

OUR FIGHTING FLEET! GRAND FREE NAVAL PLATE—INSIDE

(Actual size of plate, 9½ inches by 6½ inches.)

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The Magnet 2^d

Library
of
Complete School Stories.

EVERY
MONDAY.



Free
plate
inside

"FIRE! FIRE!" YELLED BUNTER.

SMOKING THE FAT JUNIOR OUT OF HIS HIDING PLACE!

(A "moving" scene from this week's splendid 25,000 word school story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars—within.)

OUR FIGHTING FLEET!

THIS WEEK
H.M.S. HAWKINS.

By JACKSTAFF (THE WELL-KNOWN NAVAL WRITER).

WITH H.M. cruiser Hawkins there came into the Navy a new type of warship and a new ship name. During the war the British Admiralty decided to go "one better" than the enemy in the matter of fast, light cruisers, so that no matter how good the German craft might be we would have something able to beat them. Further than that, we required "greyhounds" to hunt down the commerce raiders that the enemy let loose to destroy our trading ships on the ocean highways. Some of these raiders, like the notorious *McGee*, had sunk many of the merchantmen that were bringing foodstuffs and other articles to the United Kingdom. One of the disadvantages of living in an island state such as ours, that does not produce enough food to supply the needs of the people who inhabit it, is that an enemy who gets control of the sea by means of commerce raiders would be able to starve us into submission by merely cutting off our supplies of imported food. Germany knew this and tried hard to accomplish it.

As part of the plan for defeating her efforts we laid down four special cruisers, of which the *Hawkins* was one. She was not commenced until 1917, and consequently, took no part in the war. Her function being bold and dashing attack, the Admiralty very aptly

named her after Sir John Hawkins, one of the most enterprising seamen of the Elizabethan era. She is the first warship to bear his name.

The *Hawkins* was finished soon after the Great War ended and was sent to the Far East, where she is doing duty as flagship of our China squadron. In one respect she recalls the vessels in which our Viking forefathers roamed the sea, for she is essentially a "long ship." From stem to stern the *Hawkins* measures 665 feet, and in width only 58 feet, so that she conforms closely to the old Viking design of "long and narrow"—the narrowness being a device for accelerating speed. Another

point of interest in the *Hawkins* is that she displaces only 9,750 tons. This brings her within the limits for new cruisers imposed by the Washington Agreement, and, as a consequence, all the new cruisers built throughout the world within the next few years will be more or less modelled upon her.

Packed into her long, slim hull is a huge mass of engines. These are of 60,000 horsepower, and drive geared turbines which can send the ship through the water at a speed of about 35 miles an hour. One peculiarity of the *Hawkins* is that although an oil fuel vessel four of her boilers are fitted to burn coal, so that the ship may be able to keep going should she arrive at any distant part of the world where oil fuel is not obtainable. Her main armament consists of seven 7.5-inch guns. She has also a number of smaller ones, four of which are intended for use against aircraft, and six torpedo tubes. "Sister" ships to the *Hawkins* are the *Frobisher*, *Efingham*, and *Vindictive*—the latter was once an aircraft carrier. The *Raleigh*, which was wrecked off the Canadian coast two years ago, was similar to the *Hawkins*. Ships of her type are estimated to cost about one and three-quarter million pounds to build.

Next Week:
H.M.S. SPENCER.

NEXT MONDAY'S PROGRAMME!

PRESENTATION PLATE No. 4.

EVERY Magnetite will have another splendid Free Art Plate of our glorious Fighting Fleet to add to his collection with next Monday's issue of his favourite paper. No. 4 shows H.M.S. *Spencer*—Flotilla Leader—a vessel capable of speeding through the waves at forty miles an hour. This type of fast craft has recently been sent to the Red Sea to put a stop to the slave traders, and right well has it acquitted itself.

Next week's plate is a real masterpiece of photography. The lines of the ship, the big guns, etc., stand out exceptionally clear. Such a superb collection of Art Plates as our Grand Presentation Series will embrace has never been put within the reach of the public before. My loyal chums should make certain of collecting the complete set of twelve by placing a regular order for the "Magnet" at once. This is not idle "editorial" chin-wag, boys; it's a straight tip! Some of you will experience disappointment if you visit your newsagent on, say, a Saturday and expect a copy of the old "Magnet," with its gorgeous Free Plate, when that particular issue of your favourite paper was on sale the previous Monday.

As will be readily understood, your Editor cannot limit the sale of the paper only to those thousands of loyal chums who have stood by him in the past, and as a natural consequence there will be a host of new readers keen to "bag" these superb Free Gifts. That's all to the good, really. The THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 875.

new chum will wonder why on earth he has taken so long to discover the finest school story paper on the market. But I don't want my old pals to suffer. Everyone can be satisfied, however, if a regular order is placed with the newsagent, for he in turn will know exactly how many copies of the "Magnet" to order. Got the idea, chums?

"THE BUNKING OF BUNTER!"

And now for a few remarks about next Monday's story of Harry Wharton & Co. For the benefit of those unacquainted with the term "bunking," it means the "sack," the "bullet," or, to be more precise and proper, expulsion. Billy Bunter is still keen to receive the extreme schoolboy penalty rather than face a flogging. As you know, however, the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove is liable to sudden changes of mind. Thus, when he is "bunked" he has the unparalleled audacity, after a short interval of two or three days, to turn up at Greyfriars, prepared to "let the whole matter drop" and to be reinstated as a respectable member of Greyfriars once more. Another stipulation of Bunter's is that the "flogging" must be counted "off." After a series of nightmare adventures, Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch once again see William George Bunter "off the premises." But, like the proverbial bad ha'penny, he pops up once again. In short, he refuses to be sacked! How this latest and most amazing escapade of Bunter's turns out you will learn from reading

"THE BUNKING OF BUNTER!"

In addition to this rollicking school story there will be another long, complete footer story dealing further with

"THE TRIALS OF STORRYDENE VILLA!"

To all intents and purposes Nugent Beasley Ailen has shaken the dust of Storrydene from his bespattered feet. He has received the fright of his life. We see him bobbing up again, however, in new company, none other than a notorious band of "scallywags" rejoicing in the name of

"THE STARLIGHT BOYS!"

You'll be more than interested in next week's stirring story, chums, so don't on any account miss it!

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT.

Look out for next week's grand Supplement. It shows Harry Wharton & Co. well in form. These versatile journalists of the "Herald" deserve a laurel apiece. They can turn their fluent pens to any subject under the sun.

"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

Another reminder, boys, that this world-famous annual is still going great guns. If you have made up your minds to buy a copy—and you really should—there's no time like the present for ordering it. I understand from the publishers' report before me that the "H. A." looks like creating a record sale. The copies can't be turned out quick enough to meet the demand.

"MAGNETS" WANTED.

Good prices are offered for copies of the "Magnet," January-June, 1918, inclusive. Will any reader who has stocked his copies and is disposed to sell them communicate with the Editor, the "Magnet," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

LENIENCY UNAPPRECIATED! After due consideration of Bunter's latest grave misdemeanour, Dr. Locke decides to flog him instead of expelling him from Greyfriars. Most fellows would consider that real "sporty" of their headmaster. Not so Bunter, however. He can face the "sack" any day—there's no physical pain attached to that ordeal! But a flogging—Phew! The very thought sends a shiver down his spine.



The Vanished Ventriloquist!

A Magnificent New
Long Complete Story
of Harry Wharton & Co.
of Greyfriars, told by

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Tribulations of W. G. Bunter!

"Blow Milton!"

It was Billy Bunter who made that disrespectful remark concerning the great epic poet.

Poets, epic or otherwise, never interested Bunter very much. On the present occasion he was less interested than ever.

It was Saturday evening at Greyfriars.

"Sunday prep" was the order of the day in the Remove studies. In Study No. 7 in the Remove, Peter Todd had a volume of "Paradise Lost" propped open against the inkstand. A section of that great poem had to be "prepared" for the following morning.

In the Lower Fourth studies, the beauties of Milton were rather at a discount. Nobody really was enthusiastic on the subject. Even Lucifer, Son of the Morning, though considered rather a sportsman in his way, was looked upon as much too long-winded. Bunter's private opinion of the whole thing was that it was "bosh." And on this particular Saturday evening Bunter had far more important things than "bosh" to think about.

Bunter was up against it.

He had looked for trouble, and he had found it; and now he was wrapped in trouble and woe as in a garment.

So when Toddy suggested gently that he had better give his attention to prep, William George Bunter replied crossly that Milton could be "blowed."

Billy Bunter sat in the study armchair, with his fat hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his fat brow.

His little round eyes were mournful behind his big spectacles.

There was supper going on in Harry Wharton's study farther along the Remove passage. In other circumstances, Bunter would have been haunting the doorway of Study No. 1, hoping for an invitation to join up at the festive board; or, failing that, an opportunity of wedging into the study unbidden. Now he was not even thinking of supper.

When Bunter was not thinking about a meal of some kind, it was indubitable evidence that there was something very much amiss with Bunter.

"Better get your prep done, old man," said Peter Todd kindly. "No good getting Quelch's rag out, you know."

"Blow Quelch!"

"I'll help you with your Milton, if you like."

"Blow Milton!" growled Bunter.

He blinked mournfully at Peter Todd.

"I say, Peter, what do you think the Head will do?"

"Give it up, old man! I'm not a giddy thought-reader."

"You're an unsympathetic beast, Peter."

"Thanks!"

"How will you get on without me in the study, Peter, if I have to leave Greyfriars?"

Peter Todd glanced across at his fat study-mate. Bunter was apparently under the impression that his departure from the school would be a blow to Study No. 7.

This really was an extraordinary delusion.

"Oh, we'll manage to rub along, somehow, old fat man," said Peter. "Don't worry about me. I'll try to bear it."

"You'll miss me, Peter."

"Bound to, especially at meal-times," agreed Peter. "There will be enough grub to go round at last!"

"Beast!"

Peter Todd grinned.

"The fact is, Bunter, I don't believe the Head has any idea at all of kicking you out," he said. "He's just letting that simmer in your silly mind as a warning to you."

Bunter did not look comforted.

"But if I'm not sacked I'm going to be flogged!" he said.

"That's all right."

"Is it?" exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "I'd jolly well rather be sacked than flogged."

"Well, you won't have the choice," grinned Peter. "It's for the Head to decide. You really shouldn't ask for trouble, Bunter, if you don't like it when

it comes home to roost. You've been warned lots of times about playing your beastly ventriloquial tricks. I've kicked you for it myself—you know I have."

"Beast!"

"Now you've been playing tricks on a Sixth-Form prefect, and slanging him, and so on," said Peter. "I haven't much opinion of Sixth Form prefects myself, or of the Sixth generally; but from the Head's point of view they're the giddy Palladium of the school, as somebody says in some silly book or other. The Head's bound to come down heavy."

"The Head's a beast!"

"You'll get off with a flogging," said Peter encouragingly.

"Ow!"

"It's rather painful," said Peter, with a reminiscent wriggle. "I've been there myself. But you'll get over it."

"I won't be flogged!" howled Bunter.

"You jolly well will, if the Head says so!" chuckled Peter. "And it will do you good. If it makes you chuck up ventriloquism, it will be a jolly good thing."

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter detached himself from the armchair, and rolled to the door. Just as a prophet is without honour in his own country, so William George Bunter found little sympathy in his own study.

No doubt Peter knew him too well to sympathise with him very much.

"What about Milton?" called out Toddy, as Bunter rolled into the passage.

"Blow Milton!" repeated Bunter, for the third time. "Bless Milton! Bother Milton! Do you think I'm going to worry over that bosh now?"

Peter Todd shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his work. Bunter rolled along the Remove passage, in search of the sympathy that was denied him in Study No. 7.

He found Skinner and Snoop and Stott lounging in the passage. The three grinned at him.

"Hallo, you're looking joyful, Bunter," remarked Skinner. "Looking forward to to-morrow morning—what?"

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Bunter groaned.

"You'll know in the morning whether you're going to be sacked or only flogged," said Skinner. "Let's hope it will be the sack, old man. That will be a windfall for the whole Form, won't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snoop and Stott.

Bunter gave the humorous Skinner a reproachful blink, and rolled on. Harold Skinner was even less sympathetic than Toddy.

He arrived at the door of Study No. 1, which stood open. Prep was over in that study, and the Famous Five of the Remove had gathered there for supper. There were sausages and chips for supper, and a fragrant odour of the same floated out into the Remove passage. Five cheery faces were gathered round the table, and Bunter blinked into the study with a bitter blink. Harry Wharton & Co., evidently, were not worrying over his misfortunes. They could enjoy a supper of sosses and chips, though the shadow of the "sack" hung over the Owl of the Remove like the sword of Damocles.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry smiled round at Bunter. "Roll in, old man, and join up."

Bunter brightened a little.

He was hungry; he had had only two teas and one supper so far.

"Well, I'll join you, as you're so pressing," he said.

"Do!" said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "You're a fat rascal, Bunter, and you ought to be kicked. But you've got it in the neck, so we'll let bygones be bygones!"

"Oh, yes, rather!" assented Frank Nugent.

"Here's a chair, Bunter," said Johnny Bull, with unaccustomed geniality.

