

"That cuts no ice, you gink! You figure that you know him?"

"Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"Where you seen him?"

"I—I—I saw him in the chaparral when he took the flour-bag off!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! He—he's the man in the flour-bag!"

The juniors all had their eyes fixed on Blake.

For a second he stood quite still, staring. That accusation was utterly unexpected, and it came like a blow to the rancher. He stood as if transfixed, dumbfounded. Not till that moment had he even dreamed that he was suspected, much less known, for what he was. In that terrible moment the colour wavered in his hard, reckless face, and a hunted look came into his eyes. Then, like lightning, his hand shot to his revolver.

"Hands up!"

The Bounder's voice rang, sharp. His Colt was out, levelled at the Circle O rancher, his finger on the trigger, his eyes gleaming like steel over the barrel.

"Hands up, Jad Blake! Touch that Colt, and I'll shoot you dead where you stand! Hands up, you trail-thief, or take what's coming to you!"

"Will you drop that gun and tell a guy what this means?" roared Jad Blake, his eyes gleaming.

"Hands up!" said the millionaire's son. "And quick about it!"

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Defeat!

THE Bounder's revolver looked the Circle O rancher in the face. Sheriff Lick, his feet still on his deck, stared over those feet in blank amazement.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood, their quirts in their hands, ready to weigh in with the butts, if needed. But they were not needed. Vernon-Smith had the rancher covered; he had been watching him like a cat, ready for the sudden and desperate grasp at a weapon; he had him covered, and his voice and his look showed that he was ready to shoot—as he would have done on the instant had Blake pulled the gun.

Blake's hard face was distorted with rage. But there was more than rage in it, to the juniors' eyes; there was desperation. That sudden clutch at a weapon was the action of a guilty man whose first fierce thought was desperate resistance.

But Blako did not pull the gun.

He would have gone down with a bullet through him had he pulled it and that fact, in spite of his fury, was quite clear to him.

His hand touched the butt, but he did not close on it. Slowly, breathing rage, he put his hands over his head. His eyes burned at the Bounder; but he had to obey or go down, and he knew it, and his hands went up.

The sheriff spluttered.

"You young gink!" he roared. "Pack that gun! You hear me shout?" Mr. Lick dragged his feet off the desk to get out of his chair.

The Bounder did not heed him.

"Take that scoundrel's gun, Wharton!" he said.

Harry Wharton stepped forward and removed the Colt from the holster at the rancher's belt. Blako made an almost convulsive movement; but he did not venture to resist, and he was disarmed.

Then the Bounder lowered his revolver.

"You can put your hands down now, Mr. Blake!" he said. "But I've got my gun on you—keep that in mind!"

Blake lowered his hands.

"Are you standing for this, Lick?" he panted, hoarse with rage. "You got me here to be bulldozed by a bunch of schoolboys?"

"Not in your life-time!" gasped the sheriff. "But you don't want your hardware, Blake. What you figure on pulling a gun for, you mosshead?"

Blake looked at him. With a visible effort, he pulled himself together.

His first desperate action, in reaching for a gun, had been the action of a guilty man, denounced, and believing, in the moment of the sudden shock, that the game was up. The juniors knew that if Mr. Lick did not. But he was recovering his coolness now.

His first overwhelming thought had been that he was known for what he was—that he had to fight his way out of the sheriff's office. But, as coolness came back, he realised that that was far from being the case.

"I guess my mad was up, Lick," he said, and his voice was calm now. "But I sure ain't the guy to pull a gun on a bunch of schoolboys. You put a guy wise what this means."

The rancher could see now that, whatever the schoolboys believed, the sheriff was of a different opinion. If he could

keep the sheriff on his side, all was well. And the desperate man was cool as ice now.

"Sure!" said Mr. Lick soothingly. "You don't want to get your mad up, Blake. I got to go into this, as sheriff, and I guess it won't hurt you none to let that fat goob blow off his mouth a few."

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"Who is he? And what has he got to spill?" he asked.

"He allows that he was hid in that spot of chaparral, a mile off the stage-trail, the day the hack was stopped and Bud Carter shot up," said the sheriff.

Blake, in spite of his self-control, gave a start.

"He allows," went on the sheriff, "that the flour-bag guy hunted cover in that chaparral to get his fixings off, and he saw his face and saw him counting the money he got from the bank messenger he shot up."

Blake breathed hard and deep.

