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BICYCLES FOR READERS! | GOLD!" STARTS IN THIS ISSUE!

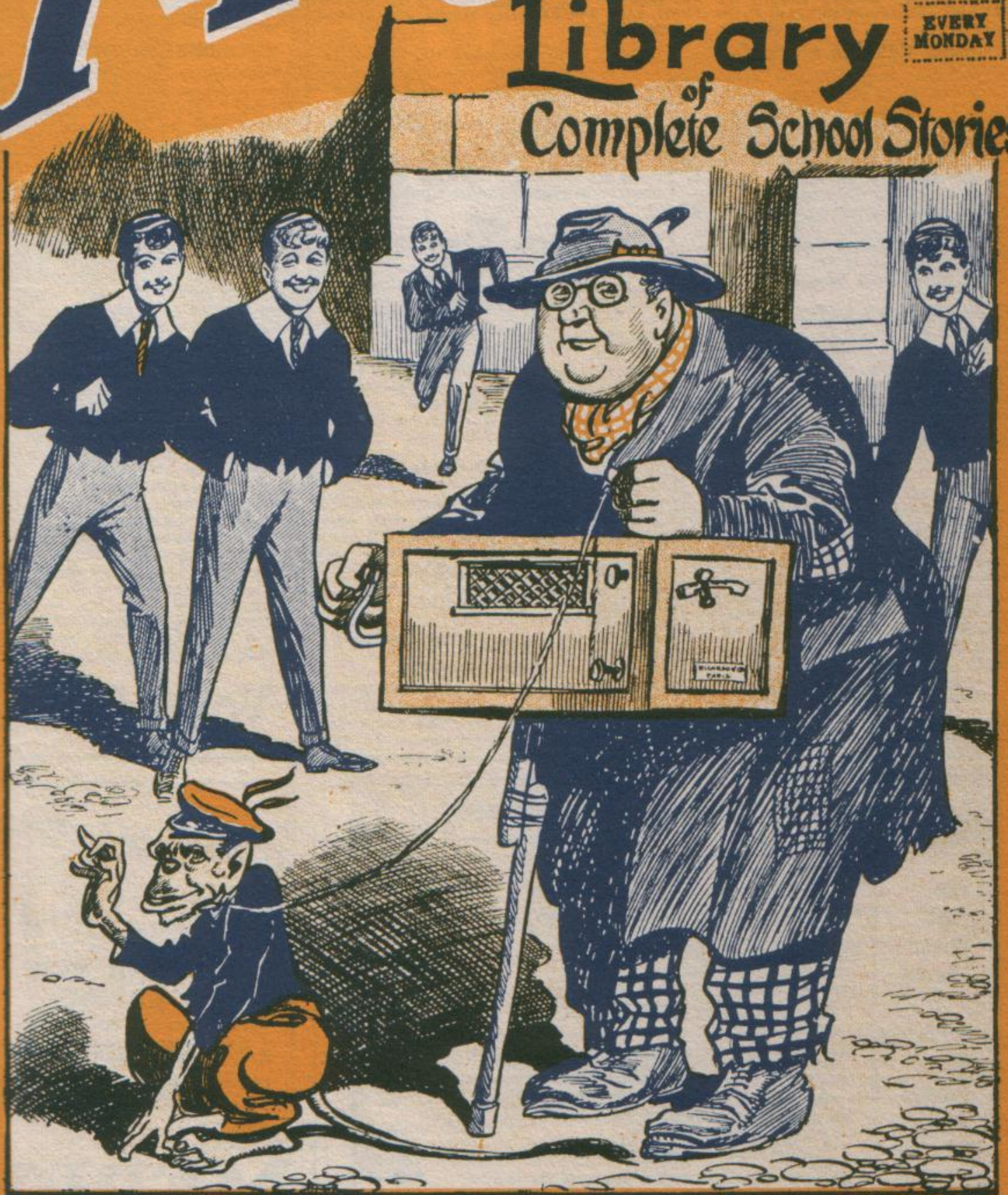
The

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Week Ending July 5th, 1924.

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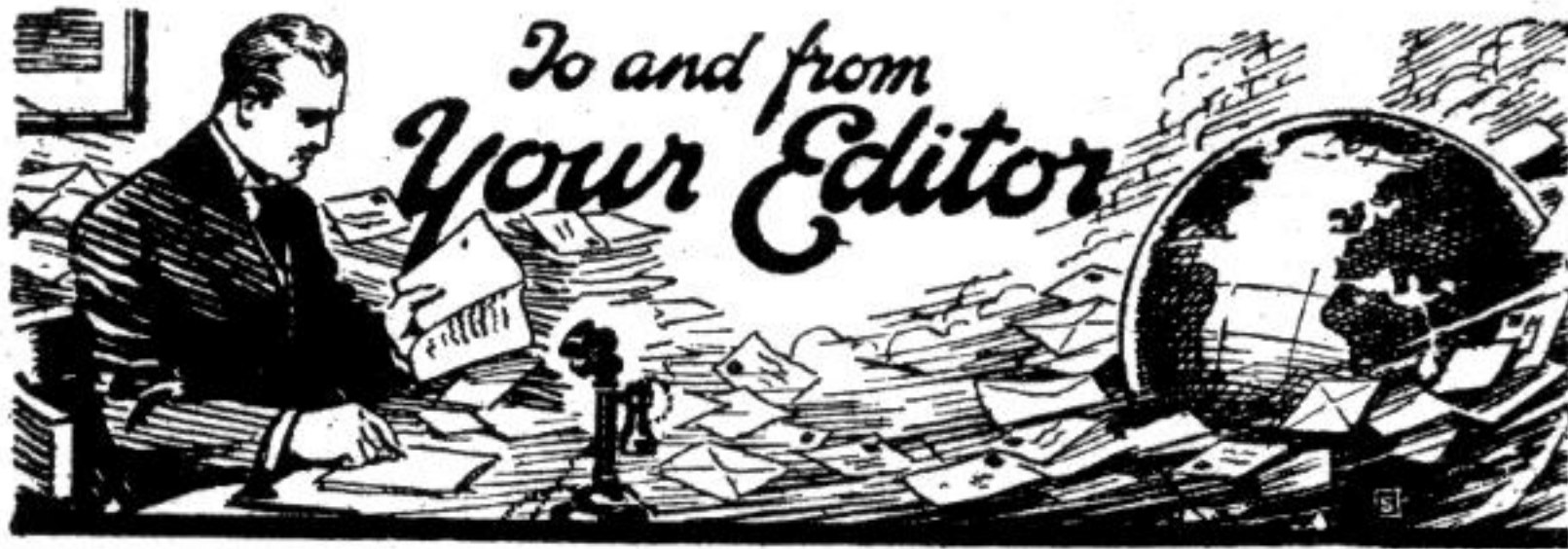
BUNTER, THE ORGAN-GRINDER!

"DRUMMED OUT OF GREYFRIARS!"

(This week's magnificent, extra-long story of Harry Wharton & Co.)

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Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply. Letters should be addressed "The Editor," THE MAGNET LIBRARY, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WHO WANTS A BICYCLE?

I CAN hear in imagination, of course, thousands of my readers yelling "I do!" Much as I would like to comply personally with every single request, I am afraid that is too tall an order. There is, however, an interesting way out—and your Editor has taken it. For weeks past readers have bombarded me with letters asking for a weekly competition. Well, it's here! Again, consulting my mail, I discover that a really good bicycle as a prize is the most popular choice. Now, listen here to

YOUR EDITOR'S LATEST OFFER!

On page six you will find full particulars of a simple competition that is fascinating to a degree. To the reader whose effort is adjudged the best I will award

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AWARDED EACH WEEK!

Magnetites may send in as many attempts as they like—the more the

merrier, and the richer the chances of success—but each effort must be written on the proper entrance form provided.

DON'T DELAY—ENTER TO-DAY!

is an excellent maxim, and one which I trust my thousands of reader chums will observe in regard to this competition.

MAGNIFICENT NEW SERIAL!

You will, no doubt, have read by now the opening chapters of Mr. Francis Warwick's brilliant "old time" serial, and that being so, are clamouring for the second instalment. That spirit of enthusiasm will be carried throughout the story till the curtain rings down, I feel confident, for nothing so vigorous, so thrilling, has ever appeared in these pages before. Mr. Warwick has excelled himself in

"SHERWOOD GOLD!"

and every word from his pen will be devoured with an interest that only Magnetites can display. Tell all your friends about this stirring story, and persuade them to start RIGHT NOW with the opening chapters.

"THE SCHOOLBOY DOMESTICS!"

By Frank Richards.

That is the title of the next grand long complete story of our old friends Harry Wharton & Co. We see Greyfriars thrown out of its normal balance

by the ever-growing tentacles of the "flu." The heroes of the Lower Fourth put their backs into the work of keeping the old school fresh and clean, whilst the unfortunate domestics to whom such tasks usually fall are undergoing treatment in the sanny. Apart from the serious side of the work, there is plenty of merriment—that is inevitable with such a good-natured, but incompetent character as Alonzo Todd, and the egregious Owl of the Remove. To say more about this treat to come would be spoiling a good thing. In any case, it will all "come out in the washing"—next week!

"SUMMER SPORTS!"

With summer in full swing, what better than a supplement devoted to Summer Sports? Harry Wharton & Co. have tackled this healthy subject with vim and vigour, and the result is well up to "Herald" standard. Don't miss it!

"ADVENTURES ON THE MANE!"

There may be nothing in it, but it is reported that Peter Todd is thinking of writing a history of equestrianism under the above title. I give the information for what it is worth—which is not much!

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"

These are magic words. I counsel all Magnetites to make a note of an auspicious event. In September the new volume of the "Holiday Annual" makes its welcome appearance, so fail not to place your orders early, since the rush is bound to be tremendous. Year by year the "Annual" waxes in popularity and prosperity. It is the vade mecum of the Companion Papers reader, and its appeal is special to all the many thousands who stand by the MAGNET. This year the "Holiday Annual" will offer a more fascinating list of stories, articles, and pictures than ever.

Your Editor.

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Billy Bunter's indiscretions are almost as numerous as the sands of the sea shore, and they arise chiefly from his insatiable appetite and his perpetual state of impecuniosity. The egregious Owl will go to any lengths to satisfy the cravings of his inner man. But, as a certain wise gentleman has remarked, "After the feast, the reckoning." Little did Billy Bunter imagine that the reckoning, in this case, would result in his being—



Drummed Out of Greyfriars!

A Magnificent New Extra Long
Story of Harry Wharton & Co.,
of Greyfriars, by Popular
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In Funds!

"HOW'S the money market?" Harry Wharton asked that question at teatime in Study No. 1 in the Remove.

The rest of the Famous Five—Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh—were in that famous apartment with him.

They turned out their pockets ruefully.

Bob Cherry brought to light a solitary sixpence and a French halfpenny that had a hole in it.

"I'm only worth fourpence!" said Johnny Bull glumly.

"Ninepence—ha'penny, me!" said Frank Nugent.

"Well, I've only got a few coppers!" laughed Harry Wharton. "How about you, Inky?"

All looked hopefully at the dusky nabob of Bhanipur, who was usually well supplied with cash.

But Inky shook his head sorrowfully.

"I am hard-upfully on the rocks, my worthy chums!" he said. "The remittance from my esteemed bankers has not arrived, and the brokefulness of my ludicrous self is terrific!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked glum.

"We shall have to have tea in Hall, I suppose," said Johnny Bull.

"Doorsteps and weak tea—and perhaps a little jam and stale cake!" moaned Bob Cherry.

"Groooooogh!"

The prospect of tea in Hall was not very alluring.

"We should have had enough for tea in the study—at a scrape—if Bunter hadn't raided all the grub out of the cupboard yesterday," said Harry Wharton. "The fat burglar!"

At that juncture a tap sounded at the door, and Harold Skinner's thin, sallow face looked in.

"Bunter here?" he asked.

Bob Cherry felt in his jacket pockets, and shook his head.

"Nothing doing! Perhaps Inky has him spirited away up his sleeve," he suggested humorously.

"Oh, don't rot!" growled Skinner. "I'm looking for Bunter. He promised to come to tea with me to-day."

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five looked utterly flabbergasted.

For any Greyfriars fellow—and Skinner, of all people—to be looking for William George Bunter to take him to his study for tea, was most amazing—incredible, in fact. When anyone did look for Bunter, it usually meant trouble for the fat Owl of the Remove, not a free tea.

"My giddy aunt!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You—you've invited Bunter to tea, Skinney?"

"Yes; why not?" demanded Skinner. "I suppose I can ask Bunter to tea in my den if I like?"

"Ye-e-es, but what's the giddy wheeze?" inquired Frank Nugent. "Has Bunter's postal-order turned up at last?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's postal-order was now quite a legend at Greyfriars.

Bunter was always expecting a postal-order from his alleged titled relations, and was ever trying to mortgage that postal-order in advance. The sad part about it was that Bunter's postal-order never materialised. Bob Cherry, indeed, had often remarked that when—if ever—it did turn up, it would arrive complete with beard and side-whiskers.

Harold Skinner grinned as well as the Famous Five.

"I don't know about Bunter's postal-order," he said. "But it's a fact that Bunter's in funds."

"What!"

"His pater's brought off another swindle on the Stock Exchange—a bull, or a bear, or something. Anyhow, he's roped in some tin, and he's sent Bunter a whacking remittance."

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked interested.

Billy Bunter's pater dealt in stocks and shares for a living. Vernon-Smith, whose pater was also "something in the City," had frequently referred to Bunter senior's business as a "bucket shop,"

and on rare occasions he brought off a sensational deal that gave him a good haul. And sometimes—on very, very rare occasions—Bunter senior sent his fat son and heir at Greyfriars a substantial "tip."

"So Bunter's flush," said Bob Cherry. "And, Skinney, you've invited him to tea so that you can rook him of some of his unaccustomed wealth—what?"

"Rats!" growled Skinner. "I'm standing Bunter a tea—that's all. I don't want him to miss it—"

"Or the quiet little game of nap that will follow?" grinned Frank Nugent.

"The fat lamb hasn't turned up to be fleeced, I presume, Skinner? You're a cute card, you know!"

"The cutefulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Skinner is terrific!" murmured Inky.

Harold Skinner flushed uncomfortably. As a matter of fact, Nugent's shaft had hit home, but the cad of the Remove tried hard not to let the Famous Five think so.

He gave a snort, and departed hastily from Study No. 1.

A chuckle followed Skinner from the room.

The society of William George Bunter was never in great demand, except when he happened to be in funds. And then certain of his Form-fellows discovered that Bunter wasn't such a bad chap, after all. Fellows who at other times could not stand Bunter at any price managed to tolerate him for the time being—some even went so far as to display quite a brotherly affection for him.

"Well, my sons, what about this latest Bunter bulletin?" grinned Bob Cherry. "If the fat cormorant really is in funds, then it's up to us to see that he squares for that tuck he burgled yesterday."

"Rather!"

"We'll look for Bunter, and see what he has to say about it," said Harry Wharton. "If we can make him settle up, it will be like corn in Egypt to us. Come on!"

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The Famous Five left their study and went, like Harold Skinner, in search of Bunter.

They first went down to the tuckshop. Penfold, Dick Rake, and Russell were in there, quaffing ginger-pop and eating doughnuts.

"Seen Bunter?" inquired Frank Nugent. "We hear he's in funds."

"So he is!" grinned Dick Rake. "The fat blighter is fairly rolling in tin. He bought up half the tuckshop about half an hour ago. I expect you'll find him stuffing somewhere."

"Right-ho!"

The Famous Five felt quite anxious to find Billy Bunter now.

They felt hungry, and wanted their tea, but did not at all care about partaking of the frugal tea that was supplied in Hall.

Billy Bunter had raided their tuck yesterday, and now that he had become affluent and—according to Rake—had bought up half the tuckshop, they felt it only right that they should seek out the Owl and persuade him, gently or otherwise, to square matters.

The chims of Study No. 1 went in-doors, and Harry Wharton led the way upstairs.

He shrewdly suspected that Billy Bunter would be discovered in the upper box-room, and thither he and the others made their way.

The box-room was situated in a very secluded part of the school upper regions. The juniors crept softly along the landing, and, arriving at the box-room door, they stopped to listen.

They heard a voice come from within, speaking in tones of unctuous joy:

"Gorgeous!"

There was no mistaking the voice of William George Bunter.

The Famous Five exchanged meaning glances.

"He's come up here to have a feed all on his own!" said Bob Cherry. "The greedy little rotter was afraid he'd have to whack out the tommy if he stayed downstairs."

"He'll have to whack out now—or we'll whack out!" said Harry Wharton grimly.

He threw open the box-room door.

Billy Bunter was displayed to view, seated alone in his glory! Tuck surrounded him on all sides—piles of it. The Owl of the Remove was evidently enjoying himself.

Dick Rake had certainly not over-estimated matters when he had stated that Bunter had bought up half the tuckshop. The Owl seemed to have laid in sufficient tuck for a siege. On the boxes all round him were stacked all manner and variety of luscious edibles—cakes, rabbit-pies, veal-and-ham pies, pork-pies, biscuits, jars of jam, and tins of preserved fruits, swiss-rolls, doughnuts, pastries of all kinds, a chicken, ham, and tongue, tarts galore, and chocolates.

Harry Wharton & Co. at first could only stand and stare at this tremendous array of eatables. The sight of it all simply took their breath away.

Billy Bunter had been eating steadily ever since installing himself and his provender in the upper box-room. His fat face was shiny, his breath was somewhat laboured, and a certain tightness about his ample waistcoat was becoming apparent.

"My hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton at last. "Bunter, you—you greedy little gormandiser!"

Billy Bunter blinked up through his round spectacles and hastily swallowed a mouthful of rabbit-pie.

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"Oh, really, Wharton!" he said. "You—you might let a chap alone, you know!"

"Do you mean to say you're going to eat that lot?" demanded Bob Cherry, waving a hand to indicate the Owl's hoard of tuck.

"Ahem! I—I'm hungry, and—"

"The hunger of the ludicrous, fat worm must truly be terrific!" said Inky.

Billy Bunter looked rather uneasily at the Removites.

"I say, you fellows, you can clear off!" he said. "This is my feed. I—I didn't invite you!"

"And only this morning the little blighter tried to cadge a tanner out of me!" exclaimed Johnny Bull indignantly.

"Oh, really, Bull, I don't want your rotten tanner!" said Bunter, with a sniff.

"I hope I have sufficient funds of my own, without lowering myself to cadge from chaps who are really as poor as church mice!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

Billy Bunter waved a fat hand loftily towards the door.

"You fellows will oblige me by getting out!" he said. "I don't hold any truck with chaps who are too mean to lend a fellow a tanner—I—I mean—"

"But where did you get the money from, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton dazedly. "Have you been robbing a bank?"

"No fear! My pater's rich, you know!" said Bunter airily. "I've had a whopping remittance—and it's not the only one I shall have, of course. But my affairs are no business of yours. I wish you chaps would clear off—you're interrupting."

"It's about time you were interrupted, Bunter, I think," said Harry Wharton, looking round at the empty tins, bags, and dishes that littered the floor. "You've scoffed enough for a dozen already!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What about that tuck you wolfed out of our study cupboard yesterday, you rotter?" demanded Frank Nugent. "Are you going to pay up for that?"

"Ahem!" coughed Billy Bunter. "I—I don't remember—"

"But we do!" snapped Harry Wharton. "We found the remains in the cloisters and—"

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"Oh, if you must press the matter, you can take a few biscuits and a tart or so, Wharton!" he said. "There wasn't much in your cupboard, anyway. The sardines were nifty, and the cake was stale, and the doughnuts—"

"We're going to make you square up for all the other raids you've made on our grub-hole, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "We haven't come to stop you from guzzling. You can guzzle on till you burst, for all we care. But we want some of that tuck for our tea!"

"Look here—"

"Are you going to hand it over?"

"Nunno!" roared Billy Bunter, jumping up with surprising alacrity. "You're not going to touch my tuck! It's mine—all mine! I paid for it, and I'm going to stick to it! I offered you some biscuits and a few tarts. I'll chuck in half a cake if you like."

"Rats! We're going to take enough for our tea!" said Bob Cherry. "There will be plenty left for you, my pippin. Pile in, chaps!"

Billy Bunter gave a horrified yell and looked desperately round him.

He was not a brave youth, and always funk'd a fight. Billy Bunter was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. But when he had that pile of tuck, and raiders were menacing it, the soul of Billy Bunter rose in revolt. To lose

any of that tuck would be an unheard-of catastrophe. The bare thought of it gave Bunter a pain, and it made him valiant. He was like a lioness defending her cubs. He saw a broom, and he picked it up and brandished it aloft.

"Yow! Keep off!" he yelled. "You're not going to touch my tuck! Clear off, or I'll—I'll wallop the lot of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Bunter's showing some spirit for once! Even the worm will turn! He'd rather perish than lose his tuck! And he reckons on walloping the lot of us! Ha, ha— Yoooooop!"

Bob gave a howl and went reeling backwards as the head of the broom descended with terrific force on his nose. Johnny Bull was just behind him, and when Bob cannoned into him they both sprawled together on the floor with loud concussions.

"Yarooooogh!"

"Wow! Woooooop!"

Billy Bunter pranced about in front of his store of tuck, his little round eyes glinting behind his spectacles, and a most war-like look on his face.

"Yah! Thieves!" he roared. "Ger-away—yow! Take that!"

Harry Wharton took it—a mighty swipe with the broom that landed on his left ear.

Frank Nugent sprang forward, but went spinning back over a box with the whole force of the broom and Billy Bunter driven hard on his chest.

"Lemme alone, you beasts!" howled Billy Bunter. "This tuck's mine and— Yaroooooop!"

Bob Cherry managed to grab the broom and wrench it from Bunter's grasp. He hurled it through the door, and then charged at the Owl.

Next minute a fat fist came with a crash on Bob's nose, and the champion fighting-man of the Remove was floored—knocked down by Billy Bunter.

The others looked dazed.

"I'll show you!" howled Billy Bunter, prancing about with fists doubled. "Come on! I'll tackle the lot of you, you thieves!"