"The bygonefulness will be terrific, my esteemed rascally Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "You have very nearly caused me to be beaten flogfully by the esteemed and ludicrous Head, but the forgiveness is great in the ridiculous circumstances."

Bunter sat down.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Help yourself, Bunter."

Bunter helped himself, liberally. He was undoubtedly pleased by this hospitable reception in Study No. 1. At the same time, it alarmed him a little. It was because he was up against it that the Famous Five were so kind; and it looked as if they considered Bunter "booked."

"I say, you fellows, do you think the Head was joking?" asked Bunter, blinking round from face to face with his mouth full.

"Hardly," said Wharton.

"But I haven't done anything, you know," urged Bunter. "Just a little ventriloquism—"

"You made Walker of the Sixth believe that Inky was calling him all sorts of names, and very nearly got Inky a flogging for it," said Johnny Bull warmly. "Do you call that nothing?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"If the Head hadn't come down on you so heavy, you'd have bagged a ragging from this study," said Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific. But in the esteemed circumstances, the sympathy is great."

"It's pretty certain you'd only have to take a flogging, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove.

Bunter yelped.

"I'd rather be sacked."

"Oh, you're an ass!"

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"I don't care if I'm sacked, not very much, anyhow," said Bunter. "I've never had justice in this school. I'm not really understood at Greyfriars. At Eton or Harrow I should make my mark."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Eton or Harrow would be rather a come-down, after Greyfriars," said Johnny Bull. "Better stick to the old firm—if the Head will let you."

"I'm not going to be flogged."

"Fellows have been flogged before without raising the roof," said Bob Cherry. "Why, I've been flogged myself."

"You're a tough beast, you-know—"

"Eh?"

"A tough beast. I'm delicate."

"Oh, my hat! Yes, you look delicate!" grinned Bob. "About as delicate as a walrus or a hippopotamus, I think."

"I say, you fellows, the Head said that he would think it over and tell me in the morning whether I was to be sacked or flogged. Do you think he would make it the sack if I asked him specially?"

"Fathead!"

"Oh really, Wharton—"

"You'll get over the flogging," said Harry, laughing. "And if it's a warning to you not to play your rotten ventriloquial tricks, it will be a benefit in disguise."

"Beast!"

"Well, have some more sosses and chips, old porpoise, and forget about it," said Bob cheerily.

Billy Bunter acted on the first part of that good advice, but not on the second. He made an excellent supper—the deepest woes never affected Bunter's appetite for long.

But when the Remove went up to their dormitory at half-past nine, Bunter's fat face was still lugubrious.

The danger of the "sack" apparently did not worry him unduly. But the prospect of being flogged was a nightmare to him.

"Good-night, fatty, and pleasant dreams!" called out Skinner, when the Remove turned in.

Bunter groaned.

"I say, you fellows, I sha'n't be able to sleep to-night, you know."

But that was only a little error on Bunter's part. Five minutes later his deep snore was echoing through the Remove dormitory as usual.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Head's Sentence!

BILLY BUNTER did not look happy the next morning.

Generally, he was very cheerful on a Sunday.

Sunday was a quiet day at Greyfriars, and some of the fellows voted it rather slow. There were no games, and anything like japing or skylarking was considered bad form. But it suited Bunter. Excepting for an hour with Mr. Quelch and Milton, and the morning and afternoon services, the fellows had the day to themselves. In summer Bunter found it pleasant to lie in the grass and munch jam-tarts or chew toffee. In winter it was equally agreeable to "frowst" over a study fire in an armchair. So, as a rule, William George Bunter welcomed Sunday.

But on this particular Sunday morning he was booked for an interview with the Head; and that made all the difference.

Certainly, the flogging, if flogging it was to be, would not be administered

that day. No offender was flogged, or even caned, on a Sunday. But that really only made the matter worse. For if Bunter was sentenced to a flogging, he would have twenty-four hours of awful anticipation with the flogging to follow. The thing itself was bad enough, without the horrid anticipation; and Bunter would have both.

So that sunny autumn morning William George Bunter appeared in the quadrangle with a lugubrious visage, looking, as Skinner remarked, as if he had lost an English shilling and found a German mark.

Even a day on which there were no classes, no faggings, and no lickings could not comfort Bunter, in the circumstances.

When it was time for the fat junior to present himself in the Head's study, he was fairly quaking.

The interview was to take place after the hour with Milton. When Mr. Quelch, to the great relief of the Remove, closed that great masterpiece, "Paradise Lost," and dismissed them, he fixed his eyes on Bunter.

"You will now go to the Head's study, Bunter," he said.

"Oh lor'!"

"What? What did you say, Bunter?"

"N-n-nothing, sir!" stammered the Owl of the Remove.

"I thought I heard you utter a ridiculous ejaculation!" said Mr. Quelch severely.

"Oh, no, sir! Nothing of the kind!"

"That will do, Bunter! Kindly proceed to Dr. Locke's study at once," said the Remove master.

"I—I say, sir—"

"You need say nothing, Bunter. The matter is not in my hands."

"I—I mean, sir, I—I hope you'll put in a word for me with the Head, sir," groaned Bunter. "If you explained to him that I am innocent, sir—"

"What? Innocent of what?"

"Of—of anything, sir—I mean everything—"

"Say no more, Bunter."

"The—the Head doesn't believe me, sir, when I tell him," said Bunter. "But if you mentioned to him how truthful I am—"

"Silence!"

"Oh dear!"

Bunter rolled dismally out of the classroom after the Removites. In the corridor he blinked lugubriously at the juniors. A good many of them were grinning, just as if this were not a serious matter at all. It was fearfully serious to W. G. Bunter.

"I say, you fellows," groaned Bunter. "What's a fellow to do?"

"Go to the Head, of course," said Harry Wharton.

"And buck up," advised Bob Cherry. "The Beak doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"Let him wait, and be bothered," growled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, will you come with me and swear—"

"Swear?" ejaculated Bob. "On a Sunday, too! My hat!"

"You silly ass!" howled Bunter. "Is this a time for joking? Swear that I have never done any ventriloquism, and that you know I can't ventriloquise, and so on. The Head may take your word—though, of course, you're not such truthful chaps as I am—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I say, Toddy, will you swear—"

"Well, you're jolly nearly enough to make a fellow swear, and that's a fact," said Peter Todd. "But I won't, all the same. I'll tell you what I'll do for you, though, Bunter."

"What's that?" asked Bunter hopefully.

"You don't want to go to the Head?"

"Ow! No!"

"Sort of feel that you can't drag yourself there?"

"That's just it, Toddy."

"Well, I'll help you out, old fat man. I'll kick you all the way to the Head's study."

"What?" roared Bunter.

"Turn round, old chap."

"What for?"

"So that I can begin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled away to the Head's corridor. It was true that he had a great reluctance to repair thither; but he did not want assistance of the kind offered by Peter Todd.

He reached the Head's door and stopped.

Twice he raised a fat paw to tap—and twice his courage failed him, and the paw dropped without tapping on the oaken panels.

Bunter groaned dismally.

The Head was expecting him; and certainly the Head did not like to be kept waiting. Indeed, when a junior of the Lower Fourth kept the Head waiting, it was almost time for the skies to fall.

The longer the Head waited, the more waxy he would be when the interview came off; Bunter was aware of that.

But he couldn't help it! His fat paw, as if endowed with a will of its own, simply refused to tap at the Head's door.

The Owl of the Remove heard the sound of a movement in the study. Perhaps the Head was getting impatient.

The door suddenly opened.

Dr. Locke came striding out—perhaps to seek Bunter. He strode fairly into the fat junior.

Bump!

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke stepped back, breathing very quickly. He fixed an angry frown on the Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter! How dare you!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Bunter.

"I—I've come, sir!"

"I have waited more than five minutes for you, Bunter!" exclaimed Dr. Locke. "I was coming to Mr. Quelch's room for you. How dare you keep your headmaster waiting!"

"I—I didn't—"

"What?"

"I—I mean—I wasn't—"

"Step into my study, Bunter!"

"Oh dear!"

Billy Bunter rolled in. His fat and lugubrious face might have moved the heart of a stone statue. But the Head was angry. Perhaps, like the prophet of old, he considered that he did well to be angry. His eyes fixed on Bunter's face ruthlessly.

"Bunter! I have considered your case," he said. "You have acted in a despicable manner, Bunter."

"Oh, sir!"

"For the sake of your relatives, Bunter, I shall not send you away from Greyfriars!"

"Oh dear!"

"I have decided, therefore, to administer a flogging," said the Head. "It will take place before classes to-morrow morning. This punishment, I hope, will be a warning to you. You have been guilty of reckless prevarication, of disrespect to the prefects, and to your headmaster, and you have very nearly caused an innocent boy to be punished for your fault. This is very serious, Bunter."

"Is—is it, sir!"

"Do you not realise that it is?" thundered the Head.

Bunter jumped.

"Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly!" he gasped. "Awfully serious, sir! I—I was just thinking, sir, how—how frightfully serious it was."

"You have certainly deserved to be expelled from the school, Bunter. If I spare you this most severe punishment it is because I consider you are too obtuse to realise clearly the wrong you have done. I trust that a flogging will meet the case."

The Head paused. Doubtless he expected Bunter to look immensely relieved. Any other fellow at Greyfriars would have welcomed a dozen floggings rather than have the "sack." But the views of William George Bunter were not like the views of other fellows.

"I—I—" began Bunter.

Dr. Locke waved his hand.

"You need not thank me, Bunter," he said icily. "I have decided thus chiefly from consideration for your father. You need not thank me."

"I—I wasn't going to, sir—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean—"

"You may leave my study, Bunter."

"If you please, sir," gasped Bunter.

"c-c-couldn't you make it the sack—"

"Make it the sack!" repeated the

Head dazedly.

"Yes, sir—make it the sack. You see

I—"

"Boy! Do you mean that you would prefer to be expelled from the school?" thundered the Head.

"That's it, sir!" said Bunter eagerly.

"Ever so much, sir!"

"Are you in your right senses, Bunter?"

"I—I hope so, sir."

"Are you impervious to a sense of shame—are you totally regardless of bringing disgrace upon your name and family?"

"Yes, sir! I mean"—Bunter stuttered—"I—I mean, I'd rather go home, sir! You—you see, sir, I should have a few weeks at least before I was sent to another school—that would be so much to the good—"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head blankly.

"And then I might get into a better school than this—"

"A—a—a better school than Greyfriars!" gasped the Head. The mere suggestion that there existed a better school than Greyfriars seemed a good deal like profanity to Dr. Locke.

"That's it, sir. Very likely a much better one, with a headmaster who would know my value—"

"Upon my word!"

"So—if you don't mind, sir—I'd rather be bunked," said Bunter brightly. "Is it a go, sir? I—I mean, is it all right?"

Dr. Locke looked fixedly at Bunter for a few moments, while the Owl of the Remove regarded him hopefully. Then



Dr. Locke came striding out of his study—perhaps to seek Bunter. He strode fairly into the fat junior. Crash! "Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Bunter. "Bless my soul!" Dr. Locke stepped back, breathing hard. He fixed an angry frown on the Owl of the Remove. "Bunter! How dare you!" he rapped. "I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean—I wasn't—" "Step into my study, Bunter!" said the Head. "Oh, lor'!" moaned Bunter. (See Chapter 2.)

his hand strayed to a cane. Then he remembered that it was Sunday, and did not pick up the cane.

"Bunter," he said at last, "I shall not expel you from Greyfriars. I shall flog you to-morrow morning in the Remove Form-room in the presence of your Form. On account of the impertinence you have just uttered, I shall make the flogging considerably more severe than I had originally intended."

"Oh lor'!"

"Now you may go, Bunter."

Billy Bunter gave his headmaster a last hopeless blink, and rolled from the study. His last hope had been dashed to the ground—it was not to be the sack. It was to be a flogging, and a flogging of unusual severity. Bunter had long been aware that all masters were beasts, and headmasters special beasts. But he had never realised before what an awful beast a headmaster could be.

He rolled down the corridor in the depths of woe. Billy Bunter was fairly up against it now; and the universe seemed to him a dismal place, quite unworthy of William George Bunter's presence in it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Unsympathetic!

IT really was extraordinary.

Nobody in the Remove, with the solitary exception of William George Bunter, realised how serious this matter was.

Fellows went on Sunday walks, or sauntered about the old quad or chatted in the passages, just as if nothing special was to transpire on Monday morning.

Really, Bunter could hardly understand it.

He was going to be flogged before classes in the morning in the Remove Form-room. He was to be "taken up" by Gosling while the Head laid on the birch before the eyes of all the Lower Fourth. Form-room and passage were to ring to his wails. Greyfriars was to echo to the sound of his woe.

And fellows went on the even tenor of their way, just as if it did not matter.

Nobody seemed to realise how much it mattered if Bunter was flogged; how very important it was that he should not be flogged! Such heartless indifference was really amazing to Bunter. Nero fiddling while Rome was burning was a mere jest to it.

Vernon-Smith of the Remove, passing Bunter in the quad, actually grinned at the sight of his dismal, weebegone face. The Bounder of Greyfriars actually seemed to find his lugubriousness entertaining. That really was the limit.

Smithy had been through it himself in his time. Bunter remembered the Bounder's last flogging quite well. He did not remember having felt specially concerned about it. Indeed, he remembered having remarked that the Bounder had asked for it, and, further, that he hoped it would do him good.