The juniors, watching him, could see the strain he was putting on himself. With all his coolness and his nerve, the sheriff's words must have sent a cold chill to the man's heart.

"That's what that fat guy allows," said Mr. Lick.

Blake gave a contemptuous laugh.

"You let that gink string you along with a yarn like that?" he sneered.

"That much is the goods, Blake," explained the sheriff, "because they toted along the flour-bag and the cloak that the guy had worn. I got them in this here office now. He left them in the chaparral under that goob's eyes."

Blake's eyes glittered for a moment at the fat face of Billy Bunter, peering from behind the Famous Five.

It was only a flashing look, but it revealed what would have happened to Bunter had the trail-thief known that the fat junior's eyes were on him when he removed the flour-bag from his face.

"Waal, they horned in and spilled it to me here in this office," said the sheriff. "But I reckoned that that gink never knowed what the man looked like, and that it was the Rio Kid he saw in the chaparral. I guess he was scared too stiff to take a good look at him, and he sure is a prize boob that don't know his right hand from his left! I sure wouldn't hang a Mexican greaser's derg on what he's got to spill."

Jad Blake breathed more freely.

He was getting it clear now. His first desperate terror had been groundless. Bunter was the only witness against him, Bunter's evidence was regarded by the sheriff with whole-hearted contempt.

"You figure that that pesky geck saw the man in the flour-bag, Lick?" he asked.

His self-possession was complete now.

"Yep, I allow that much," said Mr. Lick. "He sure was there and saw him. But he didn't know his looks to describe, and I guess he saw the Rio Kid."

"Nobody with him?" asked Blake.

He was very anxious to be assured that none of the other juniors had been on the spot. Their witnessing would have been of a very different calibre from Bunter's.

"Jest on his own," said the sheriff. "I reckon you can tell me, Blake, where you was at the time the hack was held up."

"I was over at Hard Tack," answered Blake. "I remember that I passed these young guys on the trail riding back."

"Quite!" said the Bounder. "But you hadn't come from Hard Tack; you'd come from the spot where Bunter saw you take off the flour-bag."

Blako laughed.

He was quite easy now.

The first shock had been a terrible one, and he had passed through moments of gripping terror. But that was past.

"Search me!" he said. "It boils down to this—that fat gink saw a man take off the flour-bag, and he figures that he recognises me as the man. Is that the whole heap?"

"That's the whole heap!" said the sheriff.

Blake laughed again.

"That's why the pesky geck was scared at the sight of me!" he said. "He sure does scare easy! I'll say he was so scared when he saw that guy in the flour-bag, he wouldn't have noticed if the guy had been a coon or an Injun!"

"You said it!" agreed the sheriff. "I ain't got the least doubt that it was the Rio Kid he saw, but he don't know a cow's tail from a bronc's nose, that geck don't! He sure seems to figure that it was you he saw; he might have figured it was me, by gosh! Don't you figure that I'm taking any stock in this, Blake. Them young gecks got you hero for that locoed mosshead to say his piece! And now I guess we're through."

Harry Wharton & Co. stood in silence.

The denouement in the sheriff's office had not worked out according to their hopes and expectations. Billy Bunter had identified the man in the flour-bag—in the sheriff's presence. And it left Mr. Lick with his belief entirely unchanged.

That Bunter believed what he stated, his terror of Blake witnessed—that was clear to Mr. Lick. But that he had made an egregious mistake was also clear—or the sheriff believed it was. All depended on Bunter's evidence—and the sheriff of Packsaddle regarded Billy Bunter's evidence as utterly worthless.

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

He was not beaten yet.

"We're not through, Mr. Lick!" he said savagely. "Bunter has identified this man as the man in the flour-bag! That's good enough for us, if not for you! But that's not all."

"Spill the rest!" snapped Mr. Lick.

"Sure—let's hear the rest!" sneered Blake.

"The trail-thief took twenty thousand dollars from the hack!" said Vernon-Smith. "He changed it, I guess, into smaller bills, on a trip up the railroad. But he's got the money, or most of it. You know, as well as I do, that Jad Blake has no thousands of dollars of his own. I demand that a search be made on him, here and now—and the money will be found."

The sneering smile died off Blake's lips. But the next moment he forced a jeering laugh.

"I guess the sheriff of Packsaddle don't take orders from you, Mister Vernon-Smith," he said. "So-long, Lick—I reckon it's time I got back to my ranch!"