Billy Bunter was fairly on the war-path now. Even as a pigeon will peck to defend its nest, Billy Bunter found great courage in defence of his tuck.

Bob Cherry was up from the floor in an instant, thirsting for Bunter's blood.

"Lemme gerrat him!" he bellowed.

Whiz!

An empty tin, hurled by the desperate Owl, struck Bob just over his right eye. This was followed by a perfect barrage of cream-buns, which struck Harry Wharton & Co. in great profusion, and, in bursting, disported the cream all over their persons.

There was no holding Billy Bunter now!

He would rather sacrifice his cream-buns than lose any of the other tuck.

"Yarooooop!" gurgled Nugent, as a cream-bun burst in his eye. "The little rotter—"

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!

"Groooooogh!"

"Yerruugh!"

"Grab him!"

There was a sudden step outside the door, and a tall, imposing figure, in cap and gown, strode into the box-room.

It was Mr. Horace Quelch, the master of the Remove.

As luck would have it, Mr. Quelch walked in just as an extra-large cream-bun, thrown with deadly aim by Billy Bunter, hurtled through the air.

The cream-bun landed beautifully right on the Remove master's nose.

Scrunch!

"Yarooooogh!" roared Mr. Quelch.



"Clear off, or I'll wallop the lot of you!" roared Bunter. "Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Even the worm will turn. He'd rather perish than lose his tuck. Ha, ha, ha!—Yooooooop!" Bob broke off abruptly as the head of the broom descended on his nose. Johnny Bull was behind him, and Bob cannoned into him, sending him sprawling. "Yarooogh!" howled Johnny. "Yah!" hooted Bunter. "Take that!" (See Chapter 1.)

Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled round, thunderstruck at the sound of their master's voice, and they almost fell down when they saw him standing there, with his nose supporting the crumbling pastry of the cream-bun, and the cream thereof smothered liberally all over his face!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tuckless!

THERE was a horrible silence in the box-room—a silence that could almost be felt.

"Yerrugh! Yah! Bless my soul! Oh dear!"

Mr. Quelch broke the silence with those remarks.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Billy Bunter, all his truculence vanishing, and a look of blank dismay crossing his podgy features. "I—I—I—I—I say, you fellows—"

"Look out for squalls, Bunter!" murmured Harry Wharton grimly. "You've done it now!"

Mr. Quelch dragged a handkerchief from his pocket and looked round, wiping the cream from his face.

The expression on his face was truly terrific.

"Who—which little rascal hurled that—that object at me?" he hissed.

His gaze became riveted on Billy Bunter, who held another bun in a fat hand.

"Bunter!"

"Yow!"

"Bunter, are you the culprit?"

"Grooogh! Nunno, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked grimly at Harry Wharton & Co.

They were in a parlous state. They were smothered as a result of Billy Bunter's pelting operations. Thunderclouds settled on the Remove master's brow.

"Bunter, I do not believe you! You are the one who has been hurling about these horrible comestibles!"

"Ow! It wasn't me, sir!" wailed Billy

Bunter. "These beasts came up to thieve my tuck, and they started chucking cream-buns about."

"Indeed, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch. "Did they resort to throwing them at each other, then?"

"Ye-es, sir! You—you see, I—I managed to dodge 'em, and—and they pelted each other instead of me. Yow! I appeal to you to defend me, sir! The rotters are after my tuck!"

Mr. Quelch's eagle eyes swept round the box-room, and he started when he beheld Billy Bunter's mammoth collection of tuck.

"Bless my soul! Bunter, is all this yours?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir, all mine! I paid for it, and it's my property. These beasts have no right to come up here to steal it!"

The Remove master looked at Bunter in amazement.

"Bunter, do I understand that you purchased all these comestibles for yourself, and that you brought them up here to hide them away from your school-fellows, to—to hoard them?"

"Ye-es, sir!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I was under the necessity of hiding the tuck, sir. These thieves would have stolen it, and—"

"Bunter, you are a greedy little rascal!"

"Eh?"

"I have always regarded you as a greedy, selfish boy, Bunter, but this—this is colossal! Where did you get the money from—or have you stolen all these things?"

"Oh, really, sir!" said Billy Bunter, drawing himself up with considerable dignity. "I hope I'm above stealing! As a fellow of high principles and strict honesty—"

"Don't be ridiculous, Bunter! If you did not procure these things by stealth, where did you get the money from to purchase them?"

"My father sent me the money, sir," said Billy Bunter. "He caught some flats—I mean, he's made a lot of money on the Stock Exchange, sir."

"I am aware, Bunter, that your father now and again sends you a large remittance," said Mr. Quelch icily. "It seems that the money had far, far better be devoted to other purposes than to satisfying your greedy obsession for eating. Your greed is almost beyond belief, Bunter. Every farthing that comes into your possession is expended on eatables; I have noticed it repeatedly."

"I—I must keep up my constitution, you know, sir," protested the Owl feebly. "I suffer considerably from lack of nourishment—"

"Nonsense, Bunter! You eat far more than is good for you. You are a greedy spendthrift, Bunter, and ought not to be in possession of money. What are you other boys doing up here?"

"Ahem!" said Harry Wharton. "We—we came up to see Bunter, sir!"

"They came up to thieve my tuck, sir!" howled Bunter desperately. "I threw the buns at them in self-defence!"

"Then you admit throwing those articles, Bunter?"

"Yow! Not at all, sir! I—"

"Your conduct is disgraceful, Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch angrily. "I am ashamed to own you as a pupil of my Form! You will not be allowed to keep all these things, Bunter!"

"Oh crumbs! Look here, sir—"

"Silence! I mean to put a curb on your greediness, Bunter. I also intend to give you a lesson which you very badly need, especially now that you seem to be well provided with money. You have got to learn to look after your money, Bunter, and to devote it to better purposes than feeding!"

"Grooogh!"

Mr. Quelch turned to Harry Wharton.

"I will leave you in charge of these things, Wharton, until I find a means of disposing of them," he said. "Meanwhile, you will follow me to my study, Bunter!"

The luckless Owl gave the Famous Five a haunted look as he crawled out of the box-room after Mr. Quelch.

His interview with Mr. Quelch was a most painful one.

The Remove master gave him six cuts with the ashplant, laid on with all the force he could muster. And Mr. Quelch, despite his declining years, could be quite an athlete when he liked.

Billy Bunter crawled upstairs again, with both hands tucked tight under his armpits. His moans and groans were heart-rending to listen to.

"Yow-wow-wow-wow!"

That was the burden of his plaint, and it re-echoed along the corridors on his way upstairs.

Harry Wharton & Co. were mounting guard on his tuck when he arrived at the box-room.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Here's the prize porpoise! How many did you get, my fat tulip?"

"Ow-wow-ow! Grooogh! You rotten beasts!" moaned Bunter pathetically. "This is all through you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme have some of my tuck before that rotter Quelch comes up!"

"No, fear!" said Harry Wharton promptly. "This tuck's under my charge, Bunt, and you're not to touch any of it."

"Look here——"

"Not a giddy crumb, Bunter! Hands off!"

Billy Bunter was speechless with rage and indignation.

"You rotters! You beasts!" he howled. "That's my tuck! Blow Quelch! I paid for the tuck!"

"Blow Quelch as much as you like, but you're not laying your paws on this tuck," said Wharton cheerfully. "You badly need a lesson, Bunter. Perhaps this will teach you to spend your money to better advantage."

"I'll spend my money how I like!" roared Billy Bunter. "Why shouldn't I do as I like with my own money? It's no business of yours, or of Quelch's, or of——"

"Bunter, how dare you speak of me like that?"

Mr. Quelch, terrible and awe-inspiring, stood in the doorway again.

Billy Bunter went quite limp with dismay.

"Bunter, had I not already caned you, I should punish you most severely for such disrespect," said the Remove master angrily. "However, I will let the matter pass. Wharton, I will rely upon you, as captain of the Remove, to see that Bunter does not touch a morsel of any of these things."

"Very well, sir!" said Wharton promptly.

"Perhaps, next time he has so much money to spend, he will hesitate before investing it in useless eatables," went on Mr. Quelch. "You may share these things among the boys of the Remove, Wharton, omitting Bunter, of course."

"Oh, good egg!" gasped Bob Cherry joyfully.

Billy Bunter gave Mr. Quelch a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"I say, sir, that isn't fair!" he wailed. "I paid for that tuck, and it's mine!"

"You had no business to waste your money so, and the things are now confiscated, Bunter!" retorted Mr. Quelch tartly. "I have given them to Wharton to share among your Form-fellows. If you attempt to circumvent my orders I shall deal with you most severely."

Mr. Quelch rustled majestically from the box-room.

Billy Bunter moaned with dismay when Harry Wharton & Co. gathered up those piles of tuck and bore them downstairs.

It was like gall and wormwood to the greedy soul of William George Bunter to see his tuck—his very own tuck, bought and paid for out of his own money—taken away from him and given to his Form-fellows.

Great was the joy and satisfaction in the Remove, however, when the Famous Five went their rounds, distributing Bunter's tuck.

Never before had Mr. Quelch issued such a popular order.

The Remove did full justice to that tuck, whilst the unhappy Owl went from door to door, like a hungry wolf on the prowl, begging and whining for food.

None came his way. Harry Wharton had strictly impressed on his Form-fellows that Mr. Quelch had forbidden Bunter to touch any of that tuck.

In the dormitory that night Billy Bunter wore a drear and woebegone look.

The other Removites chuckled.

"Jolly good tuck you bought, Bunter," said Squiff cheerfully. "The rabbit-pie was prime!"

"Ow!" moaned Billy Bunter.

"So was the chicken, and the veal and ham!" said Ogilvy.

"And the cakes and the raspberry-jam tarts!" said Hazeldene unfeelingly.

"Oh dear!"

"The meringues were simply delicious, Bunter!" said Bolsover major. "They fairly melted in my mouth, you know."

"Ooooooogh!"

"Porkee pies vellee good!" said Wun Lung. "Bunttee vellee clevel judgee of tuck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Poor Billy Bunter crawled into bed with his soul in torment. He lay in bed and writhed as he listened to his Form-fellows' appreciation of the tuck. Their glowing descriptions of it was like adding insult to injury. Like Rachael of old, Bunter mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter in Luck!

"I SAY, Wharton, old chap!" Billy Bunter's tone was quite plaintive.

Two days had elapsed, and the Owl of the Remove was standing outside the tuckshop as Wharton, Bob Cherry, and the Bounder strolled up.

Bunter's attitude plainly showed that he had run through whatever funds he had had, and was now in his usual lamentable-state of "hard-upness."

Money always burned a hole in Billy Bunter's pocket. He could not hold on to any cash for long. The tuckshop was a sort of bottomless pit that swallowed it all up sooner or later.

So, like a very fat Peri at the gates of Paradise, Billy Bunter stood outside the tuckshop in his manner of old.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Are you broke again, Bunter?"

"Ahem! I—I happen to be temporarily embarrassed, you know," said Bunter. "Only for a day or so, of course. I am expecting a postal-order from one of my titled relations—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Owl of the Remove glowered.

"Yes, you beasts can laugh, but wait till I do get my next big remittance!" he snorted. "I'll show you! I—I suppose you wouldn't care to lend me a few bob till my remittance comes, Wharton, old chap?"

"Your supposition is correct, Bunter," laughed the Remove captain. "I wouldn't care to."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Come on inside, kids!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Mrs. Mimble has some of her extra-special raspberry jam-tarts in to-day. We must sample them."

"What-ho!"

The mouth of Billy Bunter watered at the mere thought of Mrs. Mimble's raspberry jam-tarts. They were a delicacy that never failed to gladden his soul. He saw them in the window, and his heart went out to them.

Skinner came up, and he grinned when he saw Billy Bunter mounting guard outside the tuckshop.

Skinner had been very, very civil to Bunter in his short period of affluence, but now that the Owl was again on the "rocks" Skinner did not feel it incumbent upon him to maintain his civility.

"I say, Skinner—"

"Nothing doing to-day, Bunter," said Skinner, as he brushed past the fat Removite. "I've got no money to lend."

"Look here, you beast—"

But Skinner went inside the tuckshop, and his voice could be heard loudly ordering jam-tarts and ginger-pop.

Wun Lung strolled up.

The little Celestial had a great partiality for Mrs. Mimble's pastries, and he, also, was after some of those tarts.

Billy Bunter caught his arm.

"Half a tick, Wun Lung, old chap!" he said with great affability. "I was thinking about standing you some tarts."

"Ah! Handsome Buntree vellee kind!" said Wun Lung in a soft, purring voice. "It's your treat, eh?"

"Yes, but unfortunately I've been disappointed over a remittance," said Billy Bunter. "It's bound to turn up, you know. My pater's simply rolling in money, and he won't forget me. If you could lend me something on account, Wun Lung, I should only be too pleased to stand you some tarts."

"No savvy," said Wun Lung.

"Only a few bob, you know!" said Billy Bunter persuasively.

The Chinese Removite shook his head.

"No savvy," he said again; and then, with a deft jerk, he disengaged himself from Bunter's grasp, and walked into the tuckshop.

"Why, you—you heathen beast!" roared Billy Bunter through the doorway. "Yah! Beast! For two pins I'd come in and cut off your beastly pigtail, you—you yellow-faced image!"

But Wun Lung did not appear to hear. He was already piling into the tarts!

Billy Bunter tried his luck with Bulstrode and Morgan, who strolled up soon after. But they told him plainly and



Mr. Queleh walked in just as an extra-large cream bun, thrown with deadly aim by Billy Bunter, hurtled through the air. Scrunch! The bun landed beautifully, right on the Form master's nose. "Yaroooh!" roared Mr. Queleh. Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled round, thunderstruck at the sound of their master's voice. "Look out for squalls," murmured Harry Wharton. "You've done it now, Bunter!" (See Chapter 1.)

emphatically to "go and eat coke" when he broached the subject of a loan.

Bolsover major and Trevor sat Bunter down on the cold, hard gravel when he approached them with the same request.

"Yow! Beasts! They're all beasts!" moaned the Owl, as he rolled disconsolately towards the gates. "I'm famished—fairly starving! And I can't even raise the price of a few tarts! They're all down on me—the mean rotters! Yowp!"

Billy Bunter was standing by the gates, dismally contemplating the sad state of affairs, when Wingate came up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Like to cut down to Friardale for me, Bunter, and deliver this parcel at the printer's?" he said. "I'll stand you sixpence for your trouble."

"Right-ho, Wingate!" said Billy Bunter eagerly. "Gimme the sixpence."

Sixpence was not a fabulous sum, but it was useful in the lean days, and all was grist that came to Billy Bunter's mill.

With the solitary sixpence in his pocket, and Wingate's parcel tucked under his arm, the fat Removite set out for the village.

He delivered the parcel at the printer's in the High Street, and then made a rapid bee-line for Uncle Clegg's tuckshop, which was just opposite.

Uncle Clegg received Billy Bunter with rather a grim look.

He knew the Owl of old, and there were still several little outstanding

accounts which Bunter had overlooked to pay.

"Good-afternoon, Master Bunter!" said the tuckshop keeper. "Have you come to settle what you owe me?"

"Ahem!" coughed Billy Bunter. "I—I'll square all that up later, Uncle Clegg. My pater will be sending me another big remittance soon, you know."

This quite failed to impress Uncle Clegg.

He had heard Bunter's story of an expected remittance many, many times.

Billy Bunter himself had very faint hopes of receiving any more money from his pater. He had had a letter from home only that morning informing him that the market had hardened, and that his pater was holding on to what money he had.

Billy Bunter laid his sixpence on the counter.

"Gimme some ginger-pop and a plate of doughnuts," he said.

Uncle Clegg took up the sixpence and put before Bunter a glass of ginger-pop and three doughnuts.

The Owl blinked at these.

"Oh, really, you know—" he expostulated.

"That's all you get for sixpence, Master Bunter," said Uncle Clegg.

A man who was seated at one of the small tables in the shop grinned when he saw Billy Bunter polish off the three doughnuts and the ginger-pop.

Like Oliver Twist, Bunter felt a great, insistent yearning for more.

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He blinked covetously at Uncle Clegg's stock of cakes, tarts, and pastries.

"I—I say, I think I'll have some of those meringues and lemon cream tarts," he said.

"Have you got the money to pay for them, Master Bunter?"

"Nunno. I—I'll settle up when my postal-order comes, you know."

"I'm sorry, Master Bunter, but I cannot give you any more credit," said Uncle Clegg. "You already owe me seven-and-six."

"Just one or two cakes, then—"

"No, Master Bunter," said the tuck-shop keeper firmly. "You can't have anything unless you pay for it."

"Br-r-rrrr-r!"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at Uncle Clegg, and then, hearing a chuckle, he turned round.

The man at the table seemed to be greatly amused at the Owl's ineffectual efforts to obtain "tick" from Uncle Clegg.

He was a tall, smartly dressed man. He would have been very handsome had it not been for the deep, sallow lines on his features. He caught Billy Bunter's eyes and beckoned him over.

"Feeling hungry, young 'un?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Yes, rather, sir," said the Owl pathetically. "I'm on the verge of collapse for want of food—really! I don't get half enough to eat at Greyfriars. The rotters there treat me horribly. They're all mean beasts!"

The stranger's dark eyes gleamed as he took stock of Billy Bunter.

"If you are hungry, Master Bunter, perhaps you will allow me to pay for a few things?" he said quietly.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed eagerly.

"What-ho! That's jolly good of you, sir! May I have some doughnuts?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Trot out the doughnuts, Uncle Clegg!"

Uncle Clegg gave the stranger a very peculiar look; but when a ten-shilling note was laid on the counter he quite willingly "trotted out" the doughnuts to Billy Bunter.

The Owl soon made short work of a large plate of those edibles.

"What about some ginger-beer, Master Bunter?" said his benefactor.

"Good egg!"

Ginger-beer was forthcoming, and also a plate of tarts.

Billy Bunter tucked into the tarts and finished them at express speed.

These were followed by a whole Madeira cake, a rabbit-pie, some pastries, and several more ginger-pops.

The stranger watched Billy Bunter in growing amazement.

The Owl's gargantuan appetite was, to one who did not know him, a thing to marvel at.

"Those tarts are prime!" said Billy Bunter, with a fat chuckle. "May I have some more, sir?"

"Ye-es. But you'll be ill, my lad."

"Not much," chuckled Billy Bunter. "I can stand a lot of this! Why, this is just a snack. Pass the tarts, Uncle Clegg!"

The stranger sat at the table and watched Billy Bunter eat as he might have watched a boa-constrictor at the Zoo.

When Uncle Clegg intimated that the limit of the ten shillings had been reached the stranger called a halt.

"I think that will be sufficient, Master Bunter," he said. "You will be ill."

"Not likely," said the Owl. "I—I'd

like another rabbit-pie, if you don't mind, sir."

"Not now, Master Bunter," said the other firmly. "Will you come along the High Street with me? I'd like to talk to you."

Billy Bunter rolled down from the stool on which he had been perched, and, with a last long, lingering look at the rabbit-pies on Uncle Clegg's counter, he followed the stranger out into the High Street.

"Now, Master Bunter, I might as well confess that I have taken rather a fancy to you," said the man glibly. "You seem to be just the sort of lad that I am looking for."

Billy Bunter swelled with pride at the imminent hazard of bursting his buttons.

"You belong to Greyfriars School, I think?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Billy Bunter. "I'm one of the leading lights in the Remove, you know."

"That is excellent! I am looking for a Greyfriars lad to assist me. I think you will do very well, Master Bunter."

"Wh-what's the idea, sir?" demanded the Owl wonderingly.

"First of all, I will introduce myself," came the suave reply. "Here is my card, Master Bunter."

Bunter took the proffered card in a grubby hand and blinked at it. This is what he read:

"J. STUART PLUMMER,

Hon. Treasurer and Supervisor, Courtfield Branch, The British Unemployed Benevolent Fund."

"You see, Master Bunter, that my business is on behalf of the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund," said Mr. Plummer. "I am, in fact, established in Courtfield with the object of raising funds for the many hundreds of workless in the neighbourhood who are in dire need of help."

"Oh!" said Billy Bunter.

"It occurred to me when I saw you, Master Bunter, that you might be very useful in obtaining contributions to the fund from the boys at Greyfriars," continued Mr. Plummer. "Greyfriars is a large school, and the young gentlemen there, I am sure, would not begrudge giving a little to help the unemployed. Would you care to undertake the task of making a collection from your school-fellows?"

"Ahem!" coughed Bunter. "The chaps there are a jolly mean lot, you know. I've started funds before, but the beasts wouldn't listen to me."

"Perhaps they required some proof of the bona fides of your fund, Master Bunter, before feeling inclined to contribute," said Mr. Plummer, with a smile. "But in this case I can furnish you with credentials. I have here a printed collection-sheet, with the address of my local office at the top. You can take that, and then surely your school-fellows will have no doubts as to the genuineness of the fund!"

He handed Billy Bunter a large sheet, bearing the name of the fund at the top, and giving the local office address as 74, River Street, Courtfield.

"If you will undertake to raise subscriptions for me, Master Bunter, I think I can make it worth your while," said Mr. Plummer, with an artful look. "Of course, such a thing is not usual, but I am willing to give you a small percentage of your collections as—er—a sort of encouragement, you know."

"Oh!" said Billy Bunter, looking more interested.

"I will give you two shillings out of

every pound you collect, Master Bunter. How's that?"

"My word!" said the Owl, his eyes gleaming craftily. "That is to say, that if I collect ten pounds, I get a quid out of it?"

"That's the idea, Master Bunter. Of course, it ought to be ridiculously easy to collect ten pounds from among all your schoolfellows—and the masters. There are several fairly wealthy boys at Greyfriars, I believe?"

"Yes, rather! There's Hurree Singh, and Vernon-Smith, and Coker, to name only three. The rotters don't usually have much faith in me—the mean beasts—but this paper ought to work the trick, sir."

"Certainly it ought. I expect to get at least thirty pounds from the boys of Greyfriars," said Mr. Plummer. "That will mean three pounds for you, Master Bunter."

Billy Bunter rubbed his fat hands together in delight at the prospect.

"I'll do it, sir!" he said. "Can I head the list with a subscription of five pounds? That will make things look better."