But the present occasion was quite different. This time it was Bunter who was going to be flogged.

That made an enormous difference.

At such a time—really a serious crisis in the history of the old school—Bunter felt that something ought to be done. A general protest on the part of the Remove might have caused the Head to relent. A deputation of the whole Form interviewing the Head and requesting milder treatment for Bunter might have had some effect. This, in

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Bunter's opinion, was the very least the fellows could do.

Instead of which they actually seemed to forget that Bunter was to be flogged at all, and when he reminded them they did not appear to see how it mattered, anyhow.

It was extraordinary, and it made Bunter feel very bitter and sardonic.

"You never know fellows till you find them out!" he said bitterly to Peter Todd.

Toddy stared at him.

"What does that mean, if it means anything?" he inquired.

"I'm going to be flogged to-morrow morning."

"Are you?"

"You know I am!" hooted Bunter.

Toddy nodded.

"Yes, I know, now you remind me," he assented. "What about it?"

"What about it?" repeated Bunter, scarcely able to believe his fat ears.

"Did you say what about it?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I said: what about it?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 1 that evening for comfort. There were toasted scones, with nice fresh butter, and coffee in Study No. 1. And the Famous Five had gathered there to dispose of them before dorm—with youthful reckless disregard of the fact that coffee is an enemy to sleep. Bunter found some comfort in the toasted scones, and he proceeded to annex the lion's share of them. But as he munched, his fat face was full of woe.

"About that flogging, you fellows—"

he said. "What flogging?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The flogging to-morrow morning in the Form-room—"

"My hat! Is some fellow booked for a flogging?" asked Bob innocently.

Bunter breathed hard.

"I am, you beast!" he said. "I've told you so about a dozen times to-day at least!"

"At least!" assented Bob. "More like a hundred, old fat man! Put some exercise-books in your bags."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"The Head's wide to that," said Frank Nugent, shaking his head. "You remember when Skinner had it the Head heard the cane cracking on the books. Of course, Skinner overdid it. I believe he put in a Liddell and Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Make up your mind to it, Bunter," said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Dash it all! Fellows have been flogged before!" growled Johnny Bull.

"What's all the fuss about?"

"The fussfulness really is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You must bear it grinfully, my esteemed funky Bunter!"

"The fact is, I'm not going to be flogged," said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five. "I'm too delicate, you know. The question is, how am I going to get out of it?"

"No giddy how!" said Bob. "You are booked, old man! What the thump did you ask for it for, if you didn't want it?"

"Beast!"

"Thanks! Have some more scones, and shut up!"

Bunter had some more scones.

"The Head's refused to sack me," he said. "I'm prepared for that. I asked him. He refused, and said he would lay it on all the harder because I'd asked him. Said he would make me squirm just because of that!"

"Yes, I can hear the Head saying that!" chuckled Bob.

"He didn't put it in those words. You fellows remember once before I was up against it, and I left the school for a time—"

"And jolly well had to be brought back!" grinned Bob. "Don't try that on again, Bunter!"

"I refuse to be flogged. I'd rather go!"

"Fathead!"

"Will you fellows lend me some money?" asked Bunter. "A few pounds would see me through."

The Famous Five chuckled. They were not likely to lend Billy Bunter a few pounds to see him through in running away from school.

"Don't be an ass, old chap!" said Harry. "Take your flogging, and chuck up playing ventriloquial tricks and that will be all right."

"I'm not going to take a flogging. The trouble is that if I go home my pater will send me back here," said Bunter sorrowfully. "I know he'd rather have me flogged than sacked."

"Of course he would!"

"So I can't go home. If the Head would sack me it would be all right; the pater would have to let me go home then. But he won't have me at home unless he's fairly driven to it."

"Same reason we stand you at Greyfriars!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Now, in the circumstances, I can't go home. I'm going out into the wide world—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The cold, cruel world!" said Bunter pathetically. "The least you fellows can do is to lend me a few pounds."

"Oh, we can do less than that!"

grinned Nugent. "You see, we can lend you nothing at all!"

"If you're going to be mean—"

"We are—we is!"

"The meanfulness is going to be terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"Well, if anything happens to me, remember you're responsible!" said Bunter. "If I starve, and waste away to skin and bone—"

"That would take years and years,"

said Bob Cherry comfortingly. "Your fat would last you ever so long!"

"I may become desperate," said Bunter darkly. "If I should go to sea and become a pirate—"

"A—a—a which?"

"A pirate, it will be your fault!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Fancy old fat Bunter under the skull and cross-bones!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

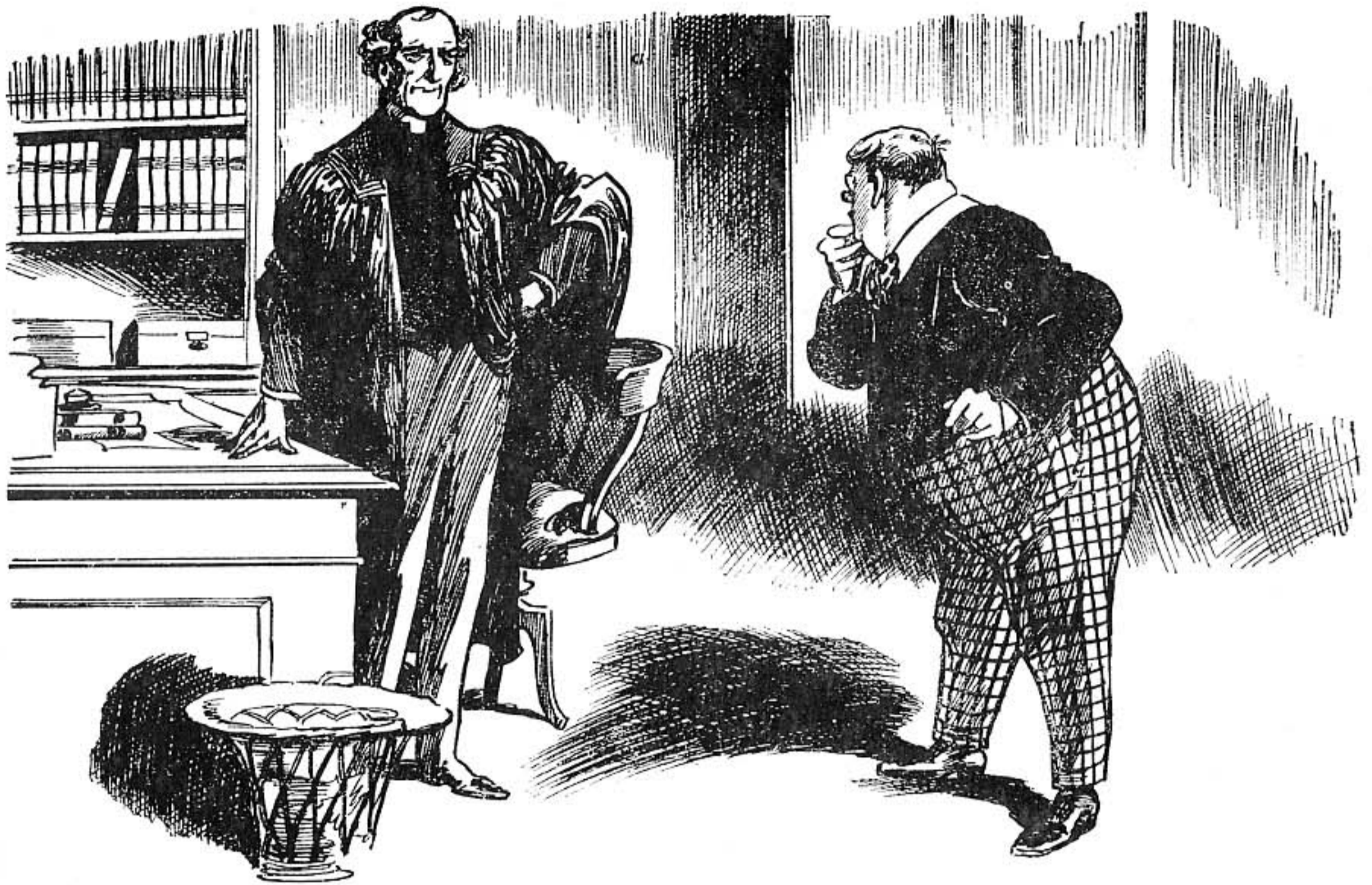
Billy Bunter blinked ferociously at the Famous Five. They could roar with merriment when he was going to be flogged in the morning! Just as if it didn't matter—just as if it was some other fellow who was going to be flogged!

The scones were finished. There was nothing more to be had in Study No. 1 but merriment, and Bunter did not want that. He rose to go. As he rose he gave a fat little cough to clear his podgy throat for a ventriloquial effort.

"How dare you make such a noise in this study!" came a sharp rapping voice from the passage. "Disgraceful! Take one hundred lines each, and hand them into my study after classes to-morrow!"

"Oh, my hat! Quelch!" breathed Bob.

The merriment died away suddenly in Study No. 1. But Harry Wharton, with a quick suspicious glance at Bunter, stepped to the door and looked out. He



“I have decided to flog you, Bunter,” said Dr. Locke, “instead of expelling you. I have decided thus chiefly from consideration for your father. You need not thank me——” “I—I wasn’t going to, sir——” stuttered Bunter. “If it’s all the same to you, sir—I—I’d rather be s-sacked!” “Eh?” gasped the Head faintly. (See Chapter 2.)

had been caught by the Greyfriars ventriloquist before. There was no sign of Mr. Quelch in the Remove passage.

“All serene, you fellows,” he said. “It’s Bunter!”

“Ventriloquism again!” roared Johnny Bull. “By Jove! I’ll——”

Bunter jumped to the door.

“I—I say, you fellows——”

He did not stop to finish. Johnny Bull was drawing back a large size in boots, and Bunter skipped into the passage.

“Blessed if I didn’t think it was Quelch, for a minute,” said Frank Nugent. “It’s high time Bunter was flogged for his tricks, I think.”

“Yes, rather!”

“The ratherfulness is terrific!”

“Oh, that’s all rot, Nugent—jolly unfeeling, if you ask me!”

Nugent stared at the captain of the Remove.

“What!” he exclaimed. “You cheeky ass, what do you mean?”

Harry Wharton did not answer that question. He made a jump into the passage after the Remove ventriloquist.

“Yaroooh!”

Then fleeing footsteps were heard. Wharton came back into the study with a red face. Nugent’s face was also red. He understood that it was the fat ventriloquist who had spoken, and not the captain of the Remove.

“Oh!” he ejaculated. “Sorry! It was Bunter, of course.”

“Of course it was, ass!” said Wharton, rather gruffly.

“All serene, old man!” murmured Bob Cherry. “I thought it was your voice, for the moment.”

Wharton drew a deep breath.

“It’s time Bunter got a lesson for playing rotten tricks like that,” he said.

“The harder the Head lays it on tomorrow morning the better, in my opinion.”

“Hear, hear!”

And that, indeed, was a general opinion in the Greyfriars Remove. Only one fellow did not share it, and that one was Billy Bunter. Only Bunter realised what an awful injustice was going to be done, but he realised it very clearly indeed. And he still failed to understand why the Remove fellows were unsympathetic.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Where is Bunter?

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!” The rising-bell was ringing out over Greyfriars School on Monday morning.

Bob Cherry was the first out of bed in the Remove dormitory. He came out of bed with a bound, scattering blankets. And Bob, being first up, was the first to observe that there was an empty bed in the dormitory.

Bunter’s bed was vacant.

Bob Cherry stared at it in astonishment. For William George Bunter to be up before rising-bell was amazing—indeed, it was a portent. But the bed was empty.

It was not only empty, but cold. It had been vacant a long time. Billy Bunter was not only up, but he had evidently been up over-night. He was not an early riser in the morning. He was, apparently, a breaker of dormitory bounds in the dead of night.

“Well, my hat!” ejaculated Bob.

“What’s the row?” yawned Peter Todd.

“Bunter’s gone!”

“What?”

Peter jumped out of bed. His example was followed by a dozen more fellows. The news that Bunter was gone was exciting.

“There’s a letter on the pillow!” exclaimed Ogilvy.

“My hat! So there is!”

Ogilvy picked up the letter. Apparently it had been written before Bunter went to bed on Sunday night, for he could not have written it in the dark, and he could scarcely have burned a light in the dormitory over-night without awakening some of the fellows. Bunter’s mysterious midnight move had been planned in advance.

The letter was scrawled on a sheet of impot paper. It ran:

“ROTTERS!

“I’m going.

“I refuse to be pllogged, especially when I am innocent, and it was only a joak all the time.

“Yore a lott of unsimpathtic beests. I despize you!

“Yores kontemptuously,
W. G. BUNTER.

“P.S.—I skorn the lott of you.”

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at that epistle to the Removites and chortled. Bunter’s farewell seemed to entertain them.

“This is addressed to the lot of us,” remarked Vernon-Smith. “Perhaps it’s meant for the Head and Quelch, too. They will have to see it, if Bunter’s really gone.”

“But is he?” said Harry Wharton sceptically. “He was gassing yesterday about running away from school, but——”

“He wanted to borrow money to run away on!” grinned Bob. “But we

didn't lend him any. He said he might go to sea and become a pirate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he couldn't bolt without any money," said Frank Nugent. "And he never had any money. I remember he told us on Saturday that he'd been disappointed about a postal-order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's gammon," said Vernon-Smith. "He's not gone. We shall find him downstairs all right."