"Stand where you are!"

The Bounder's Colt whipped up.

"Stand there!" he snapped. "If the sheriff won't search you, Jad Blake, we're going through you ourselves, and Lick will have to believe the truth, when the dollars are turned out."

In that moment, the schoolboys could

(Continued on page 28.)

TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP, the Boys are Marching with—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



THE DAILY ROUND. 4 p.m. DISMISSAL

(1)

The clock is on the class-room wall.
We watch its hands; they slowly crawl
Towards the hour of four.
And after centuries of time
We hear a sweet and mellow chime
Which means that work is o'er—
Except for fellows in detention
(Of which I'm one, I needn't mention!).

(2)

Dick Rake and Skinner share my grief,
For us the hour brings no relief—
We're there till half-past four.
The other fellows stream outside,
And happy shouts ring far and wide
Outside the class-room door;
While we poor wretches go on churning
A load of literature and learning.

(3)

We hear the clack of bat and ball,
And now we hear a prefect call
Some fag to get his tea.
We seem to smell his sausage rolls;
And there's a yearning in the souls
Of Skinner, Rake, and me—
Until with song and shout and whistle
(One each) we welcome our dismissal!

AFTER SCHOOL HOURS The Wreck of the Desperate!



It was the schooner Desperate
That sailed the angry Sark,
And bravely went to meet her fate,
A proud and sturdy barque.
And Coker looked on her with pride—
He'd made her out of wood.
She seemed a trifle swivel-eyed,
But Coker thought her good.

But horrid doubts smote Potter's breast,
And fearful doubts smote Greene;
They thought her the unearthliest
Affair they'd ever seen.
They clung in anguish to the thwarts,
And wished themselves at school;
And both called Coker several sorts
Of fatuous footling fool.

"Oh, Coker, I hear a dreadful sound!
Oh, say what may it be?"
The angry billows lashed around
The ship and the sailors three.
"Oh, Coker, port your helm!" groaned
Greene.
And Potter panted: "If
We leave this boat alive, old bean,
We'll knock that fathead stiff!"

And then the planks began to start
As, with a frozen grin,
They saw the schooner come apart
And let the water in!
Then from the watchers on the bank
Arose a dreadful groan,
As Coker's home-made vessel sank
Extremely like a stone.

The foaming breakers round them
Surged.
Was e'er such waves as these?
The gallant crew were all submerged
In water to their knees.
They all escaped a dismal fate
By wading to the shore;
But Coker's schooner Desperate
Will sail the seas no more.

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

STEPHEN PRICE,
the Black Sheep of the Fifth.



P is for PRICE—a black sheep,
He's callous and cunning and deep;
He's clever at acting the fool
And ought to be sacked from the school.
For Hilton, his pal and his dupe,
He often leads into the soup.
And that, we admit, is a shame,
For Hilton can play the straight game.
And if he'd take Wingate's advice
He'd jolly soon finish with Price.
The cad of the Fifth has no pluck,
But usually gets all the luck—
His habits are seldom found out;
And if, when the pre's are about,
He's down playing cards at the inn,
He seems to get out with his skin.

ANSWER to PUZZLE

Two inches. The first page of Vol. I
and the last page of Vol. III—both
volumes being upside-down on the book-
shelf—are (except for the covers) each
next to Vol. II.

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRINS

SUM FOR ARITHMETIC BOOKS.
Bunter has 16 doughnuts, $\frac{3}{8}$ of which
belong to Todd, $\frac{1}{4}$ to Desmond, and $\frac{1}{4}$
to Field. How many will Bunter have
for himself?

ANSWER (by those who know
arithmetic): 4 doughnuts.

ANSWER (by those who know
Bunter): 16 doughnuts.

When Bolsover was feeling ill yester-
day we asked if anything had disagreed
with him. He said yes—Quelchy had!

PUZZLE PAR

Three volumes—I, II, III—are
on the Head's bookshelf. The
cover of each is $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick, and
the reading matter of each 1 inch
thick. A bookworm ate his way
from the first page of Vol. I to
the last page of Vol. III. How
far did he travel?

Answer at foot of col. 2.

We are looking forward to hearing
Harry Wharton construe Suetonius on
his return from Texas.—"Waal, this guy
Nero was kinda horn mad, and kept
shooting off his mouth: 'Gee, what
mebbe this rookus, stranger?'" (Quelch
faints.)