"You subscribe five pounds, Master Bunter! But I thought you were—ahem!—hard up?"

"So I am!" grinned the Owl artfully. "Broke to the wide, in fact! But I needn't pay the five pounds. It will be just a—a sort of blind, you know."

Mr. Plummer laughed.

"Oh, very well, Master Bunter! That is an excellent idea. It will give the collection a good start—what? Really, quite a good notion. I will give you a receipt immediately for five pounds."

He took out a receipt-book and fountain-pen from his pocket, and wrote rapidly on it, tearing out a slip afterwards and handing it to Bunter.

"There is a receipt for your imaginary contribution, Master Bunter," he said. "That ought to set the ball rolling—what?"

"Rather!" chuckled the Owl gleefully. "I'll take this list along, and start collecting right away, sir. Rely on me!"

"Thank you, Master Bunter!" said Mr. Plummer. "I will write to you in a couple of days or so and make an appointment for you to meet me. You—er—you quite understand, Master Bunter, that this little arrangement I have made with you must be kept perfectly secret? You will not mention a word of it to a soul?"

"No fear!" said Billy Bunter promptly. "I'll be as mum as an oyster, sir!"

"Remember that, then, Master Bunter. It is most important. Well, I'll be off. Good-bye for the present, my lad, and remember that the more you collect from your schoolfellows, the more money you will have for yourself."

"Right-ho, sir!"

Mr. Plummer crossed the road and disappeared into the railway-station.

The Owl of the Remove blinked at the receipt and at the nicely printed collection-sheet, and he gave a deep chuckle.

"My word!" he murmured gleefully. "What a stroke of luck! The rotters at Greyfriars will swallow this whole. They'll think it's all perfectly genuine, and they're bound to stump up a good deal of cash. That's where they'll pay me back for that tuck of mine they wolfed the other day. I'll deduct the price of that tuck out of the contributions. He, he, he! I'm a keen card, I am! Plummer won't know. I'll destroy the collection-sheet before it's time to take it back to him, and tell him I've lost it. He'll have to accept what

money I care to give him then. He'll never find out how much I've kept to myself. He, he, he! I'll get my own back on Wharton and those other beasts. I'll keep most of the money—as compensation for the rotten way they've treated me. What a stroke of luck! He, he, he!"

And, thus chuckling softly to himself, Billy Bunter rolled onwards towards Greyfriars.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Reformed Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

Billy Bunter entered the Common-room later that evening with a very serious look on his fat face and a sheet of paper and a pencil held in one hand.

Harry Wharton & Co. and most of the Remove were there, beside Temple, Dabney & Co., and a few of the Upper Fourth.

"Hallo! On the cadge again, Bunter?" asked Peter Todd, who had the doubtful pleasure of sharing Study No. 7 with the Owl. "Don't, for goodness' sake, pitch that yarn about the postal-order! We're sick to death of it! Try changing the record!"

"Oh, really, Peter!" said Bunter peevishly. "I hope, as a fellow of strict, high principles, I am above cadging. Besides, I've got no need to cadge, as my pater has sent me another large remittance."

This was a glib falsehood of Bunter's, but he was believed for once.

"My hat! So your pater's turned up trumps again! He's still rolling in filthy lucre!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather! You chaps can look down your noses now. He, he, he!"

"I suppose all your money will be blued in tuck by to-morrow!" growled Johnny Bull, in his blunt way. "Better not let Quelch get to know of it, Bunter. You know what happened before."

"Yes, the rotter—— I—I mean, Mr. Quelch was quite right, Bull!" said Billy Bunter hastily. "I quite agree with him."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"I have been thinking things over," said Billy Bunter, blinking through his eyeglasses with a very artful expression. "The fact is, you fellows, I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Quelch is quite right. A fellow ought not to waste his money on tuck, when there are heaps of other good purposes he can devote it to."

"Great pip!"

"We must bear in mind that, although we have plenty of everything we want, there are thousands about us who are poor and starving!" said Billy Bunter impressively. "I consider it a crying shame for any fellow to waste money on unnecessary tuck and luxuries, when there are so many unemployed in our midst who would be glad of the money!"

"My hat!"

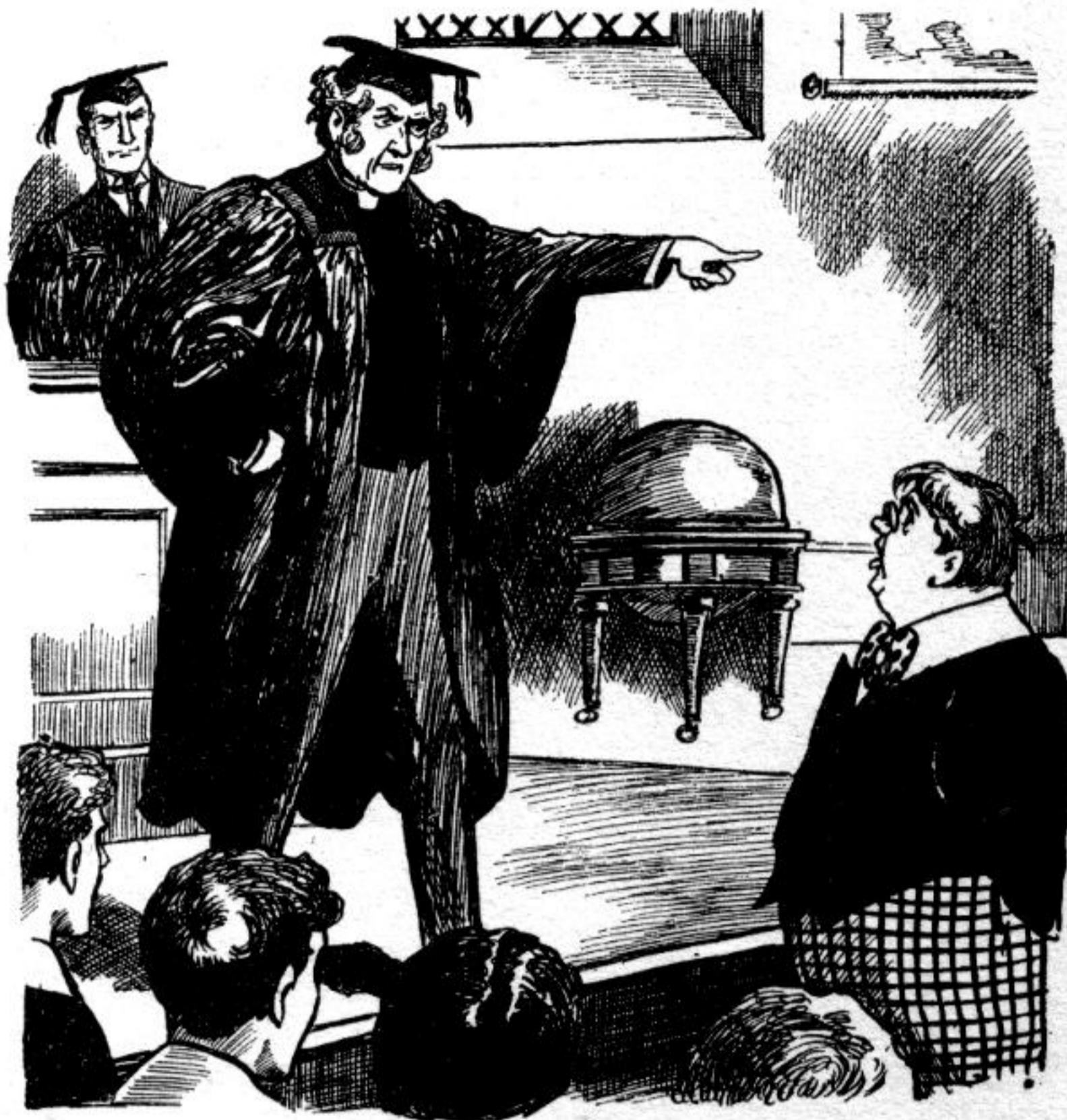
"I'm going to set the example!"

"You!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, in a faint voice.

"Yes, I!" said Billy Bunter. "As a matter of fact, I have already set the example. As a leading member of the Remove, it was up to me. I expect all you fellows to follow my lead."

"Wh-what the dickens——"

"In future," said Billy Bunter, looking round severely upon his startled Form-fellows—"in future, any chap squandering cash on needless luxuries will be considered a selfish, unfeeling beast. Fellows having any spare cash



"Bunter!" said Dr. Locke sternly. "You are a disgrace and a discredit to this school. Bunter—you are expelled!" Billy Bunter blinked up at the Head, dazed and incredulous. "Boo-hoo! I'm innocent, sir! I——" he wailed. "Do not seek to excuse yourself by further subterfuge, you miserable lad," said Dr. Locke. "Not another word—go!" (See Chapter 7.)

will be expected to devote it to the poor people who are starving through unemployment!"

"My only sainted Aunt Tabitha!" gasped Bob Cherry, in utter amazement. "What's wrong with you, Bunter?"

"It must be sunstroke," said Frank Nugent. "You've been out too much in the sun, Bunter!"

"Rot!" snorted the Owl. "Look here, I want to talk plainly to you chaps. You know jolly well that at the present moment things are in such a rotten state that there are thousands of unemployed."

"Yes, we know that, and it's jolly rotten!" said Harry Wharton. "But what——"

"Many of these unemployed are men who fought for their country in her hour of need, and are now unable to find sufficient money to keep body and soul together," went on Bunter. "Isn't it therefore up to all patriotic chaps to do all they can to alleviate the distress caused by unemployment?"

"Yes, rather! But look here, Bunter, I——"

"Under the circumstances, it is a sin and a shame for anyone who has plenty to waste it on pleasure, when he might be—and ought to be—doing good with it," said the Owl, now quite warmed to his theme.

"Great Scott!"

"What I suggest is a levy on all surplus cash!" said Billy Bunter impressively. "Fellows with money to spare ought to be made to devote it to the relief of the unemployed and starving. There are no means of making a chap

part with his money, but I'm setting the example of self-restraint and sacrifice, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Billy Bunter setting himself up as a pioneer and example of self-sacrifice was really too much for the Remove. They yelled.

"Oh, really, you rotters, there's nothing to cackle at!" spluttered Billy Bunter. "I'm an example——"

"Of a fat, greedy, gormandising, selfish little toad!" said Harry Wharton. "That's you, Bunter, and you'll never be anything else!"

"Oh, really——"

"Come off it, Bunter! You can't pull our legs!" roared Bolsover major.

"I'm not! I'm setting an example of self-denial——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a fact, I tell you!" shrieked Billy Bunter. "I've contributed a fiver to the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund!"

"Oh, help! Hold me up, somebody!" moaned Bob Cherry, collapsing in Squiff's arms. "That's too rich—even for Bunter! Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's announcement sent the juniors into hysterics.

The Owl glowered round upon his hilarious Form-fellows. He felt most indignant. He began to believe himself that he had really contributed a fiver to Mr. Plummer's fund.

"Well, if Bunter doesn't romp off with the whole giddy biscuit factory!" gasped Frank Nugent. "Fancy expecting us to believe a yarn like that!"

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"It's true!" howled Bunter. "The other day Quelch ragged me for wasting my money on tuck! Well, after thinking things over, I realised what a greedy rotter I was——"

"Hear, hear!"

"So, when my big remittance came today, I immediately went to Courtfield and handed it over to the treasurer of the local branch of the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund."

"Gammon!"

"Tell that to the Marines, Bunter!"

"Here's the receipt!" yelled the Owl eagerly. "See for yourselves!"

Harry Wharton took the grubby slip of paper that Bunter handed to him. He looked at it, and then his eyes and mouth opened wide.

"Mum-my hat!" he ejaculated.

This is what he read:

"RECEIVED on behalf of the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund, the sum of Five Pounds from W. G. Bunter, with thanks.

(Signed), J. S. PLUMMER,
Hon. Treasurer and Supervisor,
Courtfield Branch, 74, River St.,
Courtfield."

It was a printed receipt, and had every appearance of being genuine.

The Removites crowded round and gazed at that receipt with wondering eyes. It utterly flabbergasted them. They could not have been more amazed had that missive been a proclamation to the effect that William George Bunter had been made Prime Minister.

"There you are!" said Billy Bunter triumphantly. "There's no gainsaying the official receipt, is there?"

"You — you've contributed five pounds—out of your own pocket—five whole pounds to the unemployment fund?" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"What-ho! As an example to you chaps!"

"Well, carry me home to die, somebody!"

The Removites gazed long and hard at Billy Bunter.

They hardly knew what to think.

Was it possible that Mr. Quelch's lesson had gone home to the Owl of the Remove, and that he was making a serious effort to break from his greedy, selfish ways?

"It—it seems too amazing to be true!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Why, only a few hours ago Bunter was hanging round the tuckshop door, on the cadge as usual. When did you get your remittance, Bunter?"

"Oh, it came by the afternoon post, you know," replied Billy Bunter. "The letter was lying unnoticed at the bottom of the rack. Look here, you fellows, I've not only contributed the whole of my remittance to the unemployed fund, but I have also undertaken to collect subscriptions on its behalf. In the circumstances, you chaps can't do less than follow my lead, and contribute all your spare pocket money to the fund. Here's the subscription-list that the treasurer gave me. Everything is quite genuine, you see!"

The Removites blinked at the subscription-list which Bunter handed round.

His name, with the amount of five pounds, headed the list.

"Well, my only hat!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "What silly ass said the age of miracles was past? Bunter seems to have reformed! He's trying to redeem himself by doing good!"

"That's just it, Toddy!" said Billy Bunter. "As a study-mate, I expect

you to back me up. What shall I put you down for?"

Peter looked at Harry Wharton.

The Remove captain handed Bunter back the subscription-list and walked to the door.

"I sha'n't be a minute, you chaps," he said. "I'm just going to have a look at the Courtfield directory in the library, to look up the address of this fund, and see if it really does exist."

"That's a good idea, Harry!"

Wharton left the room, and Billy Bunter looked a trifle uneasy.

He could be very deep and crafty when he liked, and he already more than half suspected that the benevolent Mr. Plummer was an impostor and a rogue.

If Harry Wharton discovered this, the whole business would fall through, and the bottom would be knocked out of the Owl's own artful little plan.

But he breathed again when Wharton returned and announced that the name and address of the unemployed fund, according to the directory, were perfectly genuine.

"Then Bunter isn't pulling our legs!" exclaimed Temple. "He means business."

"Of course I mean business!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "I've set you chaps an example by contributing five pounds of my own, and I'm going to see that you all back me up. Considering the way I have been treated from time to time by you chaps, it's only right that you should follow my lead."

"Well, wonders will never cease," said Harry Wharton. "We'll back you up, Bunter, of course! I had a remittance from my uncle this morning, so you can put me down for ten bob."

"Good!" said Billy Bunter, taking the money eagerly, and writing Wharton's name under his own on the list. "What about you, Cherry? No sacrifice can be too great for the poor and needy."

"Here's five bob, Bunty—that's all I can afford now," said Bob good-humouredly. "It's worth the money, anyhow, to see you behaving decently for once!"

Contributions fairly rolled in to Billy Bunter.

In the usual way his schoolfellows would have turned a deaf ear, so to speak, to his appeal for donations. They would not have trusted Billy Bunter with their money any farther than they could see him, knowing that the Owl would inevitably take it to the tuckshop and spend it in satisfying his own persistent hunger.

But now things seemed different. The fact that the fund for which Bunter was collecting was genuine, and that he had the accredited subscription-list, and, moreover, that he was able to show an official receipt for his own personal contribution of five pounds, disarmed their suspicions.

Most of the juniors were generous and unselfish, and they contributed all they could to the fund.

Inky "stumped up" two pounds, and Vernon-Smith gave thirty shillings. By the time he had finished collecting in the Common-room Billy Bunter had a long list of names on the paper, and nearly eleven pounds in cash in his pocket.

He met Wingate on the stairs, and halted.

"I say, Wingate!" he called.

"What's the row?" demanded the stalwart Greyfriars skipper, turning back.

"I am collecting subscriptions for the Courtfield branch of the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund!" said the Owl eagerly. "I expect you, as captain of the school, Wingate, to stand something handsome!"

"I'll stand you a thick ear for your cheek, Bunter!" said Wingate grimly. "I'm not likely to hand over any money to you, whatever fund you said it was for."

"But I've reformed, Wingate. I——"

"You've what?"

"I—ahem—I've seen the error of my ways since Mr. Quelch licked me for spending my money on tuck the other day," said Billy Bunter. "I've been pretty flush lately, you know."

"Yes, so I've heard!" growled Wingate. "A wasteful little monkey like you, Bunter, ought never to be allowed to have money."

"But I've turned over a new leaf now. I've devoted all my money to the Unemployed Fund. Look!"

Billy Bunter flourished the receipt and the subscription list.

Wingate's expression changed when he read the receipt, and saw that long list of subscriptions, headed by Bunter's five pounds, on the paper.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "This appears to be genuine enough."

"It is," said Billy Bunter eagerly. "Wharton looked up the name and address of the fund before he subscribed his money. He's a suspicious rotter like you—ahem—I mean——"

"As things seem to be above board, I certainly don't mind contributing," said Wingate, looking queerly at Bunter. "I hope this change in you lasts, that's all. Here are a couple of pounds."

"Good egg! Sign here, please!"

Wingate signed the sheet and passed on, smiling.

Bunter also smiled.

His collection was turning out a huge success.

"Nearly thirteen pounds already," he chuckled. "My word, that's great! I'll run along and see that rotter Quelch now. I'll make him pay for that licking he gave me, and all the other lickings, the beast! He ought to be good for at least a fiver."

Mr. Quelch was in his study when Billy Bunter arrived.

"Come in!" said the Remove master gravely, in response to the tap at the door.

He looked grimly at the fat junior.

"Well, Bunter?"

"Ahem! I—I hope I don't intrude, sir. I'm afraid I've got an awful nerve in coming here——"

"What do you require, Bunter?" demanded Mr. Quelch testily.

"I am raising subscriptions for the unemployed fund at Courtfield, sir——"

"Bunter!"

"And I thought that perhaps you would care to contribute, sir," said Billy Bunter. "At the present time, when there are thousands starving throughout the land, it is up to everyone to sacrifice all luxuries and help in relieving the widespread distress. Tuck is unnecessary, sir. Money spent on tuck is money criminally wasted. How much can I put you down for?"

"Bunter! Bless my soul, what is the matter with you, boy?"

"I must confess, sir, that the caning you gave me the other day has done me the world of good," said the Owl impressively.

"Dear me!"

"That money I wasted on tuck would have done some poor unemployed family a jolly good turn," went on Bunter warmly. "I—I have realised it all since. When another five pounds came from my pater this afternoon, sir, I went straight over to Courtfield and gave it to the unemployed fund."

"Bunter, you amaze me!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "I—I cannot conceive you doing such a thing!"

"Really, sir. Here's the receipt, sir," said Billy Bunter. "And here's the subscription list I have brought back with me to raise funds for the good cause."

Mr. Quelch gazed blankly at the receipt and the subscription list.

"Bless my soul! Then you, of your own accord, have contributed five pounds to this most deserving fund, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir," replied the Owl. "I—I felt that it was up to me. I want to set an example to the rest of the school and raise all I can for the fund."

"Bunter, I am very gratified to see that the lesson has done you good. I perceive that Wingate and most of the Remove lads have responded nobly to your call. I will have much pleasure in adding my quota."

Mr. Quelch unlocked his drawer and withdrew a bundle of five-pound notes. He extracted one, and handed it to Billy Bunter, whose fat palm closed over it eagerly.

"Thanks awfully, sir! Will you please sign the list?"

Mr. Quelch did so, and, with a kind nod, dismissed the Owl.

Billy Bunter walked along the passage, feeling that he was walking on air.

The addition of Mr. Quelch's august name to the list was bound to give a fillip to the contributions.

The bell rang for bedtime, so that Bunter had to suspend his operations for that day.

But he had done very well so far.

The Removites were more respectful to him than they had ever been before, and William George Bunter had the unusual pleasure of being regarded as a hero in the land.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Plummer's Lucky Day.

THE whole of the next day Billy Bunter devoted to subscription hunting.

His efforts met with unqualified success once the school had recovered from the shock of his amazing "reformation."

Dr. Locke followed Mr. Quelch's lead and contributed five pounds. Mr. Prout and Mr. Capper gave three pounds each, and Mr. Twigg gave two pounds.

The Sixth and Fifth Forms gave handsomely, and even Dicky Nugent & Co. and the rest of the fag tribe contributed their mites.

Harry Wharton & Co. kept a strict watch on Billy Bunter, in case he backslid from his alleged high principles. But not once during that day did he venture near the tuckshop, except to collect half-a-crown from Mrs. Mumble for his fund.

The fat Removite did his usual full justice to the school meals, but so far as tuck was concerned he seemed to have entered upon a fast.

He did not seem to suffer, either. He went about with a cheery expression on his face, and very frequently he chuckled, as though he were in possession of some deep joke.

Harry Wharton & Co. had to agree that Billy Bunter certainly seemed to be trying hard to break himself of his old ways, and they began to speculate as to how long he would manage to keep it up.

Upwards of thirty-six pounds stood to the credit of Bunter's subscription list by the second day.

"Good biz!" chuckled the Owl softly to himself, as he crossed under the elm-trees



"Yarooogh! Hands off, you rotter!" roared Billy Bunter. "I'll call the police! Yah! Help! Fire! Murder!" Bunter was dragged down the stairs like a sack, and he went flying out into the road, to land with a crash in the midst of his belongings. "There," said 'Erbert. "That's seen the last of you in this 'ouse. Don't you dare come in 'ere again!" (See Chapter 9.)

in the Close that afternoon, which was a half-holiday at Greyfriars. "I shall have enough to keep me in tuck for weeks. I'll have feeds every day, and those beasts won't know. They'll still think I've reformed, and I dare say I shall get some free feeds out of them now and again. He, he, he! I'm pretty deep."

Bunter rolled into the cloisters and made his way under the old grey arches. He halted once or twice, and looked round artfully to make sure that nobody was following him.

