



The GEM $1\frac{1}{2}$



No. 576. Vol. 13.

February 22nd, 1919.

THE TWO BUNTERS.



WHICH IS WHICH?

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A MAGNIFICENT NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST JIM'S.



THE TWO BUNTERS.



By Martin Clifford.



CHAPTER 1.

A Shock for Bunter.

HALT!

Mr. Blagg, the Rylcombe postman, halted, with a grin, as the Terrible Three lined up a his path near the gates of St. Jim's.

"What is there for me?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Nothin', sir!"

"And me?" asked Lowther.

"Same as for Master Merry!" answered Mr. Blagg.

"And me?" demanded Manners.

"Now, be careful, Blagg. I'm expecting a tip from my pater for some new films. Don't say he's forgotten it!"

Mr. Blagg's grin widened.

"I expect he have, Master Manners. Leastways, there isn't any letter for you."

"Alas!" said the Terrible Three tragically.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bunter of the Fourth rolled up.

"I say, is that the postman? I'm expecting a postal-order this afternoon—"

"The same one you've been expecting over since you came to St. Jim's?"

periered Monty Lowther, in a tone of gentle sarcasm.

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"Roll out Bunter's remittances, Blagg," said Tom Merry. "We'll borrow a few hundred quids of Bunter, you fellows."

"Bunter!" repeated Mr. Blagg. "Yes, sir, there's a letter for Master Bunter."

Billy Bunter's fat face brightened.

Whether Bunter really expected a postal-order or not nobody at St. Jim's quite knew; but he certainly seemed to live in hopes of a remittance dropping in from somewhere.

He held out a fat hand.

"Hand it over!" he said. "I expect it's my postal-order, you fellows. It's been rather delayed."

"It has, and no mistake!" agreed Tom Merry.

Mr. Blagg obligingly went through his sack. Bunter watched him eagerly through his big glasses. The Terrible Three looked on, rather amused. They had heard a great deal about Bunter's postal-order since W. G. B. had honoured St. Jim's with his presence.

The letter was produced and handed over, and Mr. Blagg went on his way, sack on shoulder.

Bunter blinked at the letter.

It was addressed W. G. Bunter, at the school, in a firm, clear hand that Billy Bunter had never seen before.

The fat junior seemed to hesitate about opening it.

"Well, pile in!" said Monty Lowther.

"Let us feast our eyes upon the wealth,

Bunter, and it will console us for being stony."

"I—I suppose I can open it!" said Bunter hesitatingly.

"Eh? It's yours, isn't it?"

"Ye-es, of course, it—it's mine!"

"It's addressed to W. G. Bunter," said Tom Merry, glancing at the envelope.

"Why shouldn't you open it?"

"Yes, why not?" agreed Bunter. "If there's a remittance in this letter it's mine, ain't it?"

"I suppose so," said Tom, in surprise.

"Yes, of course! It was understood—"

Bunter paused abruptly.

"What was understood?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Billy Bunter opened the letter at last by the simple process of jamming a fat thumb into the envelope.

The Terrible Three looked at him, perplexed.

Why Bunter should hesitate to open a letter addressed to himself, and should appear doubtful as to whether a remittance in it was his, was a mystery to the Shell fellows.

But there were many things about Bunter that perplexed Tom Merry & Co. His manners and customs were so unlike those of the Wally Bunter they had met, and were so like those of the Billy Bunter they had seen at Greyfriars!

Wally Bunter, they knew, was exactly like Billy to look at; but they had not known that the resemblance went further.

Naturally, they had no idea that the fat junior in the Fourth was not Wally Bunter at all, and that Wally's place at St. Jim's had been taken by Billy.

That was not likely to occur to them; though, if their acquaintance with the Bunters had been closer, they would probably have suspected something.

Billy Bunter's brief hesitation was over, and he opened the letter and unfolded it. If there was a remittance for W. G. Bunter, it was certainly for Walter Gilbert Bunter, not for William George. But, after all, Billy was W. G. Bunter, too; and as he had taken his cousin's place at St. Jim's he was entitled to take his remittances, too. At all events, he decided that he was.

But there was no remittance in the letter. There was a closely-written page, and Bunter blinked at it discontentedly. But suddenly his blink became fixed and his jaw dropped.

His little round eyes almost bulged through his glasses as he stared at the letter.

"Oh dear!" he gasped, in utter dismay.

Tom Merry & Co. were turning away; but they turned back at that dismayed exclamation.

"Anything wrong, kid?" asked Tom good-naturedly.

"Oh dear!"

"Hasn't the postal-order come?" asked Monty Lowther sadly.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Dry up, Monty! It looks like bad news," said Tom. He tapped Bunter kindly on the shoulder. "What's wrong, kid?"

"He's coming!" gasped Bunter.

"Who's coming? Your cousin Billy from Greyfriars?" asked Lowther, as if that would fully account for dismay at the prospect.

Bunter grinned faintly.

"Nunno! Oh dear! Why can't he keep away! What does he want to see Wally—I mean, why can't he mind his own business? I say, you fellows, what on earth is a fellow to do?" groaned Bunter.

"Well, what's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry. "If there's anything one can do, you've only got to say so."

"Oh dear! The silly old ass, why can't he keep away?" gasped Bunter. "No need for him to come here that I know of. Oh dear!"

"But what the deuce—"

Bunter recovered himself.

"I say, you fellows, don't you ask questions," he said, blinking at the Terrible Three. "I'm not going to tell you anything."

"What?" roared Tom Merry.

"You shouldn't be inquisitive, you you know," said Bunter, wagging his head at the incensed chums of the Shell.

"This may be a letter from Mr. Penman, at Canterbury, and it may not. I'm not going to tell you anything about it."

"You fat, sneaking slug!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "I—I'll—"

Tom Merry, with knitted brow, took Bunter by the collar.

"Yow-ow! Leggo! Wharrer at?"

"You fat rotter!" said Tom, in measured tones. "I asked you what was the matter because you were howling as if you were hurt. Do you think I care twopence about your affairs, you silly owl? Sit down!"

"Yoooop!"

Billy Bunter sat down—hard!

The Terrible Three walked away, leaving Bunter gasping on the hard road.

"Yah! Beast!" howled Bunter.

The chums of the Shell went in at the gates, unheeding. They were fed up with Bunter of the Fourth. Billy Bunter scrambled breathlessly to his feet, and shook a fat fist after them. Then he blinked again at the letter.

"Oh dear! What's a fellow to do? Mr. Penman—that's the mercantile beast who sent Wally to school—oh dear!—coming here to see how Wally's getting on—oh, crumbs!—and Wally's at Greyfriars, and I'm here—and he'll spot me at once. He's knows Wally better than these silly asses do. Oh, crickey!"

Billy Bunter rolled in at the gates in a state of dismay. The change of places with his cousin Wally had seemed to him a splendid idea at the time, and certainly it had extracted him from the peck of troubles he had accumulated at his old school.

But now—

It was all very well to face St. Jim's, where Wally was almost a stranger, in his cousin's name! But to face a man who knew Wally well, and had known him well for years—Billy Bunter's nerve was not quite equal to that!

But what was to be done?

CHAPTER 2.

The Troubles of an Impostor.

BA! Jove! You look wathah wowed, Buntah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth paused as he came upon Bunter in the window recess in the Fourth Form passage.

The Owl of Greyfriars was standing there with a letter crumpled in his hand, and a lugubrious expression on his fat face.

He blinked dismally at D'Arcy over his big spectacles.

"Oh dear!" he said.

"Are you in trouble, deah boy?"

"Oh! Ow! Yes."

"I am weally sowwy to heah it, Buntah!"

Arthur Augustus was sympathetic. He had liked Wally Bunter once, and though he had soon been fed up with Wally's substitute he had not quite forgotten his former friendly feelings.

"Pewpaws I can help you?" he suggested. "If you would like me to advise you, Buntah—"

"Oh dear!"

"You can rely on me as a fellow of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

Grunt!

"Are you coming in to tea, Gussy?" bawled Jack Blake from Study No. 6. "If you're not pretty quick there won't be any sosses for you!"

"Comin', deah boys!"

"Buck up, then!" called out Digby.

"I am wathah engaged at the present moment, Dig."

Herries' voice came next.

"Do you mind if I give your whack in the sosses to Towser, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove! I object vewy stwongly, Hewwies. You can give your own sosses to Towzah if you like."

"Br-r-r-r!" was Herries' rejoinder to that.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made a step towards the study. But he stopped again, impelled by his kind heart, and turned towards Bunter.

"I twust it is nothin' sewious, deah boy?" he said.

"Yes, it is," grunted Bunter.

"If I can help you, Buntah, I am entially at your service."

"You can't prevent the old josses coming here, I suppose?" growled Bunter peevishly.

"Eh? Whom?"

"Never mind!"

"Are you expectin' a disagweable wistah, deah boy?"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort—not at all! In fact, there's nothing the matter— I—I'm not worrying about anything," said Bunter.

Arthur Augustus blinked at him.

"Bai Jove!" was all he could say.

"The fact is, I'm as happy as—as a king!" said Bunter.

"That's all wright, then!" said Arthur Augustus, puzzled.

And he went on to his study in a mood of some perplexity. Bunter blinked after him darkly. He felt that his dis-

play of trouble was not judicious, and certainly if the cause of his trouble had become known it would have put a sudden end to his imposture at St. Jim's. But it was difficult for him to conceal the worry on his mind, and his locks did not bear out his statement that he was as happy as a king.

He rolled dismally away with so exceedingly troubled a fat visage that Julian of the Fourth stopped him as he came along.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Oh, all right! Not catching 'flu'?"

"Of course not, you ass!"

Bunter was rolling on, but he paused, and spoke to Dick Julian again.

"I say, Julian—"

"Go it!" said the junior good-humouredly.

"I—I say, you being a Sheeny, you know—"

"What?"

"I—I mean a Jew, you know, you must be a rather sharp chap," said Bunter. "All Jews are thundering sharp. I—I wonder whether you could give me a bit of advice?"

Dick Julian looked at him hard. Bunter's way of asking a favour was peculiarly his own, but Julian was a good-humoured fellow, and he smiled.

"Go ahead!" he said. "I'll try. I don't know about being thundering sharp, but I've got my wits about me. Pile in!"

"I can't tell you the circumstances of—"

"That makes it rather hard to advise, doesn't it?" asked Julian, with a stare.

"Well, I might put a case," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Suppose a chap—"

"Yes?"

"A—a—a chap, you know—"

"Yes, I've got that!" assented Julian. "A chap—"

"Suppose a chap had done a certain thing to oblige another chap. It might be his cousin, or it might not—" said Bunter cautiously.

"Ye-es-es?"

"And suppose they were keeping it dark—"

"Eh?"

"And suppose a man—it might be a business man from, say, Canterbury. It might be, and again it might not be. But suppose it was."

"Yes?" said the amazed Julian.

"Well, suppose he was coming to see a chap—"

"Which chap?"

"Oh, a—a chap, you know," said Bunter. "Suppose he was coming to see a chap, and a chap didn't want it to come out about having changed places—"

"Whattid?"

"I—I don't mean that!" gasped Bunter hastily. "Not changed places. Certainly not that. Nothing of the kind. I wonder what made me say that? I—I mean that the chap hadn't done anything of the sort. Is that clear?"

"Clear as mud!" said the perplexed Julian. "I think you'll have to make it a bit clearer. It sounds like a set of conundrums so far."

"You're a bit dense, Julian. I thought all Jews were jolly keen," said Bunter. "You don't seem to comprehend. Suppose, as I said, a chap—that is to say, suppose a man—say, a man at Canterbury—"

"Ye-es-es?"

"Suppose he was coming, then, and it might all come out. What would you do in that chap's place?"

Dick Julian gazed at the fat junior in wonder.

"Are you wandering in your mind?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"If not, what's the matter with you?" "You silly ass! Haven't I made it clear?" demanded Bunter peevishly.

"Ha, ha! You'll have to make it clearer if you want my advice. I don't think Jew or Gentile could make head or tail of it so far," said Dick Julian, laughing.

"I'm not going to tell you my private affairs, Julian. Don't be inquisitive!"

"What?" yelled Julian.

"That's just like you Sheenies—"

"My—my—my hat!"

"I must say— Yooooop!" roared Bunter, as Julian took him by the neck and proceeded to bump his head on the wall. "Leggo! Wharrer you at? You beast! Yarooooooh!"

"There!" gasped Julian. "You fat worm, you can wriggle off now, and if you speak to me again I—I—I'll burst you!"

And Julian walked away in high dudgeon.

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast!" howled Bunter.

He rubbed his head, and rolled on dismally to Study No. 2, which he shared—or was supposed to share—with Mellish and Trimble. But Mellish and Trimble were fed up with Bunter, and they had given him the order of the boot from that study. Ever since then Bunter had been in search of a study, but nobody in the Fourth had shown the slightest desire to take him in.

The Owl of Greyfriars blinked in at No. 2.

"I say, you fellows—"

There were toast and toasted cheese on the tea-table, and Mellish and Baggy Trimble were sitting down to it. They jumped up as if moved by the same spring as Bunter looked in.

They did not waste any time in words. Mellish seized the poker, and Baggy Trimble the tongs.

Bunter did not wait.

Before they could reach the door he reached the staircase, and he went down the steps at great speed.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter, as he rolled out into the quadrangle. "I—I must have some tea. I've had nothing but tea in Hall and some sandwiches. I—I wish I was back at Greyfriars! Oh dear!"

He rolled away dismally to Dame Taggles' little shop. But he was in his usual state of impecuniosity, and the prospect of inducing Dame Taggles to extend tick to him was remote. The good dame had learned to know her Bunter in this time. There was already a considerable account due; and when Mrs. Taggles saw Bunter it was her habit to make remarks about that account—remarks which Bunter considered ill-timed and cross-grained.

Figgins & Co. of the New House were coming out of the tuckshop. They had plainly been shopping for tea in the study. Bunter joined them, with an ingratiating grin on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't!" said Kerr.

"You buzz off!" said Fatty Wynn darkly. "You keep off the grass, you fat boulder!"

"But, I say, you fellows, I—I was thinking of coming to tea with you, for—for the sake of old times—"

"Do!" said Figgins genially. "Oh, do! We'll give you the frog-march along the passage if we find you in the New House. Honour bright! Do come!"

Figgins & Co. walked on, but the Owl of Greyfriars did not follow them. He shook a fat fist after them instead.

CHAPTER 3.

The Only Way.

"I SAY, you fellows—"
The Terrible Three were at tea, and Bunter rolled into No. 10 in the Shell without waiting for the formality of an invitation.

Grim looks greeted him. "Outside!" said Tom Merry curtly. "I say, I'm in trouble!" urged Bunter. "As an old pal, Tom, old fellow, you—"

"If you call me 'Tom, old fellow,' I'll scalp you!" exclaimed the captain of the Shell.