Tom Brown, who loves swimming, says
he's not afraid of the river. He knows
it will run!

"The Coker League" (president and
only member, H. J. Coker) has been
formed to kick Wingate out of the cap-
taincy and instal the said H. J. Coker
instead. At the first general meeting
the Coker League itself was, by some
error, kicked out instead of Wingate.

There is an article in the "Courtfield
Argus" this week: "How I Shot a
Moose," by Paul Prout. It is, of course,
a printer's error for "moose."

When we asked Gosling why he was
smiling, he said: "Well, it's like this—
I'm full o' spirits to-day." We wonder
what he did with the empty bottle!

read the terror, the desperate fear, in the eyes of the man who had worn the flour-bag, and they knew that the stolen dollars were on Jad Blake. He was helpless under the Bounder's gun—the juniors were ready to search him—and the discovery of thousands of dollars on him would have convinced even the sheriff. For the moment, it seemed that Vernon-Smith had won the game after all.

But only for the moment. The sheriff, with a roar of wrath, strode between Blake and Vernon-Smith.

"Pack that gun!" he roared. "You doggoned young piecan, you figure you can hold up a guy in my office, agin my orders! By the great horned toad, you pack that gun and beat it out of this office, or I'll run you into the calaboose and keep you there a week to cool your cabeza! You hear me shout!"

The Bounder's eyes blazed.

"Stand aside, you old fool," he roared.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped the sheriff.

But the Famous Five closed round Smithy, and Harry Wharton grasped his arm and dragged it down.

"Git out of this office!" roared the sheriff, purple with rage. "By hokee, you figure you can bulldoze a sheriff in his own office! I'm telling you, if you ain't out of this office in two shakes of a gopher's eyelids, I'll run the whole bunch of you into the calaboose."

The enraged Bounder would have lingered, but the Famous Five walked him out, Wharton throwing the rancher's gun to the floor as he went.

Billy Bunter was out first—scuttling like a fat rabbit. The other fellows followed him out—the Bounder breathing fury.

The sheriff glared after them in wrath—Blake watched them, with a mocking sneer on his face. Mr. Lick, his burly frame nearly filling the office doorway, waved the schoolboys off.

"Git!" he roared. "Beat it, you!" And the Greyfriars fellows, mounting their horses, "vamoosed." There was nothing else to be done.

The Bounder almost choked with rage as he went.

"He's beaten us!" he said, between his teeth. "We might have known that that fat fool would be no use—"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"But this is only the first round!" said the Bounder. "We'll beat him yet—we know who he is now; we know, if that fool Lick doesn't—and we'll get him. The sheriff's let us down—but there's another who can and will help—"

"Who's that?" asked Bob.

"The Rio Kid!" said the Bounder.

The Famous Five stared at Smithy. How the hunted outlaw of Squaw Mountain could help them to "get" Jad Blake, they could not guess. And the Bounder did not explain, as he rode with knitted brows back to Kicking Cayuse.

THE END.

(The final yarn in this thrilling Wild West series is entitled "THE TRAIL-THIEF'S LAST RIDE!" Watch out for it in next Saturday's MAGNET, chums.)

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.

LOOKING forward to the Whitsun holiday, chums? I'll say you are! Here's hoping you'll all have a fine time. My thoughts on Whit Monday will go out to Donald Frazer, an ardent reader of the MAGNET, who has been ill in bed for some considerable time. Donald tells me that quite a number of friends visit him and bring him good things, but what he looks forward to most is the MAGNET. I feel sure you will all be with me in wishing "Don" a speedy recovery.

By special request, I am inserting the following notice:

"The Ilford MAGNET Club, c/o 5, Parkway, Seven Kings, Ilford, Essex, is anxious to purchase the following back numbers of MAGNET: 1016 to 1026, 1171, 1181, and 1185."

Should any reader have these particular issues for sale, will he please communicate with Mr. V. Hammond, secretary of the above club.

Now for a word or two about the "SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY."

I should like to remind readers that this month's issues contain grand book-length stories of the chums of Greyfriars, Rookwood, and St. Frank's Schools. "Harry Wharton Declares War" is a powerful yarn of a bitter feud between schoolboy and master. "Under False Colours" tells of a Rookwood master who tries to live down his shady past—only to find that someone knows him at the school! And, finally, there is "The St. Frank's Castaways"—a thrilling story of the perilous adventures of Nipper & Co. in a wild Balkan state. These three numbers are now on sale, price 4d. each.