Arriving in the ruined chapel, he went over to where an old iron ring was fastened to one of the crumbling flagstones that formed the floor. Bunter exerted all his strength at the ring, and slowly the flagstone lifted. The Owl dragged it aside, and then clambered down into the yawning black cavity below.

He jumped, and landed on the stone floor of the vaults.

"Yow! Where are those rotten matches?"

After fumbling for a little while in his pockets he discovered his matches, and, lighting them one by one, groped his way through the darkness until he reached a door that was let into the grim, black wall at his side.

Swinging the door open, Billy Bunter entered his secret vault—his own secret vault.

Nobody else, so far as he knew, had even been in there. He had discovered it quite by accident last week, when Loder had been giving chase to him,

and he had sought sanctuary down there in the dreary vaults.

Bunter closed the door, lit a small lamp that was standing on a box, and blinked round.

He gave a soft chuckle.

The scene inside the vault was one that gladdened his eyes.

The little vault was almost full of boxes of tuck and tins of dainties and crates of ginger-beer. Billy Bunter had gone to great pains to purchase those things secretly in Friardale and to get them into the school and down into the secret vault under cover of darkness.

The cost of that vast quantity of provender had made rather a hole in the amount he had collected for the fund, but the wily Owl had easily satisfied his conscience about that.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled, rubbing his fat hands together with delight. "If only those beasts knew that they had paid for all this! I've got my own back now, with interest. They'll never find out, and I can come down here when I like and have a feed! My word!"

Billy Bunter selected a rabbit-pie, and, sitting on a box, he fell to. The pie disappeared, and then another was demolished.

Bunter's jaws worked at express speed on the ham and tongue and sardines. Bottle after bottle of ginger-pop was opened and the contents devoured. Cakes, tarts, pineapple, and pastries disappeared in quick succession.

Not until he felt that he could really eat no more did Billy Bunter give over.

By that time his waistcoat was very, very tight, his face was very shiny, and his breath was heavy and laboured.

"That was prime!" chuckled the hungry Owl. "Now I—I think I'll go along and see that chap Plummer. He said half-past four by the woodman's hut in the Friardale Wood. I'll hide the subscription list here, and show him this other one I've prepared."

Bunter placed his subscription list at the bottom of a ginger-beer crate, blew out the lamp, and rolled laboriously out of his secret vault, leaving the floor littered with a fine collection of empty tins, bottles, and paper bags, not to mention the crumbs.

He left the vaults, replaced the stone, and made his way through the cloisters and out into the Close.

A cricket match was in progress on Little Side between Harry Wharton & Co. and Dick Trumper & Co., of the Council School. The merry click of willow meeting ball, and the shouts of the schoolboys round the ropes, resounded on the afternoon air.

Billy Bunter had no thoughts for cricket, however.

He rolled on through the gates and down the Friardale Lane.

Reaching the wood, now puffing and blowing like a grampus, the fat Removite wended his footsteps slowly towards the old woodman's hut.

Mr. Plummer was standing there, smoking a cigarette, and his dark eyes gleamed when he saw the Owl.

"Ah! Good-afternoon, Master Bunter!" he exclaimed, shaking Bunter's grubby hand effusively. "How has the collection been progressing?"

"Not bad," said Bunter. "Most of the chaps are awfully mean. You'd be surprised! I've had a bit of a job in getting some of 'em to contribute."

"How much have you got?"

"Just over ten pounds," said Billy Bunter, with a sly look at Mr. Plummer. "That's not so bad, is it?"

Judging by the expression on Mr. Plummer's face that gentleman thought it very bad indeed.

"Only ten pounds, from a large school like Greyfriars!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's ridiculous!"

"I can't help it, can I?" said Bunter glibly. "Here's the subscription list—I mean, the duplicate one. I lost the original one."

"Lost it!" exclaimed Mr. Plummer, looking very closely at the Owl.

"Well, that is to say, one of the rotters tore it up when I asked him to contribute. He did it out of sheer temper, you know."

Bunter pulled a dirty sheet of paper from his pocket. He did not notice the unpleasant glint that had come into Mr. Plummer's eyes.

"There you are!" he said, handing over the paper. "Half a tick, and I'll give you the money."

Bunter groped into his inside pocket and pulled out a bundle of notes. Then he gave an exclamation of dismay.

He had brought out the wrong packet of notes with him!

During that morning he had carefully divided the fund money into two portions—the portion that he intended handing over to Mr. Plummer, and the portion he meant to keep for himself. Needless to say, the greedy Owl's portion was by far the lion's share.

He had set aside one five-pound note and five one-pound notes, as well as some silver, for Mr. Plummer, and had made a parcel of the other notes, which,

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according to Billy Bunter's own law of appropriation, were his.

Being short-sighted, he had not noticed that the parcel of notes he had hidden was the one he intended giving to Plummer.

He had brought out with him a nice fat bundle of notes, which anyone at a glance could see represented far more than a mere ten pounds.

Mr. Plummer noticed this immediately, and with a quick movement he snatched the bundle out of Bunter's grasp.

"Hi! Gimme those back! They're mine!" roared the fat junior. "That's not for you!"

"Is this all your money, Master Bunter?" asked Mr. Plummer, far from pleasantly.

"Ye-es! Gimme those notes back! I—"

"I don't believe you, Master Bunter," said the other, looking hard and grimly at him. "This is money you have collected for the fund, and you intended keeping it back."

"I didn't!" roared Bunter indignantly. "I never collected it at all! It's mine! My pater sent it to me. You thief! I want my money!"

"I will return it to you when I have satisfied myself that it really is yours," came the calm reply. "I will go with you to Greyfriars now, Master Bunter, and we will see the headmaster."

Billy Bunter went pale.

"You—you can't!" he stuttered. "The Head's out. He—"

"Then I am bound to see one of the masters," said Mr. Plummer suavely. "I am convinced that this is not your money, Bunter."

"You—you mustn't go to Greyfriars!" gasped Bunter, in terror. "I—I say, you can have half of that if you like. That's fair."

"It isn't at all fair, Master Bunter. You admit, then, that this money should really belong to the fund?"

"Nunno! It's mine! I—"

"Then why should you offer me half, in order to keep me away from Greyfriars?"

"I—I—I—"

Mr. Plummer's dark eyes glittered, and a sneer crossed his face.

"I am going to keep this money, Master Bunter," he said. "I shall put it into the fund, of course. I will not visit Greyfriars, unless you desire me to. If this money is really yours, you have only to follow me and tell the police, to safeguard yourself."

"You—you rotter!" gasped Billy Bunter, glaring most homicidally at Mr. Plummer. "I—I don't believe you're anything to do with that Fund! You're a swindler!"

"Indeed? If you think that, then all you have to do is to make inquiries at the Courtfield office, tell them what money you have collected for the fund, and give an account of the whole affair. Good afternoon, Master Bunter!"

"You—you—you—"

"Do you wish me to come to Greyfriars?"

"I—I—I—"

"Good-bye! You can let me have the other ten pounds next time we meet, Master Bunter."

"Can I!" howled Billy Bunter wrathfully. "I jolly well won't! See? I believe you're as big a swindler as I am—I—I mean, I won't—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Plummer was gone.

Billy Bunter stood there, his fat visage red with wrath, his grubby fists doubled.

"The—the rotter!" he gasped. "For two pins I'd go after him and—give him a walloping! He's got all that tin I was keeping for myself! Groogh! But never mind, I've got the ten quid, and all the tuck, so I haven't done so bad. But I've been done! That chap Plummer is a swindler! He ought to be shown up! I'll bet he won't hand that money in to the Fund! Fancy doing the innocent unemployed out of all that money! Yah! Thief! Swindler! Beast! Yah!"

The benevolent Mr. Plummer was, however, gone, and Billy Bunter went, too.

He rolled slowly towards Courtfield, looking most indignant and muttering all manner of uncharitable things upon the devoted head of Mr. J. Stuart Plummer.

He had some silver in his pocket, and he consoled himself, on arriving at Courtfield, with a snack at the bunshop in the High Street.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Not Believed!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter!"

The match was over, Dick Trumper & Co. having left Greyfriars the losers by only 11 runs, and the Famous Five, Squiff, and the Bouncer were adorning the school gateway with their presence.

William George Bunter rolled up.

"Where have you been all the afternoon, Bunty?" inquired Frank Nugent pleasantly.

"Oh, just taking a stroll, you know," said Billy Bunter evasively.

"Feeling hungry?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ye-es, I do feel hungry, but I wouldn't think of stuffing myself out with tuck and wasting money that might well be put into the fund!" said the Owl impressively.

"You look as though you've been having a feed already, Bunter!" said Vernon-Smith, peering closely at the fat Removite's face. "Look at the jam round his mouth, you chaps!"

"My hat! Yes, rather!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, and he fixed Bunter with a stern look. "You've been back-sliding, you little bouncer!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You've been stuffing, my fat tulip!" said Bob Cherry, wagging a reproving forefinger at him. "If you've been spending any of the money belonging to the fund—"

"No, fear!" said Billy Bunter, with great promptness. "As a matter of fact, you fellows, I've been over to Courtfield to pay all the money in."

"Oh!"

"I've only just got back, you see. The treasurer—a chap named Plummer—was jolly pleased at the amount I'd collected."

"And you haven't been stuffing?"

"No, fear! They stood me a tea at the office, that's all."

Harry Wharton shook his head as Billy Bunter rolled onward across the Close.

"I don't know whether Bunter is spoofing us or not," he said. "He's such a deep little beggar, you know. He certainly seems to be telling the truth for—"

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2?



Trembling all over Billy Bunter blinked round him in the gloom of the barn. "Ooo-er!" he yelled. "Yow! Wh-what the——" Bunter broke off with a gasp. The moonlight shining in through a chink in the barn just then revealed a monkey perched on his chest. "Yaroooh!" roared the fat junior. "Sapristi," came another voice. "What was dat?" Scarcely daring to breath Bunter looked towards the sound, and saw the Italian organ-grinder he had seen in the streets earlier in the evening. (See Chapter 10.)

"But it's so unusual for Bunter to tell the truth!" growled Johnny Bull. "He'll want watching, anyway!"

Billy Bunter had tea in Hall that day. It did not matter to him, really, whether he had any tea at all, as he had had quite a respectable repast at Courtfield.

After tea he went to his study for prep.

Having finished prep, the pangs of hunger began to assail the Owl again, so he arose and left the study.

He went downstairs and hurried over to the cloisters.

Harry Wharton & Co. were standing in the evening shadows, under the elms, and Bunter did not see them, although they saw him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's Bunter up to, I wonder?" said Bob Cherry. "His movements look jolly fishy!"

"He's got something secret on, that's evident!" said Harry Wharton, knitting his brows. "Perhaps we'd better follow."

"Rather!"

The Famous Five stalked Billy Bunter through the cloisters, and into the ruined chapel. They saw him raise the stone and descend into the vaults.

"My hat!" said Wharton. "What on earth can Bunter be doing down here? Quiet, you fellows! We don't want to alarm him!"

One by one they followed Bunter down into the vault. Proceeding with infinite caution and silence through the deep gloom, they were able to keep on his trail by following the flickering light of the matches which he struck.

"He—he's gone through that door!" muttered Bob Cherry tensely. "Bunter must have discovered some secret vault down here!"

"Come on!" said Wharton grimly. "We must see into this!"

They crept on tiptoe to the door of Billy Bunter's vault.

Peering through the doorway they beheld a sight that made them gasp.

Tuck everywhere—stacks of it! It was a perfect hoard. Standing up by a pile of jars of jam, William George

Bunter was counting over a small wad of notes which he had just taken from his pocket.

At the same time he had a rabbit-pie before him, and in between the mouthfuls Billy Bunter rustled the notes and murmured to himself:

"Ten quid left! That will keep me going in tuck for quite a long time. Blow the fund!"

Harry Wharton & Co., watching and listening outside the door, looked at each other.

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The young toad! Then the collection was a swindle, after all! He's been using the money to buy all this tuck! Oh, great pip! This is the absolute limit!"

Harry Wharton, setting his teeth hard, strode right into the vault and laid violent hands on Billy Bunter.

That youth was in the middle of a mouthful of pie, and he commenced to choke and splutter wildly.

"Groogh! Yah! Yerrooch! Leggo! I'm chick-choking! Gerragh!"

"Bunter, you awful cad, so we've caught you!" exclaimed the Remove captain, shaking him vigorously. "We've bowled you out in your rotten, thieving game!"

"Yaroooop! Leggo!" wailed the terrified Owl. "Don't shish-shake me like that, Wharton, you b-b-b-beast! Ow-wow! If my gig-gig-glasses fall off they'll b-b-b-break—yowp!—and you'll have to pip-pay for them! Yoooooop!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!

Bob Cherry picked up the notes that had fallen from Billy Bunter's grasp. He counted them.

"My hat! Ten quid! Is that all Bunter has left of the subscription money?"

"That's all—we heard him say so when he was talking to himself just now," said Frank Nugent. "The thieving little toad has spent the rest—on tuck!"

"Wow - wowww - wow! I haven't!" howled Billy Bunter, wriggling like a very fat eel. "The rest of the money has been handed over to the treasurer!

I gave it to him this afternoon! Yow Wow-wow!"

"We'll soon find out!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "Woe betide you, Bunter, if we find that you've swindled us! You'll get into awful trouble!"

"Mercy! Leggo! I—I say, you fellows, you can keep the money——"

"What!"

"You can share this tuck, too!" wailed Bunter desperately. "We'll—wow-wow!—keep this thing to ourselves! Yaroooooooogh! Wharrer you doing, Wharton, you beast? Yah!"

"I'm going to take you up to stand trial before the whole Form," said Wharton between his teeth. "We'll hold a full inquiry into this, Bunter. Yank him along!"

Billy Bunter yelled at the top of his voice and kicked and struggled, but it was all of no avail.

He was dragged through the vaults, bundled up through the hole in the floor of the chapel, and whirled out into the Close.

Wingate was chatting to Blundell of the Fifth on the steps when the Famous Five came up with Bunter.

"My hat! What's the matter with Bunter?" exclaimed Blundell.

"Help! Murder! Rescue! Yarooogh!" roared the Owl. "Make 'em let me go, Wingate! I haven't spent the collection-money!"

"Hallo! What's that?" said Wingate quickly. "Have you discovered that Bunter has been spending the money he collected, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton was silent.

Certain as he was of Bunter's guilt, he had no desire to sneak on him.

Wingate looked grimly at the wriggling Owl.

"Explain yourself, Bunter!" he rapped. "Why are Wharton and the others ragging you like this?"

"Yow-ow! It's all a mistake, Wingate!" howled Bunter. "I bought all the tuck out of my own money! I——"

"Then you have been spending money on eatables, after all your fine talk!"

"Wow! I—I have to keep up my

nourishment, you know, Wingate! Groooogh! But I haven't spent the collection-money! I wouldn't think of such a thing, really! Yah! Ow!"

Wingate turned to Harry Wharton & Co.

"Where did you find this little rotter?" he asked. "I command you to tell me all you know of the affair, Wharton!"

"Very well," said the Remove captain quietly. "It will all have to come out, anyway. We followed Bunter down into the vaults, to a secret room, where he has a hoard of tuck. He has evidently been sneaking down there to guzzle on his own, while making out to us that he had broken himself of his greedy habits—setting us an example, mind you! We also found this money on him—ten pounds. It seems that that is all he has left of the money he collected round the school for the Unemployed Fund. The remainder, I reckon, has gone on grub."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Wingate. "He must have collected over thirty pounds in all! That means he has embezzled something in the neighbourhood of twenty pounds. If Bunter has really spent the money he'll catch it hot!"

"I haven't touched the money!" wailed the terrified Owl. "I paid it in this afternoon! I—"

"Take him up to my study, and hold him there till I get back!" said Wingate grimly. "I'll go down to the vaults and have a look round."

"This way, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry. "Yarooooogh!"

The Famous Five literally carried Bunter upstairs to Wingate's room. The fat Remove's howls awoke the echoes, and brought dozens of astonished fellows running up.

Great was the amazement when the reason of Billy Bunter's capture was known.

Wingate came up to his study ten minutes later.

His face wore a most serious expression.

In his hand he held Bunter's subscription list.

"I think there will be some trouble for Bunter over this," he said quietly. "According to the list here, which I found hidden in a ginger-beer crate, Bunter has collected thirty-six pounds nine and sixpence. I have just rung up the Courtfield office of the Unemployed Fund, and they inform me that they know nothing of Bunter, and that no subscriptions from Greyfriars have been handed or sent to them."

Harry Wharton & Co. drew deep breaths.

"Then Bunter—the swindling little rogue—has been spoofing us!" gasped Frank Nugent. "He took us in properly—not only us, but the Head and the masters! My hat! He'll catch it for this!"

"Yow-wowp! I say, you fellows—"

"How on earth did he manage to get that printed receipt and the subscription list?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"They were certainly not given to him by the treasurer," said Wingate. "In all probability Bunter happened to find them somewhere, and made use of them to collect money round the school for his own ends."

"I didn't find them!" roared Billy Bunter desperately. "They were given to me by Plummer, the treasurer!"

"There is no person named Plummer connected with the fund!" said Wingate sternly. "I made sure of that over the telephone just now. I saw the name, you see, on that bogus receipt of yours, Bunter."

The Owl of the Remove went pallid. His knees began to knock together with fright.

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"I—I say, Wingate, I've been swindled!" he spluttered. "A man calling himself Plummer gave me that subscription list and—and the receipt, and asked me to collect subscriptions round the school—"

"A likely yarn, you swindling little rotter!"

"It's true, I tell you!" howled Bunter. "I took it on for the good of the cause, and started the subscription with a fiver of my own."

"Don't tell lies, Bunter!" rapped Wingate sharply. "The biggest fool on earth wouldn't believe that! And we know you only too well, you little rascal!"

"Ow! Look here, I'm telling the truth! I gave Plummer the money this afternoon in the wood—"

"Why, you told us you had been to Courtfield to pay the money into the office!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Ahem! I—I—er—that was a slip of the tongue! What I really meant to say was that I had met Plummer in the wood. The rotter pinched the money from me—"

"What?"

"I mean I handed it to him—all of it!" gasped the Owl, who was now getting quite bewildered. "I never kept a penny for myself!"

"Don't tell whoppers, you fat toad! What about the tuck you had hidden in the vaults?"

"I bought it with my own money—"

"Here, you'd better tell that to the Head!" exclaimed Wingate, gripping Bunter's shoulder firmly and whirling him towards the door. "He will go into matters more fully, and discover whether you are speaking the truth or not."

"Yarooooogh! Leggo! Hellup! I won't go to the Head! Yah! Hands off! Yow-wow-wow!"

Billy Bunter, despite his yells and fierce struggles, was taken to the Head's study. A crowd followed him there. The news had created a great sensation at Greyfriars, and all were eager to know more.

Condemning looks were cast at Billy Bunter from all sides.

There wasn't one who believed what he said.

He was too well-known as a prevaricator. He had a reputation for untruthfulness that was second to none. Indeed, Bob Cherry had often remarked that Billy Bunter had Ananias beaten at his own game. It was not to be expected, therefore, that Greyfriars would believe Bunter's word.

In response to Wingate's tap, the grave voice of Dr. Locke called out:

"Come in!"

The Head was seated at his table when Wingate dragged Bunter in. He jumped up and looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Bless my soul! Wingate, what is the meaning of this? What has Bunter done?"

"I think it will be found, sir, that he has done the whole school, if you will excuse the term," said Wingate grimly. "The subscription which Bunter has been raising on behalf of the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund seems to be a swindle. Bunter was not authorised to collect the money, and what money he had collected has not been paid over to the fund. It appears to be a colossal swindle of Bunter's."

"Good heavens! Are you certain of what you say, Wingate?" exclaimed the Head in horror. "It is a most serious charge to bring against this junior. What are the facts that lead you to your conclusions?"

In quiet, incisive tones Wingate told the Head everything.

Dr. Locke's usually kind old face became grim and stern-looking as he listened, and Billy Bunter quailed before his look.

"Bless my soul! Bunter, what have you done with the money you collected?" he exclaimed at last, when Wingate had finished. "Have you no plausible excuse to offer?"

Desperately Billy Bunter blurted out his defence, mixing truth and falsehood in a hopeless jumble.

The Head's grim look deepened.

"Bunter, your story seems to me to be a wicked fabrication from beginning to end!" he exclaimed. "Your propensity for falsehood is well-known to me, as also is your cupidity and dishonesty. I am afraid I cannot believe you. All you have left of the subscription money is a mere ten pounds. You have squandered the rest!"

"Yow! I haven't, sir!"

"Then where is it?"

"Plummer has it, sir! I—"

"I will have inquiries made, to ascertain whether such a man as Plummer really exists, or if he is only a product of your imagination," said the Head. "Wingate, take Bunter away to the punishment-room, and incarcerate him there for the time being. I will go into this matter thoroughly. It is most serious!"

Billy Bunter's yells awoke the echoes as Wingate yanked him away.

Loud hisses greeted him in the passage outside.

He was universally condemned. Billy Bunter's reputation was against him. He was thrust unceremoniously into the punishment-room—that dread apartment known among the juniors as Nobody's Study—and locked there.

And Bunter was left alone in his solitude, to contemplate the dread calamity that had befallen him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Disgrace to the School!

"WHAT'S the news?" Squiff asked Wingate that question eagerly on descending the stairs next morning.

Billy Bunter's bed in the Remove dormitory had not been slept in. The Owl had languished all night on the hard bed in the punishment-room.

A horde of Removeites crowded round Squiff, and all looked eagerly at Wingate.

"I can't tell you yet," said the Greyfriars skipper. "You'll probably hear during the course of the morning."

Dr. Locke was more than usually grave during call-over, and when it was completed, instead of dismissing the boys from Hall, he stood up and motioned for silence.

A hush fell on the assembled school.

"Boys, I have an announcement of the gravest import to make," said the Head, in a low, well-modulated voice. "It appears that the collection which Bunter made, supposedly on behalf of the Courtfield branch of the British Unemployed Benevolent Fund, was in effect the most audacious and wicked swindle ever perpetrated on Greyfriars. I have made exhaustive inquiries into the matter, but have discovered nothing to mitigate Bunter's rascality. I wish to express my deepest regrets to all who gave Bunter money, for not a penny of it has reached the fund for which it was given."