"Most likely," said Harry.

There was a good deal of chuckling over the letter, and over Bunter's new move, before the juniors went down. When they came downstairs they fully expected to find Bunter somewhere about.

But the Owl of the Remove was not to be seen.

"Bound to turn up for prayers," said Bob.

But Bunter did not turn up for prayers.

"Absolutely certain to turn up for brekker," said the Bounder; and all the Remove fellows agreed.

But Bunter did not turn up for breakfast.

Amazing to relate, a meal was spread without William George Bunter attending to secure as many helpings as possible!

His place was vacant at the Remove table in hall, and Mr. Quelch, at the head of the table, noted it at once.

"Wharton!" rapped out the Remove master.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Bunter?"

"I don't know, sir."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. He said no more, but he looked as if he would have something to say to Bunter when he should see that fat and fatuous youth again.

Breakfast finished without the Owl of the Remove putting in an appearance.

The Removites swarmed out into the quadrangle, buzzing with excitement now. It really looked as if Bunter's farewell letter had been written in earnest, and the Owl of the Remove had taken French leave. Once upon a time, the juniors remembered, Bunter had "bunked" in fear of a flogging, and it looked as if history had repeated itself.

At all events, the Remove ventriloquist had vanished.

He was gone from the gaze of his Form-fellows like an unbeautiful dream.

Fellows looked for him, up and down and round about. But he was not to be found.

Traces of him, however, were discovered in the Remove passage—traces which seemed to point to departure on the part of the Owl. The study cupboard in No. 4 had been fairly sacked. Vernon-Smith had a good supply of things there, and Bunter had taken the lot. There was no doubt, of course, that it was Bunter who had done it.

"Provisions for the voyage, I suppose," grinned Bob Cherry. "Jolly old Bunter's on his way to become a pirate!"

The juniors roared, but the Bounder looked quite serious. Two or three pounds' worth of stuff had been purloined from his study cupboard—expensive preserves, bottles of currant-wine and limejuice; all sorts of nice and expensive things. If Bunter had taken them all with him he must have gone fairly well loaded. But it was probable that he had taken the greater part of the Bounder's tuck inside.

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On the door of the Bounder's cupboard a farewell word was scrawled in chalk:

"BEEEST!"

That, apparently, was Bunter's thanks for the supplies he had appropriated.

"The cheeky fat villain!" said the Bounder wrathfully. "Why, I'll burst him if he ever comes back!"

"I wonder if he's cleared out any other study?" remarked Tom Redwing.

That suggestion started a rush along the passage. Every fellow searched his study for traces of Bunter.

Traces were soon found. Lord Maul-everer's fur coat was missing from Study No. 12. Mauly had left his handsome fur-lined overcoat hanging on a hook in Study No. 12. The hook was still there, but that expensive overcoat was conspicuous by its absence.

"Great gad!" said Mauleverer. "My coat's gone! That fat villain has bagged my coat!"

"He's bagged my travelling-rug!" came a roar from Ogilvy's study. "My rug's gone! It was on my armchair, and it's gone!"

In several other studies articles were missed. Evidently Bunter, in the dead of night, had gone through the Remove passage thoroughly.

In Study No. 1 Harry Wharton found that a silk muffler had been borrowed.

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In its place Bunter had left a chalked message. It was scrawled on the looking-glass:

"I've borrowed a few things. They will be returned later. Go and eat coak!"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"He's really gone!" he said.

"The gonefulness is terrific!"

"Good riddance!" said Skinner. "But there's no such luck really; he will turn up again, like a bad penny."

"The silly ass will be found and brought back, as he was before, and he will get the flogging," said Bob Cherry. "Much better have faced the music and got it over!"

"There'll be a row!" remarked Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the bell."

The bell for classes was ringing. The Removites hurried down to their Form-room.

In that Form-room, before class, Bunter was to be flogged by the Head in the presence of the Form. But when the Removites took their places one place was vacant; Bunter was not there to be flogged. Gosling, the porter, was already there; he had been instructed to be on the spot to "hoist" Bunter for the painful process. Gosling had quite a cheerful look, as if he had pleasant anticipations. Mr. Quelch came in, and glanced over the class and frowned.

"Bunter does not seem to be here!" said Mr. Quelch in a deep voice. "Wharton, why is not Bunter here?"

"I—I don't know, sir. I haven't seen him!"

Mr. Quelch knitted his brows.

Before he could speak again there was a stately tread in the passage, and Dr. Locke entered the Form-room.

He bowed to Mr. Quelch and turned his majestic glance upon the silent Remove.

"Bunter! Stand forward, Bunter!"

A pin might have been heard to drop then in the Remove Form-room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Not a Flogging!

DR. LOCKE waited.

A frown gathered on his brow. He had not yet observed that

Bunter was not in class—indeed, it was not likely to occur to him that the fat junior would dare to absent himself on such an occasion. There were few fellows at Greyfriars who would have ventured to disregard a direct command from the Head, and Bunter decidedly was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. But it was said of old that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. And in foolishness, at least, Bunter was an easy first at Greyfriars.

Mr. Quelch coughed.

"Bunter is not present, sir," he said.

"What?"

"The boy is absent."

"Absent!" repeated the Head, as if he could not believe his ears. Possibly he couldn't.

"I am sorry, sir, but he is certainly absent!" said the Remove master.

"Is this possible, Mr. Quelch? I informed Bunter that I should be here at this hour to administer his punishment. Is it possible that the boy has ventured to absent himself, at the risk of wasting my time?" exclaimed the Head, in astonishment.

The Removites dared not grin.

It was only too probable that Bunter had not taken the great value of the headmaster's time into consideration at all!

Mr. Quelch coughed again.

"This is—is unprecedented!" said the Head. "If the boy is not here, Mr. Quelch, where is he?"

"I am not aware at present, Dr. Locke. I was about to inquire in the Form—"

"Quite so! I will do so."

The Head transferred his majestic attention to the Remove.

"If any boy present is aware of Bunter's present whereabouts, let him stand out and tell me at once."

No one moved.

"Wharton! You are head boy of the Form. Do you know where Bunter is?"

"No, sir!"

"When did you last see him?"

"Last night, sir, when we went to bed."

"Bless my soul! I suppose he has been seen this morning?" exclaimed the Head testily. "Has any boy present seen him this morning?"

"No, sir!"

"This is extraordinary! Wharton, have you any idea what has become of Bunter?"

Wharton hesitated.

But it was clear that the facts had to be known. The captain of the Remove stepped out from the desks.

"We found this letter on Bunter's pillow this morning, sir," he said. And he held out the Owl's farewell letter.

Dr. Locke took it and glanced at it.

Amazement was imprinted upon his face. In amazed silence he handed the letter to Mr. Quelch. The Remove master perused it, with compressed lips and glinting eyes.

"Upon my word!" said Dr. Locke. "Is it possible that Bunter has run away from school?"

"It would appear so from this, sir," said Mr. Quelch.

"Shocking!" exclaimed the Head.

Mr. Quelch coloured. Bunter was in his Form, and he was to some extent responsible for the proceedings of the fatuous Owl. The serious and solemn occasion was becoming just a trifle ridiculous. The Remove were there, the Remove master was there, the Head was there, Gosling was there with the Head's birch—but Bunter was not there. Without Bunter it was obvious that the flogging could not proceed. Matters were at an impasse; and both the Head and Mr. Quelch were painfully aware of lurking grins among the youthful faces turned attentively towards them.

There was a long silence. A red spot glowed in either cheek of the Head.

"Bunter must be found at once, Mr. Quelch!" he said at last.

"Most certainly, sir."

"Doubtless, as his Form master, you will take the matter in hand, Mr. Quelch," said the Head.

"If it is your wish—certainly!"

"No doubt a Sixth Form prefect will relieve you in your Form-room, Mr. Quelch. Let the matter be seen to at once."

Dr. Locke swept out of the Remove-room. Fellows in the Remove would have given a term's pocket-money to chortle, but they could not venture to do so. No one desired to draw the baffled wrath of the Head upon himself.

Gosling gave a grunt. He seemed disappointed. Mr. Quelch gave him a sharp look.

"You may go, Gosling," he said. "Your services will not now be required."

Another grunt from William Gosling; and he went.

Then Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes on the Remove. Those keen eyes, often compared by his pupils to gimlets, really seemed to pierce the juniors, and all the Remove tried hard not to catch their glance.

"I shall be occupied elsewhere this morning," said Mr. Quelch. "I shall request Wingate of the Sixth to take my place here. I trust that complete order will be kept—that every member of my Form will be exceedingly circumspect. If it should prove otherwise—"

Mr. Quelch did not finish. He left the rest to the imagination of the Remove.

But it was very probable that good order would be kept in the Remove Form-room that day. Bunter's reprehensible conduct had excited Mr. Quelch's deepest wrath. At present that wrath was a pent-up torrent—pent-up till Bunter should be found. But it was quite ready to pour upon any other devoted head—as the juniors well knew. And nobody in the Remove wanted to provide Mr. Quelch with a victim.

The Remove master rustled out.

"What larks!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I say, the Head looked rather an ass this time, didn't he?"

"The ratherfulness was terrific!"

"So we're going to be taken by a giddy prefect," said Skinner. "Chance for a rag! Who's for ragging Wingate?"

"Fathead!"

"No jolly old rags to-day," said Bob Cherry. "Quelch's on the warpath. I'm going to be good!"

"Same here," chuckled Johnny Bull. "I'm going to be a giddy model till Bunter's found and Quelch's let off steam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here comes Wingate."

Wingate of the Sixth entered the Form-room. It was his pleasant duty that morning to take in hand the most unruly Form at Greyfriars in the absence of their Form-master.

Possibly Wingate anticipated trouble. But there was no trouble. Skinner had suggested a rag—but Skinner showed not the slightest sign of ragging personally. Nobody wanted to be singled out by Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye when the Remove master returned.

That morning the Remove were as good as gold—much to Wingate's relief. The Form master's cane lay idle on the desk; not a single impot was inflicted. When Mr. Quelch came back, Wingate was able to report that the Remove had been absolutely exemplary.

Doubtless Mr. Quelch was pleased to hear it. But as he came back without Bunter it is possible that he would not have been displeased at having some delinquent to deal with.

But there was no delinquent, and the deep wrath of Mr. Quelch had to remain in its pent-up state.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Tartaric!

"NO news?"

"None!"

"He's gone!"

Classes were over for the day, and the Remove fellows, in the Rag, were discussing Bunter.

It had been a trying afternoon.

Mr. Quelch had returned unsuccessful from his quest. That he was unsuccessful was obvious from the circumstance that he did not bring Billy Bunter back with him. Also, he had returned in a tart and acid temper.

After seeing Mr. Quelch's face at dinner the juniors hoped fervently that he would spend the afternoon also in looking for Bunter, leaving Wingate to take the Remove again. He looked dangerous, in the opinion of his dutiful Form.

But they were disappointed. Mr. Quelch, apparently, had done all he could in the way of hunting Bunter during the morning; in the afternoon he returned to his Form master's duties. And that his temper was tart, not to say tartaric, was soon very clear.

Mr. Quelch was a just man. Not for untold gold—or any other consideration, told or untold—would he have inflicted undeserved punishment upon any fellow. But when he was in a tartaric temper he was wont to inflict deserved punishment more frequently and emphatically than at times when his temper was unruffled.

So while a model youth might hope that afternoon to escape lickings, lines, and lectures, any youth who was not a model was in danger of getting some of what Mr. Quelch was unable to inflict upon Billy Bunter.

Unfortunately for the Remove, that Form contained many fellows who were not model youths. Indeed, it was improbable that a single model youth could have been found within its ranks. Faultless characters may doubtless



It was by sheer ill-luck that Bob Cherry let a heavy geography book fall to the floor of the Form-room. "Cherry!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "How dare you!" "Sorry, sir!" gasped Bob. "It was an accident, sir!" "Nonsense!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "Hold out your hand!" Cherry reluctantly did so and received two sharp cuts with the cane. "Oh, my hat!" murmured Nugent. "This is getting rather thick!" (See Chapter 6.)

exist; but they were exceedingly rare in the Greyfriars Remove.

So that afternoon there was an atmosphere of thunder in the Remove Form-room; and frequently the thunder rolled.

Harry Wharton received a hundred lines for whispering to Nugent. It was against all rules to whisper in class; and the punishment was not very heavy. But it was unlikely that it would have been inflicted, but for the intense exasperation Bunter had caused. Mr. Quelch was just. But he was just a little too just.

Wharton was only the first victim. Vernon-Smith was the next, with two hundred lines for not answering immediately he was spoken to. Peter Todd came third, with an impot for shuffling his feet. Sidney James Snoop next drew the wrath of Mr. Quelch for not having washed his hands. Snoop's hands, and, indeed, all Snoop, left much to be desired in the way of cleanliness. He deserved to land into trouble. But again, undoubtedly, it was Bunter's delinquency that made the trouble so severe for Snoop. Snoop had been unwashed before, without so much fuss being made. He had captured lines on that account. Now he was caned, and sent out of the Form-room specially to wash.