"Oh, really, you know—"
"Keep your troubles to yourself, and be blowed!" said Monty Lowther. "And get out of this study!"

"I haven't had my tea yet—only tea in Hall, so far," said Bunter pathetically. "And—just at a time, too, when I've got a fearful worry on my mind. I should think you might ask a chap to tea when he's down on his luck."

Tom Merry looked at him more attentively.

There certainly were signs of worry in Bunter's fat face. The impending visit of Mr. Penman, on the morrow, was worrying him considerably. How to deal with that threatened visit he did not know, though the problem had to be postponed while the more urgent matter of tea was dealt with.

Tom glanced at his chums after that survey of the Owl's fat face.

"Oh, just as you like!" grunted Manners, understanding his look. "You're a soft noodle, Tommy!"

"Thanks!" said Tom, laughing. "You can sit down, Bunter, if you like."

"Oh, do!" growled Lowther.

It was not a flattering invitation; but Bunter did not stand upon ceremony. He plumped down into a chair, his fat face brightening considerably.

"I say, you fellows, you've got cake?" he said. "And eggs are these eggs new-laid?"

"So we heard. We didn't get a pedigree with them, though!"

"I'm rather fond of new-laid eggs. If I take four, can you chaps manage?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Don't mind us!" said Lowther sarcastically. "There were only four eggs on the table."

"Right you are! I won't!" agreed Bunter. "I admit I'm rather hungry. I say, you fellows, these eggs are really good."

"Sorry there only four!" hissed Manners.

"Don't mench, old fellow! Of course, if you cared to cut down to the tuckshop and get some more I shouldn't object. In fact, I'd cook them. I admit I could do with a couple more."

Manners was silent; he really did not know what to say in reply to that. He contented himself with munching bread-and-butter and sardines.

Bunter made rapid work with the tea, and in the race for the cake he beat the Terrible Three hands down.

"I think we'll get out," remarked Tom Merry, the moment tea was over, as a hint to the guest to travel farther. But hints were quite lost on William George Bunter of Greyfriars.

"I say, you fellows," he began, blinking amiably at the chums of the Shell, "I'm in rather a scrape."

"Keep in it!" said Lowther politely. "I'm sure you'll help me out, Tom Merry, as an old pal—"

"B-r-r-r-r!"

"You could if you wanted to, you know—"

"If it's cash," said Tom Merry bluntly, "there's nothing doing!"

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"Tain't that! In fact, I expect to be in funds shortly!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm expecting a postal-order, in fact! I'm in a scrape—"

"Well?" grunted Tom impatiently.

"A man's coming to see me to-morrow afternoon—"

"Well?"

"It may be a man from Canterbury, or it may not," said Bunter cautiously.

"Well, a man from Canterbury's coming to see you!" exclaimed Tom.

"I don't see any scrape in that!"

"It might be Mr. Penman, and it might not. Suppose it was Mr. Penman?"

"Who on earth's Mr. Penman?" grunted Manners.

"The man who—who I mean—"

"I remember the name," said Tom. "You were employed in an office at Canterbury, some time ago, and Mr. Penman was the head of the firm. Isn't that it?"

"Ye-e-s, exactly!"

"And he sent you to school," said Tom. "I know! Well, it's natural for him to come and see how you're getting on here, especially as he's an old St. Jim's man himself, so I hear. What are you grumbling about?"

"I—I don't want to see him!"

"Don't, then!"

"B-b-but I must if he comes! I—I want to dodge him!"

"What on earth for?" growled the captain of the Shell.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Now you're asking inquisitive questions—" he began.

"You fat idiot!" roared Tom, in great wrath. "I suppose you're too fatheaded to know what a silly ass you are; but if you don't travel out of this study you'll get chucked out! Have you sense enough to understand that?"

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"There's the door!"

"But I haven't finished yet, old chap!" said Bunter cheerfully. "What are you getting waxy about?"

Tom Merry laughed; he could not help it. Apparently Bunter did not realise that there was anything offensive in his remarks.

"I want to dodge the man," said Bunter, continuing; "and you can help me, Tom Merry. That's what I want you to do."

"Oh, go and eat cake!"

"You see, there's a football match played to-morrow, isn't there?" said Bunter.

"Yes; Abbotsford," said Tom. "They're coming over here to-morrow afternoon. What about the match?"

"I want you to play me."

"Eh?"

"I played in a House match when I came, you know—"

"And kicked the ball through your own goal!" roared Lowther.

"That—that was an accident—"

"There's not going to be any accidents about in our match to-morrow," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Nothing doing, Bunter! You took us in about footer, and it turns out that you can't play for toffee. The best thing you can do is to get some practice with the Third. D'Arcy minor, and Manners minor, and young Levison could teach you ten times as much as you know."

"Oh, really, Merry—"

Tom rose to his feet.

"Hold on a minute, Tom Merry! I want you to play me in the football match for a special reason. Not about footer. Blow football! But you see, if I'm playing in the match I shall be able to keep out of old Penman's way!"

"And you think I should play a hopeless dud in the Abbotsford match for a

reason like that?" ejaculated Tom Merry, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Yes. You see—"

"Of all the fat idiots—" said Manners.

"Oh, really, Manners—"

"Well," said Tom Merry, "I'm not playing you, Bunter, for that reason or any other. And in any case, I wouldn't help you dodge Mr. Penman, and I don't see why you should want to. It seems to me you're an ungrateful bounder to speak like that about an old chap who's doing so much you for. And now, dear man, we're fed up with your fascinating society, since you force me to speak plain English. Travel!"

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Buzz off!" said Lowther.

"Of course, if Tom Merry refuses to do the decent thing, I can't make him," said Bunter with dignity. "I may mention that I despise him—"

"Do you want my boot?"

"Nunno! I—I say, you fellows, if you won't help a chap in a scrape, you might at least lend me—"

"Nothing to lend, ass! Buzz off!"

"Lend me a—"

"We know all about the postal-order," said Lowther. "Wait till it comes, old chap! That will be a lesson in patience. You will be an old, old man by that time, and—"

"Lend me—"

"Oh, my hat! Stoify!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"A stamp!" yelled Bunter.

"What?"

"A stamp!" snorted the Owl of Greyfriars. "I've got to write to my cousin. It's the only way now."

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, I can give you a stamp," he said, opening his desk. "I've got one left, and you're welcome to it. 'Here you are!'"

"I said lend!" answered Bunter firmly.

"Lend or give, it doesn't matter!"

"It does matter!" said Bunter calmly.

"I know some fellows are not so particular in money matters as I am. But I want it distinctly understood in this study that I certainly could not accept even so small as sum as three-halfpence as a gift. Unless this is understood to be a loan, I—"

"Oh, my hat! A loan, if you like! Any old thing! And now, for goodness' sake, give us a rest!"

"Very well! If it's understood to be a loan I can accept it. Not otherwise. There's one other point—"

"There isn't! Buzz off!"

"There is! Will you have this three-halfpence back out of my postal-order when it comes—?"

"Eh?"

"Or could you make it convenient to wait till I get a cheque for a rather large sum that I'm expecting from a titled relation of mine?"

Bunter blinked at the Terrible Three with owlish seriousness as he asked that important question.

They stared at him for a moment. Then, with one accord, they fell on Bunter, their pent-up feelings finding expression at last.

"Yoop! Yowp! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. And he fled frantically out of Study No. 10; and the question of the date of repayment of the three-halfpence remained unsettled—for ever!

CHAPTER 4.

All Clear!

THE next day Billy Bunter might have been seen, as a novelist would remark, looking a great deal more cheerful.

In fact, he seemed quite his old, self-satisfied self.

Whatever worry had been weighing upon his mind was apparently removed, and he was no longer dreading the visit of Mr. Penman, the mercantile gentleman from Canterbury.

The simple process of writing to his cousin at Greyfriars apparently had done the trick.

It was one of Billy Bunter's charming customs to shift his troubles off his own fat shoulders on to any shoulders that were handy; and, having done so, he felt at ease with himself and the world.

During morning lessons, while Mr. Latham was attending to Levison's construe, Bunter whispered to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Gussy, old fellow——"

"Pway don't talk in class, Buntah! Mr. Latham will be watty!"

"Blow Latham!"

"That is a vewy diswepctful way of speakin' of a Form-mastah, Buntah!" said D'Arcy severely.

"You know all about the trains to Greyfriars," said Bunter, unheeding. "You've been over with the football eleven."

"Yaas!"

"Suppose my cousin was coming from Greyfriars to see me th's afternoon," said Bunter, "Mind, I don't say he is. He might be. If he was, how long would it take him to get here?"

"That depends on the twain, Buntah."

"I know it does, fathead!"

"I have a stwong objection to bein' called a fathead, Buntah!"

"Suppose Wally——"

"Eh?"

"I mean, suppose Billy——"

"I do not quite follow you, Buntah!"

"Suppose my cousin cut dinner and got an express, he could get here pretty early in the afternoon, couldn't he?"

"Yaas, quite easily."

"Well, I've to'd him not to worry about d'inner, under the circs," said Bunter thoughtfully.

"Bai Jove! Fwom what I wemembah of Billy Buntah, it is not much use tellin' him not to wowy about dinnah!" smiled Arthur Augustus.

"If you mean that I'm greedy, D'Arcy, I'll——"

"I was speakin' of your cousin Billy."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Of course! My mistake! Wel, I suppose he'll have sense enough to cut dinner and catch an early express train, won't he? The trains are better since the war."

Mr. Latham blinked round.

"Dear me! I am sure someone in the class is whspering!" he said. "Pray, who is whispering?"

Silence.

"You may proceed, Levison!"

Ernest Levison proceeded. Bunter remained silent, apparently satisfied on the subject of trains. His fat face was quite contented, at all events.

Tom Merry glanced at him with a smile when the juniors came in to dinner in the School House. He wondered whether Bunter was going to repeat his request to be played in the Abbotsford match that afternoon, as a means of dodging Mr. Penman of Canterbury.

But Bunter did not approach the subject when he saw the captain of the Shell. Tom tapped him on the shoulder when they came out of the dining-room.

"All serene now?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, yes! What do you mean?"

"You were deep in trouble yesterday," said Tom.

"Oh, that's all right! By the way, though, Merry, I was going to make a suggestion——"

"Ha, ha! Do you want to captain the St. Jim's team this afternoon?"

"Under the circumstances, Merry, I decline to play for St. Jim's at all! On

second thoughts, your junior play here is hardly up to my weight!"

"Your weight?" said Tom, with an amused glance at Bunter's ample figure. "Well, it wouldn't be easy to come up to your weight, would it?"

"I mean, my form, you ass!"

"My dear chap, your form is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!"

"My form as a footballer, I mean! Not my figure, you chump! Though, if you come to that, there's precious few fellows in St. Jim's have a figure like mine!" said Bunter, with a sniff.

"Precious few!" agreed Tom. "Only Trimble and Fatty Wynn—and you beat them hollow."

"Oh, really, Merry——"

"Coming, Monty?"

"Hold on a minute! I was going to make a suggestion——"

"Buck up, then!"

a local train brought passengers on to Rylcombe.

And Bunter's fat face brightened up at last when the local train came in and he spotted a fat face, remarkably like his own, at a window in it.

The train stopped, and Wally Bunter jumped out.

He glanced up and down the platform, and came quickly towards the Owl.

Old Trumble, who was wheeling a trolley along, stopped and stared at them in surprise.

"My hoye!" he murmured.

The two fat juniors were so alike that they could scarcely have failed to attract a second glance anywhere.

Both were in Etons—Wally carrying a coat on his arm—and both wore glasses, though Wally wore his low on his nose so that he could see over them. He did not need glasses, but he had to adopt them



Bunter Hits Out.

(See Chapter 6.)

"I'm expecting a postal-order——"

"What?"

"I was going to suggest that if you cared to hand me the money, I would—I wish you wouldn't walk away while I'm speaking, Merry!" howled Bunter.

But Tom Merry did so, in spite of Bunter's wish.

Billy Bunter grunted and rolled away. His celebrated postal-order was getting as well known at St. Jim's as it had been at Greyfriars. It really seemed doubtful whether Bunter would ever be able to raise any more loans on that postal-order.

The fat junior rolled out of gates at last, after an ineffectual attempt to raise the wind from Julian and Cardew and Roylance, and several other fellows in the Fourth. He ambled away cown the lane to Rylcombe, and rolled in at the station there.

There he made inquiries from old Trumble, the porter, concerning trains from the east. He ensconced himself on the platform at last, to wait. The express trains stopped at Wayland Junction, and

in order to keep up appearances while playing the part of Billy Bunter at Greyfriars School.

Seen closely, however, a difference between the two juniors could be observed; not in form or feature, but in health and fitness. Wally Bunter, fat as he was, was as fit as a fiddle, and he had a keenness in his eyes and a springiness in his step that were noticeably lacking in William George.

"Oh, here you are!" said Wally, not very amiably.

"And here you are!" said Billy.

"What do you mean by——"

"Let's get out of this," said Bunter hastily. "If we're seen together it will give the whole game away. That old porter beast is staring at us now!"

"You ought to have met me at Wayland, then. It wasn't safe for me to come and see you——"

"If you think I'm going to walk three miles, Wally——"

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Wally.

"Come on, fathead!" said Billy Bunter, and he led the way hurriedly out of the station. The new-comer followed him, with an expression on his fat face that was far from amiable. It was pretty clear that Wally Bunter was not pleased by this sudden summons to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

The Two Bunters.

AND now— said Wally at last. The cousins had separated outside the station, and Wally had followed Billy Bunter at a distance. Certainly any St. Jim's fellow who had seen them together would have been struck at once by their resemblance, and the imposture would have been in danger. Bunter had led the way into the wood, and he stopped there for Wally to come up.

"And now—" grinned Bunter, as his cousin paused.

"What does this mean?" growled Wally. "It was understood that we changed places, wasn't it? You asked me, and I wasn't half willing. Now you're running the risk of dishing the whole game by calling me here like this. I had to cut dinner at Greyfriars, and I've had nothing but some sandwiches in the train," added Wally, in a tone of deep grievance.

"Never mind that—"

"But I do mind that!" snapped Wally.

"It couldn't be helped, old chap. Old Penman's coming this afternoon at half-past three. Here's his letter."

Wally glanced at the letter.

"Well, I knew Mr. Penman would drop in sooner or later to see me at St. Jim's," he said. "You've taken my place there, and bamboozled everybody. Why couldn't you keep it up with Mr. Penman?"

"No jolly fear!" said Billy Bunter promptly. "Why, I don't even know the man by sight. And he knows you like a book. He would be bound to spot me."