Space for a few RAPID-FIRE REPLIES.

to readers? Yes, I think so!

TOM HUNTER (Belfast).—George Bulstrode is in Study No. 2, and his study-mates are Tom Brown and Peter Hazeldene. A story telling of Alonzo's last days at Greyfriars appeared in the MAGNET some time

back. Fisher T. Fish was first introduced in MAGNET No. 150. He's been a popular character ever since.

R. HANSON (Birmingham).—The answers to your queries are as follows: No. 1, No; No. 2, Yes; No. 3, Yes.

Miss J. LE MAY (Newbury Park).—An illustration depicting the Famous Five together appeared in a recent issue of the MAGNET.

GEOFFREY HALL (Bellingham, S.E.).—Bunter dodges washing as often as he can; but it's not very often—his schoolfellows see to that! While out in Texas, Bunter has little chance of raiding the stores with Chick, the choreman, about.

C. A. (Fulham).—Both the Boys' Brigade and Boy Scout movements include first-aid in their activities.

R. MACCARTHY (S. Africa).—Stories dealing with the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. are now appearing in our companion paper—the GEM.

T. MUMFORD (Fulham).—Dr. Locke took over the headmastership of Greyfriars thirty years ago. That he is respected by masters and boys alike, there is not the slightest doubt.

My thanks and acknowledgments are due to the following readers, who have written me within the last few days: Beryl Townsend (Grimsby); "Loyal 'Mag' Reader" (Co. Armagh); N. Symes (Liverpool); Jack Smith (Sydney, N.S.W.); J. Dix (Bristol); Tick, Terry, Bill, John, Tom, and Bob (all of Newport, Mon.); Miss D. Hecker (Yorks); R. Atukorala (Ceylon); Peter Young (Hanwell), and Thomas Graley (Athlone). Your letters are most interesting and much appreciated, chums.

And now for a word or two about next week's super-story of Greyfriars, entitled:

"THE TRAIL-THIEF'S LAST RIDE!"

which rings down the curtain on Harry Wharton & Co's thrilling holiday adventures "way out in Texas," and tells how the Famous Five find themselves in a hidden cave in company with the Rio Kid, the hunted boy outlaw, on whose head a price of 1,000 dollars has been placed! Never before has Frank Richards written a yarn so brimful of thrills as this one. Our shorter features, too, deserve full marks, so take my tip, chums, and order next Saturday's MAGNET well in advance. And don't forget that this issue will contain more "Armaments" stamps to add to your collection. If you are not a prize-winner in the first lap in this great "Armaments" Race, don't get down-hearted—there are two more laps to go!

YOUR EDITOR.

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BEATEN ON THE POST!

Last Laughable Spasm of the "ST. SAM'S DONKEY DERBY!" featuring Jack Jolly & Co. By DICKY NUGENT

"Keep hout!" Fossil, the aged St. Sam's porter, spoke these words to the motley crowd that swarmed round the gates of the school, clammering to come in. It was the day of the St. Sam's Donkey Derby. The news of that grate sporting event must have spread far and wide, for crowds of would-be spectators had turned up to see it. But Fossil was determined to keep them out. "Keep hout!" he roared for the umpteenth time. "Fossil! Fossil! What a vulgar way to talk!" came a refined voice from behind the porter at that moment. "Besides, I don't want the public turned away on this grate day!" The old porter turned round in serprize and touched his forelock respectfully, as Doctor Birchmell, the revered headmaster of St. Sam's, stalked up on the scene. "Fancy saying 'Keep hout!' on a sporting occasion like this!" went on the Head, who was wearing the complete outfit of a professional jockey. "The proper thing to say, Fossil, is 'Come hin!'" "Which you're a-goin' to let people into the school grounds, sir?" asked Fossil, in amazement.

YOUR EDITOR CALLING

The open-air swimming gala, rumoured for such a long time, is taking definite shape at last. Wingate has just looked in to tell me I can now announce it as a definite fixture. The exact date of the gala has not yet been decided on, but I understand that it will be held within the next three weeks. The programme of events will be posted on the notice-board in Hall next Monday morning. Wingate indicates that it will include a long-distance handicap race, relay races, fancy diving contests, and water polo. So now it's up to you fellows to put in all the practice you can and get yourselves ready for the fray—or should I say spray? Swimming having queen always regarded at



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 295. EDITED BY DAVID RAKE. June 4th, 1938.