By this time Mr. Quelch had tasted blood, as it were.

Indeed, the juniors surmised that the Head had called him over the coals on Bunter's account. Doubtless the old gentleman took the view that Bunter's Form master should have brought Bunter up in the way he should go; in which case he would not have defied the head-master's authority in this flagrant manner.

If the Head had "jawed" Quelch, as the juniors put it, it was natural enough that Quelch should pass it on to the Remove—just as Bolsover major, after classes, passed it further on by cuffing and kicking some hapless fags of the third.

Still, Mr. Quelch was just. He never punished without cause. The trouble was that causes only needed looking for, and Mr. Quelch looked for them with an eye as piercing as a gimlet.

After Snoop's discomfiture the Remove scarcely breathed. They watched their Form master with painful interest, wondering where and when he would break out next.

Hazeldene came next.

The hapless Hazel actually dropped a cigarette from his pocket. Probably he had never intended to smoke the cigarette—he had it about him for a kind of dingy swank. But the sight of that smoke was to Mr. Quelch like a red rag to a bull.

For five minutes Hazel was standing up while Mr. Quelch scarified him with his tongue. Hazel was almost dazed by the torrent of eloquence; never had the Remove believed that Mr. Quelch possessed so extensive and scarifying a vocabulary. It was almost a relief to Hazel when Mr. Quelch stopped tongue-lashing and took up the cane. But four cuts with the cane reduced Hazel to a helpless state of quivering and gasping for the remainder of the class.

It was by sheer ill-luck that Bob Cherry let a heavy geography book fall to the floor soon afterwards. The crash of the falling volume seemed like thunder to the startled juniors.

On any other day a word of reprimand would have been enough. On this special day Bob's clumsiness was punished more emphatically. He had two hands to rub for a long time afterwards.

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"Oh, my hat! This is getting thick!" Peter Todd murmured. "Sha'n't I be glad to get out of class!"

"Todd!" Mr. Quelch's ears seemed as sharp as his eyes that afternoon.

"Oh dear! Yes, sir!"

"You were speaking to Field."

"Yes, sir!" groaned Peter.

"Take two hundred lines, Todd!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Hard luck, old bean!" murmured the Bounder incautiously.

Mr. Quelch's eye glittered at him.

"Did you speak, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder started.

"Oh yes, sir."

"What did you say to Todd?"

"I said it was hard luck, sir," said Vernon-Smith calmly.

The Bounder of Greyfriars faced his angry Form master quite coolly. Anything like fear had been quite left out of the Bounder's composition; and perhaps he rather enjoyed "standing up" to Quelch in these strenuous moments. The Form always expected nerve from the Bounder; and Smithy was not the fellow to disappoint such an expectation.

"What did you mean by that slangy expression, Vernon-Smith?"

"I meant that it was rather rotten for Toddy, sir."

"Can you speak English, Smith?"

"I hope so, sir."

"I hope so also, Vernon-Smith. I should be sorry to think that my instruction had left you incapable of



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speaking your mother-tongue. If you can speak English, kindly do so, and refrain from the use of vulgar slang."

"Right-ho, sir!"

"What—what did you say?"

"I said right-ho, sir."

"Stand out before the class, Vernon-Smith."

Swish! Swish!

"You will remember, Vernon-Smith, not to use such an expression to your Form master again."

"Right-ho, sir."

"What?" roared Mr. Quelch.

"Right-ho, sir!" said the Bounder deliberately.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cool impertinence of the Bounder, and the concentrated wrath in Mr. Quelch's face, proved too much for the juniors. They laughed!

That laugh was fairly frozen on their lips by the icy glare they received from their Form master. There was sudden silence.

"So this Form regards impertinence as amusing!" said Mr. Quelch. "Ha! We shall see! Hold out your hand again, Vernon-Smith!"

"Right-ho, sir!" said the Bounder hardily.

But the swipe that came down on the Bounder's palm really made him wish that he had not carried his little joke so far.

He went back to his place looking quite pale.

After that the Greyfriars Remove fairly walked in fear and trembling. If

they had been in the cave of the Cyclops, with Polyphemus looking round for his next victim, they could hardly have been more watchful and on the alert. It was with deep, deep relief that the Lower Fourth received their dismissal. It really seemed too good to be true when classes were over at last.

But everything comes to an end, and that painful afternoon ended. And then most of the Remove gathered in the Rag to discuss matters.

Eagerly they asked fellows whether there was any news of Bunter.

There was no news.

Squiff even went to Wingate's study to ask the captain of Greyfriars. But he returned with the dismal information that nothing was known of Bunter or his whereabouts.

"He's gone!" said Bob Cherry dismally. "He mayn't be found for days. And if Quelch is going to be like this all the time—"

"What a life!" sighed Lord Maul-everer.

"It's too thick!" hooted Skinner. "Quelch's taking it out of us because the Head's jawed him over Bunter."

"He doesn't know it, but he is," assented Bob Cherry. "That fat idiot is at the bottom of it. Why, we've had more among us this afternoon than Bunter would have got from the Beak if he'd taken his flogging. The blessed fat funk!"

"We're getting it instead of Bunter," groaned Snoop.

"Well, you ought to wash, Snoopey!" said Johnny Bull, with a grin. "Soap's cheap, and water's free gratis."

"I never thought I should ever miss Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "But if this is going on I shall be jolly glad to see Bunter back again."

"What-ho!"

"Even Bunter is better than this!" said Hazeldene dismally.

"Yes, even Bunter!"

"What a life!" groaned Lord Maul-everer again.

The Remove were not happy. Most of them had lines to do; many of them had aching palms to rub.

It could not be said that Mr. Quelch had been unjust. But there was no doubt that he had been painfully just.

The Removites were feeling sore in every sense of the word.

Billy Bunter, doubtless, had expected his Form-fellows to miss him. He would probably have felt quite flattered had he known how they longed for him to reappear now. For if Bunter remained missing, and Mr. Quelch's temper remained tartaric till he ceased to be missing, the prospect before the Remove was an exceedingly dismal one.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Passing It On!

B UZZZZZZZ!
The telephone-bell rang in Dr. Locke's study, and the Head took up the receiver with a jerk.

The Head of Greyfriars was not in his usual placid temper. The affair of Bunter had worried him considerably, and annoyed him deeply. His authority had been set at naught. The execution of his sentence, which should have been as inevitable as the movements of the stars in their courses, had been prevented. And somewhere in the wide world there was a truant junior who might get himself into serious trouble, which would mean more trouble for his Headmaster.

It was no wonder that the usually calm brow of the Head wore that day a frown of Olympian wrath.

He jerked off the receiver. Earlier that day he had telephoned to Mr. Bunter, to ask whether Billy Bunter had gone home. But Mr. Bunter was in the City. Mr. Bunter was a stock-broker, and a busy gentleman, and he was not at home to answer the Head. So the Head had asked that he should be rung up when Mr. Bunter returned home; and now he had no doubt that it was Bunter's father who was on the telephone.

"Hallo! Is that Greyfriars?"

"Yes—Dr. Locke speaking. Is that Mr. Bunter?"

"Yes, sir! I have received a message—it seems that my son has left school. Is that correct?"

"Quite correct, Mr. Bunter. Has your son arrived home?"

"No, sir, he has not. Should he do so I shall chastise him severely and send him back at once."

"Very good, Mr. Bunter. But he has left Greyfriars without permission, and is still absent."

"I recommend a flogging, sir."

"Quite so; but the boy is absent. Can you give me any idea where to look for him?"

"None."

"This is a very troublesome affair for me, Mr. Bunter—"

"No doubt!" said Mr. Bunter gruffly. "I rely upon you, of course, to see that my son comes to no harm."

"Really, sir, as he has deliberately absented himself—"

"He is under your care, Dr. Locke."

"That is so; but—"

"The responsibility is yours, sir," said Mr. Bunter tartly. "I cannot have it placed on my shoulders."

Apparently Mr. Bunter's temper was none too amiable that day. Perhaps he had had his own little troubles in the stock markets—that mysterious region where you buy what you cannot pay for, and sell what you do not possess, and sometimes land a fortune, and sometimes a bankruptcy.

"Really, Mr. Bunter—" snapped the Head.

"Really, Dr. Locke—" snapped Mr. Bunter.

"The boy has deliberately left the school—"

"You do not suggest, Dr. Locke, that I should keep watch on Greyfriars to see that a boy does not leave the school?"

"Eh, what? Certainly not!"

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Bunter—"very good! I am glad you do not suggest that, Dr. Locke."

"Really, sir—"

"I left my son in your charge, Dr. Locke. He is still in your charge. The responsibility is yours. Good-evening, sir!"

Mr. Bunter rang off.

Dr. Locke put up the receiver and sat down, with a crimson spot burning in either cheek.

Seldom had the Head of Greyfriars been so intensely annoyed and exasperated.

Had Billy Bunter been present, it is probable that the Head would have expelled him on the spot.

But he could not expel a fellow who was not there to be expelled. He could only fume, and swallow his own smoke, as it were.

There was only one relief for the Head; the ancient system of "passing it on." He rang for Trotter, and sent him to request Mr. Quelch to come to the study.

Mr. Quelch came.



Cecil Reginald Temple went down the Remove staircase, rolling. "Yaroooop!" On the next landing he sat up and roared. But a series of missiles from the passage above decided him on departure. He shook his fist and fled down the lower stairs at full speed. "Ha, ha, ha!" A burst of merriment floated after him. (See Chapter 9.)

Generally, the two gentlemen were on the best of terms. They had many things in common; Greyfriars was the beginning and the end of all things for both of them; their universe was bounded by the old grey walls of the school. Both of them had a deep interest in Aeschylus, and often their heads were bent over the pages of that great Greek together, elucidating the meaning—if any—of some of the more obscure passages. Often the Head addressed the Remove master as "My dear Quelch."

Now all was changed.

The most unimportant member of the community of Greyfriars had done it. The Head was cross, and the Remove master was tart; and it was all due to the utterly unimportant and negligible Owl of the Remove.

The Head frowned; and Mr. Quelch looked steely.

"Mr. Quelch—"

The Head looked as if he had never addressed the Form master as "My dear Quelch" in his life.

"Sir!"

Mr. Quelch's manner was almost savagely respectful.

"I have received a telephonic communication from Bunter's father—"

"Well, sir?"

"Bunter, it appears, has not gone home."

"Quite so."

"Mr. Bunter states that he considers the responsibility to be wholly mine."

"No doubt, sir!" said Mr. Quelch.

The Head breathed hard.

"I do not agree with Mr. Bunter's view," he said.

"No, sir?" said Mr. Quelch, with an air of polite interest.

"The responsibility, in my opinion, falls upon the boy's Form master!" said the Head sternly.

"Indeed, sir."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Quelch."

There was a short silence.

"The boy must be found, Mr. Quelch. He may come to some harm, wandering about the country."

"It is probable. I have taken all possible steps," said the Remove master. "I have spent a whole morning seeking to trace him, without result. I have notified the police. If there is anything further I can do, you have only to mention it, Dr. Locke. I am entirely at your orders."

"I look to you, Mr. Quelch, to see that a member of your Form does not absent himself from the school in this way."

Mr. Quelch opened his lips to reply. But the headmaster raised his hand.

"I leave it to you, Mr. Quelch. I have a right to rely upon you, as Bunter's Form master. I expect the boy to be found."

"Sir—"

"I do not think, Mr. Quelch, that it is necessary to say more," said Dr. Locke icily.

The door closed on Mr. Quelch.

It would have astonished, and doubtless offended, the Head had anyone told him that he had "jawed" Mr. Quelch because Mr. Bunter had "jawed" him. But that, in point of fact, was precisely what the Head had done.

Mr. Quelch left the study with a set brow, his lips tightly compressed. Any Remove fellow who had seen Mr. Quelch coming, with that expression on his face, would have retired promptly and discreetly round the nearest corner. Coker of the Fifth in the corridor saw him coming, and grinned—actually grinned; as if that thunderous brow had something entertaining in it.

Mr. Quelch stopped.

He saw Coker's grin; and he was in no mood for grinning. As a Fifth-Former, Coker was not under his authority. But any Form master had a right to resent impertinence—indeed, insolence—crass insolence.

"Coker!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir!" said Coker, still smiling.

"You are in the Fifth Form, Coker."

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware, Coker, that the Fifth is a senior Form?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Are you not aware also, Coker, that something in the nature of personal dignity is expected of an elder boy in a senior Form? Do you think it consistent with the dignity of a senior Form, Coker, to grin and chuckle in a master's face, like an impertinent little boy in the Second Form—indeed, like an uneducated street arab?"

Coker started.

He wished just then that he hadn't grinned.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"You are impertinent, Coker."

"I—I—"

"You are insolent and ill-mannered. You are a disgrace to your Form, Coker."

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

Several fellows stopped to look on. Coker's face grew very red. He wished still more fervently that he hadn't grinned.

"I should complain to your Form master, Coker, if I were not aware that you are the stupidest as well as the most ill-mannered boy in the Fifth Form," said Mr. Quelch. "But even crass obtuseness, Coker, is no excuse for insolence. I warn you to take care, sir."

Mr. Quelch swept on—leaving Coker no longer grinning. Horace Coker looked round, with a very red face.

"Dressed you down nicely, old bean," remarked Walker of the Sixth.