"I— I suppose he might. But—but what's to be done, then? Do you want to change back?" Wally frowned. "It was agreed that you took my name at St. Jim's, and I took yours at Greyfriars, for a whole term. I didn't want to, and you know it—you talked me into it. And I know the reason now. You'd got into trouble with a dashed bookmaker, and you wanted to leave it all for me."

"Oh, really, Wally—"

"And I had no end of trouble with the man, too; and now it's blown over, and I'm getting on all right, you want to change back!" growled Wally. "Do you call that playing the game?"

"You're getting on with the fellows at Greyfriars?" asked Bunter curiously.

"First-rate, now."

"And they believe you're me?"

"Of course they do, fathead! I couldn't stay there if they didn't, could I?" grunted Wally. "And I suppose the St. Jim's fellows believe you're me?"

Bunter chuckled.

"Yes; it's working like a charm. I'm no end popular in the school—"

"Are you?" asked Wally, in surprise.

"Yes, I am!" roared William George.

"Well, I've found that you weren't so jolly popular at Greyfriars!" growled Wally. "You left a jolly juicy reputation behind you, and I came in for the benefit of it."

"Oh, really, Wally—"

"Half the fellows have been making out that I owe them money—"

"He, he, he!"

"It's all very well to cackle," said the incensed Wally. "But if I'd known how matters stood I jolly well wouldn't have agreed to your fat-headed scheme, I can tell you."

tell you. I had a dog's life, at first—though the fellows have come round now. They think you're greatly improved."

"And Wally groaned.

Bunter snorted.

"Oh, don't talk rot, Wally! They're a lot of asses to take you for me—a chap like you! Blessed if I can see it myself! You're not well-bred like me, for one thing—"

"Not like you, certainly!" said Wally Bunter drily. "And not a thumping liar like you, Billy! That's what surprises the fellows most of all."

"Look here—"

"Let's get to business. If you want to change back, I think you're being a toad—as you usually are. I'm getting on first-rate at Greyfriars now, and you ought to stick to the bargain."

"I don't want to change back—not yet, anyway. But I can't see old Penman this afternoon, and that's flat. You've got to do that."

"But—but—"

"It's easy enough," said Bunter. "You go to St. Jim's now, as me—or, rather, as yourself. He, he, he! The fellows don't know us one from another—unless they see us together, anyway. And the chaps who know you best—Tom Merry and that lot—will be playing footer."

"Footer!" said Wally, his face brightening. "I may get a game, then! I played for them when they came over to—"

"Rot! Tom Merry's refused me a place in the team, so he's hardly likely to play you—even if he knew it was you," sniffed Bunter.

Wally Bunter grinned.

"Well, never mind that," he said. "I suppose I can work it. I can meet Mr. Penman at the school. You'll have to keep out of sight."

"I'm going over to Abbotsford to keep out of the way—there's a matinee at the theatre there," said Bunter. "All I want you to do is to lend me some money."

"You have my allowance from Mr. Penman."

"Well, you have mine from my pater."

"A jolly small one, too—only half as much!"

"If you're going to be mean about money, Wally—"

Grunt from Wally.

"I made the arrangement wholly for your sake, as you know," said Bunter warmly. "You were so keen on going to Greyfriars instead of St. Jim's—"

"And you were keen on dodging out of the heap of scrapes you'd got into at Greyfriars—"

"Never mind that! I can do it on half-a-quid, if you can manage it."

"I can manage five bob."

"I call that mean!"

"You can call it what you like, Billy; and you can take it or leave it."

"Oh, I'll take it!" said Bunter, with a sniff. "I'm stony, owing to being disappointed about a postal-order. I may as well get off now."

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Wally. "You've got to give me some tips about St. Jim's. I'm a stranger there. You have a study, I suppose?"

"Yes; No. 2 in the Fourth."

"Any study-mates?"

"Yes; Mellish and Trimble."

"Friendly with them?"

"I despise them too much to be friendly with them!" said Bunter disdainfully. "Mellish is untruthful—"

"You wouldn't be able to stand that, of course!" said Wally, with deep sarcasm. "And what's the matter with Trimble?"

"He's fat and greedy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle

at! You'd better keep clear of the study, Wally. Those two cads have turned me out, and they pitch into me if I go into my own study."

"My hat! What do you stand it for?"

"I disdain to soil my hands upon the cads!" said Bunter loftily.

"You don't disdain to soil them in other ways, though," remarked Wally, with a glance at his cousin's fat paws.

"They could do with a wash."

"You cheeky rotter!" howled Bunter.

"Look here, I'm not accustomed to being talked to like this by a poor relation—"

"Bow-wow! If you're kept out of your study, why don't you ask a prefect to interfere? You've a right to."

"Those miserable cads would make complaints about the grub if I did. They actually said so. A few sardines, you know, and some pilchards, and some sosses, and a cake or two, you know—"

"Yes; I know!" chuckled Wally. "I understand perfectly, my tulip. I shall have to use the study, though. Mr. Penman will expect to see my study."

"They may cut up rusty."

"Let 'em! They won't find me so jolly easy to shift out of the study," said Wally cheerfully. "Anything else to tell me?"

"Well, you might behave as decently as possible—"

"Eh?"

"And do me as much credit as you can. I am sure you don't mind my mentioning it, Wally, but you are rather low in some ways—"

"You fat idiot!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Am I going to see you again afterwards?" asked Wally gruffly.

"No need for that. Clear off after Old Penman's gone—he says he has to catch the six train back—and I shall come home from Abbotsford at half-past six, say—not earlier, to make sure of not meeting the old bouncer. The fellows won't know there's been any change."

"They may notice that my neck is washed."

"Look here—"

"Well, I'll get off, then," said Wally.

"And bear in mind what I've said. Remember, you're taking a gentleman's place for the afternoon—"

"Ain't I going to take your place?"

"That's what I mean. Look here, Wally, I don't like your low jokes, and I'm not going to take any cheek from a fellow that's worked in an office, and who's sent to school by his dashed employer!" roared Bunter.

Wally's eyes sparkled.

"Mr. Penman undertook to send me to school because I saved him a big loss when his office was burgled," he said. "It was kindness itself. He's a really splendid man! And if you speak of him, Billy, you've got to speak of him a bit more respectfully."

"Catch me! A dashed old bouncer who's made his money in trade—"

Bump!

"Yaroooooop!"

Wally Bunter walked away through the wood, leaving Billy Bunter sitting in the grass, gasping for breath, and shaking a fat fist after him.

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "Yah! Beast!"

Wally walked on, unheeding; and the Owl of Greyfriars picked himself up, brandished his fat fist again, and then started for the railway-station. His fat face cleared as he rolled away.

He was going to have as good a time as possible in Abbotsford that afternoon, with Wally's five shillings to see him through; and Wally was going to en-

counter any difficulties that might crop up at St. Jim's.

So upon the whole William George Bunter felt satisfied.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally at St. Jim's.

WALLY BUNTER'S fat face was very thoughtful as he walked from the wood towards St. Jim's.

He had had his misgivings about that reckless scheme of changing places with his cousin Billy; but it had worked well so far.

At neither school was there the faintest suspicion of the change that had taken place.

Wally had his old wish—he was at Greyfriars with Harry Wharton & Co., the friends he had made earlier, and whose schoolfellow he had keenly wished to be.

And there was no harm in using Billy's name there, as he had given his own to Billy. He was succeeding, too, in living down the exceedingly unpleasant reputation Billy had left him as an inheritance at Greyfriars; and, in fact, he was happy at Greyfriars, and loth to think of leaving the school.

Billy Bunter's urgent letter, summoning him to St. Jim's in post-haste, had given him a very unpleasant shock. He knew the unreliable nature of the Owl, and the thought of changing back had dismayed him.

He was relieved now, however. Billy Bunter did not want to change back, so far, at all events.

And risky as another change was, for the afternoon Wally Bunter rather looked forward to spending a few hours at St. Jim's. There, at least, he would be under his own name, and he would see Tom Merry and D'Arcy, and other fellows he liked, who had been prepared to welcome him warmly when he became a St. Jim's fellow.

And he was rather tickled, too, at the thought of what would happen when Mellish and Trimble—whoever they were—taking him for the Bunter they know, tried to evict him from Study No. 2 in the Fourth.

Something like an earthquake would happen to Mellish and Trimble if they tried that on. Wally was quite certain on that point, and he chuckled at the thought.

Racke and Crooke were lounging about the gates when Wally Bunter reached the school.

Most of the juniors were gathering on Little Side, as the Abbotsford team were expected soon; but Racke and Crooke were not attracted there. The two black sheep of the Shell did not care for footer, either to play or watch, unless they had bets on the game.

They were slacking, as usual; and as Bunter came up, Racke, in sheer idleness, reached out and knocked off his cap. It was safe enough to rag Billy Bunter.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Wally in surprise at that greeting.

"What are you wearing that rag for?" said Racke. "That's not a St. Jim's cap?"

Wally looked at him.

He was wearing an ordinary cap, having taken care not to bring with him anything distinctive of Greyfriars.

"You've knocked my cap off!" he said. "Will you have the kindness to pick it up for me?"

Racke chuckled.

"Not in these bags," he answered.

"I shall make you, then!"

"Eh?"

"Are you going to pick that cap up?"

"Hardly."

"Then here goes!" said Wally cheerfully.

He rushed at Aubrey Racke. Racke backed away in sheer astonishment.

"You fat idiot!" he ejaculated. "Do you want me to bump you on the ground and burst you?"

"Yes, if you can do it, old bean!"

"My hat!" said Crooke in wonder. "Bunter on the war-path! Mop up the quid with him, Racke!"

"I'm jolly well going to!" growled Racke.

He put up his hands savagely.

To his amazement, his clumsy hands were dashed aside with perfect ease, and he received a tap on the nose that made him blink. The next moment—how, Racke hardly knew—the fat junior had him by the collar, and, with a strength that Bunter had never been suspected of, he forced Aubrey to his knees.

"Pick up that cap, dear boy!" he said.

"Yow-ow! Leggo!" shrieked Racke.

"Are you going to pick up that cap?"

"No!" yelled Racke. "Help me, Crooke, you staring fool!"

Gerald Crooke ran to his aid. Wally's left came out like lightning, catching Crooke on the chin, and sending him spinning. Crooke spun into three juniors who were coming down to the gates to look for the Abbotsford brake. Tom Merry caught him by the shoulders and stopped him.

"Hallo, what's this game?" exclaimed the captain of the Shell.

"Ow-ow-ow!" moaned Crooke, clasp- ing his chin and backing away. "Ow! My chin! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Leggo!" raved Racke. "You fat beast, I'll smash you! Yow-ow! Let me go!"

"When you've picked up my cap, old bean!" said Wally calmly.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on in utter wonder. Racke certainly was not a fighting-man, but Bunter was not supposed to be anything like a match for him, and he was nearly a head shorter than the black sheep of the Shell. And Bunter of the Fourth had not been famed at St. Jim's for courage; rather the reverse.

Yet here he was, handling Aubrey Racke as easily as a baby!

Racke was forced lower and lower, till his prominent nose almost touched the ground, and he wriggled and struggled furiously in the grip of the fat hand—in vain.

"Bunter!" gasped the captain of the Shell.

"Hallo, cocky!" said Wally, with a grin and a nod at Tom Merry, whom he knew well enough.

"What—what game are you playing, you fat bouncer?" exclaimed Manners.

"This dear boy's knocked my cap off, and he's going to be obliging enough to pick it up, that's all."

"Well, my hat! I've seen a rag in the Third knock your cap off, and you never touched him."

"Bosh!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I'm touching this dear boy, anyhow."

"Better pick up the cap, Racke," grinned Lowther. "You don't look as if you can handle Bunter."

"Ow! Help me, you fool, Crooke!"

"Ow-ow-ow!" was the only reply of George Gerald Cooke. He was busy with his chin.

Racke's nose was on the ground now, and Wally was gently but persistently rubbing it there. The Terrible Three grinned at they looked on. Racke clutched at the cap at last, and handed it up to Wally.

"Thanks, old bean!" said Wally Bunter cheerily. "You can sit down now!"

And Racke sat down—with Wally's assistance—hard.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I thought Bunter could handle a Third Form rag like that, let alone a Shell chap!"

Racke rose to his feet, with a face like a demon.

But he did not approach Wally again. He was still aching from the iron grip that had been placed on him.

Panting for breath, he moved away with Crooke, who was still rubbing his chin ruefully. The two Shell fellows were not likely to rag Bunter of the Fourth again in a hurry.

Wally grinned cheerfully at the astonished faces of the Terrible Three. He put his cap on the back of his head.

"I'm jolly glad to see you again, Tom Merry," he remarked.

Tom stared at him.

"The gladness is all on your side, then!" he answered dryly.

Wally started.

"What—what did you say? What the thump do you mean? If you call that civil—"

"I don't!" answered Tom. "But if you expect me to be glad to see you, Bunter, you must be wandering in your mind. And what the thump do you mean by speaking as if you hadn't seen me for a dog's age, when you saw me last at dinner?"

"At—at dinner!" Wally remembered himself in time. "I—I mean—ahem!—quite so! Yes—exactly! By the way, you're playing football this afternoon?"

"You know we are."

"Yes, yes, of course! Room for another man in the eleven?"

"Oh, don't be an ass! Are you beginning that again?" said Tom impatiently. "Don't talk out of your neck, Bunter; you make fellows tired!"

Tom Merry looked out at the gates. There was no sign yet of the Abbotsford brake, and he came in again. The Terrible Three walked away towards Little Side; and Wally, after a momentary hesitation, joined them.

CHAPTER 7.

Goal!

HALLO, D'Arcy!" Arthur Augustus, with an elegant overcoat and a handsome muffer over his equally elegant and handsome footer rig, was chatting with Blake on Little Side when Wally Bunter came up along with the Shell fellows.

The swell of St. Jim's extracted an eyeglass from some recess, jammed it into his eye, and surveyed Wally Bunter.

"Did you address me, Buntah?" he inquired.

"Of course I did, old bean!"

"I beg you not to do so, Buntah, in that exceedingly familiar way. I have remarked before that I do not like it!"

"Oh!" said Wally.

He bit his lip.

It was something like his experience at Greyfriars over again. Billy Bunter had evidently left a far from pleasant state of affairs for him.

Wally Bunter had been quite chummy with Gussy; but it was pretty clear that Billy Bunter had made an end of anything like a feeling of friendship in Gussy's noble breast. And Wally was not exactly surprised.

It was rather difficult for Wally, who had just arrived from Greyfriars, to act as if he had been at St. Jim's all the time. But it was evidently necessary; and he kept on his guard.

Figgins & Co. came on the ground, and they grinned as they saw Bunter.

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They had heard of the Owl's request for a place in the School Junior Eleven.