He turned to Wingate, who was standing in his usual place in front.

"Bring Bunter here!"

Wingate strode away, and some minutes later returned with Billy Bunter held firmly by the shoulder and pushed roughly along.

The Owl of the Remove was taken up on the platform and stood beside the Head, facing the school.

Billy Bunter looked tired and haggard and woebegone in the extreme. He blinked fearfully round him, and gave a jump when the Head's deep voice sounded.

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Ye-es, sir!"

"The statements which you made in your defence yesterday appear to have no foundation in fact. I have no alternative but to consider them a string of falsehoods. I have always regarded you as a greedy, dishonest boy, Bunter, but your rascality in connection with this bogus subscription exceeds even my worst opinion of you. You have deliberately robbed your masters and schoolfellows by means of a base, despicable trick!"

"I haven't, sir! I—I—"

"Everything points to your guilt, Bunter—your actions and your words. I can scarcely believe that a boy belonging to this school could be capable of such wanton wickedness. In the past I have been inclined to take a lenient view of your bad conduct, Bunter, thinking you more of a fool than a rogue. But this matter cannot be lightly passed over. If I exercised my full duty I should hand you over to the police!"

"Ow!"

"I will refrain from doing that, however. At the same time, it will be impossible for you to remain at this school. You are a disgrace and a discredit to its good name!" Dr. Locke's voice trembled here under the stress of great emotion. "Bunter, you are expelled!"

This announcement had a stunning effect on the whole assembled school. Billy Bunter blinked up at the Head through his spectacles, dazed and incredulous.

Then Bolsover major, from the ranks of the Remove, broke the silence with a loud cheer.

"Hurrah! Bunter's got the order of the boot! We'll be well rid of that fat rotter!"

A babel of voices followed Bolsover's shout. The thrum was not quelled until the Head had rapped several times on the table before him.

"Silence! Boys, keep quiet! Bunter, you may go to your dormitory and pack your things, preparatory to leaving Greyfriars at the earliest possible moment!"

"Boo-hoo! I'm innocent, sir! I—"

"Do not seek to excuse yourself by further subterfuge, you miserable lad! Not another word! Go!"

Dr. Locke pointed grimly to the door, and Billy Bunter, with a last despairing blink, went.

Cutting a most pathetic figure, he rolled from the Hall amid a dead silence.

The school was dismissed. Harry Wharton & Co. were in the passage, discussing Bunter's expulsion, when the fat junior rolled up.

"I say, you fellows—" began the Owl, but the juniors turned away and walked down the passage.

They turned and watched Bunter from afar, however, as he went miserably upstairs.

"Poor old Bunter!" broke out large-hearted Bob Cherry. "He deserved to be expelled, of course. I used to warn him, and he has only himself to blame. But—but it's a bit rough on him to be kicked out. My hat! What will Greyfriars be like without Bunter?"

"It won't seem the same place," said Harry Wharton. "Bunter, with all his faults, kept the school alive, didn't he? We shall miss him no end."



Suddenly a swarthy-faced man dashed across the road, waving his arms wildly and shrieking in a gabbled mixture of English and Italian. "Sapristi! Rascal I have founda you!" he roared, dashing at Billy Bunter. "You pincha da organ and da monk! You makea the money onna da nod! I givea you da beans!" Billy Bunter almost jumped out of his skin. "Look here, you unreasonable rotter," he began. "I—Ow! Yoooop!" The Italian's doubled fist crashed down upon his snub nose. (See Chapter 10.)

"The missfulness of the fat cadgful bounder will be terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

At that moment a horde of Removites swept up, led by Bolsover major.

"Are you chaps coming with us to join in?" he demanded.

"Join in what?" asked Bob Cherry.

"In the drumming-out of Bunter!" said the burly Removite in his harshest tones. "He's a disgrace to his Form and the school. The Head's merely expelled him, but he deserves more than that. We're going to drum him out of Greyfriars!"

"My hat! I say, Bolsover, there's no need to pile on the agony!" exclaimed Wharton, frowning. "Bunter's got it in the neck quite sufficiently, I think. He's disgraced the school, I admit, but—well, Bunter doesn't realise what a wicked little fool he is. Better leave him alone."

"Rats!" snorted Bolsover major. "We're going to show that thieving, swindling worm what we think of him! You chaps can keep off the grass if you like, but you won't interfere with us, or you'll get ragged as well. Kim on, you fellows!"

"Down with Bunter!"

"Chuck him out on his neck!"

Harry Wharton took a step forward as if to interfere, but Bob Cherry and Nugent laid detaining hands on his shoulder.

"Better let 'em have their heads, Harry," said Bob. "We can't do any good by chipping in."

Wharton bit his lip and nodded.

The Famous Five and Squiff went down into the quadrangle.

The expulsion of William George Bunter was being everywhere discussed. Condemnation of the fat junior was universal. There was not one who raised his voice in defence of the luckless Owl. Bunter's bad reputation was too much against him, and his defence was not believed.

Bang! Biff! Berom! Bang!

Those loud concussions sounded from the Hall door while Harry Wharton & Co. were walking in the quad. And above the banging the mellifluous voice of Billy Bunter was heard, raised in loud accents of anguish and terror.

"Yarooooogh! Leggo, you rotters! Yah! Wow! Stoppit! Ow-ow-ow!"

Bang, bang, bang!

The noises came from a big drum which Bolsover major had suspended on his chest, and which he was beating vigorously.

Behind him, whirled along in the grasp of his angry Form-fellows, came the fat, pathetic form of Billy Bunter.

On his back was strapped a large box. It was Billy Bunter's own box, containing all his personal belongings.

A large placard had been pinned on Bunter's chest, bearing these words:

"DRUMMED OUT!

A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

A long procession followed after Bolsover major and the drum and Billy Bunter.

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Bang, bang! Crash! Bang!
"Oh, my giddy aunt!" gasped Bob Cherry. "They're really drumming Bunter out! Poor young beggar! It's a bit thick!"

"Yow-wow-woooogh! Yah! Help! Rescue! Lemme go!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Yow-wowp! Rescue, Wharton! Ow-wow!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were fairly swept aside by the onrush of juniors who were participating in the drumming-out of Billy Bunter.

Wingate and a number of prefects were crossing the quadrangle, and they halted in surprise when they heard the loud beating of the drum.

They saw in an instant what was taking place, but they did not interfere.

"Open the gates, Gossy!" roared Treluce. "We're getting rid of Bunter this morning!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"My heye!" gasped the school porter, blinking as he unlocked the school gates. "Wot I says is this 'ere. I don't usually approve of such goings hon, but this 'ere's different. Which that young rip Bunter oughter be locked up! 'E swindled me out of a shilling, 'e did. Fine carryings hon, Hi must say!"

The gates being open, Billy Bunter was grasped in many hands and hurled out into the road, his box still tethered to his back.

Bump!

"Yaroooogh! Yah! Murder! Wow-wow-wow!"

"Don't you dare show your face near here again, Bunter!" said Bolsover major threateningly. "We're finished with you! Clear off, or we'll kick you down the road!"

"Yah! Groooogh! Beasts! Wow!" moaned the luckless Owl, struggling to his feet and blinking through his spectacles at his old Form-fellows at the gates. "I—I—Yah! Keep off! Yaroooogh!"

The juniors made a threatening move forward, and Billy Bunter, with a terrified yell, turned and ran as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

The weight of the box was heavy upon his back, but fear lent him wings, and he fairly scudded down the Friardale Lane, with visions of battle, murder, and sudden death floating before his inward vision.

The incessant beating of the drum followed him as he went.

It rang like a death-knell in his ears.

He had been turned out of Greyfriars in disgrace; drummed out of school by the Remove!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Up Against It!

YOWP! Groooogh! Beasts! Oh dear, this is awful! Groogh!"
Thus William George Bunter some hours later.

It was afternoon, and he was sitting on his box in a field, a careworn and pathetic figure.

He felt that life was simply not worth living.

He had hidden his box in a barn that morning, and set out in search of Plummer. But he found no trace of that benevolent gentleman. The hard, cold truth gradually dawned on the luckless Owl. Mr. Plummer, having used him as a catspaw to make a fairly good haul, had, like the Arabs in the poem, silently drifted away and left him to stand the racket.

And Billy Bunter was standing the racket now—with a vengeance.

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Expelled from school, with nowhere to go and not a friend in the world, what was Bunter to do?

He shuddered at the thought of going home. He knew that he would receive a very hot reception from his pater if he went home.

He groped in his pockets, and a sudden gleam came into his eyes.

His fat hand had encountered some rustling notes.

He took them out, and saw that there were three pounds.

"My word! They must have come out of the bundle that Plummer took," he murmured. "What a stroke of luck! Three quid will be jolly useful. I'll hold out in Friardale and make these rotters take me back sooner or later! I won't be expelled! Groooogh! Greyfriars hasn't seen the last of me, not by a long chalk!"

And, feeling somewhat comforted by the discovery of the money in his pocket, Billy Bunter shouldered his trunk and rolled away laboriously in the direction of Friardale.

His first place of call was the tuckshop opposite the station.

Billy Bunter rolled inside, dumped down his box, and gave a modest order. He felt that he would have to go carefully with his money.

But Billy Bunter's hunger soon got the better of his discretion.

Order followed order, until what he had intended should be a snack developed into a heavy feed. He had had no dinner, and was really ravenous, and the amount of tuck he put away fairly staggered the young lady who served him.

The bill came to over fifteen shillings, and Billy Bunter paid up with a grimace.

He felt full up, and staggered rather than walked out of the shop with his box.

"I—I suppose I had better get a room," he murmured. "I've got to live somewhere. Groooogh! It's coming on to rain, so I can't sleep out."

Then began a tour of Friardale, looking for accommodation.

At most of the places where he applied Billy Bunter was greeted with some amusement. The idea of the fat junior looking for a room seemed to strike most people as decidedly funny.

It did not strike Billy Bunter as being at all funny.

Nobody seemed to want him.

At last, however, he came to a dismal house in the High Street, near the market-place, where an unfurnished room was offered him.

"You can take it or leave it, young man!" said the very austere lady of the house. "Rooms is very easy to let nowadays. Besides, I ain't so sure that I ought to 'arbour a boy like you 'ere."

"Oh, it—it's all right, ma'am!" said the Owl desperately. "I—I've left Greyfriars, owing to my room being out of order. I've got to live out till my room is ready again, you know."

"Very well, Master Bunter. Ten shillings a week—paid in advance."

Billy Bunter paid the ten shillings—his first week's rent of an empty room.

It was raining, and dark and dreary outside, and he was glad to accept anything in the way of accommodation.

"You'll need a bed and some furniture, Master Bunter," said the lady grimly.

"What are you going to do about that?"

"I—I shall have to buy some, I suppose!" moaned the expelled Owl.

He rolled out in the rain, and visited the second-hand furniture shop in the High Street.

Thirty shillings bought him a rickety bed, some very shabby bedclothes, a cheap wooden table, a jerry-built washstand, an ancient chair, one leg of which

was very doubtful, and a ragged piece of carpet.

The second-hand furniture-dealer obligingly delivered these things on his barrow at Billy Bunter's new address.

When the "furniture" had been installed in the little room, Billy Bunter sat down on the chair and contemplated his surroundings.

"Groooogh!" he murmured, shuddering. "This is horrid! All through that beast Plummer! I wish I could find him—I'd show him up! Br-r-r-rrr! I'm jolly peckish, too, and I—I've only got a few bob left!"

The Owl rolled downstairs, and went out into the High Street.

When he returned his face was shiny, and there were traces of jam round his mouth, indicating that he had again been indulging his craving for tuck.

Billy Bunter had exactly one shilling and threepence left—not a large sum to stand between a hungry junior and starvation.

But Billy Bunter did not reck of the morrow. Sufficient unto the day, to him, was the evil thereof, and he turned into his rickety bed that night with a sleepy grunt, and was soon snoring loudly.

He had arranged with Mrs. Miffin, his landlady, to have his meals supplied. Only by dint of the utmost persuasion and the wildest of falsehoods had Billy Bunter persuaded the good lady to leave settlement until the end of the week.

Breakfast next morning consisted of one small, solitary rasher of bacon, weak tea, and bread-and-butter.

"Ugh! Fancy giving a chap that for his breakfast!" growled Billy Bunter, blinking indignantly at his paltry fare. "I'm famished! But still, I—I suppose I'd better get on with it!"

The breakfast rapidly disappeared, and then the Owl went out.

He spent the whole morning looking for the wily Mr. Plummer, but with no result.

He arrived at the gates of Greyfriars soon after morning lessons were over.

Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Tom Brown, and Morgan were standing just inside. They started when they saw Billy Bunter roll up.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Clear off, you rotter!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "You're expelled! You have no business here at all now!"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Hallo! That cad Bunter has turned up again!" roared Bolsover major, running up with Rake, Wibley, Treluce, and Micky Desmond. "Turn him away!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm starving—"

"Jolly good job! Clear off!"

"I—I feel that I'm going to die!" moaned Billy Bunter, sinking on a milestone just outside the school gates and raising his eyes pathetically skywards. "Oh, I've had an awful time! I—I shall give way altogether, unless I'm taken in and fed! Groooogh! If I die, you beasts, my death will lie at your door!"

"Rats!" snorted Bolsover major. "Chaps, we'll use these lumps of turf that Gosling has been pulling up, to pelt Bunter with."

"What-ho!"

Gosling had been at work at the side of the drive, and Bolsover major & Co. grasped huge lumps of turf and strode through the gates.

Whiz!

"Yaroooogh!"

A huge turf, hurled by Morgan, struck Billy Bunter on the nose, and sent him toppling backwards off the milestone.

"Sock it to him!" yelled Bulstrode.

Whiz! Whiz! Wallop! Thud!

William George Bunter arose from the ground with a rapidity that was most

amazing in one who was expecting to die at any minute.

With turfs hurtling at him, and striking him violently in all manner of places, the Owl fled down the lane at top speed, and he lost no time in putting as much distance as possible between himself and Greyfriars.

"Groogh! Woop! Oh dear! Wow! I'm hurt! Ow! My back's broken in several places—yooop!—and my spinal column is dislocated—groooooogh-ooogh! Oh, the beasts! They won't let me go back! Ow-wow-wow!"

Gasping and groaning, and bewailing his lot, Billy Bunter returned to his little room in Friardale.

Dinner was on the same meagre scale as his breakfast. He looked round for more when he had polished off his portion, but there was none.

Mrs. Miffin, too, was adamant. Billy Bunter had to be satisfied with what he had had—and it made him groan.

"The mean old cat!" he growled. "There's half an apple-pie left in the dish and heaps of custard! She's keeping it back! Grooogh! I'm hungry! Oh dear! I can't put up with this for long!"

Mrs. Miffin went out shopping that afternoon. Billy Bunter watched her go from his little window. His eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"Now's my chance for that apple-pie!" He crept stealthily downstairs, and into the kitchen. There was nobody about, only a cat. Bunter's greedy eyes soon sought out the larder. He dragged the door open, and a chuckle escaped his lips.

"Oh, good!" There was a pie-dish, with half a pie remaining. There also was a dish of custard and a large jar of jam, and a cake, and some ham, and some home-made tarts.

Billy Bunter pulled a chair up, and set to work on the contents of Mrs. Miffin's larder.

His jaws champed away at a great rate, and all that was eatable in the larder quickly disappeared.

"That was prime!" murmured the Owl, pushing back the chair. "Mrs. Miffin may be an old cat, but I'll give her her due—she can cook! I— Oh, jeminy!"

He turned as a sound came from the doorway. His spectacles nearly fell off with dismay when he saw the tall, lean figure of Mrs. Arabella Miffin standing on the threshold.

"So, Master Bunter, I have caught you!" said Mrs. Miffin, her eyes glinting like a Gorgon's at the fat junior.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Miffin, I—I haven't been stealing, you know!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I happened to lose my way in the house, and found myself here."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Miffin, stalking to the larder and gazing in through the open door. She gave a gasp.

"My goodness! Everything's gone! You—you little thief, Master Bunter!"

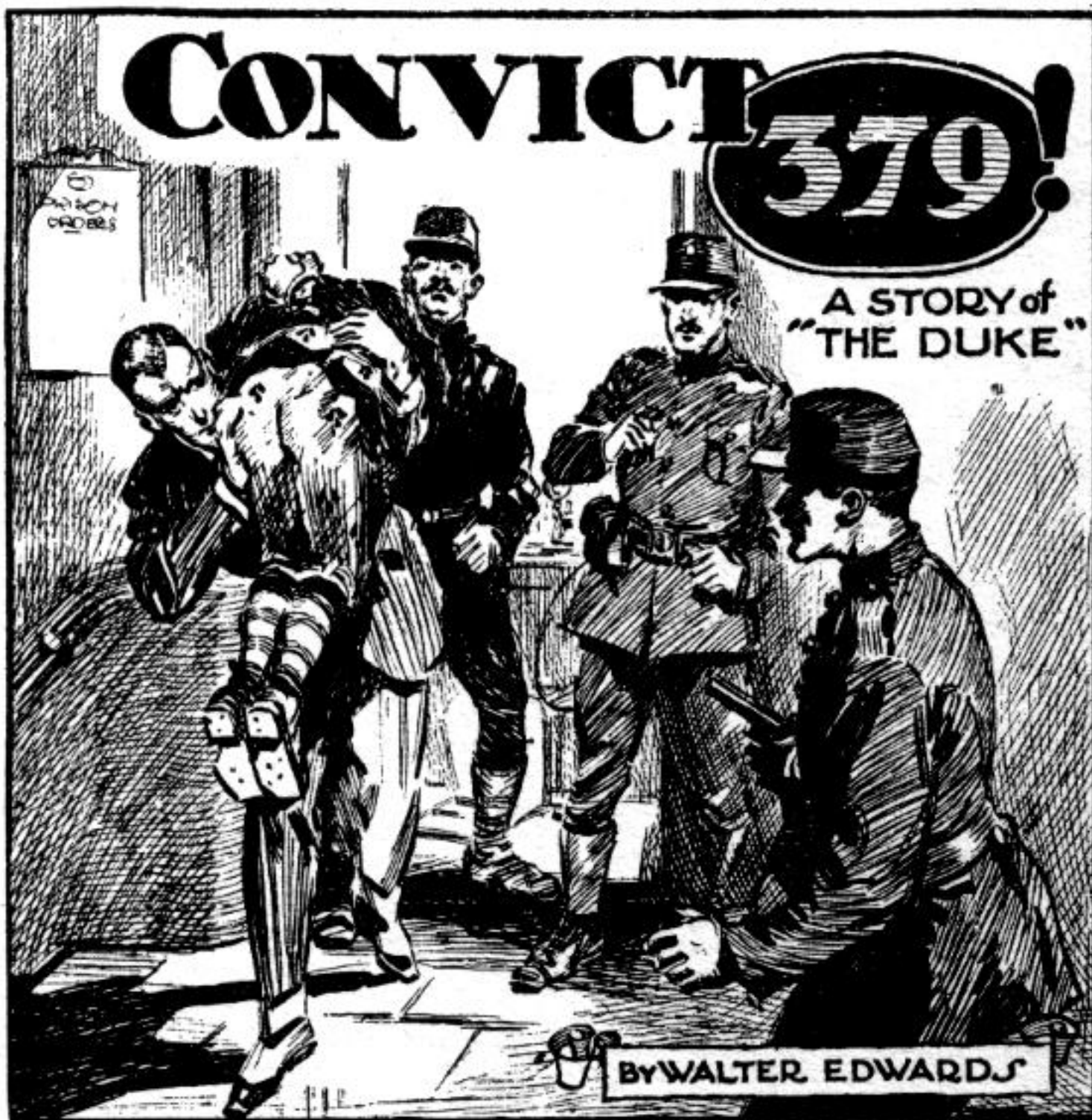
"It wasn't me!" roared Billy Bunter, locking wildly round. "It was the cat, ma'am! I—I happened to see the cat eating the pie when I came in!"

"The cat was eating the pie, was he?" said Mrs. Miffin. "He has also eaten the tarts, I suppose, and the cake, and the custard, and two jars of jam, and the dumplings, and the ham and the pickles?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so, ma'am." "Do you take me for a fool, Master Bunter? You are a wicked, lying, thieving boy! I shall report this to your school—robbing a poor, hard-working woman and her family of their food!"

"Oh crumbs! Look here, ma'am—"

BOYS! YOU MUST NOT MISS THIS!



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"Leave this kitchen at once, Master Bunter, before I set about you with the poker!" said Mrs. Miffin grimly.

The warlike glint in her eyes boded ill for Billy Bunter if he lingered, so he beat a hasty retreat from the kitchen.

And, wandering disconsolately along the Friardale High Street, jingling his last few coppers in his pocket, William George Bunter meditated morosely on the hardness of the world and unreasonableness of some landladies.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Homeless Bunter!

TWO days passed—days of weary hungering and hardship.

Greyfriars was barred to Billy Bunter. That much was plainly evident, for during those two days he made several attempts to wriggle his way back into the school. The fellows there, however, were deaf to all his entreaties and sorrowful wails. Like the brave centurion of old, he lingered long at the gates, but found no entrance.

Life in lodgings was not exactly a bed of roses. Mrs. Miffin kept her fat tenant on strict rations, so that Billy Bunter lived in what was to him a state of semi-starvation.

Being kept on short commons was the most unkind cut of all. Life without tuck was an empty void to William George Bunter. He strained all his resources to get tuck. In so doing he paid several visits to Mr. Aarons, the local pawnbroker, known affectionately in Friardale as "Upcle." Most of Billy Bunter's

belongings passed over Mr. Aaron's dingy little counter, and how he would retrieve them the hungry Owl did not know.

He was sitting on his bed, wondering what else he could pawn, when the door was flung open and Mrs. Miffin appeared.

"Master Bunter, your bill!" she snapped, flourishing a large sheet of paper in his face. "You will please to settle it immediately and leave!"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Miffin—" "One pound seventeen and nine is the amount, Master Bunter!" said the landlady severely. "What about it?"