Temple of the Fourth chuckled.

Coker paid no heed to Walker of the Sixth; Walker was a prefect, and could say what he liked. He concentrated his attention upon Temple of the Fourth, who was only a junior, and who had chuckled.

"Funny, what?" asked Coker. "I'll give you something to cackle for, you cheeky fag!"

"Look here—oh, gad! Oh, my hat! Yaroooh!" roared Temple, as the incensed Fifth-Former smote.

The next moment Cecil Reginald Temple was in full flight, with a red and burning ear. He hurriedly placed a staircase between himself and Coker of the Fifth.

Reprisals on Coker were out of the question. Temple could no more have dealt with Coker, than Coker could have dealt with Mr. Quelch. But his luck was in; Sammy Bunter of the Second Form came rolling along. Bunter minor, of the Second, really had no business near the Fourth Form quarters—being very much like his brother Billy, it was probable that he was going to and fro like a lion seeking what he might devour. Whatsoever had brought him there, he came along in time to capture what Temple would have liked to bestow on Coker of the Fifth.

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"You fat worm, what are you doin' here?" demanded Temple.

"Nothing!" said Sammy.

"Then go and do it somewhere else," said Temple. "And that will help you to start!"

"Whoop!" roared Sammy.

Temple's boot helped him, and he started. Finding solace in it, Temple dribbled the fat fag as far as the stairs, and Sammy went howling down. Cecil Reginald Temple felt somewhat comforted; a feeling that was far from being shared by Sammy Bunter of the Second Form.

Sammy scudded away in great anguish and wrath. Fortunately, he came on Trotter, the page, in one of the lower passages.

"Mind where you're going, you lout!" said Sammy.

"Yes, Master Bunter," said Trotter.

The shadow of the sack loomed over Trotter, should he so far forget his place as to kick a Greyfriars fellow. For that adequate reason he nobly repressed his yearning to kick Sammy Bunter.

"Don't barge into me!" snapped Sammy.

"No, Master Bunter."

"You're a clumsy ruffian, Trotter!"

"Yes, Master Bunter."

"And a low beast!" added Sammy.

And Sammy of the Second rolled away, feeling a little better. Trotter, the page, looked after him, breathing hard and deep.

"If jobs wasn't so 'ard to find—" murmured Trotter.

But there was the rub. Jobs were hard to find, and Trotter's job at Greyfriars was quite a good one. So Sammy Bunter rolled away victorious and unknicked.

Trotter went down the lower staircase, and disappeared into the regions below. But even Trotter was not without his resources.

In the kitchen he kicked the cat.

The Head of Greyfriars, sitting stately in his study, would have been greatly surprised to learn that he was the primary cause of a loud and indignant mew that echoed through the school kitchen. But there was no doubt that he was!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Tantrums!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. did not look merry and bright the following morning.

There was no news of Bunter.

It was really a matter of wonder in the Lower Fourth that anyone could possibly want news of Bunter.

But, in the peculiar circumstances, everyone did.

Every fellow in the Remove wanted to see the vanished ventriloquist back at Greyfriars. Above all, they wanted to see him with the Head's birch in full play.

For, until the Bunter affair was settled, it was obvious that the Remove were in for a rough time.

On that point there was no shadow of doubt, no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever.

Mr. Quelch was in his tantrums.

The Remove master was quite unaware of having "tantrums," still more unaware that his dutiful pupils alluded to

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his stately wrath by such a name. But really he had them—and they did!

Mr. Quelch was deeply disturbed and irritated by Bunter's escapade. His anxiety lest the truant junior should come to some harm added to his deep annoyance. And the view taken by the Head was intensely irritating to him, and the Head's cold expectation that he would, somehow, produce the missing Bunter, galled him extremely. Where Bunter was Mr. Quelch had not the faintest idea. He could not produce Bunter like a conjurer producing a fat rabbit from a hat. The thing was impossible!

Being expected to perform impossibilities by a stately gentleman with whom it was impossible to argue, naturally had a most intensely irritating effect on Henry Quelch.

A truly great and wise man, Socrates, for instance, would have borne this irritation with meek placidity, and carefully forbore to visit it upon others. Mr. Quelch had a bust of Socrates in his study, being an admirer of that great and wise man. But on this occasion Mr. Quelch failed to model his conduct upon that of Socrates. Had that Socratic bust been able to speak, doubtless it would have rebuked Mr. Quelch.

For undoubtedly the Remove master was in a terrific tantrum. He had let the sun go down upon his tantrums, and the sun had risen again upon tantrums still more severe.

Woe to the Removeite that morning who incurred the wrath of the Remove master!

Mr. Quelch was still just. In fact, he was more just than ever. Knowing that he was angry, he was very careful indeed to inflict no undeserved punishment in his Form. But the number of Remove fellows who deserved punishment that morning—and received it—was a record.

Fellows who "mucked-up" their construe were fairly scorched by Mr. Quelch's eloquence. And there were several different standards by which a fellow's "con" was judged. It depended largely on the Form master's humour at the time.

In a bright and cheerful mood Mr. Quelch would be playfully sarcastic over a blundering construe. Sometimes he would be kind and patient to such an extent that it was really surprising. On other occasions he would judge more harshly, and would resort to lines, and even lickings. And when he felt very bad, he would take the view that a bad con was a deliberate affront offered to himself—and an affront to a Form master, of course, was a thing that had to be dealt with severely.

On a celebrated occasion when Bunter had rendered "Arma virumque cano" as "the armed man and the dog," Mr. Quelch had laughed. Any fellow, on this particular morning, who had construed Virgil in such a manner, would scarcely have lived to tell the tale.

Mr. Quelch was not really conscious of the fact that he was wary and watchful as a lynx, on the look-out for offences. He would have repudiated with horror the bare suggestion that, being wrathful, he wanted victims.

But that, unfortunately, was precisely the state of affairs.

What Mr. Quelch would have done had his Form been composed of perfect characters who never deserved punishment is rather a problem.

Fortunately, the Removeites were far from perfect, and many of the construes were very far indeed from perfection.

So Mr. Quelch was able to "take it out" of them without being in the least degree unjust.

It was not a happy morning in the Remove-room.

After two or three fellows had been scarified, and two or three caned, fellows became nervous, and really good cons were turned into bad ones by hesitation and nervous stammering.

The harvest of lines and raps and canings reaped in the Form-room that morning was extraordinary. Every fellow in the Remove went through it more or less.

And at the end of the class, instead of being relieved, Mr. Quelch was crosser than ever. For the view he took was that, in the midst of his trouble and anxiety, his pupils were giving him more trouble than usual—witness the number of punishments he had had to inflict!

Some of the Remove were perspiring when they came out of the Form-room.

They longed for news of Bunter.

But there was no news.

The Owl of the Remove had vanished. He seemed to have disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him up.

Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, had kindly taken the matter in hand, but he had reported to the Head that nothing whatever could be learned concerning the missing junior.

Bunter had not taken a ticket at the railway-station, or at any railway-station within a wide radius of Greyfriars. No one had seen him on the roads or paths, so far as could be ascertained by inquiry. He had not gone home. What had become of him was a mystery. He was, as Bob Cherry remarked, big enough to be seen, at least, sideways. Yet nobody seemed to have seen him.

How the fat Owl had vanished so completely and successfully was a deep puzzle.

It began to be supposed that something must have happened to him. If he had gone by the cliff path in the dark, no doubt he had tumbled over. Possibly a footpad had knocked him on the head. Possibly he had fallen into an old chalk-pit. Indeed, if nothing had happened to him, it was difficult to imagine how he could have vanished so utterly from all human knowledge.

Bunter could have vanished, and the more utterly the better, without anybody worrying very much, but for the consequences it entailed on his Form-fellows. Mr. Quelch's tantrums made the matter serious.

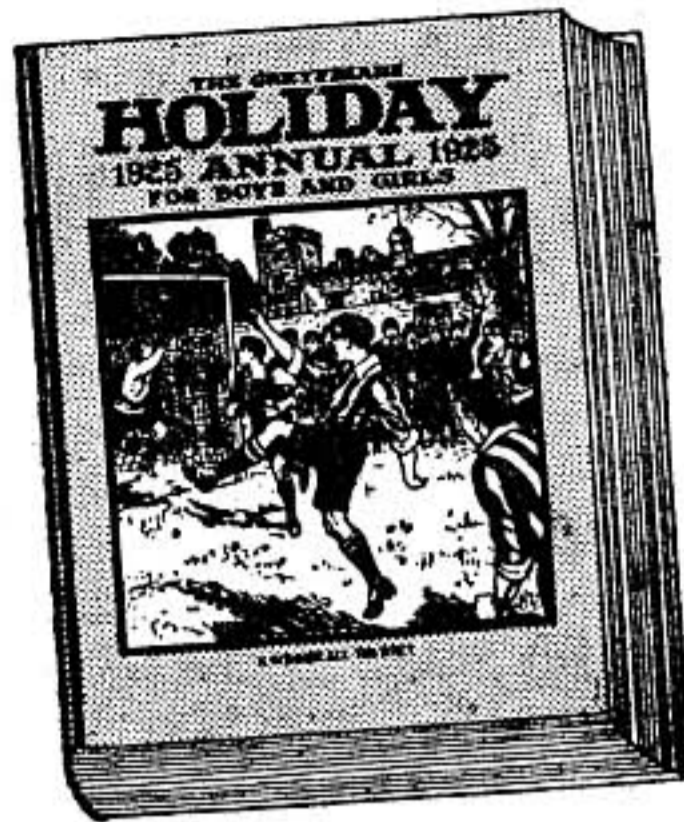
It was known that Mr. Bunter had telephoned again to the Head, demanding news of his son. It was reported that Mr. Quelch had been "on the carpet" again. Skinner declared that he had seen Mr. Quelch leaving the Head's study afterwards, looking like a Prussian Hun.

Mr. Bunter blamed the Head. The Head blamed Mr. Quelch. Mr. Quelch could not possibly have blamed his Form, but he certainly acted just as if he did. Skinner, who saw him leaving the Head's study after being carpeted, was given two hundred lines for "loafing" in the passages. He was given an extra hundred for trying to explain that he wasn't loafing. Lord Mauleverer had a hundred lines for yawning at dinner. Squiff another hundred for dropping his knife. The Bounder was given five hundred for shrugging his shoulders. He did not shrug them a second time. Shrugs at that price were much too costly.

"We're going to have a jolly afternoon, I don't think," groaned Bob Cherry, as time for class drew near again.

"The jolliffulness will not be terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "We shall have to bear it grinfully, my esteemed chums!"

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"Fancy all this bother about Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "Anybody would almost think that Bunter mattered somehow."

"And he doesn't!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Not in the least. But I suppose it will mean a lot of trouble for the Head if anything happens to him."

"That's jolly certain!" said Skinner. "If he's been run over by a motor-car there will be an inquest, and the Head will have to go and identify him."

"Oh, my hat! What a cheery suggestion!" growled Bob.

"Well, that blind ass is just the fellow to walk under a car," said Skinner cheerily. "I fancy it's that."

"Oh, rot!"

"Bosh!" said the captain of the Remove. "Bunter's all right—only he's got out of sight somewhere. But it's jolly queer how he's vanished like this without being seen."

"If he's at the bottom of a chalk-pit he mayn't be found for weeks," remarked Skinner brightly.

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Shut up, Skinner!"

"Ring off!"

Nobody liked the idea of anything serious having happened to Billy Bunter. Had anything serious happened to him, it would have been rather unfeeling to yearn to kick him for all the trouble he had given. And undoubtedly the Remove fellows yearned to kick him.

Faces in the Remove were quite solemn as they went into class that afternoon. Fortunately, that day they had an hour with Monsieur Charpentier, in French; and another hour with Mr. Lascelles for maths. But they had had quite enough of Mr. Quelch.

After classes, they inquired again for news of Bunter; and still there was no news. The Owl of the Remove had now been missing for two whole days, and all Greyfriars felt that the matter was getting serious.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

HERBERT VERNON SMITH looked into Study No. 1, where Harry Wharton & Co. had gathered for tea—not a very cheerful tea-party. There was a frown on the Bounder's face.

"You fellows been larking in my study?" he asked.

"No, ass!" said Harry.

"Well, I've asked all along the passage, and I want to know," growled the Bounder. "My cupboard's been raided."

"Well, you silly owl, do you think you'll find grub-raiders in this study?" exclaimed Nugent.

"I'm asking all the Remove; I'm going to know what's become of that cake," said Vernon-Smith. "It was bad enough to be cleared out by Bunter the other night. Now if some other fellow is following in Bunter's footsteps, it's jolly well got to be stopped. I gave Mrs. Mimble ten shillings for that cake—it was a whacker—and I asked two or three fellows to tea. And it's gone."

"Bunter's ghost, perhaps," grinned Bob Cherry. "He's haunting the Remove passage."

The Bounder walked away, evidently very much annoyed. The Famous Five finished their tea, and were about to go down to the Rag, when Russell of the Remove looked in.

"Finished with my Holiday Annual, Nugent?" he asked.

"Yes; I put it back in your study," answered Frank.

"Eh! It's not there."

"Must be there," said Frank. "I put it on your table just before class this afternoon."

Russell grunted.

"Then some other fellow's borrowed it without asking," he grunted. "Might have asked a fellow first."