Wally was about to greet the three, whom he remembered well; but he paused in time.

"Time Abbotsford showed up," remarked Figgins.

"Well, kick-off's not till two-thirty," said Tom Merry. "Time yet. What do you want, Bunter?" he added, a little gruffly.

"I suppose you couldn't stretch a point. Mr. Penman's coming to see me this afternoon, and he's an old St. Jim's man—he used to play for St. Jim's thirty years ago. It would please him no end to see me playing for the School."

"Not if he's a footballer," said Tom Merry dryly.

"Unless he's got a vewy remarkable sense of humah, Buntah!" grinned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What rot! I played for you before, when you were short of a man at Greyfriars," said Wally. "You know I'm a player!"

"I know you played well that time," admitted Tom Merry. "It must have been some sort of a queer fluke, as you've proved yourself a fumbling idiot ever since you've been here."

"Oh, my hat!" mumbled Wally.

"That fat idiot—"

"What!"

"N-n-nothing! I say, I can really play, you know," urged Wally. "I'll tell you what. You've got time before the match, as your visiors haven't arrived. Put a man in goal, and see if I can beat him."

"F-the-d!"

"Ass!"

"Put Wynn in," said Wally determinedly. "Wynn's your best goalie, I believe. And if I beat Wynn—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind, I don't want to bag another chap's place in the team," said Wally hastily. "I don't mean that. But I'd give a lot to let Mr. Penman see me playing for the School: I owe him a lot, and I'd like to please him. Some chap may offer to stand out for me."

The juniors stared at him.

"Are you quite potty?" asked Tom Merry at last. "You can't play footer, and you know you can't! Cheese it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "If you can land a goal with Fatty between the posts, Bunter, I'll stand out for you."

"Done!" exclaimed Wally Bunter instantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You agree, Tom Merry, as skipper?" asked Wally, in a business-like tone.

Tom Merry laughed impatiently.

"What's the good of talking rot?" he said. "No need to be playing the fool on the field when Abbotsford comes along. Roll away and dry up!"

"Do you mean business, Figgins?" asked Wally.

"Ha, ha! Yes! Let him try, Tommy; it won't do any harm. It's funny to see that porpoise rolling after a ball."

"He can play the goat, if he likes," said Tom, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't mind!"

"And if I score a goal off Wynn Figgins can give me his place in the eleven?" asked the fat junior.

"Yes, ass; and he can give you his head, too, if he likes—and you can have mine along with it!"

"Done! I don't want your nappers but I want a show in the game this afternoon, to please Mr. Penman. Will you trot into goal, Wynn?"

Fatty grinned.

"Any old thing!" he answered. "Go ahead!"

There was a general chortle as Fatty

Wynn went into goal, and Figgins pitched out an old practice ball into the field for Bunter. Fatty Wynn grinned between the posts. But the chortling died away as Bunter took the ball up the field, dribbling it. Certainly the fat junior was dribbling the ball in a masterly way, as far as that went.

"I—I say, he isn't such a clumsy ass as he's always made out," said Figgins.

"He won't beat Fatty Wynn!"

"Ha, ha! No!"

A good man, with his best shooting-boots on, would not have had an easy task to beat the New House goalkeeper on his lonesome. Wally had set himself a hefty task, and he knew it. But he had some advantage in the fact that Fatty Wynn did not believe for a moment that the leather would come anywhere near him, and was certainly not on the alert as he would have been in a game.

Wally Bunter dribbled the ball up, and made a show of kicking, and Fatty Wynn grinned at him. In a flash Wally changed his feet, and the ball flew into the corner of the net before the fat goalkeeper knew what was happening. Fatty Wynn had fairly been caught napping!

"Goal!" stammered Tom Merry blankly.

"Gig-gig-gig-goal!" spluttered Figgins.

"Goal!" murmured Kerr. "Oh, Figg!"

Fatty Wynn stared round at the leather. There it was—there was no was no mistake about that! It was in the net, and that goal stood to Bunter's credit. As Fatty Wynn mechanically picked up the footer, Wally sauntered back to the astounded group of juniors by the ropes.

"Well?" he said.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Fatty wasn't at his best, but that was a jolly clever kick. Have you been pulling our leg all this time, you fat rascal? You can play footer!"

"I told you I could."

"Yes, but—"

"Bai Jove! That was weally a vewy remarkable kick!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally did not think Buntah was capable of it."

Figgins' face was a study.

"Well, I can play," said Wally Bunter cheerfully. "The question is, can you make room for me?"

"Bai Jove! Figgay has settled that."

Tom Merry was silent. In his utter disbelief that Bunter could score off Fatty Wynn, he had given a careless assent to George Figgins' reckless offer. The assent had been careless, but he was a fellow of his word.

He looked rather queerly at Figgins. Figgins was looking very queer indeed.

"Well, Figgins?" said Wally Bunter.

"You you—you've done it!" stammered Figgins.

"He's done it," said Kerr, "and he's done you, Figg, you ass! You'll have to stand to it now, and so will Tom Merry. That fat bouncer's dished the pair of you, to say nothing of the match."

"The match is all right," said Tom Merry. "I can see whether a chap's a form, and Bunter's in form all right. You remember how he played for us in the Greyfriars match that time. I suppose he's been spoofing us since. Anyhow he can play footer."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well," said Figgins slowly, "I agree that. I—I've been taken in."

"Taken in and done for!" grinned Blake.

"Hold on!" said Wally Bunter quickly. "I do want to play this after-

but I'm not going to diddle you, Figgins. If you want to call it off, I'm willing. I'll let you off, old boy!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry blinked.

This generous offer was quite like the old Wally Bunter—the Wally they had known before Bunter came to St. Jim's.

Figgins shook his head.

"If you play as you did that time at Greyfriars, you'll be as good a man in the team as I am," he said. "And a bargain's a bargain. I'm standing out, you agree, Tom Merry?"

"I've already agreed," said Tom.

"Then it's settled."

"I—I don't want to pin you down, Figgins, really," said Wally. "I withdraw my claim, if you like. There!"

Figgins grinned faintly.

"You're playing!" he answered. "Cut off and get into your rig, Bunter. The Abbotsford fellows will be along in a few minutes."

"Well, if you don't mind—"

"Buck up!" was Figg's reply.

"Right you are, then!"

"Cut off!" said Tom Merry, as Wally Bunter hesitated. "There isn't too much time to change, and your things are indoors."

"I'm off!" said Wally.

His hesitation had a cause unknown to Tom Merry & Co. He did not know his way about the school, and had no idea where Bunter's footer outfit was kept. He was not even sure which was Bunter's House, of the two he could see in the distance. It was rather a difficult position, especially as he could not venture to let his doubts be observed.

He picked up his coat and started off. Tom Merry called after him, when he got to a little distance.

"Bunter, you owl!"

Wally looked round.

"Aren't you going to change?"

"Eh? Yes!"

"Well, your things are not in the New House, are they? Look here, if you're going to play, don't lose time."

"Oh, all right!"

Wally Bunter changed his direction, Tom having unobtrusively given him his bearings. He trotted off cheerfully into the School House.

CHAPTER 8.

An Earthquake in Study No. 2.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Wally Bunter, as he entered the School House and looked round him over his glasses.

He knew there was no time to lose, as the visiting team were due already, but he was at a loss.

All he knew of Bunter's quarters was that the Owl belonged to Study No. 2 in the Fourth, and that his study-mates were named Mellish and Trimble. But where the Fourth Form quarters were was beyond him. He had to find them somehow.

As he stood blinking round him, three faces came along, and one of them Wally recognised by his likeness to the great Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form. The other two were Frank Levison and Manners minor. D'Arcy minor had stopped to fasten an obstinate shoe-lace, and Frank Levison called out:

"Buck up, Wally. You'll be late for the match."

Wally Bunter started.

For the moment he naturally supposed that the fat's remark was addressed to him. But D'Arcy minor replied:

"Wait a minute, fathead!"

Evidently Arthur Augustus' young brother rejoiced in the same front name

"Abbotsford ought to be here by this time," said Manners minor. "We sha'n't get a good place, Wally. There'll be a crowd."

"Oh, give us a rest, Reggie!"

At this point Wally Bunter had a brain-wave, so to speak. He gave a sudden stagger, and caught at Levison minor's shoulder for support. He selected Frank on account of his kind, good-natured looks, as the most likely to waste time on a fellow in distress.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Here, roll off me, barrel!" said Frank.

"Ow! A—a sudden twinge!" gasped Wally Bunter. "I—I say, kid, help me to my study, will you?"

"Oh, my hat!" I'm just off to the footer ground—"

"Rot!" snapped Manners minor. "Help yourself, you fat boulder! You've only been eating too much. I expect. Shove him off, Frank. Check!"

"Lend me a hand, there's a good kid!" murmured Wally Bunter.

"Come on!" called out D'Arcy minor, who, having finished his obstinate shoelace, was heading for the doorway.

Frank Levison hesitated.

"I'll come 'fter you," he called back.

"More duffer you!" said Reggie Manners.

And he ran after D'Arcy minor.

"Come on, Bunter!" said Frank hurriedly. "I don't want to miss the kick-off. Get a move on, quick!"

He led the fat junior upstairs.

Wally Bunter kept a hand on his shoulder, as if for support, but he was not much trouble to Frank. All he really wanted was a guide.

Levison of the Fourth passed them on the stairs, with Cardew and Clive. Levison was in footer rig under his coat.

"Hallo! What are you rolling that tub about for, Frank?" called out Levison major.

"He's got a pain," said Frank.

"Serve him right!"

"Ow!" said Wally pathetically.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Cardew.

"It was the hundredth sausage did it, I expect. Or was it the two hundredth, old bean?"

"Can I help you with my boot, old chap?" asked Sidney Clive. "If a really good shove behind would help you—"

Wally Bunter hurried on with Frank, and the three Fourth-Formers went down the stairs grinning.

"Here you are!" exclaimed Frank Levison, as they reached the door of No. 2 in the Fourth. "All right now?"

"Help me in."

"Oh, all right!" said Frank, manfully suppressing his impatience.

He was anxious to join his chums on Little Side.

He threw open the door of the study, and a scent of cigarette-smoke greeted him. Mellish and Trimble were there, and they had a guest in the study—Scrope of the Shell. The three young rascals were spending their half-holiday at banker, with cigarettes going. They stared at Frank Levison and the fat junior as they came in.

"Get out of this, Bunter!" snapped Mellish. "I've told you you're not to come here, haven't I?"

"Do you want another licking?" demanded Trimble.

Frank Levison grinned.

"Anything more I can do for you?" he asked.

"Hold on a minute," said Wally Bunter.

The fat junior had found Billy Bunter's study. But it was pretty clear that the football outfit was not kept there. All he was likely to find in the study was a scrap with Billy's study-mates. A "scrap" had no terrors for him, certainly, but he did not want one

just then if it could be helped. He was anxious to get into Billy's football club and get back to the field.

"Well, what do you want, Bunter?" asked Frank. "I'm in a hurry, you know."

"I—I want my footer rig," said Wally.

"What on earth for?"

"I'm playing this afternoon for Tom Merry."

"Oh, don't be a funny ass, Bunter!" said Frank. "I haven't time to stay here and listen to fatheaded jokes."

And Frank Levison, not dreaming for a moment of taking Bunter's statement seriously, cut off, and went down the staircase on the banisters at great speed.

Wally Bunter had lost his guide.

Mellish, Trimble, and Scrope had risen to their feet, with threatening looks. They were angry at the interruption of their game. Mellish and Trimble were

the boot was on the other foot now, so to speak.

As their grasp was laid on the fat junior, two plump fists came up like lightning.

Scrope caught one of them with his nose, and Mellish caught the other with his eye.

Bump, bump!

The Shell fellow and the Fourth-Former reeled back, and sat down on the carpet. And Baggy Trimble, with a howl of surprise and terror, released Bunter as if the fat junior had suddenly become red-hot and damped back.

Wally grinned at them.

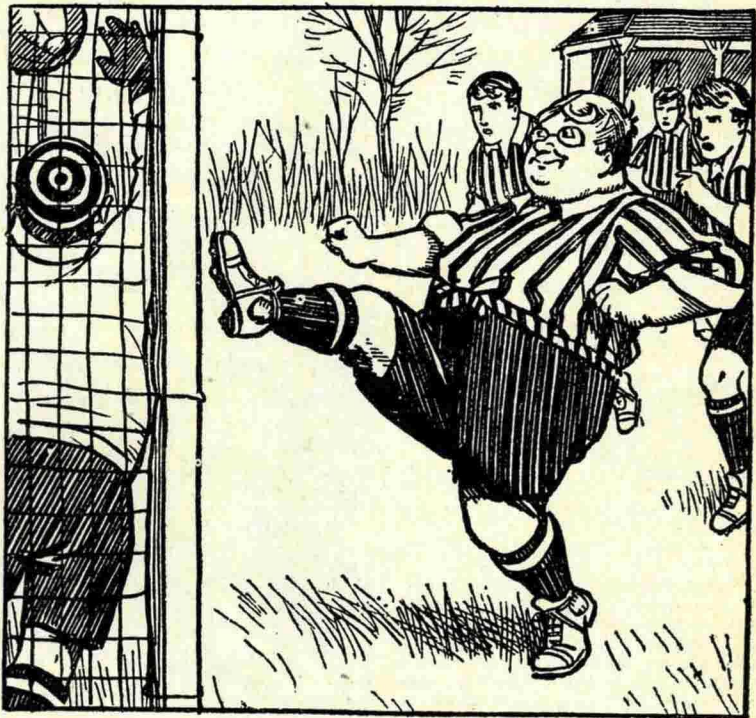
"Come and have some more!" he said.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Oh dear!"

Scrope sat up and dabbed his nose dazedly. Mellish squirmed round the



W. G. B. Was the Goal Bagger.

(See Chapter 7.)

especially exasperated. They had not expected Bunter to make another attempt to establish his rights in the study; and they did not suspect that this was quite another Bunter they had to deal with.

"Take the fat beast by the neck," said Mellish.

"What-ho!" grinned Baggy Trimble.

"I'll lend you a hand," remarked Scrope. "Now, then, Bunter, out you go!"

Wally's eyes gleamed over his glasses.

"Hands off, you silly asses!" he snapped. "I've no time to waste on you!"

"We've a little to waste on you," said Mellish—"just enough to pitch you out on your neck!"

And the three juniors piled on Wally Bunter together.

What happened next was like an earthquake to them.

On previous occasions Billy Bunter had been handled easily enough. But

table before he ventured to get on his feet. Baggy Trimble dodged behind the armchair, as if to use it as a fortification.

They glared at Wally Bunter in blank dismay.

"Oh, I—I say!" gasped Trimble. "I—I say, Bunter, old chap—"

"Ow-ow-ow!" came from Mellish.