"I—I can't p-p-pay, ma'am—" "Ah! I thought as much! I have been making inquiries about you, Master Bunter. I find that you have been turned out of school for being a thief and a swindler!"

"Oh crumbs! I—I—I—" "To think that I have harboured such a monster under my roof—that he has eaten my food—stolen it, even—and, to cap it all, refuses to pay!" cried Mrs. Miffin. "Master Bunter, if you cannot pay your bill you must go!"

"Look here, ma'am, you might be reasonable—"

"Pay up or clear out!" shrilled the angry landlady.

"I'm broke!" moaned Billy Bunter, blinking pathetically at Mrs. Miffin. "I'll settle with you, though, when I get the postal-order I'm expecting from one of my titled relations."

"Titled fiddlesticks!" snorted Mrs. Miffin. "You will not stay a moment longer in this house, Master Bunter! You are, by all accounts, an incorrigible

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rogue and a thief! Go, and take all your things with you!"

"Oh crumbs! I—I can't—"

"'Erbert!" shouted Mrs. Miffin down the stairs.

"Yes, ma?" came a burly voice in response.

"Come and turn this little rascal out into the street—his things as well!"

There was a heavy tramping of feet on the stairs, and 'Erbert, Mrs. Miffin's eldest son, strode in.

'Erbert Miffin was a huge, beefy labourer, and Billy Bunter blinked at him in terror.

"I—I say, you can't t-t-turn me out, you know," he stuttered. "You—you—"

"We'll soon see about that, young shaver!" said the burly 'Erbert, squaring his shoulders. "This 'ere room's goin' to be cleared right now. I'll see nobody imposes on my ma!"

With that 'Erbert commenced to clear the room.

He wasted no time on words, but carried Billy Bunter's belongings, one after another, downstairs, and hurled them through the front doorway into the middle of the road.

There they lay in a heap!

"Now, young shaver, out you go, too!" said the energetic 'Erbert.

"Yarooogh! Wow! Hands off, you rotter! Ow-wow! I'll call the pip-police! Yah! Help! Murder! Fire! Yaroooogh!"

Bunter was dragged down the stairs like a sack, and he went flying out into the road, to land with a crash in the midst of his belongings.

"There!" said 'Erbert. "That's seen the last of you in this 'ouse! Don't you dare come in 'ere again!"

Slam!

The door closed with great violence, which seemed to emphasise 'Erbert Miffin's words.

A crowd of urchins and villagers gathered round, and they roared with laughter at the Owl's sad plight.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"'E's been turned out of 'ome!"

"Grooooooh! Yow! There's nothing to laugh at! Ow!" moaned Bunter, as he sat there in the road, surrounded by his goods and chattels. "Wow-wow! I'm terribly injured! Groooooh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's all this rumpus about?"

The well-known voice of Bob Cherry sounded above the laughter, and next minute who should press to the front of the throng but the Famous Five, followed by Squiff, Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, and a number of other Removites.

The juniors stopped short when they beheld Billy Bunter, and so utterly amazed where they that they were incapable of speech for several minutes.

"Mum-my only hat!" gurgled Johnny Bull, in a faint voice. "Bunter!"

"Bunter!" murmured Nugent wonderingly. "What on earth—"

"I say, you fellows, I've been turned out of my lodgings, and—"

"Turned out!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Bunter's been evicted!" roared Peter Todd. "Oh, my hat! This takes the bun! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really Peter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Harry Wharton & Co.

The eviction of William George Bunter struck them as being decidedly comical.

Other Greyfriars fellows came up, and they, too, howled with laughter when they beheld Billy Bunter seated there in the midst of his belongings.

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"Oh, hold me up, Franky!" gurgled Bob Cherry. "This is too rich! Bunter evidently couldn't pay his rent, so they turned him out. Ha, ha, ha!"

P.C. Tozer, looking pompous and important, strode up.

"Ho!" he said. "Wot's this? Riot an' civil commotion, or wot?"

The worthy constable's eyes opened wide when he saw the reason of the disturbance in the High Street.

"'Ere, you'll 'ave to move hon, and take them things with you!" he said commandingly to Billy Bunter. "Which this is hobstruction of the public 'ighway, and ain't allowed by lor. Move hon, or I'll run you in!"

Moaning, Billy Bunter struggled to his feet. He gave Harry Wharton & Co. a pathetic look. Down upon the Owl as they were, they could not resist that look.

The Famous Five lent Bunter a hand in shifting his things.

"What are you going to do with 'em, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I—I'd better get rid of 'em, I suppose?" gasped Billy Bunter. "The secondhand dealer will buy 'em back."

The village furniture dealer did buy back those things—for the inclusive price of ten shillings.

Billy Bunter was very glad to accept that.

The furniture was left at the shop from which it had previously come, and Billy Bunter walked down the High Street unencumbered, and with ten shillings in his pocket.

Harry Wharton & Co. had gone. So had the other Greyfriars fellows.

He was alone again, adrift in a hard, merciless world.

Feeling in dire need of consolation, he rolled into the tuckshop opposite the station and had a feed.

That feed cost Billy Bunter exactly nine and elevenpence.

It had been a really prime feed, but Billy Bunter did not feel very cheerful as he rolled out of the shop into the High Street again.

With only a penny in his pocket, how was he to obtain lodging for the night?

That was the problem with which the brain of William George Bunter wrestled as he made his way along the High Street.

The wheezy strains of an organ broke in on his thoughts, and, looking across the road, Bunter saw an Italian organ-grinder churning out a doleful dirge from his instrument with one hand, whilst the other hand was occupied in holding out his shabby, battered hat.

On the organ-grinder's shoulder was perched a monkey in a funny sailor's cap. Quite a small crowd had collected round the Italian and his monkey, and money was jingling merrily into the hat.

Billy Bunter halted, and watched with covetous eyes from afar.

"My word! That greasy Italian organ-grinder chap is making money easy!" he muttered to himself. "People are simply chucking it at him. Yet here am I, homeless and broke, and more deserving of their charity. Oh dear! It's a rotten shame! I—I've got to get some money somehow. But how? I suppose I shall have to get a job of some sort?"

Billy Bunter shuddered at the prospect.

He darted one more envious glance at the organ-grinder and rolled onward, in search of a resting-place for the night, which was now fast approaching.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Change of Fortune!

"I SUPPOSE I shall have to make shift in here?"

Billy Bunter murmured those words to himself as he crawled amongst the straw inside a barn that stood in a field just outside Friardale.

It was a lonely spot, and Billy Bunter had decided, as it was a fine night, to take refuge in there.

He was weary, footsore, and fed-up.

He had tried again that evening to gain admittance to Greyfriars to plead his cause, but had been driven away—by Dicky Nugent & Co. of the Second, too, of all people. The hope of getting back to school seemed to the Owl to be very remote indeed.

It was dark inside the barn, and silent as the grave.

Billy Bunter found a comfortable spot in the straw, and, lying down in its yielding depths, he closed his eyes and went almost immediately to sleep.

He was awakened by feeling something pulling at his nose.

Trembling all over, his soul stricken with terror, he blinked round him in the gloom of the barn and sat up.

"Ooo-er!" he yelled. "Yow! Wh-what the—"

Billy Bunter broke off with a gasp.

The moonlight, shining in through a chink in the side of the barn just then, revealed a monkey perched on his chest.

Then, out of the straw not far away, there was a rustling noise, and a man's voice exclaimed:

"Sapristi! What was dat?"

Billy Bunter, scarcely daring to breathe, looked towards those sounds, and saw a swarthy-faced, untidily-dressed man reclining in the straw near him.

It was the Italian organ-grinder he had seen in the streets of Friardale that evening.

His companion in the barn was regarding him with gleaming, astonished eyes.

"Caramba! Then I am not alone! Whata are you doing here?"

"Grooooooh! You gave me quite a turn!" gasped the homeless Owl, regaining his courage. "I'm sleeping here for the night, the same as you. I didn't know you were here when I came in."

"You gotta no other place to sleep, eh?" said the Italian, peering closely at the fat junior through the gloom. "You are but a boy—yes. Whyfore you come here?"

"I—I've run away from school, you know," said Billy Bunter. "The other beasts at Greyfriars and I have had a—a difference. I've got no friends, and I'm broke. I've been having an awful time, really. Grooogh! Keep that rotten monkey away from me!"

"Jacko, you come alonga here!" said the Italian, and then he turned again to Billy Bunter. "So you come here to sleepa here da night, eh? Well, you don't minda sharing with poor Italian organ-grinder? I will not interfere with you."

"Oh, all serene!" growled Billy Bunter. "I'm jolly tired, and want to get to sleep. Keep that monkey away from me, that's all!"

The Italian tied his monkey to a rafter, and then settled himself down in the straw again.

Billy Bunter did likewise, and soon his stentorian snore rang out again through the darkness of the barn.

He and the Italian arose early next morning, and had a breakfast of bread and cheese—provided by the Italian—in the barn.

"If you gotta nothing on to-day, young signor, perhaps you consent to minda ma monk and da organ?" said the swarthy fellow, when the rough-and-ready repast was over. "I gotta go to Courtfield to see a man on business, you see. I cannot takea Jacko and da organ. Will you stay in here and look after dem till I returna?"

"All right," said Billy Bunter. "I'll keep an eye on the monkey and the organ. Don't be too long, though."

"Non. I getta back by twelve."

Ten minutes later the Italian went, leaving Billy Bunter in the barn in charge of the monkey and the organ.

The expelled Owl sat sullenly in the straw, thinking deeply. Did his old schoolfellows still have hearts of stone, or was it yet possible to appeal to their sense of pity? And how was he to maintain himself during the day without money? He must get some money somehow.

A sudden gleam entered the Owl's eyes.

"My word!" he muttered. "Why, the very idea! That organ-grinder merchant seemed to be roping in plenty of cash yesterday. I—I wonder if I could do the same? He's out of the way this morning, and I've got his monkey and organ. By Jove! I'll try it!"

The Italian had smartened himself up before leaving the barn. He had changed into a respectable coat and hat, and discarded his old worn-out boots for a better pair. These old boots, and a ragged muffler, the tattered, dilapidated coat, and the ancient felt hat, were lying in a bundle in the straw, where the Italian had deposited them.

Billy Bunter put on the coat over his own Eton clothes, and tied the muffler round his neck. There was ample room in the coat for him, and he found that the old boots fitted him quite well.

He put the battered felt hat on his head, and gave a deep chuckle.

"I reckon I look poor enough now," he murmured. "I'll take the organ and the monkey and play in the streets of Friardale. I'm bound to collect some money that way. I'll go to Greyfriars, too, and let the rotters see what they have brought me down to. That ought to make 'em take pity on me, the beasts! I'll chance it, anyway!"

With this plan in mind, Billy Bunter took up the organ and the monkey's rope, and rolled out of the barn.

Jacko, with his little sailor cap and jacket on, hopped gaily along behind him, chattering shrilly.

There was a large farm nearby, and several labourers were at work by the fence.

Billy Bunter halted outside in the road, put on a very mournful look, and commenced to grind the organ. The tune was a libellous rendering of the "Old Hundredth."

The farmhouse workers gazed in astonishment at the queer-looking organ-grinder.

They good-naturedly flung him coppers, however, which Jacko picked up and dutifully handed to Billy Bunter.

The Owl passed on, already ninepence to the good, and made his way to Greyfriars.

When he arrived at the school gates he peered in stealthily.

Gosling was not in his lodge, so Billy Bunter walked boldly into the quadrangle with the monkey and the organ.

The expression on his podgy face as he set down the organ on its prop was one of deep sorrow and mournfulness.

He let Jacko run loose on the end of his rope, and then he turned the handle of the organ.



The rascally Mr. Plummer was just clambering down the ivy when Billy Bunter rushed to the window and looked out. Then the Owl did a very valliant thing: he jumped clean on top of Mr. Plummer. Whether it was by clever calculation or a sheer fluke is not known, but Bunter landed fair and square on that gentleman, knocking all the breath out of his body. (See Chapter 11.)

The strains of "Land of Hope and Glory" wheezed out like a jerky dirge upon the morning air at Greyfriars.

The sound attracted several juniors who were out of doors, and they gazed in astonishment towards the gates.

"My word! Here's fun, chaps!" cried Squiff. "A giddy organ-grinder has invaded our august precincts. And he's got a monkey that does tricks. What a lark!"

"Rather!"

Fellows ran up eagerly from far and near.

"My only summer bonnet!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, staring at the fat, disreputable-looking organ-grinder. "I seem to know that chivvy somewhere. Why, of course! Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Despite his shabby attire, there was no mistaking the podgy form and features of William George Bunter.

He stood there, mournfully grinding away at the organ, whilst Jacko performed numerous tricks. The boys of Greyfriars simply shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Look at him!"

"Gaze at it and weep!"

Bunter the organ-grinder was the centre of attraction.

Having churned forth "Land of Hope and Glory," he changed the tune. To the further amusement of the Greyfriars fellows, Bunter's organ gave a wheezy rendering of "The Lost Chord."

"Well, this is the giddy limit!" gasped Frank Nugent. "Fancy Bunter having the nerve to come here like that! I'm blessed if he doesn't deserve a few coppers for his cheek. It's worth it."

"This is better than a cinematograph show!" gurgled Bob Cherry. "My hat, what will Bunter do next? Anyone got any pennies?"

Clink! Clink! Clink!

Pennies were showered at Billy Bunter by the amused juniors.

They regarded this as a great joke, and the coppers fell thick and fast round him.

The monkey was kept very busy picking up the money and placing it in Bunter's hat.

Billy Bunter continued to grind the organ, whilst the Greyfriars fellows shrieked.

"Bless my soul! What is the meaning of this commotion?"

The Head's voice broke in, and next minute the tall, imposing figure of Dr. Locke came through the throng.

He peered in astonishment over the rim of his spectacles at the organ-grinder. At first the Head did not recognise Billy Bunter.

"Dear me! Who admitted this disreputable person here?" he exclaimed. "Itinerant musicians are not permitted to enter Greyfriars! Kindly remove yourself and your instrument and this ridiculous animal from here this instant, my man! I— Oh! Good-goodness gracious! Is it—it cannot be! Bunter?"

The expelled Owl blinked pathetically at the Head.

"Yes, it's me, sir," he said dolorously. "Your brutal treatment has reduced me to playing an organ in the streets! Rather a come-down for an old Greyfriars fellow; but I—I'm starving, and it's all I can do."

"Bunter, how dare you come here like—like that! If this is a joke—"

"Nunno, sir, it isn't a joke!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I'm trying to earn my bread-and-butter. Although sinking fast into the grave, through constant hardship and ill-nourishment, I'm making this last desperate effort to keep going. Spare a few coppers, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the boys gathered round.

"Silence!" rapped the Head angrily. "Bunter, either you are an audacious scamp or a stupid idiot! Leave this school at once, and do not let me see you here again!"

"Oh, really, sir, you wouldn't turn me away when I'm starving?" moaned Billy Bunter. "Unless I have some food I'm likely to expire any minute! Ow! You would be held responsible for my death—"

"Bunter, will you go, or shall I instruct Gosling to turn you out?" exclaimed Dr. Locke angrily.

"Oh crumbs! I—I'll go, sir!"

Billy Bunter desperately swept the coppers he had collected into his pocket, and took up the organ and the monkey's rope.

He rolled wearily to the gates.

He turned round in the Friardale Lane outside and glared at the Head and the boys round him.

He shook a fat fist at them.

"You wait!" he roared. "I'll get my own back for the way I've been treated! You're all rotters—unreasonable rotters!"

"Gosling, drive that impertinent little rogue away!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

Bunter backed away hastily.

He dragged Jacko down the lane after him, and looked back furiously when he had gone a safe distance.

"Rotters!" he yelled. "I'll show you what—"

"Good-bye, Bluebell!"

"Yah! Beasts!"

Billy Bunter rolled disconsolately on to the village.

His visit to Greyfriars in the role of an organ-grinder had been successful only in so far as he had collected about half-a-crown in coppers. He had failed to appeal to the kindness of the Head's heart. Billy Bunter could only come to the conclusion that Dr. Locke had no kindness in him. It was a shame—a crying shame, especially as he was innocent—or partly so.

The wily Mr. Plummer had long since departed the neighbourhood with his spoils, so that Bunter had no proof of

his defence, and until he did obtain proof he would never be believed.

He whiled away the morning by playing in various parts of Friardale. Most people who saw him chuckled at sight of the podgy organ-grinder, but a fair number of coppers came his way.

So eager was Bunter in making as much as he could, that he quite forgot the passing of time.

Half-past twelve saw him standing near the station in Friardale High Street, grinding out deep dirges from the organ, and watching, with deep satisfaction, the frequent passage of coin of the realm into his—or, rather, the Italian's hat.

Suddenly a swarthy-faced man dashed across the road, waving his arms wildly and shrieking in a gabbled mixture of English and Italian. It was the owner of the organ!

"Sapristi! Rascal, then I have founda you!" he roared, dashing at Billy Bunter. "You pincha da organ and da monk! You makea da money onna da nod! I givea you da beans!"

"Yaroooooogh!" howled Billy Bunter, as the angry Italian's brawny fist crashed down upon his snub nose.

He let go of the organ, which fell with a crash into the gutter. The Italian, fists doubled, pranced round him, hitting out to right and left.

Billy Bunter dodged desperately.

"Yowp! Stoppit! Yarooogh! Look here, you unreasonable rotter, I— Yah! Ow-wow-wow!"

Biff! Wallop! Whack!

Billy Bunter, deeming discretion the better part of valour, broke away, and scuttled into the road, roaring.

Honk, honk, honk!

A fierce tooting of a motor-horn sounded, and several people shouted to the frantic Owl.

"Look out! You little idiot!"

Billy Bunter, in his hurry to escape from the excited Italian, ran right across the front wheel of a motor-cycle that came humming down the High Street.

The motor-cycle was driven by Horace Coker of the Fifth. He gave a roar when he saw Bunter, pounded desperately on the horn, and swerved.

But too late!

The front wheel of Coker's motor-cycle struck Billy Bunter amidships and bowled him over. The machine, unable to sustain the concussion, lurched over on its side, pitching Coker out into the gutter, where he lay sprawled in a heap of paper and other market refuse.

"Yoooooowooooogh!"

That moaning sound came from the prostrate Owl as he lay motionless in the middle of the road, with the motor-cycle beside him.

His head was cut, and he was smothered with dust. His leg hurt him, too. But Billy Bunter was quite able to rise if he wished. But he did not wish. He remained stretched in the roadway, making no movement, but moaning dismally.

"Groooogh! What's the matter, Bunter? Are you hurt?" gasped Coker, struggling to his feet and going over to the prostrate Owl.

"Yoooo-hooooogh! I'm dying! Help! Groooogh!" groaned Bunter.

A startled crowd gathered round.

Billy Bunter groaned away in a heart-rending manner. His sounds of anguish were really awful to listen to.

"The poor lad must be very seriously hurt!" exclaimed an old gentleman, bending over Billy Bunter and holding a handkerchief to the wound in his head. "Will somebody fetch the ambulance?"

Willing hands dragged the village ambulance from its shed.

Coker blinked down at Billy Bunter in dismay.

"It was your own fault, Bunter!" he gasped. "You barged across my path without warning. I couldn't help knocking you down."

"Ow! I forgive you, Coker!" moaned Billy Bunter, rolling his eyes. "I—I know that I'm going to die, and I don't bear any malice. I've had no proper food for days, and I'm sinking fast. Groooooogh! The chaps at Greyfriars will be sorry now that I'm laid at death's door!"

"Poor, poor boy!" said a kindly-faced lady in the crowd. "He must be suffering terrible agonies! Be very careful how you move him!"

Billy Bunter was lifted—it took three men to do it—and laid on a stretcher. This was then laid gently on the ambulance, and, with P.-c. Tozer marching along in front, it was dragged and pushed by the eager villagers to the Cottage Hospital near Courtfield Heath.

Billy Bunter chuckled softly to himself as he lay on the stretcher. His head ached a trifle, and his leg still hurt, but otherwise the worst he had sustained from the accident was just a shaking.

But the wily Owl looked upon the accident as a stroke of good fortune for him.

He would make things out to be as bad as he possibly could. They would be bound to keep him at the hospital, and the Courtfield Cottage Hospital was celebrated for the comforts and good food it gave its patients.

Even hospital fare was not to be sneezed at in such a time of famine as Billy Bunter had fallen upon. And perhaps the Head would take compassion on him and take him back to Greyfriars. On the whole, Billy Bunter felt very much obliged to Coker for running him down.

He lay limply on the stretcher, moaning in his most pathetic tones.

Arriving at the hospital, the cut on his head was bathed and bandaged up, and his "injured" leg rubbed with liniment and also bandaged up.

Billy Bunter could be a good actor when he liked, and on this occasion all his ability in the art of masquerade came to the fore.

"The poor boy is utterly exhausted and unable to move," said one of the nurses.

"Groooooogh! I'm sure I shall die!" moaned Billy Bunter. "Tell them I forgive all! I have had to tramp the streets, starving and homeless, and have got weak and ill. Ooogh! But never mind. It will soon be over. I—I forgive them!"

"He had better be put to bed," said the sister of the hospital. "The poor lad will receive every care and nourishment here. I will see about getting him a meal; it will help to build up his strength."

"Oh, good!" murmured the wily Owl under his breath.

He received nothing but the best of care and gentle treatment at the hospital. The doctor in charge and the nurses were completely deceived by Bunter. The manner in which he wolfed the meal provided him certainly seemed to bear out his statement that he was on the last verge of starvation, and a chicken and a delicious custard were cooked especially for him.

Billy Bunter lay in bed, in the small, spotlessly clean hospital ward, chuckling when he was not moaning. He had found sanctuary at last. And he meant to make the best of it!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Return of the Outcast!

HORACE COCKER limped in through the gates of Greyfriars, wheeling his motor-cycle, the front wheel and handlebars of which had sustained some damage.

His face was smothered with dust, as was the rest of his person. His jacket was ripped up the back, and there was a large tear in the knee of his right trouser-leg.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, catching sight of Coker, as he and Harry Wharton, Nugent, Inky, Squiff, and Peter Todd came out of the tuckshop. "Ye gods and little fishes! It looks as though Coker has had an accident!"