And Russell walked away.

Harry Wharton & Co. went down to the Rag, where there was a discussion on the subject of the missing Owl. Vernon-Smith and Dick Russell came in presently, both of them looking annoyed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Found your cake, Smithy?" called out Bob Cherry.

"No!" snapped the Bounder.

"Look here, Nugent, I haven't found my 'Holiday Annual,'" said Russell crossly. "I've asked every chap in the Remove, and nobody took it from my study. So you see you couldn't have put it back."

"I did, old chap," answered Frank.

"Just before class. I ran into your study specially to put it there."

"Oh, you dreamed it!" said Russell. "You see, you couldn't have, because I went up to my study immediately after class, and it wasn't there then. Nobody could have taken it while we were at class."

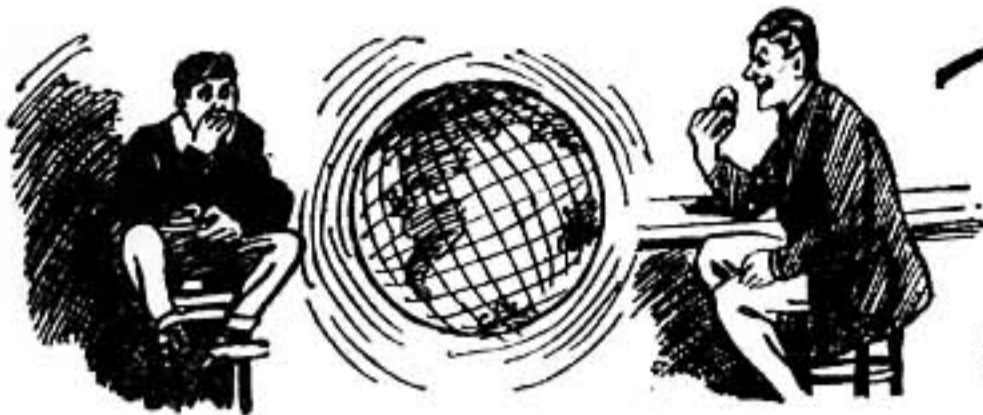
(Continued on page 16.)
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Supplement No. 199.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON

Week Ending November 15th, 1924.



The Jogography Exam!

By Dicky Nugent

REGGIE DUPP of the Fourth—generally known as R. Dupp—was broke to the wide. His people were awful skin-flints, and he hadn't received a remittance all the term.

R. Dupp sat alone in his study—an apartment that was as barren as himself. The floorboards were bare, because he couldn't afford a strip of lino, and there wasn't a single picture on the walls. There was no fire in the grate, for R. Dupp hadn't the price of a bucket of coal. He had the study all to himself, for no one would share such a cold and cheerless apartment.

Bitterly he realised the pangs of poverty. Everybody gave him the cold shoulder. Poverty was not a crime, but it seemed to be regarded as such at St. Sam's.

"If only I was rolling in quids like young Luker!" groaned the unhappy junior. "Or even comfortably off like Jack Jolly and the others! But I haven't a id. to bless myself with. I wouldn't care 2d. about my poverty if the other fellows didn't despise me so. But some of them are getting 3d. and 4d. a week pocket-money, and they keep flaunting their riches in my face! It—it's cruel!"

R. Dupp broke down completely. His bony frame was shaken with sobs.

Suddenly there was a wrap on the door.

"Come in!" said R. Dupp.

It was Jack Jolly who entered. He looked disdainfully at the pawper of the Fourth, and tossed a letter on to the table. R. Dupp snatched it up eagerly. Was it possible that the letter contained a remittance?

But, alas! no check or post-order fluttered out of the envelope when he tore it open. There was simply a letter, nothing more.

"Were you eggspecting a fiver?" asked Jack Jolly, with a grin.

"Yes."

"Well, you know the old proverb: Blessed is he that eggspecteth nicks, for he shall not be disappointed! Who's the letter from, Dupp?"

"My Uncle Rex. And he prommises to send me a fiver, on one condition."

"What's the condition?"

"That I win the jogography exam."

Jack Jolly laughed scornfully.

"Poor old Dupp! You haven't an earthly chance of winning! Your nollidge of jogography is nill! Why, you don't even know that Paris is the capital of Spain!"

"No, I didn't know that until you spoke," confessed R. Dupp. "Jogography isn't my best subject by a long way. All the same, I'm not going to miss this chance of getting a fiver. I'm going in for the exam."

"You'll have to buck up," said Jack Jolly.

"Mr. Lickham's been taking the candidates, one at a time, in his study. It's a verble exam. He asks you a string of queschuns, and the chap who gives the greatest number of correct answers wins the exam."

R. Dupp nodded.

"I'll go and see Lickham at once," he said. "And I'll try to remember that Paris is the capital of Spain, in case that's one of the queschuns he asks me."

"Good luck!" said Jack Jolly. "But I'm afraid you'll come a cropper, old chap."

R. Dupp hurried away to Mr. Lickham's study. The master of the Fourth was not

there. Swotter of the Sixth was sitting at the table.

"I want to see Mr. Lickham," said R. Dupp. "I'm going in for the jogography exam."

"Mr. Lickham's just been taken ill," said Swotter. "He's been sitting in this room all day, and it's given him room-atism. He sent for me, and asked me to take on any more candidates who came along."

R. Dupp brightened up at this. He would rather be examined by Swotter of the Sixth than by Mr. Lickham.

"Sit down," said Swotter, "and answer the following queschuns. What is the capital of Spain?"

"Paris!" said R. Dupp promptly.

"Where does the River Thames rise?" asked Swotter.

"At its sorce."

"And where does it join the sea?"

"At its mouth."

"What are the chief exports of Rugby?"

"Rugs."

"And of Bradford?"

"Brads."

"And of Bedford?"

"Beds."

"Good!" said Swotter. "We're getting on famously! What is the Equator?"

"A menagerie line running round the centre of the earth."

"What are the five big continents of the world?"

"England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the Isle of Man."

"And the biggest oceans?"

"The North Sea, the English Channel, and the Wash."

Swotter of the Sixth continued to fire queschuns at R. Dupp, who answered them without hezzitation. He seemed to be answering them right, too, for Swotter kept nodding his head approvingly.

"That'll do," said the senior at length. "I don't think any more candidates will turn up now. The rezzult of the exam will be published this evening."

Great was the joy of R. Dupp, a few hours later, to find that he had come out top, with fool marks!

The candidates who had been examined by Mr. Lickham had fared very badly; but the only candidate who Swotter of the Sixth had examined had answered every queschun correctly!

R. Dupp borrowed a shilling, and telly-graphed the news to his Uncle Rex.

By return of post came the prommised fiver. And it was corn in Egypt to the pawper of the Fourth. He went straight to the tuckshop, and started to 40-fy himself with jam-tarts and jinjer-beer. He was going grate guns, when Swotter of the Sixth strolled into the tuckshop.

"I say, Swotter," said R. Dupp eagerly, "may I stand you a feed?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Swotter. "By the way, I must congratulate you on winning the jogography exam."

R. Dupp beamed all over his dial.

"I answered every queschun correctly, didn't I?" he said.

Swotter solumly winked his eye at the junior.

"You might have done, and you might not," he replied. "Jogography is not my strong point. I'm hot stuff at Latin and

Greek, and I can tell you the history of the world from the time of the Flood down to the present day. But I don't know the first thing about jogography. You might have failed hopelessly, for all I know. But I gave you fool marks and chanced it. It was Lickham's fault. He shouldn't have asked me to take over the exam. However, we needn't diskuss that now. Pass the jam-tarts!"

THE END.

EDITORIAL!

A CERTAIN schoolboy once wrote a poem on History. It commenced with this couplet:

"History is very exciting
When the reign's one of bloodshed and fighting."

He wouldn't be able to say the same about Geography. There is nothing exciting in the knowledge that the River Thames rises in the Cotswold Hills, or that the chief export of Newcastle is coal. And our hearts do not beat any faster for knowing that Paris is the capital of France, or that an island is a piece of land surrounded by water.

Geography is not popular with the Remove. Our champion "swots" don't seem to mind it, but the majority of fellows hate it like poison. They much prefer the French lesson, when they can pull the leg of the French master, Monsieur Charpentier. And even Latin and Greek are not dreaded quite so much as Geography.

Knowing quite well that Geography is a nightmare to us, Mr. Quelch gives us a good dose of it daily. He fires off questions like a machine-gun. "Whar-ton! What are the chief lakes of Canada?" "Cherry! Where does the River Severn rise?" "Bunter! Which is the best-known thoroughfare in London?"

Needless to say, Billy Bunter promptly answered, "Grub Street, sir!" Bunter also volunteered the information that Chelsea was famous for its buns, and that Ealing was noted for its eels. Then Quelch's cane made him wriggle!

Perhaps some of my readers may feel rather disgusted with me for having chosen Geography as the subject of this week's special number. But their disgust will quickly change to merriment when they cast their eyes over our comical contributions. Our writers can extract humour from a most unhumorous subject. I believe if we had a Special Execution Number they would show us a funny side to such a grim topic!

Do not be alarmed, dear readers, lest we should proceed from a Special Geography Number to a Special Latin Number, and a Special Greek Number, and a Special "Stinks" Number. We have no such intention in our editorial mind. But we really couldn't resist springing a Geography Number upon you; and we hope you will enjoy it up to the hilt.

HARRY WHARTON.

[Supplement 4.



Put to the Test!

An Amusing Short Story of Greyfriars

By TOM BROWN

BILLY BUNTER was talking about Greyfriars.

"I know every inch of this place," he said. "Every stick and stone of it. I could walk blindfolded to any part of the building you care to mention."

"I'll wager you couldn't!" said Peter Todd. "You're such a short-sighted Owl that you often make mistakes in direction, even when you're not blindfolded. Look at the times you've gone into Study No. 5 or No. 9, in mistake for No. 7!"

Billy Bunter snorted.

"My bump of locality's jolly good," he said. "The phrenologist said so."

"The—the which?"

"The phrenologist. That's the fellow who examines your cranium and reads your bumps."

"Oh!"

"He says my bump of locality is wonderfully developed," said Bunter. "My boy," he said, "it would be impossible for you ever to get lost. You have a marvellous sense of direction. If someone were to blindfold you outside the Houses of Parliament and ask you to walk to St. Paul's Cathedral, you'd do it without the slightest trouble." And the phrenologist johnnie is quite right."

"What did he have to say about your bump of gluttony?" asked Peter Todd.

"Ass! There's no such thing as a bump of gluttony. If there was, mine would be under developed. I don't believe in stuffing, and making a beast of myself."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Peter. "Since when have you been a reformed character?"

Billy Bunter blinked at his study-mate through his big spectacles.

"You're wandering from the point, Toddy," he said. "I was talking about my bump of locality. If you care to take me on to the footer field, say, and blindfold me there, I'll undertake to find my way to any given place."

"Done!" said Peter Todd. "There's a small towel here that will do very well to blindfold you with. And I'm going to tie your hands behind your back, so that you won't be able to move the towel and take sly peeps."

"Oh, all right," said Billy Bunter.

Together they left the study, and proceeded to the football field.

Harry Wharton & Co. were indulging in shots at goal, and they stared in some surprise as Peter Todd arrived on the scene, escorting Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Bunter's not going to play footer, surely? Why have you brought him along, Toddy?"

Peter Todd explained.

"Bunter claims to have the best bump of locality at Greyfriars," he said. "And we're going to put it to the proof."

So saying, Peter proceeded to blindfold Billy Bunter with the towel. He did it thoroughly, so that the fat junior would be unable to see an inch in front of him.

Peter then tied Billy Bunter's hands behind his back, so that he would be unable to tamper with the bandage over his eyes.

"Now," said Peter, "perhaps you can find your way to the gym?"

"Oh, certainly!" replied Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. stopped playing football, and watched their plump schoolfellow in great amusement.

Billy Bunter set off at a brisk, confident pace. But he wasn't going towards the gymnasium. He was making a bee-line for Big Side, where a First Eleven match was in progress.

"Am I going right, Toddy?" inquired Bunter at length.

"I'm not giving you any information," said Peter. "Your bump of locality ought to direct you, seeing that it's the most marvellous bump of its kind."

Billy Bunter walked on. He marched

boldly on to Big Side, and he crossed in front of the goal just as Wingate of the Sixth was in the act of shooting.

Crash!

The ball came with such force from Wingate's foot that it took Billy Bunter under the chin, and knocked him backwards into the net.

"Goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter lay floundering in the net, wondering if an earthquake had hit him.

"Is this a new game, Bunter?" demanded Wingate, striding to the spot.

"Ow-ow-ow! I'm trying to find the gym!" wailed Bunter. "I want to prove to Toddy that I've got the best bump of locality at Greyfriars, so I offered to walk to the gym blindfolded. I seem to have lost my bearings a bit."

"You have!" said Wingate grimly. "But I'll soon put you on the right track. This is the way to the gym."

And the captain of Greyfriars proceeded to dribble Billy Bunter off the field. The fat junior roared with anguish as Wingate's hefty boot propelled him along.

Bunter reached the exit of the football ground. Then he picked himself up, and made his way towards the school building. It was a fairly simple matter to follow the path.