Scrope jumped up with a furious face, and rushed at Wally Bunter. The fat junior's hands shot up again, and Scrope was met with left and right, and, gasping and panting, he was driven out of the study into the passage. He was, perhaps, more amazed than hurt; but he was hurt, too, and he had plainly had enough by the time he was out of the study. He backed away in the passage, turned, and fled ingloriously.

Wally, grinning, turned back into the doorway, to find Mellish and Trimble regarding him with looks of amazement and apprehension.

"I—I say, keep off, you know!"

gasped Baggy Trimble. "I—I never wanted to turn you out, Bunter—never in my life! It—it was Mellish all the time. Mellish said—"

"Ow-ow!"
"Sure you don't want to turn me out?" grinned Wally.

"Not a bit, old chap. I—I like you too much!" gasped Trimble. "I—I have missed you awfully. Mellish remembers my saying so to him!"

"Yow-ow!"
"What do you say, Mellish, old buck?" asked Wally. He knew which was which of the two juniors now.

"Let me alone!" groaned Mellish. "Hang you!"

"Don't you want any more?"
"Ow! No!"

"Well, as we're so jolly friendly, you can do me a good turn," said Wally Bunter brightly. "I want my footer rig. Trimble, you can go and fetch it here for me, and help me change."

"With pleasure, old chap!" gasped Trimble, with a longing glance at the door.

His look showed rather plainly that if he was once safe outside the study he was not likely to come back with Bunter's footer rig.

"On second thoughts, I'll come with you," said Wally cheerfully. "Now, then, get a move on!"

"If you're going to the dorm yourself, you don't want me—"

"My dear chap, I'm enjoying your company. Shall I take your arm or your ear?"

"M-m-m-my arm, please!" stuttered Trimble.

"Come on, then!"

Wally Bunter left the study with Trimble, Mellish scowling after him savagely. Trimble, little dreaming that his companion did not know the way, headed for the Fourth Form dormitory.

"Get the things out for me!" said Wally autocratically.

"Look here, I'm not going to fag for you, Bunter—"

"Where will you have it?" asked Wally.

"I—I mean, I—I'm delighted to oblige you, old chap."

"That's better! Buck up!"

A minute more, and Wally Bunter was changing into Billy Bunter's football rig, and Trimble was allowed to go. He rolled off in a state of great amazement and disquiet. It was pretty clear now that Bunter would have to be allowed to resume his place in Study No. 2.

Wally had only succeeded in time; he had barely finished changing when D'Arcy looked into the dormitory.

"Weady Buntah? The Abbotsford fellows have awivved. Tom Mewwy sent me for you."

"Ready!" answered Wally cheerfully. And he walked to the football-ground with Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 9.

The Abbotsford Match.

"ON the ball!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"
Round Little Side there had gathered a big crowd of juniors. The Abbotsford match always drew a crowd; but the news that Bunter of the Fourth was playing for St. Jim's drew fellows from near and far.

"Bunter's playing!" said D'Arcy minor, to a group of the Third. "That means that Tom Merry's gone off his dot! The poor chap ought to be put under restraint."

"My only hat!" said Frank Levison. "The fat boulder told me he was playing, and I thought he was pulling my leg. Whose place has he got?"

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"Figgy's," said Reggie Manners. "There's Figgy standing out."

"Well, my word!"

The surprise was general, for during the time he had been at St. Jim's, Billy Bunter had succeeded in convincing the Lower School that what he did not know about football would have filled whole volumes, if not libraries. Unless Tom Merry was indeed "off his dot," there was no accounting for it.

But the amazement increased when it was seen that the fat recruit was playing up for his side in great style.

He had a turn of speed that was not excelled even by the slim Arthur Augustus—in passing he was as accurate as Kerr or Redfern or Tom Merry himself. In a very few minutes all the on-lookers knew that it was a very good man playing; and some of them rubbed their eyes.

"The fat idiot's been pulling our leg!" said Julian of the Fourth. "He made out he couldn't play footer."

"But, badad, why should he?" said Reilly.

"Blessed if I know."
"Potty, I should think," remarked Kerruish. "Fatty degeneration of the brain."

"Anyhow, he can play!" said Julian. "Look at him now! He's got the ball away from Yorke—and Yorke's a good man."

"Pass, you barrel—pass!" roared Clive.

But Bunter did not need telling; he passed in to Tom Merry, who took the leather and rushed it on, with the whole forward line in full flight. There was a cheer as a hot attack on the visitors' goal followed.

The Abbotsford goalkeeper sent the ball back, once, twice, thrice, but the backs could not clear, and there was a sudden roar as the leather went into the net.

"Goal!"

"Bunter!"

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Bunter! Oh, crickey!"

It was a yell of astonishment round the field. The first goal in the match had fallen to St. Jim's, and it was Bunter of the Fourth who had kicked it.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated George Figgins. "My only summer hat! I couldn't have done better than that! That fat duffer, you know—that blessed barrel—well, it beats me! Goal, goal, goal!"

"He's been specoin' us all," said Car-dew. "But what's he been doin' it for?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Good man, anyhow," remarked Clive, with satisfaction. "First goal to us, and we're going to win. Bravo, Bunter!"

Several of the team smacked Bunter's fat shoulder—Levison and D'Arcy and Tom Merry among them. The footballers had quite forgiven the Owl for his many sins now. They were astonished, but they were delighted.

"Bai Jove, that was a wippin' goal, Buntah! What have you been pwetendin' to be a sillay ass for?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

Wally grinned cheerfully.

"First-rate!" said Levison.

"Topping!" said Talbot of the Shell heartily.

The fat junior was on the best of terms with the team when they lined up again. It was clear that he was in the same topping form as on the historic occasion when he had filled a vacant place for Tom Merry at Greyfriars, and helped to beat the Remove there. The ineptitude shown by Billy Bunter was a perplexing

puzzle. But that mattered little now; the new recruit was more than worth his salt.

The first half was drawing to its close when the station cab drove up the School House, and a stout gentleman stepped out. He was a ruddy-faced gentleman of middle age, with a good-humoured expression, and the way his glance turned towards the playing-fields, as he heard shouting from that direction, showed that he was an old player.

"Go it, Bunter! Put her through!"
"Bravo, Bunter!"

It was a roar from the football-ground, and the name reached the ears of the gentleman who had arrived in the cab.

Mr. Railton met him in the hall. The Housemaster was acquainted with Mr. Penman, who had visited St. Jim's many times as an Old Boy. He greeted the merchant warmly.

"I will send for Bunter," Mr. Railton remarked, after they had chatted a few moments in the Housemaster's study.

Mr. Penman smiled.

"I fancy Bunter is engaged at the present moment," he said. "I am very glad that he has turned out a footballer."

"A footballer?" repeated Mr. Railton. "I heard the name shouted on the football-ground as I came in," said the gentleman from Canterbury.

"Bless my soul! I—I was not aware that Bunter of the Fourth was a foot baller of much account," said Mr. Railton, in surprise. "There is a junior match this afternoon, but surely Bunter is—"

He paused.

"Oh! There is perhaps another boy here of the same name?" said Mr. Penman, disappointed.

"No; no one of that name but Bunter of the Fourth. From what I have observed of him I should not have thought—"

Mr. Railton stepped to his window, and called to a junior in the quadrangle.

"Trimble!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Is Bunter playing for the School this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir," said Trimble.

"Bless my soul! You are right, Mr. Penman," said the Housemaster, turning back to the visitor. "Would you care to walk down to Little Side—"

"I was thinking that I should—"

"I will come with you."

The Housemaster and his visitor walked down to the football-ground together, and the shout they heard as they arrived showed that Bunter of the Fourth was not only playing for St. Jim's, but was winning golden opinions by his play.

"Bravo, Bunter!"

"Good man!"

St. Jim's were attacking again, and the Abbotsford defence was hard driven. Wally Bunter had taken the leather from a back striving to clear with an ease that astonished the Abbotsford man, and the next moment he was charged over. But in that second he centred to Tom Merry, who drove the ball home.

"Goal!"

"Well kicked, Tom Merry!"
Bunter sat up, blinking. His glasses were in his pocket now, and it was another surprise to the juniors that he did not seem at a loss without them.

Levison pulled him up.

"That was a jolly good pass, kid," said Levison. "Two up for us, by Jove!"

"Good man, Buntah!"

"Good man!" repeated Tom Merry. "You gave me that goal, Bunter. If

you ever pretend again that you can't play footer I'll scalp you bald-headed!"

Wally chuckled breathlessly. The whistle went a few minutes later, and the players came off, and Mr. Penman called to Wally Bunter. The fat junior ran up at once, and shook hands with his old employer. Mr. Penman's face was bright with satisfaction.

"In the Junior Eleven already—what?" he exclaimed. "I congratulate you, my boy! I'm more pleased than I can say."

"I congratulate you, too, Bunter," said Mr. Railton, with a rather puzzled look, however.

"Thank you, sir!" said Wally demurely.

"You will be a credit to the school, my boy," said Mr. Penman.

"Oh, sir!" murmured Wally.

He was devoutly thankful at that moment that he had come over from Greyfriars that day, and not risked Billy Bunter playing his part in the presence of his kind old friend.

Mr. Railton returned to the School House, but the gentleman from Canterbury remained on Little Side to watch the match to the end. And when play was resumed Mr. Penman's voice was as loud as any in the cheering.

Wally Bunter had played up well in the first half, but in the second he was fairly on his mettle. He owed much to Mr. Penman; and it was some sort of recompense to the old sportsman to see his protegee playing for his old school with credit. The old gentleman's evident delight was an incentive to Wally to do his very best—and his very best was very good indeed.

Not that there was anything "pushing" in his play. He never kept the ball too much for himself, and never played a selfish game. No fresh goal fell to him; but his play was first-class all through, and when Talbot scored it was from a pass given him by Wally at inside-right. His play was rather good than shewy. But the old sportsman was a good judge of play, and his face beamed with delight as he watched his protegee.

Only once did Abbotsford succeed in getting through, and beating Fatty Wynn in goal. When the final whistle went St. Jim's stood three to one, and there was a terrific burst of cheering for the victors. And when the players came off George Figgins smacked Bunter on the shoulder with a terrific smack.

"Well done, tubby!" he said heartily. "Good man! Why, you're one of the best in the bunch!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 10.

Tea in Study No. 2.

TOM MERRY was puzzled. After the Abbotsford fellows were gone the Terrible Three talked over the match by the fire in their study, and all three of them agreed that it was a puzzle.

Only that morning Bunter had been his most unpleasant self, and only a few days before he had displayed the most amazing ineptitude at footer. And now—now he had played a great game, as he had done once before to Tom Merry's knowledge—and not only that, but all his actions and words were those of a decent fellow. His grateful regard for Mr. Penman, for instance, was plain enough for anybody to see. But up to that afternoon Bunter had certainly not

given an impression of possessing such feelings. Tom remembered that Bunter had been annoyed by Mr. Penman's letter, and had actually spoken of "dodging" the old gentleman from Canterbury.

"It's a corker!" said Tom. "It almost seems as if Bunter's an entirely different fellow since dinner to-day."

"It does," agreed Monty Lowther, with a nod.

"And when he came here he seemed a different fellow from the chap we had met. Now he seems to have gone back to his old self. I don't think I'm specially dense," said Tom, "but it beats me hollow."

"It's a puzzle," said Manners thoughtfully. "I quite liked his way with old Mr. Penman. He seems to have quite

"I could peck a bit," admitted Wally. "I generally can. I've a pretty good appetite."

"Ha, ha! You needn't tell us that! But we can't come, old scout," said Tom Merry. "We're hard up to-day."

The fat junior stared at them.

"What difference does that make?" he demanded. "I suppose you don't think I want you to pay for your tea, do you?"

"I suppose you want us to lend you the tin?" said Tom, opening his eyes.

"Well, I don't!" said Wally gruffly. "And if you call that a civil remark, Tom Merry, I don't agree with you."

"My dear ass," said Tom, "you generally mean that you want tin, if you ask a fellow to tea! You know it's the fact. What's the good of beating about the bush, Bunter? I don't quite understand you to-day."

Wally Bunter inwardly blessed his cousin Billy.

"Well, to-day I want you to drop in as friends," he said. "I've got a decent spread. I—I—I want you to come, you see. I'm really not sticking you for a loan—honour bright!"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"The fact is, Mr. Penman's in my study," said Wally Bunter. "He's having some tuck with me before he goes to catch his train. He used to be at St. Jim's, you know; and he's no end gone on grubbing in the study, and all that. He's asked me to ask in some of my friends—makes him think of his merry old schooldays, I suppose. I—I'd like you to come. D'Arcy says he will."

"All serene!" said Tom at once.

"We'll back you up!"

"Thanks no end!"

"What about your study-mates, though?" asked Monty Lowther. "Have you settled with them about the study?"

"Oh, that's all right—they're keeping out!" said Wally. "They came along while I was getting tea—while Mr. Penman was with the Head, luckily. I knocked their heads together and scooted them."

"Oh, my hat!"

The Terrible Three, remembering what had happened to Aubrey Racke, could believe the statement—though the previous day they would have laughed at the idea of Bunter knocking together the heads of Mellish and Trimble. They followed Wally Bunter along to No. 2 in the Fourth.

Old Mr. Penman was there, his ruddy face glowing with good nature, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in the study chatting with the old merchant. Jack Blake was there, too—Gussy had succeeded in persuading him to accept Bunter's invitation. Herries and Digby had declared that they would see Bunter "blowed" first, quite emphatically. They admitted that he had played a good game of footer that day; but in their opinion he was the same toad he had always been—which really was not quite correct, as it happened.

However, there was a sufficient party to make things move. Wally had been rather anxious about that; he wanted Mr. Penman to have a pleasant visit. He had five of the best in his study now, and they all found themselves on good terms with the Old Boy.

Over tea Mr. Penman told them the story of Wally's act of courage when the burglars had attempted to rob his office in Canterbury, Wally shifting uneasily in his seat while the story was related with great gusto by the old merchant. It raised Bunter in the estimation of the juniors, but it perplexed them, too. For

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decent feelings. But only yesterday—well, my hat!"

The Terrible Three felt that they had to give it up. Bunter, with those sudden and surprising changes of character, was a complete puzzle to them. But they admitted that he wasn't by any means the toad they had recently supposed; and when a fat face and glimmering spectacles looked in at the door the chums of the Shell nodded genially, instead of bidding W. G. Bunter "buzz off" in uncompromising tones.

"I say, you chaps," said Wally Bunter, setting his glasses straight on his fat little nose, as if he found them uncomfortable—"I say, will you—will you come to tea with me?"

"We've had tea once, thanks!"

"Well, you needn't eat a lot, if you don't want to; but I wish you'd come."