GREYFRIARS FROM FRESH ANGLES

15. How we see it from Cliff House. By MARJORIE HAZELDENE

There are several windows at Cliff House from which one can get quite a good view of Greyfriars. I can assure you that it looks a very important place indeed in comparison with our own much more modest school. I think the boys are very lucky to receive their education in such splendid surroundings, and I think most of them realise it, too. In fact, the look of importance that Greyfriars wears is reflected and even magnified in some of its pupils! To gaze on the school buildings from the quadrangle is quite an awe-inspiring experience. To gaze on the swagging figure of a Second Form boy emerging from the massive portal of the School House is even more awe-inspiring if you like to take it that way! Personally, having the pleasure of knowing many of the Greyfriars boys fairly well, I do not take it too seriously. The school buildings are certainly rather overwhelming; but if there is anything overwhelming about the boys, it's just window dressing. When you get to know them, they seem a very lighthearted and sociable crowd. Considering the age of the place, the boys' studies are very well lighted and hygienic. As you all know, I have a brother in the Remove and I have seen quite a number of the Remove "dens." How proud their tenants are of them! And what efforts they make to get them spick-and-span when they expect a visitor from Cliff House! Whether it's on Sports Day or Speech Day, or whether it's just a dull day in November for tea in Study No. 1, I always enjoy visiting Greyfriars. In fact, I find it hard to imagine another boys' school more attractive. But don't go and get swelled heads about it, will you?

Crepit's gold cup is already as good as mine—not to mention the twenty pounds I shall collect from Bunks, the bookie! Ha, ha, ha!" And the Head larfed again and rubbed his hands with tremendous glee. Then suddenly the larf died on his lips. Canter-ing across the turf just ahead of him he had caught site of a wiry little donkey in whose saddle sat Jack Jolly of the Fourth. "Bonny Boy!" he



muttered horsely. "And he looks as fit as a fiddle! What has gone wrong with my plot?" Breaking into a run, Doctor Birchmell overhauled the young skipper of the Fourth. There was a peculiar grin on

turned up at his stable in the nick of time last night, sir. Some awful cadd had tried to clorry-form him, sir!" Doctor Birchmell's face took on the culler of a ripe tomato. "B-b-bless my sole, Jolly! You serprize me." "Oh, there's nothing serprizing about it, sir," chuckled Jolly. "There are some pretty shady carrickers on the turf, believe me!" And Jolly, with another peculiar larf, cantered on again, leaving the Head grinding his false teeth with rage. "Dished!" muttered Doctor Birchmell, fiercely. "Dished, dished and done!" For a minnit or two the Head stood still, pondering deeply. Then a crafty grin started to play round his lips again. "There's only one thing left for me now!" he mermered. "I must stop Bonny Boy from winning while the race is actually in progress! I think I can do it, too!" The Head, who had evidently had a brane-wave, hurried away, looking a little more hoapful. Meanwhile, the crowds were gathering at the

sides of the course, and a buzz of cheery chatter filled the air. At last the grate moment arrived. Burleigh of the Sixth, armed with a big hand-bell, cleared the track and, to the tune of a burst of cheering, the candidates for the Donkey Derby appeared at the starting-post. A still louder cheer greeted Bonny Boy, the favourite for the race. Then the cheers turned to larfter, as Dirty Dick appeared, with a bunch of carrots dangling temptingly in front of him, held in place by a stick tied to his head. So anxious was Dirty Dick to reach the carrots, that he started galloping down the course before the race had begun, and Doctor Birchmell had all his work out to get him back again. After that he had to keep him running round in circles till the starting-tapes were released. Clang! Clang! Clang! "They're off!" The donkeys started off on their stirring task. But not many of them seemed anxious to stir themselves much about it! In fact, right from the start, it was seen that there were only two in it—Dirty Dick and Bonny Boy! With the carrots beckoning it ever onwards, Dirty Dick at first looked like making a rare struggle of it. Then Bonny Boy took the lead, in spite of his rival's speed, and Doctor Birchmell saw that the time had come for desprit deeds. As Jolly's mount flashed past him his hand flashed out and he grabbed Bonny Boy's tail and gave it a terrific pull backwards. Bonny Boy gave a loud bray of pain and span round like a T-toetum; and Dirty Dick forged ahead once more. But not for long! Soon Bonny Boy was passing his rival again—and this time Jolly took care to keep a safe distance from the Head! Doctor Birchmell's eyes fairly flashed fire, as he saw that he was losing. Then he did an amazing thing. He sud-

MR. QUELCH'S GOLFING DEBUT!