"What happened, Coker?" inquired Squiff when Coker crawled up. "Have you been running into brick walls?"

"Or chasing cats up lamp-posts?" said Peter Todd.

"Or performing Tom Mix stunts over the Shoulder on your old grid-iron?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker blinked.

"Yow! Yowp! This isn't a laughing matter, you cheeky Remove rotters!" he growled. "I've just run Bunter over in the High Street, and he's been taken to hospital."

"Great Scott!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked serious at once.

A number of other fellows rushed up to see what was the matter with Coker. They all gasped when they heard Coker's account of the accident.

"So Bunter's in the Cottage Hospital now—badly injured!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Oh, my hat! Poor little beggar! He's been properly in the wars lately!"

Coker met the Head on the stairs, and had to stop and explain matters.

Dr. Locke was horrified.

He hurried to the telephone in his study, and rang up the hospital.

"Master Bunter is still very weak and ill, and is inclined to be delirious at times," the doctor told him. "He seems to have suffered considerably. I have every hope that he will progress favourably, however, once his hunger has been appeased. He seems to be ravenous, and has done nothing but eat since being admitted."

The Head hung up the receiver, frowning.

"The boy is evidently shamming," he muttered. "Bunter is a very crafty youth, and he seems to be well enough to eat. I have no doubt that he is pretending to be worse than what he really is, and, therefore, I will not allow the matter to worry me, unless I receive more serious news concerning him."

Billy Bunter's accident became the sole topic of conversation at Greyfriars.

Was he really so badly injured, or was he only "putting it on"?

Coker, according to his own account, had only been travelling at fifteen miles an hour when he had run Bunter down, and he himself seemed to have caught the worst of it.

After tea that day Harry Wharton suggested to his chums that they should pay a visit to the hospital and see Bunter.


"Topping wheeze, Harry!" said Bob Cherry. "We shall soon be able to detect whether he's spoofing or not!"

The Famous Five took out their cycles and rode to the Cottage Hospital.

The sister admitted them.

"Master Bunter is a little better," she told them, as she led the way to the ward. "I am not sure whether I am

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doing right in allowing you to come in. These are not visiting hours, you know. The doctor is busy with a visitor, so that I am unable to ask him. But if you really desire to see Master Bunter you may."

The Famous Five walked into the tiny ward where Billy Bunter lay in bed.

The Owl saw them coming, and he greeted them with a series of deep, anguished moans.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Who is it?" murmured Billy Bunter in a faint voice, looking vacantly at Harry Wharton. "I don't know you, do I? Oh, yes! You're Peter Todd! I remember now."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked hard at Bunter.

"Groooogh! I sha'n't last long! My last hours are near—I can feel it! Tell the Head and Mr. Quelch and Wharton and the other rotters that I forgave them at the last!"

"Great pip!"

Billy Bunter gave a moan and rolled over in bed.

At that moment the ward door opened, and two gentleman came in, one dressed in doctor's white overalls.

"Ah, sister, this is Mr. Dollington, the gentleman who is endowing our hospital to the extent of many thousands of pounds," said the doctor, introducing his companion. "He is making a tour of inspection."

"Yes, I am most interested in this little hospital," said the visitor. "I believe it does a great deal of good, and is in need of support. I have more money than I shall ever spend on myself, and so am devoting it to the good of others. Ah, a very nice little ward, this! The cleanliness is most exemplary."

Harry Wharton & Co. saw Billy Bunter give a start and turn round in bed on hearing that voice.

The Owl raised himself on one elbow and blinked down the ward at the newcomer.

Then his fat visage underwent a startling change.

"Mum-my hat!" he gasped. "I—I say, you fellows, hold that rotter! It's Plummer, the chap who took the subscription money!"

Mr. Dollington, alias Plummer, gazed in amazement at the fat patient in the bed.

His face turned a livid white, and he seemed incapable of action.

Not so Billy Bunter.

Considering that he was terribly injured and lying at death's door, his sudden recovery, as witnessed by Harry Wharton & Co., the doctor, and the sister, was miraculous, to say the least of it.

With one wild leap Billy Bunter was out of bed, and, clad only in his hospital pyjamas, he made a rush at Plummer.

"I've got you now, you rotter! You've got to own up! I've been blamed for what you did, and— Oh crumbs! He's gone!"

The benevolent Mr. Plummer had gone—through the window!

He stood not upon the order of his going, but chose the nearest exit. The window happened to be open, and Mr. Plummer dived through it and disappeared.

"I say, you fellows, stop him!" yelled Billy Bunter desperately. "Don't let him escape!"

He dashed to the window and looked out.

Mr. Plummer was just clambering down from the ivy to the ground.

He reached the ground and looked up with a livid face.

At the same instant Billy Bunter did a very valiant thing.

He jumped clean on top of Mr. Plummer.

Whether it was by clever calculation or a sheer fluke is not known, but the Owl landed fair and square on that gentleman, and the two fell to the ground, Bunter uppermost.

"Oooooooo! Ahhhhhgh!"

That winded gurgle came from Mr. Plummer. The terrific weight of William George Bunter falling on top of him had almost flattened him. All the breath was knocked out of him for the time being.

"I say, you fellows, come on!" yelled the fat Removite. "I've got him!"

(Continued on page 28.)

Magnificent New Robin Hood Serial—Start It To-day, Chums!

SHERWOOD GOLD

By
FRANCIS
WARWICK.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Nottingham Fair!

NEVER shall I forget that day. It was May 1st, the year of our Lord 1192, and old Nottingham was merry-making. In the sunlit streets the citizens were flocking towards the fair-ground. I could hear their shouts and their laughter, could see the gaily-dressed people as they hurried by on pleasure bent—dim though they looked to me, very dim through the cobweb-hung doorway of Simon Rye, the goldsmith.

"Ay," I muttered, "if there were as many kind thoughts in thy withered old heart as there are cobwebs in thy house, Master Rye, I should not be toiling here in this rathole when every other 'prentice in Nottingham makes holiday!"

'Twas true enough. I—I alone, I vow, of all the 'prentices—was kept at my bench that May Day. In my hands I held the gold cup of my Lord Hugo of Charndene—the Black Wolf, as we called him. My master, the goldsmith, had given his order that it was to be finished that night, May Day or no May Day. So there I toiled, with the sunlight outside barely lighting the dismal room, with the laughter of the merry-makers echoing in my ears, mocking me. How I cursed old Simon Rye, and with him Hugo of Charndene! Dared I obey the impulse of my smouldering revolt, I would have dashed that golden cup to the floor there and then.

It was a voice from the doorway that caused me to look up once more from my work—the voice of Hal, the armourer's apprentice. Hal was gazing in at me with dismay, as well he might.

"What? At work to-day of all days?" cried he, peering in through the dim light. "What foolery is this? I' troth, but this is a sorry sight, Tom Hadleigh! Come, down with fools and out with the rest of us! We are off to the fair-ground, and there will be rare sport, I promise."

A number of other 'prentices were crowding round the doorway. Lucky it was that Simon Rye was not at home, or a stout stick would soon have been falling about their shoulders.

I put down the cup and crossed towards them. Though I was but sixteen years of age, I well filled that doorway. Big Tom they called me, for I was of very fair size—nearly head and shoulders taller than Hal and the rest of my com-

panions. My size it was that had won for me a sort of leadership amongst them, for none of my own age could stand against me, either with fists or quarterstaff. Though I have no mind to boast, that not being my way, I remember that I could hold my own against many a grown man at most trials of strength. It was but my broad shoulders and my muscles—no merit or skill of mine.

I laughed ruefully.

"I cannot come," I told them. "The old fox has ordered that the gold cup for the Black Wolf be finished to-night, and there is still much work to be done upon it." I clenched my big fists. "Rot them both, I say!"

There was a murmur among them, but none were surprised. They knew only too well how my master treated me. Simon Rye knew that I was powerless, for ever since Hugo of Charndene—the Black Wolf—had razed Hadleigh Priory to the ground, I had been friendless as far as anyone who had power to help me was concerned. For it was the good monks of Hadleigh who, finding me deserted in Sherwood Forest—by whom none knew—when little more than a babe, had given me shelter. It was in the cloisters of the priory that I had learnt both to read and to write, to paint on vellum, and to work in wood and metals, and many other gentle arts uncommon among my fellows. It was my fair skill with the metal-worker's tools that had caused the prior to apprentice me in due course to Simon Rye, since I was too hotheaded and wild ever to take monastic vows.

But now the priory was no more than a heap of ruins, where the wolves howled and the foxes barked. Hugo, Earl of Charndene, had found excuse to destroy and plunder it—and with the smoke that rose to the blackened skies that evil night went my last protection against the petty bullyings of Simon, the goldsmith.

I had already guessed his plan; he had used me, and now that my term of apprenticeship was nearing its end he wished to be rid of me. If he could goad me into breaking my indentures he could throw me out, without one obligation to me, without having to repay a mite of that which I had done for him by my years of all-but-unpaid work.

"Ay," I repeated bitterly, "rot him, and rot Earl Hugo, too!"

A warning exclamation broke from

Hal at my words, and in another moment I saw the reason.

A group of soldiers was drawing near from up the street, and on their crimson surcoats was the black wolf's head of Charndene. Had those men-at-arms heard my words there would have been trouble in plenty, for, though the morning was yet young, they were already riotous with wine.

They came on, swaggering down the street, a dark blot on the gay scene. The merry-makers gave them wide room in which to pass, and eyes darkened. All hated the sign of the black wolf's head, with its message of tyranny and oppression. For ever since Richard Lion-Heart, the King, had left England on the Third Crusade, and his brother John held power in his place, the Norman barons had grown more lawless and oppressive day by day. Hugo of Charndene was worse than any. He and his vassal barons robbed and plundered where they would, and Nottingham was one of the few towns of his earldom that was large enough to be safe from his greedy, murderous hands.

The men-at-arms reeled by, shouting and singing. It was as though a cloud had passed across the sun. But as they vanished down the street the sun returned—the laughter of the merry-makers broke out afresh as they made their way on towards the fair-ground.

Two swarthy men—from the south, evidently, as their speech indicated—went by, leading a great brown bear on an iron chain. At the corner, by the armourer's shop, a pedlar sold ribbons and sweet things. A contortionist twisted his limbs not far away; a couple of mountebanks made fine fun at the other side of the street. And at sight of it all a great flame of revolt burnt suddenly within me.

I would defy Simon Rye! No longer should his mean tyrannies oppress me, stand 'twixt me and my rightful holiday. I threw back the long golden hair from my forehead in a sudden defiant lifting of my head. My hands clenched, and my eyes gleamed, I'll warrant, as I cried:

"To the rats with him! He has no right to imprison me here when all Nottingham is merry-making! Let him do his worst, I'm coming with you!"

I was ever reckless and hot-blooded. I threw down my leather apron where I stood, stepped out into the sunlit street, and slammed the door behind me with

a crash that caused many to start and turn their heads. The warm breeze played pleasantly upon my face after the stuffy air that had been mine to breathe till then that morning. I would show that I was no cowed dog!

And so, with shouting and laughter, our hearts high and ripe for any fun, that band of Nottingham 'prentices, myself amongst them, went swinging arm-in-arm down the narrow, cobbled street towards the fair-ground.

All was gaiety and excitement. We plunged straightway into the thick of it, among the jostling crowds, the men-at-arms and archers, the tumblers and the stiff-walkers and the contortionists. We had little enough money amongst us, but we raised sufficient to buy rare good pies from a hunchback near the booths. We ate them at a booth where fire-eaters and sword-swallowers made good show; and then at last we found ourselves at a wooden stage where a man with the chest of a bull and a mighty black beard challenged all-comers to fight with the quarterstaff.

Hubert of Stamford he called himself—a great big fellow with muscles like knotted rope. He stood on the boards with a vast grin on his face, while a showman, clad all in scarlet to draw the crowd, cried that a purse of gold pieces was offered to any that could overcome Hubert of Stamford, champion of that city, with the quarterstaff.

"Come, come!" cried he in scarlet. "Is there not one amongst you who dares try his skill? A purse of gold—see it here!—to him who first overcomes Hubert of Stamford. You archers, now, i' faith, is there not one amongst you who means to show what Nottingham can breed? Men of brawn, I'll warrant—perhaps better, stab me—than any in Stamford!"

The group of archers to which he pointed grinned. Then, after some hesitation, one of them made a move—a broad fellow with crisp brown hair curling from beneath his cap of steel. A roar of approval went up then; and, with a sheepish grin, the man was pushed forward by his fellows. He tossed his cap to a comrade and climbed up upon the boards.

A stout six-foot staff was thrust into his hands. He spat upon his palms and turned his head to answer the chaffing of his friends. Then he took his stand, his jaw forward; and we all grew quieter to watch the sport.

And poor sport it was! The archer, though big as blackbeard, had but little skill. Hubert of Stamford played with the man, grinning all over his ugly face, till at last he tired of the game, and sent the archer down with a crack on the skull that would have felled an ox.

He sat up, looking mighty stupid, and rubbed his dizzy head. A great roar of laughter from us all did little to restore his good-humour. His comrades seized him, shouting and laughing, and carried him away upon their shoulders. Again the showman in scarlet came forward and held high the bait—that little purse of gold.

"'Twas more like sheep-killing than a bout with the quarterstaff!" chuckled Hal to me.

"Ay," I laughed. "Faith, if I could not fare better myself against blackbeard there, I would never hold the six-foot staff in my hands again!"

I spoke lightly enough. Nevertheless, I claim that it was no idle boasting, for the Prior's men-at-arms at Hadleigh had taught me the sport, and so by now I was no mean hand with the quarterstaff. Besides, my practiced eye had seen that this Hubert of Stamford, though possessed of great strength, was but of

moderate skill. Though I did not believe that I should have a dog's chance against such a giant, I knew that my nimble young strength and lightness of foot would serve in better stead than the archer's brawn.

But one of the archers overheard my words, and a sneer twisted his lips.

"Listen to this young boaster!" cried he. "Why not prove thy words, stripping, if th' art so sure of thy strength?"

I flushed. There had been no intent of boasting in my careless words, and my hot temper flamed out.

"'Tis skill, not strength, that is needed against yon bearded bull!" I cried. "If thy comrade had more brain than brawn he would have provided less sorry sport for us!"

Those about us turned to stare. The archer stood before me, hands on hips, legs thrust wide. His shining steel cap all but fell from his head as he threw it back in a mighty guffaw.

"Oho! The young gamecock still crows! If thou thyself had more of brain than brawn—for I own thou art a big-boned specimen, babe—thou wouldst talk less big when men are about. Thy mother's apron-strings is more thy place till that wagging tongue has learnt control!"

'Twas enough! With cheeks still aflame that my words had been taken so, with lips tight set as my teeth, I turned angrily towards the wooden stage. I heard the laughter of the onlookers turn to a sudden murmur of—well, I know not what; surprise, maybe.

And then I found myself standing there on the boards, with a quarterstaff in my hands, facing the grinning giant before me, with a purse of gold if I could overcome him, and the prospect of a broken head for my pains if I could not.

"And 'twill be the broken head that will fall to my lot!" I muttered to myself as I took my stand.

The Fight!

IT was a good staff that they gave me. I knew that at once as I swung and weighed it in my hands. A stout ash pole, six foot from tip to tip, it had always been a favourite weapon of mine, and somehow the balance of it in my hands now brought me a sudden confidence that I had little enough cause to feel.

Hubert of Stamford was surveying me with a grin of amusement on his hairy face. His little eyes gleamed unpleasantly; he was not too well pleased that such a youngster as I should venture to match myself against him. He stood there with one hand in his beard, the other gripping his staff, eyeing me up and down. Although I was mighty big for my age, as I have said, he stood nigh on a foot taller than I, and his reach was like an ape's.

"Oho, young wolf!" he said at last. "Does thy mother know that thou art all alone to-day? 'Twould be wise to go back to her, methinks. Wine is bad for children, and 'tis clear that already thou hast drunk overmuch. It has gone to thy head badly, young gamecock!"

I laughed.

"We breed as tough heads in Nottingham as they do in Stamford. See if thou canst crack mine before there is talk of children and wine!" I answered him boldly.

He laughed outright, his great beard shaking.

"'Tis the staff with which we make sport now, not with reeds!" said he. "Perchance thou art more used to rush than ash?"

There was a laugh at that from those who watched. I laughed with them, cool enough to all outward show.

"It would seem that thou art somewhat loth 'to begin, blackbeard!" I cried. "What with all this delay of talk,



I struck then as I had seldom struck before. All my young strength was behind the blow that went whistling down upon Blackbeard's unguarded head.
(See Page 24.)

art sure that thou wouldst not sooner forgo the purse without the fight?"

His eyes darkened, for the laugh was against him then. And, without more ado, we began.

He came at me like the bull he was. But his first blow fell on air, for I slipped aside before his clumsy onslaught, and 'twas my own staff that cracked first. It took him on the shoulder, and an oath of pain and surprise broke from him, for I had struck with no light hand.

He turned on me, whirling his staff with his great wrists; and the strength of his arms well-nigh wrenched the staff from my hands as it took the blow. I fell back before him, as needs I must. But then I slipped aside again, and a blow of mine rang out on his staff as he held it above his head in swift self-defence. Already he had begun to realise that I knew more than he had supposed of the sport.

I had no time to look about me, but vaguely, through the corner of my eyes, as the saying is, I knew those who watched were tense and quiet. At any rate, though I must assuredly fall soon, I was providing better sport for them than the archer had done.

Again I was driven back. He meant to corner me. Again I slipped aside, but a whack from blackbeard's staff got home on my forearm, so that I cried out. I saw his eyes gleam at that, and I struck back at him fiercely. It was a miracle rather than my skill, but my staff struck the knuckles of his right hand, and there came from him a roar as from a wounded ox.

The staff clattered from his hands, and a great shout swept through the crowd who watched us. Hubert of Stamford leapt back, his knuckles to his mouth, savage fury in his eyes.

I, too, stepped back. The monks of Hadleigh Priory had always taught me to be generous at such times as this. But I own that my breast was swelling.

"Pick up thy reed!" I cried. "What talk of children now?"

He came forward slowly, his eyes on mine. 'Twas clear enough that he did not trust me.

"Hasten!"

I was angered by his distrust. He sprang forward suddenly and snatched up the staff, leaping back on the instant for fear of a blow from me. And then we were at it again—crack, crack, crack!—staff on staff.

He had lost his temper now, and that helped me. I was powerless to stand before his onslaughts, but I could leap aside and strike home ere he had recovered himself, and his fury grew. Once more I broke the skin of his knuckles; and then, with a mighty sweep that I was too late to avoid, he sent the staff spinning from my hands halfway across the stage.

I leaped back, and he came after me. 'Twas clear that he meant to give no quarter such as I had given him. I could hear the shouts of the crowd as he rushed upon me.

If I had been a tithe less nimble I should never have escaped him then. But I ducked, and threw myself sideways as I did so, and I heard the hiss of air as he missed my head by a knife-breadth. I twisted from him, and managed somehow to slip behind his back. But he was still between me and my own weapon, which still rolled over and over along the boards.

He turned, his beard waving over his great chest, his little eyes gleaming savage with triumph. With a quick back-twist of his wrist he hurled his staff forward and lunged. But again I was too quick for his heavy attack. He all

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but overbalanced as his blow fell on empty air, and I seized my chance.

I was past him in an instant—had snatched up my staff before he could turn again. His eyes burnt like coals of hate when he found me armed again.

He threw caution to the winds. As he leapt forward, with a single bound, his staff raised high for one sweeping, murderous blow, he left his head open and undefended. He meant to strike me down and end it—to crush my very skull; I could see it in those eyes.

For a moment I quailed before him. If his staff should reach its mark—And then I shook the cowardly fear from me.

I struck. I struck then as I had seldom struck before. All my young strength was behind the blow that went whistling down upon his unguarded head. Even as I struck I had to leap aside as his own staff sawed the air, skinning my arm from shoulder to elbow beneath the rough cloth. But I felt no pain then. I had thought for one thing only.

Blackbeard was staggering back, his knees tottering beneath him.

My blow had reached its mark. The staff had cracked on his unprotected head. Like a great beast that falls to the shaft of the hunter, he dropped to his knees, sagging slowly sideways.

I stood there as in a dream, staring down at him, lying motionless there at my feet, where he had crashed to the boards. His eyes were closed. Stunned he was, though for a moment the feat gripped my heart that he was dead.

I heard a rush of feet behind me. And then, still as though in a dream, I was swaying high on the shoulders of Hal and the other 'prentices. They shouted and sang as though mad, while in my hand I found that I was grasping a small leather bag, from which came the clink of gold.

And then a voice broke in upon my dream—a harsh, high-pitched voice, a voice that I knew only too well:

"So, young whelp! Is this how you work upon the gold eap of my Lord Hugo of Charndene?"

The voice of my master, Simon Rye, the goldsmith!

The Open Road!

THE sun was setting, touching my left cheek with its crimson glow as I trudged doggedly onward down that long, long road that leads from Nottingham, through Sherwood Forest, to the North.

The roofs of the town were long lost to sight. On either side of the road great arched limbs of oak and ash and thorn rose darkly to the gathering dusk. Mighty beeches and elms, with the cool, hawthorn-scented depths of the forest glimpsed between them, flanked the road like buttressed walls.

'Twas Sherwood Forest.

I came to a standstill, my eyes gleaming as I drew in the soft air of the woodlands. In the forest I could already hear the stealthy movement of the little living things that come out at twilight. Overhead an early bat fluttered by. I was there alone in the heart of Sherwood—free!

"I'm glad—glad!" I muttered.

For it had happened as I had foreseen. Simon Rye had found excuse at last, and be sure that he had seized his chance.

He had cast me out. I had broken my indentures, and he could. I had shaken the dust of the goldsmith's shop from my feet in hot anger, but an anger not unmixed with keen joy, if that be possible. More than one kind offer of

assistance had come to me, but I had refused them all to be free. And now I was out on the open road, with nothing but my clothes and the gold pieces, but five in all, that I had won from Hubert of Stamford. At my belt hung a dagger in a simple sheath, a present from the friendly armourer. That was all. But the broad bosom of the countryside lay before me, mine in which to wander whither I pleased.