"You can manage the lion's share, I suppose?" grinned Lowther.

CHAPTER 11.

Lauris for Bunter.

"BUNTAH, deah boy!"
 "Hallo?"
 "Did you have to wait for the twain?"

"Train! What train?"
 "I suppose you are awah that you have missed callin'-over, Buntah?"
 "Can't be helped!" grunted Billy Bunter. "I suppose I've got to go in and be jawed by old Railton—what?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass curiously on Bunter. Already, somehow, there seemed a subtle change in the fat junor.

"You will have to weport to Waitton, Buntah. But it's all wight—he knows you went to the station to see Mr. Penman off."

"Oh, he's gone, then!"
 "Eh?"

"I—I mean, of—of course!" stammered Bunter. "I—I say, I—I saw him off at the station, of—of course. I—I had to wait for the train; that—that's why I—I'm late in. See?"

"Yaas; I pwesumed that was the case, deah boy!"

"Oh, here you are, o'd top!" said Tom Merry, coming along the passage. "You've missed call-over."

"We had to wait at the station," said Bunter calmly. "I couldn't very well come back before Mr. Penman had started, could I?"

"No. That's all right, if you tell Railton."

Billy Bunter rolled away to the House-master's study, grinning. It was evident that there was no suspicion in the School House. He tapped at the door, and the House-master's voice bade him enter.

"I'm sorry I'm late for call-over, sir," said the Owl meekly. "There was a delay at the station. The train—"

"Very well, Bunter; I excuse you," said Mr. Railton genially. "Wait a moment, my boy. I am very glad, Bunter, to see that you play such a good game of football."

Bunter started.
 "I—I'm a splendi'd footballer, sir!" he ventured. "If there's a thing I can really play, it's football!"

Mr. Railton's manner became a shade less genial.

"I had an impression, Bunter, that you were something of a slacker," he said. "I am glad I was mistaken."

"Oh, sir! The fact is, I ought to be in the Junior Eleven here," said Billy Bunter confidentially. "I offered my services to Tom Merry for the match to-day. He declined them."

Mr. Railton raised his eyebrows.
 "But you played, Bunter!"

The Owl jumped.
 "I—I played!" he stammered. "Oh, ah! Yes! Certainly! The—the fact is—"

It dawned upon Billy Bunter that Wally must have played in the Abbotsford match. "I—I certainly played— Oh, yes, I—"

"You played a very good game, Bunter," said Mr. Railton, puzzled by the fat junior's confusion. "Mr. Penman was very pleased with you, and I am glad to correct my impression of you. I hope, Bunter, that you will endeavour to keep up to the mark, and not fall back into the habits of slacking, which I had previously observed."

"Oh, sir! Oh, certainly! Oh, yes, sir!" stammered Bunter.

He was glad to get outside the House-master's study. He was wondering what else Wally might have done while he was at St. Jim's, and was sorely nervous of putting his fat foot in it.

Baggy Trimble was waiting for him in the passage. Billy Bunter eyed him warily through his big spectacles.

But Trimble's manner was friendly, not to say effusive.

"I—I say, Bunter, old chap—" he began.

Bunter continued to eye him.
 "You—you needn't be so jolly stand-offish," murmured Trimble. "I—I say, old fellow, I'm really sorry there was any trouble in the study. It—it was all a misunderstanding. All Mellish's fault from beginning to end—and—and I really liked you all the time, you know."

Bunter wondered what on earth this might mean, and he judiciously kept silent. Evidently something else unknown to him had happened to account for this new friendliness from Baggy Trimble.

"Mellish won't cut up rusty any more," said Baggy.

"Won't he?"

"He, he! Not after you knocked him down in the study," grinned Trimble. "He doesn't want any more like that, I can tell you. You should see his eye now!"

Billy Bunter drew a deep breath.
 "His eye!" he repeated.

"Beautiful mouse under it," chuckled Trimble. "Serve him right! I've told him it served him right! Cheek—trying to keep you out of the study—I've told him so. I never agreed to it! I—I was against it all the time, Bunter. I was, really, you know."

Bunter grinned.

What had happened was pretty clear now; his study-mates had fallen foul of Wally, and Billy was inheriting his cousin's reputation as a fighting-man!

The fat junior assumed a lofty manner at once. He gave Baggy Trimble a threatening blink.

"You tried to keep me out of the study as well as Mellish!" he exclaimed, in a bullying tone.

Trimble backed away.

"No, no, really, old scout!" he gasped. "I—I'm sorry—merely a misunderstanding, you know. I—I want you to come back to No. 2—I do, really! I—I've been looking to it no end."

"Well, I'm coming back," said Bunter. "I'm going up now, in fact. You can help me get my books from the Form-room."

"With pleasure, old man!" said Trimble affectionately.

"I've a jolly good mind to make you do your prep in the Form-room," said Bunter loftily. "Still, I'll let you off, Trimble. But if I ever have any more of your rot—"

"Never!" gasped Trimble, as Bunter doubled a fat fist. "I—I—I—apologise!"

"Well, that's all right. If you ever get your ears up again, you just remember what I gave Mellish!" said Bunter darkly.

"I—I will!"

Billy Bunter's manner was lofty, not to say swanky, as he rolled into Study No. 2, followed by Trimble, carrying his books.

Percy Mellish was there, bathing his eye for about the twentieth time, and he gave Bunter an angry scowl.

"Now, then, none of your sulks!" said Bunter, who almost believed by this time that it was really he who had given Mellish that eye. "If you want another eye to match that one, you've only got to say so, Mellish!"

Mellish scowled without replying.

"Do you hear me?" roared Bunter truculently.

"Yes!" snarled Mellish.

"Mind, I've half a mind to sling you out of the study," said Bunter aggressively. "If I let you stay here you've got to behave yourself. Understand that!"

Grunt!

Bunter of St. Jim's hadn't shown that kind of courage, by any means; and, moreover, his modest diffidence while Mr. Penman told the story was strangely out of keeping with his usual "swank."

Still, the juniors were feeling quite cordial towards Bunter now; and they could only hope that the amazing change in him would last.

Mr. Penman glanced at his watch at last.

Wally was not sorry when that happened.

All had gone well so far, and he was anxious for the old gentleman to be clear of the school a good while before Billy Bunter returned. He trembled to think what might happen if Billy Bunter should "barge" in while Mr. Penman was there. But the old gentleman had his train to catch, and there was no danger of that.

When Mr. Penman left the School House in the dusk, Wally went with him to the station. Mr. Penman decided to walk, to chat with his protege on the way. Tom Merry & Co. saw them off at the gates.

They little dreamed that they were seeing the last of that particular Bunter.

Wally breathed more freely when he was outside the gates. It had been an entertaining afternoon, all things considered; but he was glad that it was over without any startling discoveries being made.

"You seem to be getting on excellently at my old school," Mr. Penman remarked genially, as they walked down the lane.

"Yes, sir," said Wally.

"You play a good game of football, my boy; and you seem to have some very agreeable friends."

"Ye-es!"

"Your Form-master's report of you is not exactly flattering, though."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wally.

"You must work hard as well as play hard, my boy," said Mr. Penman kindly. "Keep up the games—they're useful; but don't neglect Form work. A sound mind in a sound body, you know—that's the idea! 'Mens sana in corpore sano'—what?" Mr. Penman chuckled. "That reminds me of my Fourth Form days. But I'm pleased with you—very pleased."

"I'm jolly glad of that, sir!" said Wally.

He was tempted, for the moment, to confide all to his kind friend; but he refrained. The old St. Jim's man would never have understood his keenness to go to Greyfriars, that was certain. Besides, there was his arrangement with Billy Bunter to be considered. Wally was silent.

At the station Mr. Penman shook hands cordially with his protege, and Wally saw him off in the train. The old gentleman departed greatly pleased with his visit to the school, and little dreaming what curious preparations had been made for that visit.

"And now for Greyfriars!" murmured Wally ruefully. "I shall just about do it by bed-time. I suppose—and what a thumping wiggling I shall get when I get there! Well, it can't be helped!"

A quarter of an hour later Wally Bunter was on his way homeward to Greyfriars, with the pleasant prospect before him of a "wiggling" for staying out late; and certainly he would not be able to give his Form-master the real reason of his having overstayed his time. And while the train bore Wally Bunter westwards, Billy Bunter was rolling home to St. Jim's, wondering what had happened there in his absence.

"Do you understand it?" roared Bunter, clenching his fat fists.

"Yes!" gasped Mellish.

"That's all right, then. I want you to understand, too, that I'm head of this study," said Bunter, swelling almost visibly. "Bear that in mind! I'm not standing any cheek here. If I begin on you again you'll remember it. You too, Trimble."

"Certainly, old chap!" murmured Trimble.

"Make up the fire, Trimble!"

"Yes, Bunter."

"Put a cushion on the armchair for me, Mellish!"

Mellish gave Bunter a look that was only suited to a demon in a pantomime, and hesitated. But he decided to obey. Until he had recovered from that eye, at least, he was not likely to argue with Bunter.

Billy Bunter sat down in the armchair, grinning—monarch of all he surveyed. Study No. 2 really seemed large enough to hold the fat junior now.

Tom Merry & Co. had been surprised by the change in Bunter that day.

But they were still more surprised by another change in him the next day.

Quite early in the morning Bunter, taking advantage of an unusual geniality in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's manner,

requested a loan in advance upon a postal-order he was expecting. It was, as he explained, from one of his titled relations.

Arthur Augustus made the loan. But his cordiality vanished, and did not return.

The same day Tom Merry took Bunter to football practice. Bunter's form seemed remarkably unequal at different times; but Tom had decided that he was a valuable reserve, at least, for the Junior Eleven.

Bunter went along cheerfully enough; bucked by the praise he had received for Wally's play, and quite convinced in his own fat mind that he could play Wally's head off, if it came to that.

But his performance on the field made Tom Merry rub his eyes.

Never had the captain of the Shell beheld so clumsy a dud on the football ground; excepting upon the occasions when he had seen Billy Bunter play before.

"My only hat!" was all Tom could say.

The wonderful form of the Abbotsford match was evidently a thing of the past; Bunter was himself again!

"Well, what do you think of me?" asked Bunter loftily. "Rather a cut above the footer you play here—what?"

"Oh, dear! I don't quite know how to tell you what I think of you," answered Tom. "Yesterday you played

a splendid game; and to-day you play like a born idiot!"

"Oh, really, Merry——"

"I'm blessed if I understand it. Why, you can't even kick a footer to-day."

"I expected this jealousy, Merry—I'm accustomed to that sort of thing. I suppose I'm going to play regularly for the House and the School?" demanded Bunter loftily.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not quite, old scout," he answered. "Eh? When am I going to play in a match, then?"

"About the time of the Greek Kalends, I expect, my son—not while I'm football captain, at all events!"

"Oh, really, you know——"

Bunter did not play in a match. He offered his services several times—but they were declined without thanks. But the fat junior had one satisfaction at least—for a long time one of his chief topics was how he had played Abbotsford and beaten them. And in three or four days the juniors were wondering how they could ever possibly have imagined that Bunter of the Fourth was anything but a fat toad!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"BUNTERS FUND!"—by Martin Clifford.)

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 36.—Mr. Philip G. Lathom.

MR. LATHOM can hardly be said to be quite one of the most important figures in the St. Jim's stories. Of masters, Mr. Raiton, Mr. Ratcliff, Mr. Selby, and, of course, the Head, all figure more prominently. But all of these have already been dealt with, and of those who remain only Mr. Linton, Monsieur Morny, and Herr Schneider matter much besides the subject of the present sketch.

Messrs. Lathom and Linton, like the French and German masters, have very little to do with the discipline of the school outside their own Form-rooms. But perhaps what they have to do with it there is quite as much as they want.

The Fourth Form is not too easy to handle. Most of the fellows in it are very decent fellows indeed; but that does not mean that they never give Mr. Lathom trouble. Indeed, it is not certain that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for instance, quite one of the best of them, does not give him more trouble than Percy Mellish, who is, with the possible exception of Baggy Trimble, quite the worst. For Mellish is sly, and avoids, as a rule, coming too closely into contact with masters; while Gussy wants to argue matters with them, "as one gentleman with another," a thing which no master can really be expected to stand. Not because a man of Mr. Raiton's type, or of Mr. Lathom's—they are essentially different, yet both the right sort—fails to recognise the fact that he is a gentleman and that all his pupils ought to be gentlemen as common ground. Where Gussy's theory slips up is on the fact that a master cannot permit a boy to argue with him.

Baggy gives Mr. Lathom trouble enough, no doubt. He is stupid and pig-headed. His constructs are abominable, and his manners are revolting. But Baggy, again, is probably less trouble than Ralph Reckness Cardew, a fellow his superior in every way that matters, but not wholly pleasing to any master. Fatty Wynn is as good a fellow as there is in the Fourth, but his little habit of taking something into class in the way of a snack to keep him going through the long time between meals annoys Mr. Lathom a great deal—when he discovers it. In the days of my early boyhood I used to wonder why masters made so much fuss about such trifles as apples, chocolate, cocoanut-ice, or bulls'eyes in class.

They did not prevent one from working. It might have been argued—had one been allowed to argue—that they helped one to get on with the work. But any and every master was down upon them. There came a



day when I myself was down upon them; but that was when I had become a master. I don't pretend to account for it; I did not think the matter out at all; I simply found that I had accepted the magisterial view of the matter—whence it followed that the boys I had to deal with must also accept it, or face trouble!

But I do not think such things really caused me the acute annoyance they caused Mr. Lathom. For I was never a mild little man, as Mr. Lathom is, and I had hardly such strict notions of propriety as he cherishes. I could never quite forget that I had been a boy myself, whereas Mr. Lathom probably seldom remembers that he was a boy. And no doubt he was a good boy. I wasn't.

Mr. Lathom has some of the defects that prevent any master from being quite a first-rate man for a very difficult job. But these matter less in the Form-room than they do outside. In a Form-room there must be a decent quietude, and japes are dead off—or should be. Sympathy with boys may help in class-work, but it is not indispensable; and there are men with sympathy who simply cannot teach at all.

As a Housemaster Mr. Lathom would probably be a pretty complete failure. But he would at least be more acceptable to the boys in his House than Mr. Ratcliff is. As a Form-master he is by no means a failure. His boys like him; not with enthusiasm, maybe, but still, they like him. They certainly respect him; they know that he always means to be just, and if he makes a mistake he does not shrink apologising for it. He does not sling around lines and canings with the liberality that characterises Messrs. Ratcliff and Selby; but, after all, no one wants him to. And he can punish when necessary; he is not too mild for that.