Purse Hard Hit—But Not Ball!

We knew that Quelchy would succumb to golf in the end. We knew he could not go on resisting Prout's alluring pictures of the great game for ever. Now it has happened. Last week Dr. Pillbury, called in to treat Mr. Quelchy on an attack of dyspepsia, and told him that he was not getting sufficient exercise. He advised a round of golf now and again. After the doc had departed, Mr. Quelchy went to see Prout. He told him what the doctor had ordered. Snoop, who happened to be tying up his shoelace in the passage outside, informs us that Prout was quite enthusiastic. "Excellent, my dear Quelchy!" he puffed. "We'll have a game to-morrow—you and I. You'll enjoy it." "But I'm only a novice," objected Quelchy. "Pah! We all have to begin some time or other, my dear sir! It will be a pleasure, I assure you." "But I have no—or—golf sticks," protested Quelchy, feebly. "Um! Well, you'll have to purchase a few clubs, certainly," said Prout. "You won't need an elaborate set for a start. The whole outfit will not cost you more than a ten-pound note." Snoop says that at this point a slight gasp escaped Quelchy, and we can quite believe it. Anyway, whatever he may have felt about the initial expenditure he allowed Prout to take him down to Chunkley's and lay out a cool tenner. Then they went along to the Courtfield Golf Club where the real business started. At the first hole, Prout showed his colleague how to drive. His demonstration was not strikingly successful, but it was good enough to give Quelchy the idea. Quelchy had a go. He carved a large chunk of turf out of the ground, but failed to hit the ball. At a second try, he removed another portion of the earth's surface from its place, and still the ball remained in its original position. At the third attempt, the nearest thing he came to hitting was Prout's nose. Quelchy's efforts, having attracted the curious

gaze of a number of caddies hanging round the clubhouse, Prout decided that they would give the first hole best, and move on to the second. They did so. Quelchy tried again. Still he failed to get in a smack at the ball. After several unsuccessful bashes, he asked Prout if it would not be advisable to move on again. Prout thought it would. Quelchy's eyes were glinting and his lips tightly set, as he made an attempt on the third hole. Nothing rewarded his efforts. He hit the earth, Prout's arm and his own foot; but the ball was still unhitt! The maddening record was repeated at the fourth, fifth, and sixth holes. At the ninth, Quelchy had still failed to make contact. The "Greyfriars Herald" reporter, who



watched the show from a safe distance, found at this stage that he could bear it no longer, and withdrew. So we cannot say for certain what happened between the ninth hole and the eighteenth. All we know is, that when Quelchy and Prout arrived back at Greyfriars they were not looking happy. Prout's face was scarlet; his chin was wobbling as though he was undergoing severe emotional strain. Quelchy's eyes were hawk-like and his cheeks a sinister white in colour. As a cure for dyspepsia, golf had certainly not proved a

success. In fact, from Quelchy's point of view, golf is probably a cure for nothing in the world now—except perhaps a good temper! All we hope is that Quelchy doesn't see this number of the "Herald." Fortunately, it is not at all likely. He has gone back to his customary recreations now—reading Sophocles and sucking indigestion tablets!

WHITSUN HOLIDAY PRESENTS A PUZZLE says DICK RUSSELL

Trouble about Whitsun is, you don't quite know what you're going to need. The chaps I've watched packing, seem to have widely differing ideas about it. Take Bulstrode and Ogilvy. When I saw Bulstrode, he was carefully packing skates, snow-goggles, fur gloves, and all sorts of arctic stuff. "Made a mistake, old bean?" I asked. "It's Whitsun—not Christmas!" On the other hand, Ogilvy was taking cricket-bat, swimming-suit, panama hat, and other what-nots associated with tropical heat. "This is Whitsun, old chap—not August!" I reminded him. Funny thing was, they both took my remarks to heart. Bulstrode, after a few moments' reflection, dumped his entire outfit and took his summer stuff instead. Ogilvy, after sitting thoughtfully on the edge of his bed for a period, put away his summer clobber and packed for an old-fashioned Christmas! But they both took their maes. So they're bound to be right in one thing, anyway!