And now the sun was setting, and I was here in the heart of Sherwood Forest. I looked around me at the darkening trees, and no wonder my eyes were shining.

For 'twas here in Sherwood that there dwelt that strange, gallant figure that we of Nottingham and all that countryside had learned to wonder at—ay, and to love. Robin Hood and his band of outlaws, that merry brotherhood of the Lincoln Green.

What one of us 'prentices had not dreamed of coming, some day, face to face with that champion of the English cause? He alone, at the head of his hundred men, could still fight against the oppression of the Norman barons. Earl Hugo of Charndene, the Black Wolf, had set a great price upon his head; but Robin Hood and his reckless band, skilled archer every one, were so formidable a company that four hundred others durst not attack them. They knew the forest trails better than the deer themselves, and Hugo's soldiers were helpless in Sherwood against the men who could lie hidden as the field-mice, and could send a shower of arrows hissing about their ears before the clumsy attackers dreamed even of their presence.

A thousand tales were told of Robin Hood. Many said that his real name was Robert Fitzooth, and that he was the rightful heir to the Earldom of Huntingdon. Be that as it may, his wondrous courage, his skill with the six-foot bow, his way of taking from the rich oppressor to give to the poor and down-trodden—all this had made him the idol of us all. We knew, too, of Little John, his giant second-in-command, of the fat, rollicking Friar Tuck, and of Will Scarlet, too, and of Alan-a-dale, the gleeman. No wonder the blood thrilled within me at the thought that even now I might be within a mile of them all.

But there was of a certainty no sign of any man, outlaw or wayfarer, just then. I had the road to myself but for a fox that flashed from tree to tree not far away—a shadow-streak. Somewhere in the forest deeps a wolf howled, and as the mournful sound died away I realised suddenly how utterly alone I was, there in the deepening twilight, hemmed in by those mighty trees.

I moved slowly on, but somehow my hand was at the hilt of the dagger in my belt. I looked about me as I went, for 'twas clear that I must soon find some spot among the trees in which to shelter for the night. And then suddenly I came to a halt, listening.

What had I heard? It was as though stealthy footsteps had been stealing after me, out of sight among the trees, level with the road. But though I strained my ears, all was silent now. I went on again, alert for any sound, and my fingers still played with the hilt of my knife.

I could feel the little purse of gold pieces beneath my rough brown jerkin. 'Twas little enough that was in it, but 'twas sufficient to make me worth the while of any wayside robber who should chance to learn of its existence. But then, I told myself, no one could know.

And then a thought struck me. Many a ruffian from the fair-ground must know,



A small man, slim as a woman, mounted high on a great brute of a piebald horse, came thundering through the avenue of trees. The four villains round me were on either side of him in a moment. I heard a little laugh from my unknown rescuer—his sword flickered, and almost before that laugh was finished two of my enemies were down. (See this page.)

If such an one had seen me set out upon the road and had followed?

'Twas an uncomfortable thought, wild though it might seem. But there in the twilight of the forest 'twas no idea to trifle with. I stopped again, and this time I knew I heard them—soft, stealthy footsteps that stopped but a moment after mine.

I gazed into the trees. Nothing! Had my senses played me false? But I was not the lad to imagine such nervous fears. I strode firmly in among the trees forthwith, looking to right and left.

"Ho there!" I cried, and my voice was not so steady as I could have wished. "Whoever thou art, 'tis better to show thyself than skulk like a weasel through the trees—"

My words went unfinished.

A sudden movement sent me swinging round, and my hand flashed to the dagger it had relinquished for a moment. I had a brief vision of a low-browed knave who crouched before me like a wild beast about to spring, and then he was at me.

Another followed. It seemed as though the bushes around me were alive with the villains, though a moment later I saw that there were but five, though, i' faith, 'twas enough. My dagger leapt from its sheath, and the next instant, with my back to the broad bole of an oak, I was fighting for my life.

It was as I had guessed. They were ruffians from the fair-ground who had followed me. They had trailed me to this lonely spot to get my gold, and my life was of no account to such men as they. Two of them had knives, the other three were armed with stout cudgels. Though I fought grimly I breathed a silent prayer, for I believed that my last hour had come.

And come it would had not a startling, wondrous thing happened even as I struck down the first man, only to have my knife sent flying by a cudgel blow from another.

The Little Horseman!

MY knife, as I say, went flying from my hand. I was helpless then. At my feet lay groaning the man I had struck down, his hand to his side; but the other four were closing around me. To my back was the oak. All hope of escape was cut off as securely as though they had me in the meshes of a seaman's net.

The foremost ruffian chuckled with a savage glee to see me thus disarmed, their helpless prey. The four human wolves closed in upon me, grinning right devilishly. Again a silent prayer was breathed through my dry lips, but I held myself erect. If I needs must die I would die without showing the terror that had gripped my heart with its icy fingers.

And 'twas then he came to me—the little horseman.

A sudden sound came drumming through the trees, and the man with the knife who crouched before me turned his ugly head in startled fear. The other three turned, too, while from my dry lips there broke a cry of joy, such as I had not thought I had breath to utter.

For down the avenue of trees from the road there came a galloping horseman, and the thundering of those hoofs was like music to my ears.

I can see him still, in my mind's eye, as I saw him that day there in the twilight of Sherwood. A small man, slim as a woman, mounted high on a great brute of a piebald horse. He was lean-

ing forward and sideways in the saddle, his mouth set grim and firm, but his eyes laughing with the sheer joy of fighting. In his right hand, a hand white and delicate, there gleamed the silver streak of his deadly sword. He was hatless, and his reddish-brown hair streamed back from his forehead as his horse plunged on like a nightmare steed, its eyeballs wide and bloodshot, its mighty hoofs sawing the air.

He was on them already, and the great horse reared on its huge black and white haunches as the bit dragged back. The four villains round me were on either side of him in a moment, their first surprise and fear over now that they saw there was but one man with which to deal, and he so small. I heard a little laugh from the man on the piebald horse. His sword flickered. 'Twas like summer lightning. Almost before that laugh was finished two of my enemies were down.

It was over in a moment, and then the other two turned and raced away through the trees. A laugh broke from me then—half hysterical it was—to see them run so with that strange horseman thundering upon their heels. But they plunged into the thickest undergrowth, where he could not follow, and he waved his sword above his head mockingly as he called after them something I could not hear.

He trotted back to where I stood by the fallen three. When he leapt lightly down from the sweating beast, boy though I was, I found that the man was only to my eyes in height.

"Pardon this unwarrantable interference," said he gravely, setting upon his head rakishly a black cap, in which was stuck an eagle's feather. "I know not the wrongs nor the rights of this quarrel, lad, but five to one is more than I could

ever abide, though methinks 'twas but four to one when I arrived. Happening to see thy need as I passed along the road, I took the liberty of joining this small affair."

His golden eyes danced into mine. Though his hands were soft and white his face and neck were very brown. He was clad simply enough in a somewhat tattered white shirt, but round his waist was a broad leather belt, of which the studs were silver. As at last I found words to stammer out my thanks he laughed his gay laugh.

"Nay, nay; 'twas a little thing. I troth. Hereward and I"—and he patted the tangled mane of the great piebald horse that panted at his side—"Hereward and I take keen delight in a passage of arms, however slight. But how com'st thou to be here in the forest at such an hour? Darkness is on us apace. 'Tis far enough from Nottingham, if that is thy goal."

"'Twas from Nottingham I came, sir," I told him. And, without more ado, I gave my brief story. He listened with his head on one side, those fascinating eyes, sharp as any eagle's, biting deep into mine.

"Ah!" said he quietly, when I had finished. "It would seem then, Tom Hadleigh, that thou and I are brothers of the open road. My name is Lantern, and Hereward and I also have nothing in this world, save that in which we stand. Vagrants, wandering gentlemen—call us what you will."

He turned to the three ruffians on the grass, and bent over each in turn.

"Two are dead," said he coolly. "The third—he who felt thy dagger 'twixt his ribs—is but in a faint. If we pass on our way his friends will doubtless return for his ugly carcase."

Carefully he cleaned his sword upon the grass and returned it to his side. I had picked up my dagger, and, as in a dream, I followed him as he turned to lead the way towards the road. He seemed strangely small, a wisp of a man, beside the noble horse that he called Hereward. I saw that his legs were slightly bowed by the saddle, but his tattered leathern shoes trod the greensward with the light grace of a buck in spring. He whistled a careless tune as he walked, and one hand was upreached to grasp a shaggy knot of hair on the proudly arched neck of the piebald stallion.

And so it came about that an hour later we three—Lantern and Hereward and I—rested in a glade of Sherwood Forest far from the road, with a grand fire leaping between us, and the stars a-twinkle through the mighty, over-arching limbs of the forest giants above our heads.

Lantern had some slices of venison, and little we cared that they were none too fresh. We roasted the meat on pointed sticks, and I watched him with the firelight dancing on his face and in his eyes. The strange fascination of Lantern, that many a man has felt, was upon me already like a spell.

Hereward was nibbling the grass hard by. As we ate Lantern told me many things, though nothing further of himself. He knew Sherwood Forest as a monk knows his cell, and, wonder of wonders for me, he had seen and spoken with Robin Hood himself.

"Ay, once I all but joined his gallant band!" he told me. His voice was deep and mellow as a bell. "But Hereward and I can accept leadership from no man,

not even Robin himself. Though if we needs must follow anyone, 'twould be Robin Hood."

"What is he like?" I cried. Lantern hesitated, his head on one side, thinking. Then he said:

"He is like a lance in rest. He is like a noble stag that proudly defies the hunters. His is the face of a king, born to command. He wears a little pointed golden beard. He— But, there, how can any man describe Robin Hood?"

"Would that I, too, might see him!" I said, with a sigh of envy.

Lantern laughed. "You shall some day!" cried he. "If you stay with Lantern you shall. Ay, Tom, I mean it! How wouldst like to join forces with Hereward and me?"

I gasped. But something in my eyes must have told him, for he chuckled right merrily.

"Then 'tis settled. We are comrades together of the open road. Ours is the freedom of the birds, lad. If I can name 'lad' one who's stature puts mine to shame," he added, with twinkling eyes.

I sprang to my feet, speechless still, and our hands gripped. To this day I cannot describe it—the rare quality within him. But I know that I would even then have died willingly for Lantern.

The great shadows leapt around the glade as we heaped fresh wood upon our fire. There was something wild and gay about us both that night, and before long Lantern pulled from his shirt a slender reed, upon which he began to play a merry tune. He was but an indifferent player, I must confess, but in spite of that the notes thrilled me.

Our fire flamed higher, and the heat was such that I opened my jerkin. My eyes were on the embers as I listened to the wild notes of his pipe, and thought of many things. How little I had dreamed that morning of all that this strange day was to bring forth.

Suddenly the music stopped. I looked

up, to find Lantern's eyes fixed upon my throat where the cloth was turned back.

"'Tis a mighty queer talisman around thy neck, Tom," said he.

My fingers went to it. Suspended there by a leather plait it was, and I always wore it, an odd-shaped fragment of polished horn, thin as a knife-blade. 'Twas as though it had been shaped to a rough circle once, but only the part remained, it having been fractured across before it was found. It had been lying near me, I had been told, when the monks discovered me as a babe deserted in Sherwood. On it were scratched a few words, meaningless now that half were missing.

Over them had I puzzled many a time and oft: "The cave betwixt . . . a split oak . . . follow the water . . ." And, finally, in larger letters than the rest, the word "Gold." That was all. I knew not what it meant.

I bent my neck and slipped it off, handing the thing to him. Lantern held it in his palm, leaning towards the firelight to obtain a better sight of it.

"Strange!" he muttered.

I told him how I had come by it. He nodded silently. Everything around was very still, but for the low hiss of a green twig in the fire and the sound of the great piebald horse near us as it cropped the grass.

And then a startled cry broke from his lips, and in a moment I was on my feet. Out of the darkness of the trees an arrow had come streaking, and now stood quivering in the short grass within a hair's-breadth of Lantern.

He seemed no whit perturbed, nor yet surprised. But he was on his feet with his sword glistening in the firelight ere I could draw breath.

And then they came bursting from the darkness of the trees, rushing swift upon us, a dozen or more fierce-visaged men, a gleam with steel, all wearing the hated crimson surcoat of Hugo of Charndene, the Black Wolf!

Why we were being thus attacked I could not dream. I knew only that in a moment the lonely silence was no more, that the glade was now echoing to the clash of weapons as I drew my dagger and Lantern's nimble sword leapt and flickered.

The Black Wolf!

T WAS ebon black in that forest glade, but the fire gave us the light by which we fought.

The clash of steel echoed 'midst the trees. I could see the firelight running like a ribbon along Lantern's sword as he thrust and parried with a great rogue in a brigandine of chain-mail, with a broken nose, who struck savagely at Lantern with a mighty battleaxe.

I saw this giant crash to earth as Lantern's sword found his throat, saw a second of Hugo's men fall victim to my friend's darting blade. Never was there such a swordsman as Lantern! And then I was surrounded in my turn by men in crimson surcoats, and I had no more time to watch and wonder at him.

Armed as I was with a dagger only, I was all but helpless. But I am big built, as I have said, and I kept them at bay for a little while, drawing a howl from one that was mighty good to hear as I opened his wrist to the bone. But then, as I struck at another, a mace crashed upon my forehead, and I fell

EARL HUGO—



—Better known as

THE BLACK WOLF!

with a groan across the body of a man-at-arms whom Lantern had slain.

I was unconscious thus for many minutes, and when I opened my aching eyes, and the mists in my brain had cleared a little, I found that my arms were lashed behind me.

But I gave a quick cry to see that Lantern stood there in the ruddy glow of the fire—a ring of dead and wounded men around him, 'tis true, the victims of his wondrous skill with the sword—but with his shoulder wounded, and his wrists, like mine, lashed behind him.

He held his head high, mighty proud he looked, and his eyes flashed fire as he gazed upon that ruffian crew. 'Twas clear that he despised them for the evil dogs they were, and they knew it, and I believe they still feared him, prisoner though he was.

"'Tis black magic!" muttered a cross-bowman who stood near me. "Never have I clapped these eyes on such a swordsman! Seven men fell before him—and he so small! Ay, 'tis witchcraft!"

"Be that as it may, our Lord Hugo shall deal with him!" snarled the other, and they moved away to speak with one who seemed to be their captain.

My eyes met Lantern's as I lay upon the ground, and the little smile he gave me sent a pang through my heart, 'twas so sad and full of bitterness.

"So this is what comes of joining forces with Lantern!" said he softly. "A bad hour for you, Tom, that we gripped hands across this fire! This murderous brood of Hugo, the Black Wolf, has me at last! They have tried before, Tom, for the Black Wolf hates me right well. You see, lad, once I did slay a squire of Hugo's, and—though the rascal struck the first blow, and I killed him but in self-defence—Hugo means to avenge his rogue with my blood."

The men-at-arms turned towards us again.

"What of the boy?" I heard from one. "Earl Hugo said naught of a boy."

"Nay; but bring him, too, for he is this swordsman's companion, and he fought us like a wild-cat—'twill be many a day before I can hold sword again!" growled he whose wrist I had slashed.

And so I, too, was marched away into the forest when they dragged Lantern away, leading his great horse Hereward with them.

I knew not where they were taking us, and with two of the villains guarding each of us I had no further chance of speech with Lantern. 'Twas so dark 'neath the trees that I could not even see my friend. But I could hear his guards' feet as they crashed through the undergrowth, and every now and then a patch of moonlight shone down into the glades through which we passed, and I would see a bright gleam of steel from some sword or cap or brigandine.

We halted later, and camped for the night in a sheltered dell, well hidden 'midst thick bushes. Sentinels were posted, and I think 'twas Robin Hood they feared—Robin Hood and his merry men, who gave no ruth to men wearing the crimson surcoat embroidered with the black wolf's head of Charndene.

"Would that Robin Hood came this way to-night!" I muttered, as I lay there in the darkness.

And then my heart leapt to hear Lantern's voice near me. I could not see him, but it seemed that we had been left together in a sort of hollow in the side of the dell—'twas scarce a cave—with the opening guarded by two pikemen. I crawled nearer him, and then I could make out his form dimly in the darkness.



They came rushing upon us from the darkness of the trees—a dozen or more fierce-visaged men, a gleam with steel, all wearing the hated crimson surcoat of Hugo of Charndene—the Black Wolf. (See page 26.)

"Ay; would that Robin Hood chanced this way!" echoed Lantern. "With Little John, the giant, and that jolly rogue Tuck, the Friar, and all the rest of them! Well, they are taking us to Hugo's castle, Tom, and we cannot reach there till nigh sunset to-morrow, so perchance we may yet be rescued by the merry men in Lincoln green!"

But that was not to be, and an hour before sunset of the next day we had left the forest, and were being led by our captors up a long, sloping hill road, boulder-strewn and set with bushes upon either side, to the castle above.

'Twas vastly fine in the light of the setting sun, was the castle of Charndene, for all its evil name. Its mighty walls rose grim to the purpling sky, with the bar-bican frowning down upon us, and the four great towers, and a flaming crimson banner with the black wolf's head upon it drifting slow in the wind high above all.

Ay; vastly fine! And yet I shuddered as I looked upon the Black Wolf's castle, and my flesh grew strangely chill.

A pikeman, on watch from the bar-bican, saw us from afar, and a score or more men-at-arms came across the draw-bridge to meet us, and a mighty shout went up when 'twas found that Lantern was the prisoner.

Our weary feet rang hollow on the drawbridge as we two, with Hereward led behind, were hurried roughly across the moat and within those frowning walls in the light of the dying sun.

Through the great archway across the drawbridge we passed, as into the mouth of some great evil beast, with the iron

fangs of the raised portcullis for its bared teeth. Again I shuddered, and I glanced at Lantern. But he, as always, held his head high and proud, and stepped firm and vigorous between the ruffians that held him. Despite the smallness of his wiry frame, his was the heart of a lion—as was that of Richard, the King.

We soon found ourselves in the courtyard, swarming with excited men-at-arms, bowmen, and cross-bowmen. The captain of the guard had sent in hot haste to Hugo, and as we were ordered harshly to halt, my eyes fell upon one who came striding through a doorway opposite. And at sight of him I caught my breath.

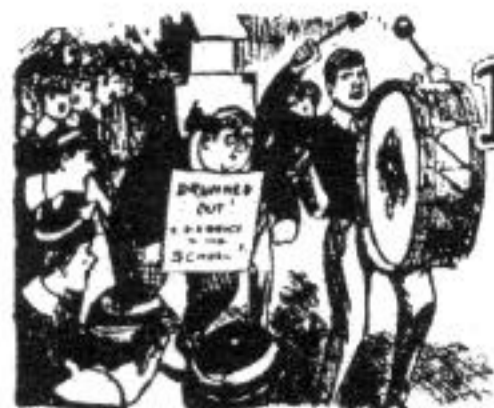
Though I had never seen him, I knew at once who it was.

A tall, gaunt man, with evil eyes and lips that seemed set ever in a snarl. His neck was thrust forward from his mailed chest, a neck strong and sinewy, and his long black hair was matted and lustreless. His whole face was lean and wolfish, so that no other name would have fitted the hated Black Wolf, whose evil deeds had struck terror into the hearts of all within his vast demesne—ay; and further! For I have heard it said of Hugo of Charndene that his was the blackest heart in all England, and well can I believe it.

Ay, 'twas the Black Wolf himself!

(Few who fall into the merciless hands of Hugo of Charndene live to tell the tale. Will Tom and his gallant friend, Lantern, prove exceptions? See next Monday's stirring instalment of this grand story, boys!)

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Drummed of Our Greyfriars!

(Continued from
page 21.)

He commenced to thump vigorously at Mr. Plummer, and that gentleman, having recovered his second wind, fought bravely.

Billy Bunter did his best, but Mr. Plummer would undoubtedly have got away had not Harry Wharton & Co. arrived promptly on the scene and collared him.

"That rotter is a fraud and an impostor!" shrilled Billy Bunter, pointing a fat, accusing forefinger at the wriggling Plummer. "He hasn't got any money at all, except what he's stolen and swindled people out of! He's the one who got me to start that collection."

"My only hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Then Bunter must have been telling us the truth, after all."

Plummer was searched, and papers found on him soon proved that he was an impostor.

Harry Wharton & Co. handed him over to P.-c. Tozer, who readily hauled him away to the Friardale police-station.

Billy Bunter dressed and returned to Greyfriars with the Famous Five. All pretence of being ill was gone now. Harry Wharton looked grimly at him.

"Well, you spoofing little blighter, you ought to thank your lucky stars that the truth has been found out!" he said. "We should have bowled you out in the hospital as sure as eggs."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"For utter artfulness, Bunter, you take the cake! But come on, the school will be no end excited to hear all this!"

Greyfriars was.

It seemed almost unreal. Billy Bunter had cleared his own name and returned to Greyfriars triumphant.

The school did not know the real facts until the morning however.

After call-over Dr. Locke explained matters to the assembled school.

Plummer had confessed everything, and told of the exact part that Billy Bunter had played in the bogus collection. This did not show Billy Bunter up in such a good light, and dark, condemning looks were cast at him from all sides.

"Bunter has suffered sufficiently for his misdeeds, so that the matter, so far as he is concerned, will drop," said Dr.

Locke in conclusion. "I think that he is more ignorant and thoughtless than wantonly wicked. In this case he was made a catspaw of by a man who specialises in bogus charities. Bunter has paid the price of his own roguery. I trust it will be a lesson, not only to Bunter, but to the whole school, that honesty is the best policy. As for the rascal Plummer, he heard that Bunter had left Greyfriars, and so thought the coast clear for him to return to this neighbourhood without being found out. His return to enact a fraud at the Cottage Hospital was fortunate for Bunter. The school will now dismiss."

Bunter took his old place in the Remove Form-room that morning, and directly lessons were over he made a bee-line for the tuckshop, where he had a fine feed all on his own with the money he had collected by organ-grinding in Friardale.

THE END

(Be sure and read next week's grand long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled, "The Schoolboys' Domestic!"—also have a shot at the simple competition. Those "Royal Enfield" Bicycles are really worth having!)

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