And he is a really good sort. Frank Levison could bear witness to that. Do you remember how Frank, hiding under the table in Mr. Selby's study, overheard a conversation between Messrs. Lathom and Linton that he should not have heard, and the trouble it caused by reason of his feeling that he had no right to repeat it, even though to do so would clear up a quarrel between him and his dearest chum? He went to Cardew for

advice at last; and Cardew, who knows his Lathom well, suggested that he should make a clean breast of it to that gentleman. Mr. Lathom snorted up well in that matter. He hates conflicts with Mr. Selby; the two men have nothing at all in common. But, to clear Frank, he risked the displeasure of his autocratic colleague; and what he said to Ernest Levison afterwards proved that he was capable of appreciating Frank's standpoint—quixotic as it might seem to some people.

Mr. Lathom is much easier to get round than most of the St. Jim's masters. When Wally Bunter was coming to the school—or was supposed to be coming, for, as you all know, it was Billy who really came—the Terrible Three asked leave from Mr. Linton to go and meet him at the station. Mr. Linton refused them curtly; he saw no reason why they should have leave during class-hours. But Kerr had no great difficulty in persuading Mr. Lathom to let him and Figgins and Wynn go. It is true that Kerr, while avoiding anything like a misstatement, played cunningly upon the Form-master's sympathies; but that only shows that he has sympathies to be played upon.

Kerr is one of Mr. Lathom's pupils who stands high in the master's regard, for, without being a swot, Kerr is a honest worker in class, and in several branches of study much above the average. But Mr. Lathom has been very angry with Kerr more than once, for the Scots junior has made up in the likeness of the Form-master, and has been caught out; and that is the kind of thing calculated to arouse any master's ire. Lathom is quite an easy one for a capable actor like Kerr. He is short, and his features are not too marked, while his little mannerisms are marked, and can readily be imitated. Do you remember how both Lewther and Kerr made up to represent the Fourth Form-master, and how Lowther took in the Fourth, but Kerr took in Lowther himself and most of the Shell? Two Mr. Lathoms were face to face then, and neither of them was the real one!

Mr. Lathom has been the master of the Fourth ever since stories of the St. Jim's Fourth have appeared. Mr. Raitton came from Clavering; and one can remember Shell masters before Mr. Linton. But Mr. Lathom was always there. In the early days he used sometimes to take his pupils for a walk in the afternoon—girls' school fashion. They hated it, naturally. It was soon after the coming of Arthur Augustus that some thing occurred in connection with one of these walks that led to a fight between Kerr and D'Arcy, and proved the dandy's real mettle. Kerr had wangled out of the walk by checking Monteith, and getting lines which would occupy his time while it was being taken. At least, that was supposed to be Kerr's motive. It was not the real motive, how-

ever. He appeared during the walk made up as a ragged and h-less youth, who accosted Gussy as "Cousin Arty," and was repudiated with scorn. The Fourth had got hold of the exceedingly mistaken notion that Arthur Augustus was a snob. There is not a fellow in the Form who is less a snob than he is, as they know now. Gussy was naturally very angry with Kerr, and the two fought, and Kerr was fished. They have been good friends ever since, and Kerr probably understands the swell of the Fourth better than most, for he is capable of clearer understanding than most, and certainly likes him as well as almost anyone but his own three dearest chums. There is never any malice behind Kerr's clipping of Gussy.

But this has not very much to do with Mr. Lathom. He did not play at all a strong part when the trouble arose. There was, however, another occasion when he took the juniors out which has more bearing upon his character and tastes.

His tastes are scientific, and one of his pet studies is geology, which, of course, involves much more than the history of the earth's surface. One cannot get really interested in geology without also getting interested in the dim history of primitive man, which is so closely connected with it by reason of the many remains of primitive man found in certain strata of the earth.

The Fourth master tried to get the juniors interested in his own pet subject. Some of them may have been mildly interested; among nearly a hundred boys there are almost sure to be two or three who incline to the scientific. But only one was enthusiastic. That one was Herbert Skimpole. Skimpy backed up Mr. Lathom most loyally, but, of course, in his own queer way, and of course, believing that he himself was the fit and proper person to lead, rather than the mild, benevolent, bespectacled, and rather elderly gentleman who had initiated the business.

Trouble arose out of the excursions of the Junior Scientific Club. Some of it was accidental, and some—well, wasn't. It was quite an accident that Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Carboy, in a terrible state of stale egginess, knocked over Mr. Lathom in the High Street of Ry'combe, and left him sitting on the ground with much of the egginess transferred to him,—to be accused by P. C. Crump of being drunk and disorderly. The Grammarians would not have tumbled him over purposely, and Crump would never have laid that charge if he had recognised him.

But the affair of the beery Mr. Jones was no accident. The Terrible Three wickedly suborned Mr. Jones to play the part of a prehistoric man, in a hairy mask and a

hairy skin that made him look very like a modern monkey. To find ever so small a relic of prehistoric man pleased Mr. Lathom no end, and Tom Merry & Co. naturally thought that he would be even more pleased to find a whole, live specimen of the article.

And Mr. Lathom was pleased—for a time. "Amazing—incredible—unheard of, as it seems, the creature is living!" he cried, when Mr. Jones, in a drunken slumber, was lugged out of the cave. "Oh, if only the Royal Society were present now! Oh, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and Lodge, why are you not here at this moment?"

"Hoh! Hah! Grooogh! Whurrami?" muttered Mr. Jones.

"Listen, my boys!" said Mr. Lathom, in a whisper. "He is speaking in the unknown language of his period, before, probably, articulate words could be formed by human lips."

But when Mr. Jones—who was no ordinary tramp, but an artiste of sorts—said: "I'm the prehistoric man. I lived before the world began. I used to climb trees with the little chimpanzees, with a pretty, prehistoric Mary Ann"—then Mr. Lathom saw that he had been taken in, and called Mr. Jones an impostor, as he certainly was. But Mr. Jones did not like the term, and he went for the little master, and had to be dragged off him.

The same story which told of that scientific expedition told how Levison—a very different Levison from him of to-day—stole the famous and valuable fossil jawbone from its box in Mr. Lathom's study, and contrived to fasten the guilt of the theft upon Tom Merry, who was saved from expulsion in the event by the detective powers of Gussy! Gussy "worked it out in his brain that the wottab" had hidden the fossil in Tom Merry's box; but that was not enough—his finding it there only seemed to make Tom's guilt more evident. But he fetched the locksmith who had made the key, and then Levison was bowled out.

It was Mr. Lathom who raised not too well-considered objections to the juniors reading such papers as the "Boys' Friend." You will remember how he came to reverse his decision, how he was rescued when a bull was chasing him, and talked afterwards with the man who had rescued him, and learned a few things from him. That incident shows him as a man with an open mind, at least, if not a remarkably strong one.

He has an open mind and a kindly nature, and no decent fellow could fail to respect and like him. The hero-worship which the few men of Victor Raitton's type get is not for such as Mr. Lathom. But they do not want it; respect and some measure of affection will satisfy them.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

WHEN THE GHOST WALKED.

A Tale of Wilton School.

By PETER TODD.

1.
"WHAT piffing rot! There are no such things as ghosts!"

Chumley paused in the middle of his thrilling ghost story and glared round the moonlit dormitory in righteous indignation.

"Who—what giddy bounder said that?" he spluttered angrily. "Why, I'll stay the—My hat! Of all the blessed cheek, if it isn't that cocky new chap again!"

Chumley was distinctly annoyed. It was bad enough to be interrupted just when he was at the critical part of his hair-raising yarn. But to think that this new chap—a fellow who had only been at Wilton two days—should dare to chip in when he, Chumley, captain of the Fourth, was speaking—well, Chumley could not find words to express himself!

He appealed to the rest of the dormitory. "Look here, you men, I put it to you, This new chap's too jolly cheeky by half!

He wants putting in his place. Now, what shall we do with the rotter—bump him?"

The "men," who were sitting up in bed hugging their knees, simply grinned; so did Merton, the new boy. And this fact angered the great Chumley beyond measure.

Realising that his honour and prestige as head of the dormitory were at stake, he climbed impressively out of bed, and stalked with stately tread across the room.

"Now, you cocky new kid," he observed grimly, grabbing the bedclothes, "out you get! I'll jolly well give you piffing rot! Come out and take a hiding!"

Evidently a hiding did not appeal to the new boy. He held on to the sheets in apparent terror.

"Please don't touch me, sir!" he cried in terrified tones. "I won't do it again! Keep him off, you chaps! Oh, help!"

Laughter ran round the room, and Chumley's face flushed. Then, with a snort, he took a fresh grip of the sheets, and, putting

his foot on the side of the bed, and began to pull savagely.

Amid the subdued cheers of the onlookers there followed an exciting tug-of-war. Merton, lying back in bed, easily held his own for some moments. Then quite suddenly he released his grip, and Chumley disappeared backwards amidst an avalanche of bed-clothes.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the spectators.

"Help! Rescue!" came in muffled accents from the heaving bundle.

Huxley, a crony of Chumley's, was the first to answer the call.

"Come on, you fellows! Let's smash the cocky bounder!" he yelled, leaping out of bed.

The rest of the fellows now thought it high time to interfere. So far the affair had amused them vastly. Many were only too glad to see the lordly Chumley taken down a peg or two. But then, it wouldn't do at all

to let new chaps get too cheeky; and this chap certainly was.

A moment later the new boy was surrounded by a crowd of pyjama-clad forms. If looked as if he must be swamped. But evidently Merton was a fighter, for even such overwhelming odds did not daunt him. Grasping a pillow, he laid about him with a will.

There ensued a glorious mix-up of whirling pillows and waving legs and arms. In the dim light no one could be clearly recognised, and very soon Merton was forgotten in the general engagement.

For five minutes the battle raged, and the row was terrific. Then Chumley managed to disengage himself from the clinging sheets and the stamping feet. Breathing fire and slaughter, he joined the merry, smiting throng in search of Merton.

He found his quarry at last, and, with an exultant snort, charged. But Merton, a cheerful grin on his heated face, was ready. Next moment, locked in each other's arms, the two lurched about the room.

Suddenly they barged with a thump against a washstand. With an appalling crash and clatter the whole lot toppled over, and Merton and Chumley found themselves lying amid the ruins.

That ended it. The battle ceased by mutual consent, and the combatants sorted themselves out.

"Oh, my giddy grandmother's aunt, what a mess!" gasped Huxley in alarm. "Now you've done it, Chumley, you chump! Old Townley will be here in two ticks!"

"That's where you're wrong," replied Chumley, rising slowly, and rubbing himself tenderly. "I happened to hear our respected Form-master tell Cowley to keep an eye on our giddy selves—going to a whist-drive, or something, to-night, and won't be back until late. All the same, it's a wonder old Cowley hasn't dropped on us before this. For goodness' sake let's put things straight before he does pop in, you fellows!"

But it was too late. Hardly had two or three volunteers tackled the washstand when the door-knob rattled. Thereupon followed a wild scramble for beds, and for the second time that night the unlucky piece of furniture fell with a crash. Then Cowley—a tall, tired-looking senior—lounced into the room.

Some of the juniors produced some very artistic snores, though the majority rather overdid it. And, unfortunately, the peculiarity of the scene was not a little spoiled by the pillow-strewn floor, not to mention the fact that in the hurry four juniors had made a dash for the same bed, and had got a little mixed up in the process.

For some moments the senior eyed the room grimly. Then he looked at the washstand.

"Ah! Removing, apparently!" he observed at length. "Pray do not let me stop the important work! Chumley, I fancy I heard your melodious voice as I entered. Kindly awake! And perhaps Huxley and Masters will cease their snoring, and give you a hand to put this furniture back in its place."

Three minutes later the washstand had been lifted up and the room put into something like order. Then Cowley strolled back to the door.

"Each of you kids will bring me two hundred lines before prep to-morrow night. And if I hear another sound to-night, my sons—well, it will be the worse for some of you!"

With this terrible threat the senior vanished. When his footsteps had died away, Chumley sat up in bed with a snort of disgust.

II.

"THIS is your fault, you potty new ass!" he grumbled.

"No, it isn't old scout!" answered Merton. "I simply said there were no such things as ghosts. And there aren't! It's all imaginative rot!"

"Imaginative rot—eh? S'pose you'll say there aren't such things as burglars next. And—went on Chumley, with heavy sarcasm—"I suppose you'll dispute the fact that this very school was broken into three nights ago? S'pose you call that imaginative rot—eh, you ass?"

Merton laughed. Considering the fact that the recent burglary at Wilton School was an undoubted fact, and that burglars had been the one absorbing topic since then, it wasn't likely he would dispute it. But he couldn't help laughing at Chumley's attempt at sarcasm.

"Go on, haug, you rotter!" cried Chumley indignantly. "It's no joke, I can tell you. Of course, being a new ass, it doesn't worry you that the burglars not only get clear

away with the old Head's silver-plate, but the footer-cup also—the footer-cup, mind you, that was only won outright last season! Why, you heastly rotter, I—"

"You utter ass!" broke in the new boy. "Of course, I'm as concerned about it as you are! But instead of quacking about it why don't some of you try to trace the thieving rotters. Anyway, what have burglars to do with ghosts? Any idiot knows that burglars are real enough. But as for ghosts—rot! I tell you I don't believe there are any such things!"

"But there are!" insisted Chumley. "What about Wilton Old Church? S'pose you'll say that ain't haunted next! Why, I myself have seen, or, rather, heard it! So have lots of other chaps."

"As I've never heard about it, I won't pass my valuable opinion," said Merton. "But, by the way, which is the church? Not the one I passed on my way from the station?"

"No, that's not it! The old church is about a quarter of a mile from here. It hasn't been used for years; condemned as unsafe—sinking, or something."

"I twig, then! Get on with the yarn! It can't be such drivelling rot as you were ladding out to us when I clipped in just now," observed Merton, with a grin.

"You needn't laugh," said Chumley earnestly. "It's quite true. Isn't it, you chaps? Although it isn't exactly a ghost, but one of those stone figures—gargoyles, or whatever they're called, representing the—well, his Satanic Majesty—stuck up just by the doorway of the church. The yarn is that if anyone runs around the chuch six times, the giddy thingumy,ig'll come down to 'em. Sounds a bit silly, I know; but Huxley and I were passing late one night, and heard it plainly enough walking on the flagstones round the church."

"I thought you said someone had to run round six times before it would come down!" sniffed Merton sceptically.

"So I did, ass! But that's how the yarn runs. Anyway, we've heard the footsteps—so have lots of other people. So there you are!"

"But hasn't anyone tried to do the trick?" persisted Merton; for, though he thought the yarn a bit tall, he was interested in it.

"Rather! Cowley tried it when he was in the Fourth, and they picked him up unconscious after he had run round four times. I know jolly well I wouldn't tackle such a job!"

Chumley didn't think it necessary to mention the fact that Cowley had caught his foot in a flagstone, and in falling had given his head a nasty knock against a grave-stone. Even so, the new boy was not convinced.

"Of course it's all rot!" said Merton, when several more juniors had added a few thrilling touches to the yarn. "But I wouldn't mind having a go some time to see what would happen."

"Gas again—you're all gas!" sneered Chumley. "But if you're so jolly clever, why not lay the ghost to-night? Just the night for such a job! Townley's not about, and some of us will come with you. That's the ticket!"

"Hear, hear!" came an excited chorus from round the dorm.

For a moment the new boy hesitated. But he felt he had gone too far to draw out now.

"Right—ho! I'm not particular when!" he said coolly, leaping out of bed. "How do you get to the giddy haunted church?"

"Do you really mean it?" gasped several amazed voices.

"Course I do," said Merton. "On this condition, though. If I succeed, Chumley must stand the dorm a feed to-morrow night. And if I fail—well, I'll stand one. That's fair enough!"

At this there was a unanimous chorus of approval. The conditions appealed to the fellows. They also appealed to Chumley, who never thought the new fellow would have the courage to carry out his task.

"Right, my pippin; I'm on!" he chuckled, slipping from beneath the sheets. "Buck up! Who's going with him?"

III.

"THERE'S the church!" Chumley pointed across the playing-fields to where, on a slight hill, the square tower of Wilton Old Church showed, looking strangely silent and ghostly in the moonlight.

The three—Chumley, Huxley, and Merton—were standing on a flower-bed below the

dormitory window. Only Chumley and Huxley had been willing to go with the new boy. The rest, though they had lent their aid in making a rope of twisted sheets, with which the adventurers had reached the ground, considered a warm bed preferable to ghost-hunting.

Keeping well in the shadows, the three reached the end of the school buildings, and then made a dash across the playing-fields. A few minutes' brisk running brought them to the boundary rails. Climbing these, the party found themselves in the Church Walk—a narrow path running between the church-yard wall and the rails, and leading to the school.

"No," said Chumley softly, "we'll stop here in the shadow of this tree while you do the trick, Merton, my boy! Half a mo, though! I vote we wait a bit, and see if the ghost's walking to-night. Keep quiet!"

As quiet as mice the three waited, listening intently. Everything was as silent as—well, as a churchyard should be. The wall was low, and beyond the tiers of grave-stones the church gloomed dark and forbidding in the moonlight.

From where they crouched the church door could be plainly seen. Chumley was just trying to make out the figure of the gargoyle in the shadows, when suddenly a breath of wind stirred the branches above them, and simultaneously came a sound that made Chumley and Huxley give a startled gasp.

"Tap, tap, tap!" "It's walking!" hissed Chumley thrillingly. "Listen!"

For a full minute there was silence. Then clear on the still air, but this time much louder, came the mysterious tapping, sounding remarkably like footsteps on the flagstones.

"It's coming nearer!" gasped Huxley, in alarm. "I'm off!"

Chumley had also heard as much of the ghost as he wished to hear, and followed the flying figure of his chum along the path. The new boy, however, stood firm, though he felt like bolting after the others. But he fought the inclination, and stood listening and watching, determined to find out the meaning of the strange sounds.

One thing he soon noticed. The tapping sounded simultaneously with the rustling of the wind in the trees. For a full minute he stood thus; then, with a chuckle, he turned and strolled along the walk schoolwards.

To his surprise, Chumley and Huxley were waiting some way down the path. Both looked somewhat ashamed of their inglorious flight.

"What the dickens did you scoot like that for?" demanded Merton. "Do you think I'm going to run round the blessed church when you're not there? Not likely! You'd say I'd not done it, then!"

"Why, do you still mean to do it?" gasped Chumley.

"Certainly! Come back, and let's get it over, you asses!"

"But the ghost!"

"Hang the giddy ghost! I don't believe in 'em! If you're not coming, say so! If you are, buck up!"

Chumley and Huxley hesitated a moment. Then they looked at the grinning face of the new boy, and decided that it was best for their reputation to go. And a few seconds later all three were standing once again in the shadow of the church wall.

Without a moment's hesitation Merton scaled the wall, and dropped over on the other side. Treading in and out among the grave-stones, he reached the church door. Then he glanced up, and saw the stone figure above his head.

The gargoyle was particularly ugly and grotesque. The face seemed to leer down with a fiendish grin, which almost made Merton shiver.

But he was determined to carry the thing through now he had started, and a second later he began the run.

As he trotted round his footsteps echoed hollowly to the watchers below; whilst Chumley counted the times Merton passed the church door, expecting every moment that something would happen.

Merton himself was beginning to feel rather nervous when he had completed the fifth round. Every time he passed the church door his eye caught the leering face of the gargoyle, and each time it seemed to leer more evilly.

Rounding the corner by the door for the last time, he barged into something—something particularly solid. And that something—or someone—carried a bulging sack!

For a moment he really thought the garçoyte had got him, and he gave vent to a stifled yell. But an instant later, as he staggered backwards from the impact, enlightenment came. For the man—he could see him clearly now—dropped the sack he was carrying with a clinking thud, and gave vent to a stream of particularly lurid language.

"And Merton realised that it was no ghost! Even the busiest of ghosts doesn't usually carry bulging sacks, nor do ghosts use such bad language.

But he had not much time to ponder over these things. Next moment he was struggling in the rough, ugly grip of two men. Punching and kicking, Merton fought hard to free himself. But the odds were too great, and a minute later he stood panting, firmly held by one of the men. The other stood back and eyed him curiously.

"Why, it's only a blessed kid, Bill!" he gasped, in surprise. "What shall we do with him?"

"The 'im up an' shove 'im in the church!" replied Bill roughly. "It's time we was off."

"Right y'are!" was the reply. "In with 'im!"

This project did not meet with Merton's approval. He did not argue the point, however.

He acted. A quick back-heel on the shins of Bill caused that worthy to release his grip with a yell. Then Merton bent swiftly, and, butting Bill's companion below the chest, doubled him up and put him out of action. After that Merton retreated according to plan.

IV.

HE reached the churchyard wall safely, and, glancing back, saw that he was not pursued. Vaulting over, he found Chumley and Huxley still where he had left them. It was a surprise for Merton.

"Hallo! You've not run away, then?" he said breathlessly. "Frozen to the spot with terror I suppose?"

"Don't talk rot!" muttered Chumley excitedly. "I did get the wind up when I heard you yell out. But when I heard those brutes swearing—well, I may be afraid of ghosts, but this is a different thing. What the dickens is up? Who are the rotters?"

"Hanged if I know! There's something jolly rummy on. I'd like to know what's in that sack, too—yes, I'd like to know, by jingo!"

Whereupon Merton whistled his suspicions to his companions. When he had finished Chumley whistled softly.

"Cesair! I believe you're right, old scout! But what shall we do?"

"Do? Why, tackle them, of course! They are there still—that is," added Merton, "if you're not afraid!"

"Afraid! Not me! I'm game for a scrap!" "Right, then! Get down quickly. They're coming this way!" hissed Merton warningly.

All three crouched down beneath the shelter of the wall. A moment later gruff voices were heard. Then Bill appeared over the wall. And not until his companion had handed over the sack and dropped to the ground did the pair of ruffians notice the boys.

"Now!" hissed Merton, leaping swiftly on to Bill's back.

For a moment the ruffian staggered backwards in surprise. But he quickly recovered himself, and shook off the junior with ease.

Then began a rough time for the boys. Both men fought savagely, with much strong language and many angry threats. Chumley and Huxley bestowed their attention on Bill's comrade. But Merton had Bill all to himself—and Bill was a handful!

Merton leaned sick and giddy against the wall, where a nasty jab from his burly opponent had sent him. The ruffian was on the point of punching again, when a tall, athletic figure rushed upon the scene.

A straight left caught Bill neatly under the chin and dropped him heavily to the ground.

Then the new-comer turned to the other ruffian; but that worthy did not wait for his turn. He shook himself free from the two juniors' grasp, took to his heels, and fled. Bill stayed where he was, unable to get up, or deeming it safer not to do so.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Chumley, in mingled relief and alarm. "It's Townley!"

It was! Fortunately for the boys, the master, on his way back from the whist-drive, had appeared just in time.

A moment Mr. Townley waited for the

floored ruffian to rise. Then he stared at the boys grimly.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he demanded sternly. "What are you boys—'Hallo!'"

The master stopped suddenly. From along the path came the sounds of a furious scuffle. Evidently Bill's friend had met trouble of some sort.

In silence the master and the boys—and Bill—waited. Then Bill's companion appeared and behind him a burly, uniformed figure, gripping the fugitive's arm in a judo-hold—a proceeding that individual evidently strongly resented.

"It's Jones, the bobby!" said Huxley.

"My hat! What luck!"

"What's all this? Oh, good-evening, sir!" said P.-c. Jones, recognising Mr. Townley.

"What is the matter?"

"That's what I wish to know," said the bewildered master. "Chumley, please explain this astonishing affair."

But it was Merton who explained. He had been examining the sack, and he now held up something that gleamed brightly in the moonlight.

"My aunt, the footer-cup!" breathed Chumley slowly.

"Looks like it," said Merton calmly. "These chaps are the burglars, and this is the swag!"

"If Mr. Townley did not grasp the situation just then, P.-c. Jones did. He had the handcuffs on the ruffian—he was holding in a trice, and he stuck a big knee into the chest of Bill to keep that gentleman down.

"But what I cannot understand," said Mr. Townley, somewhat puzzled, "is what the men are doing here with the stuff now. It's three days since the burglary."

"Perhaps they had it hidden here, and have waited their chance to fetch it," suggested Merton quietly.

"Hm! I believe you're right," said the master. And the constable also agreed.

"And now, what are you boys doing out at this time of night?" asked Mr. Townley, turning upon the juniors suddenly.

None of the three was at all anxious to answer; but after a short silence, Chumley spoke up.

"We were ghost-hunting, sir!"

"Ghost-hunting? What nonsense!"

"But we've heard the ghost, sir!" cried Chumley earnestly. "We—Listen! There it is again, sir!"

Everyone listened. Above the moan of the wind in the trees came that weird lapping. Even the policeman and Mr. Townley were startled for the moment. Then the short silence was broken by Merton.

"It's all right. It's only the wind blowing the cord against the flagpole on the church tower!"

All looked up to where the flagpole showed gaunt and bare. And then they understood.

The constable laughed aloud, and Mr. Townley smiled in amusement. Chumley's face flushed redly, and if looks could have killed the new boy would have dropped dead.

"Come, boys!" said Mr. Townley. "Hurry back to school, now. I shall require a full explanation of this business in the morning. Constable, I will help you take your prisoners to the station."

Five minutes later the three adventurers climbed up the rope of sheets, and found the dormitory eagerly awaiting their return.

"Did he do it, Chumley? Hallo, your mouth's bleeding, Merton! Have you been scrapping?"

A chorus of questions and remarks were thrown at the three as the fellows began to tuck in their things. But Chumley was still sore about the flagpole business, and was too grumpy to answer. Merton and Huxley were busy at the washstands removing the traces of the conflict.

"We'll tell you all about it in the morning," said Huxley at last. "Old Townley will be here in a few secs."

"Yes; but tell us this, old man—who pays for the feed?"

"Chumley!" said Huxley shortly, as he scrambled into bed.

"Good old Chumley!" came the chorus. Chumley's answer was a grunt, and he scowled across at Merton's grinning face.

"Never mind, Chumley old man!" said Merton consolingly, as he pulled back the sheets. "We'll let you have some—won't we, you chaps?"

The next morning the three boys paid a visit by special request to the headmaster's study. But Dr. Reed, delighted at the recovery of his property—for beside the footer-cup all the valuables were found in the sack

—took a lenient view of the juniors' escapade, and let them off with a couple of hundred lines for breaking bounds.

But, of course, the heroes didn't mind that. And that night, after "lights out," the promised feed came off, and was a tremendous success. Even Chumley forgot his grievance under the benign influence of boundless tuck and conviviality, and joined heartily in drinking Merton's health in bottled ginger-beer.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"BUNTER'S FUND!"

By Martin Clifford.

If Bunter had tried to raise a fund for charitable purposes directly after the adventure of Nobody's Study it is hardly likely that he would have found many subscribers.

But the memory of the average boy is apt to be a short one. That is natural enough; the boy looks forward; it is the average boy who constantly back. And the average boy does not long cherish resentment. It was to be a fairly black deed that stamps a fellow once for all in the eyes of his crew.

Then, too, wally Bunter has been along for a brief visit, and has made an impression that Billy could never have made. He handled Raake and Crooke, and Trimble and Mellish. It does not take a great deal to handle these four sweet youths; but the task is too big for William George. Warty has also prayed footer, and done great things in that line. Altogether his few hours at St. Jim's was almost enough to give his cousin a new lease of life there.

But if some of you fellows do not know what happens when Billy Bunter deals with trust funds, you can probably guess. And old "Magnet" readers know.

A VERY PLEASANT LETTER.

Most of the letters we get are pleasant; but that from which I am going to quote seems to me particularly so.

Of course, our papers are primarily for boys, secondarily for girls. They were not exactly intended for girls in the first place, but the girls have seized them, so to speak. They are not intended for grown-up readers. Yet we have a good many of these; people who have kept young hearts and a taste for schoolboy humour. The lady who wrote the letter quoted from below is evidently one of these.

Her reference is to a paragraph in the "Magnet." But most of you read that paper, I know; and it does not matter, anyway.

"I am much amused by M. G.'s criticism," she writes. "Why, in the name of Fate, does he read the papers? I and my friend read them because we thoroughly enjoy them. We should not waste our time reading them if we did not consider them very clever and highly amusing. We are both grown-up readers—in fact, we have been grown-up for more years than we care to confess! We have read the papers on and off since they first appeared. I consider that, instead of deteriorating in course of time, as many paper do, the GEM and the 'Magnet' are as good as ever—even better.

"How Mr. Clifford and Mr. Richards always give us such clever stories passes my poor understanding."

"I have many friends at great public schools, and my late husband, who fell at Ypres in November, 1914, was a public school boy. He thoroughly enjoyed your papers.

"Do you not think that in M. G.'s case they are as pearls cast before swine? To understand such clever stories one requires a brain—and in M. G.'s case— Well, 'nuff said!"

"This is just to point out to you that sane and sensible people still thoroughly enjoy your stories, and recognise the principles held up in your papers."

"From my own experience of the errand-boy class of your readers, they are more honourable and better-mannered as a rule than non-readers. They all attempt to imitate the immortal Arthur Augustus."

My lady correspondent does not mean, I am sure, that the boys she mentions merely copy Gussy's unusual method of speech. She means that they try to be straight and candid and good-natured, as Gussy is. And they could hardly have a better example in that way.

Your Editor.