Peter Todd, in order to give Bunter more freedom, had now loosened his hands; but he walked close beside Bunter, to make sure the fat junior did not cheat.

On reaching the school building, Bunter's troubles started afresh. At last, after groping his way round sundry passages, Billy Bunter's hand came into contact with a door-knob. He concluded it was the door-knob of the gymnasium. With a chuckle of triumph, he threw open the door.

"Bunter, you ass!" hissed Peter Todd warningly. "Come back!"

But the warning came too late.

Billy Bunter rolled into the gymnasium—as he supposed it to be—and started to grope

for the box-horse and the parallel-bars. He was thus engaged when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Boy! Bunter! How dare you invade my study in this absurd manner! What do you want here? And why, pray, are you blindfolded?"

It was the terrifying voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

"Oh crumbs!" faltered Billy Bunter, in dismay. "I—I thought this was the gym, sir! I'm trying to find the gym. But my bump of locality seems to have led me astray."

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Remove that bandage, Bunter, and cease these ridiculous antics at once!" he exclaimed.

Bunter removed the towel. He was only too glad to be rid of it. Then he blinked apologetically at Mr. Quelch, and beat a hurried retreat from the study.

Peter Todd was outside, chuckling.

"So much for your bump of locality," he said. "You've no idea of the geography of Greyfriars. Fancy mistaking Quelch's study for the gym! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give me another test," urged Bunter. "I sha'n't make a mistake next time. Look here, Toddy. Let me find my way blindfolded from the footer field to the tuckshop. And if I walk there direct, without going out of my way, will you promise to stand me a feed?"

"Certainly!" said Peter.

Billy Bunter was blindfolded once more, on the football field, and from there he walked direct, without a second's hesitation, to the tuckshop!

As Bob Cherry, remarked afterwards, it must have been due to some law of magnetic attraction. Or perhaps Bunter had scented Mrs. Mimble's newly-baked pies afar off.

At all events, Billy Bunter walked straight to the tuckshop without faltering, and Peter Todd was obliged to stand him a feed, and to admit that Bunter's bump of locality was not altogether a failure!

THE END.

THE DUFFER!

By Dick Penfold.

GEOGRAPHY is not a game
At which I'm over-skilled;
With mountains, hills, and lakes,
and rills
I'm not exactly thrilled.
One fact, though, I've contrived to gain—
Lisbon's the capital of Spain!

I don't know if Mount Everest
Is twenty miles in height;
Nor can I tell how many dwell
Upon the Isle of Wight.
One fact alone absorbs my brain—
Lisbon's the capital of Spain!

The Thames may rise in Oxfordshire,
Or Somerset, or Surrey;
No odds to me, that I can see,
Then wherefore should I worry?
I simply chant the dull refrain—
"Lisbon's the capital of Spain!"

Geography's a beastly bore,
I hate it, heart and soul!
An outdoor game is my chief aim,
Scoring the winning goal.
To Quelch, though, I'll make this plain—
Lisbon's the capital of Spain!

But Quelch gives an angry glare,
I feel an awful ass.
"Penfold," he cries, "you're much too wise!
Stand out before the class!
My pointer now will give you pain—
MADRID'S the capital of Spain!"

HOWLERS!

(Collected from exercise books of certain Greyfriars' fags.)

DICKY NUGENT:
"The capital of Beljum is Brussels. It is noted chiefly for its sprouts."
* * *

GEORGE TUBB:
"The famous Bridge of Size, at Vennis, is so called bekwase it is the biggest bridge in the world."
* * *

BOLSOVER MINOR:
"The chief exports of Germany are German measles."
* * *

GEORGE ALFRED GATTY:
"The Eddystone Lighthouse was built hundreds of years ago by a man named Eddie Stone."
* * *

WINGATE MINOR:
"The Scilly Isles are used as a place of exile for people who are off their rockers."
* * *

PERCIVAL SPENCER PAGET:
"The chief seaside resorts of England are Birmingham, Sheffield, and Wolverhampton. Not many people bathe at Blackpool, bekwase they prefer the water to be nice and clean. Black pools are not very nice. The best place for fresh-water bathing is Bath."
* * *

ERNEST MYERS:
"Mumbles is a town in Wales. It is called Mumbles bekwase you can't understand what the inhabitants are saying."
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(Continued from page 13.)

"I don't see how anybody could," agreed Nugent. "But I put it there right enough."

"It's not in the study now."

"Oh, rot!" said Nugent. "I'll go and look for it there, if you like."

"Do, then; but you won't find it."

Frank Nugent, a little crossly, went up to the Remove passage. But he came back to the Rag empty-handed.

"Well, found it?" asked Russell.

"No; it isn't there."

"I told you so. Where is it, then?"

"I know I put it there," said Frank. "That's all I jolly well know about it."

"Oh, rot! I lent you that book before I'd finished it myself. It's rather thick to lose it for me."

"I haven't lost it, you ass! I tell you I put it on your study table, and left it there."

"Then it flew away, I suppose," said Russell sarcastically.

"Oh, rats!"

"Looks to me as if somebody's playing giddy jests in the Remove passage," said Peter Todd. "Smithy's cake and Russell's 'Holiday Annual'—it's just as if Bunter were back again."

"Some fellow from another Form, most likely," said Bob Cherry. "The Fourth were out earlier than us this afternoon."

Vernon-Smith and Russell acted on the hint. They left the Rag, to inquire among the Fourth Form fellows for a missing cake and a missing volume.

But they made no discovery; nobody in the Fourth admitted knowing anything about the missing articles. Which was naturally annoying to Smithy and Russell, and they did not soon drop the subject. Smithy's cake, it was probable, was gone beyond recovery; whoever had purloined it had doubtless disposed of it internally. But the "Holiday Annual" could scarcely have been disposed of in that manner; and Russell wanted it, and meant to know what had become of it. When Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came up to Study No. 1 for evening preparation, Dick Russell looked in on them.

"Found that 'Annual' yet, Nugent?" he asked.

Nugent gave him an angry look.

"Look here, Russell, I'm fed up. I've told you I took your blessed book back to your study. That ends it."

"It doesn't—not till I get the book," said Russell. "You'd better look round your own study for it."

"Rats! You can look if you like."

"Look here, Nugent—"

"Look here, Russell—"

"Oh, let's look for the blessed thing!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, and the three juniors rooted out Study No. 1.

But the "Holiday Annual" did not come to light. The missing volume certainly was not there.

"Are you satisfied now, Russell?" snapped Nugent.

"Of course I'm not. I gave six shillings for that book," said Russell tartly. "I suppose I'm entitled to read it after giving six bob for it. You shouldn't have borrowed it if you weren't going to take care of it."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 875.

"I tell you—" roared Nugent.

"What's the good of telling me you put it in my study, when it's not there?" demanded Russell. "I dare say you intended to and forgot. You've put it down somewhere and forgotten where. I think you might try to remember, as I want the book."

"I put it in your study."

"Oh, rats!"

Russell left Study No. 1 and slammed the door after him. Nugent's face was red and wrathful; and Wharton regarded him inquiringly.

"I suppose you're sure, Frank—"

"Of course, I'm sure!" snapped Nugent.

"Well, keep your wool on, old chap; but it's jolly odd that the book seems to have vanished."

"Somebody's borrowed it, I suppose!" growled Nugent. "I'm jolly well fed up with it!"

"But a chap who'd borrowed it would say so. Russell's asked all the Remove from end to end."

Snort from Frank Nugent. Harry Wharton sagely dropped the subject, and devoted his attention to prep.

Prep was still going on in Study No. 1 when there was a tap at the door, and Temple of the Fourth came in. Cecil Reginald Temple was not looking amiable.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton, as you're head of the Remove," he said sharply.

"Go ahead! Cut it short—prep, you know."

"Bother your prep! Some dashed fag has been rooting about in my study," said Temple. "I can jolly well tell you that if somebody else is taking on Bunter's old tricks, there will be trouble."

"Oh, my hat! What's happened now?"

"I've missed some things from my study. I was standin' a supper to some of the Fourth, and I got the stuff in this afternoon, and left it in my study. I've just missed it—ham, and a cold fowl, and a lot of tuck. It's not good enough, I can tell you!"

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Nugent indignantly. "It was some fellow in your own Form, of course!"

"It wasn't! I've asked up and down the Fourth, and besides, it's you Remove fags who raid tuck like this," said Cecil Reginald loftily. "I don't say you chaps personally, but some kid in the Remove. It's got to be stopped! I want my stuff back. If it isn't handed back, I expect it to be paid for—see?"

Wharton and Nugent rose to their feet. Neither was in a mood to stand any swank from Temple of the Fourth.

"It's some Fourth Form chap, of course," said Harry. "And it looks to me as if he's been raiding Remove studies, too."

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Temple. "I'm puttin' it to you as captain of the Remove. I think you ought to see that my stuff's brought back to my study."

"The boot's on the other leg. Smithy's missed a cake, and I think you, as captain of the Fourth, ought to see that it's brought back to his study," retorted Wharton.

"I didn't come here for any fag cheek!" shouted Temple. "We're not grub-raiders in the Fourth."

"We're not in the Remove—now Bunter's gone, anyhow."

"Oh, you fags are all much of a muchness!" said Temple.

"That's enough! Travel!"

"I want—"

"You want help? Right!" And Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent proceeded to help Temple of the Fourth to travel.

Temple travelled at a great rate. The speed at which he travelled through the doorway of Study No. 1 made his head swim.

He arrived in the passage in a yelling heap.

"Oh, gad! Yow-ow! You cheeky rotters! I—I—I'll—"

"Want some more help?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I'll—" gasped Temple.

"Lend a hand, Franky!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Nugent.

Two or three more Removites came along to lend a hand. Cecil Reginald Temple went down the Remove staircase, rolling.

On the next landing he sat up and yelled. But a series of missiles from the passage above decided him on departure. He shook his first at a crowd of grinning faces, and fled down the lower stairs and vanished.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Bunder Thinks It Out!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER was still missing from Greyfriars, when Wednesday morning dawned on the old school.

The Head's flogging, which had scared away the Owl of the Remove, had not taken place yet—indeed, it seemed probable that it never would take place now.

For the matter was getting serious. More and more of the fellows believed that something must have happened to Bunter.

There was no doubt that the Head was alarmed, and that Mr. Quelch was growing very anxious. His anxiety took the form, chiefly, of tantrums; but the juniors saw easily enough that he lived in dread of hearing alarming news about Bunter.

Even Mr. Bunter, at the Bunter home, was displaying uneasiness—in the midst of his weird operations among the bulls and bears and stags, and other fearsome beasts that haunt the purlieus of the Stock Exchange, he found time to wonder what had happened to Billy.

Mr. Bunter's uneasiness took the form of telephoning to the Head, and making gruffer and gruffer inquiries after Bunter. He seemed to consider it useless to come down personally to Greyfriars, and certainly he could have done no good there; and he was very busy in the City. But he told the Head that if Bunter was not found, he would come down on Saturday in person to see about it.

The Head of Greyfriars, secluded in his scholastic retreat, did not even know that the Stock Exchange was closed on Saturdays, and he wondered why Mr. Bunter chose that day. And he hoped fervently that something would be heard of William George earlier in the week. He did not want to see Mr. Bunter; he most decidedly and most earnestly did not want to see him.

The Head was growing very restive under the stress of this worry. In the Sixth Form room, the great men of the Sixth found him unusually tart in temper. Generally the Head would treat the Sixth—the Palladium of the school—with polished courtesy. Now the rough showed through the smooth, as it were. Loder of the Sixth was told that he was careless. Carne was told that he was slovenly. Walker was even told that he was stupid. The Head very nearly told him that he was a fool, but fortunately stopped short of that.

It really looked as if the Sixth were going to get from the Head what the Remove were getting from Mr. Quelch, if this worrying affair of Bunter did not come to an end.

Really it was amazing that so unimportant a personage as the Owl of the Remove should cause so much annoyance and disturbance throughout Greyfriars. But there it was.

The more the Head was worried and troubled, the more it seemed clear to him that Bunter's Form master was responsible for this outrageous conduct on Bunter's part, and the more plainly he intimated that opinion to Mr. Quelch.

So Mr. Quelch, in these days, went from bad to worse, so far as the "tantrums" were concerned.

Wednesday morning was, as Lord Mauleverer pathetically remarked, simply horrid, in the Remove room.

The awful possibility that something serious had happened to Bunter, weighed on Mr. Quelch's mind. If nothing had happened to him, how could he have vanished so utterly? Inquiries had been made far and wide. A reward had been offered for information. But it was clear that no human eye had seen Bunter since he had slipped out of the Remove dormitory in the small hours of Monday morning.

The thought of the deserted chalk-pits near Courtfield made Mr. Quelch shudder.

In such a mood of mingled anxiety and alarm and anger, anything like brightness on any face was taken as an affront, if not an actual personal insult, by the Remove master. Certainly, in the present circumstances, the Remove fellows were not likely to look very bright. They were not, perhaps, worrying about Bunter; but their Form master was worrying them, so it came to the same thing.

The Remove fellows felt that they never would get to the end of Wednesday morning, and their only consolation was the fact that Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday.

That half-holiday came just in time to keep them from a nervous breakdown, according to Bob Cherry. Really, matters in the Remove were growing intolerable.

"It's all Bunter's fault," Harry Wharton remarked in the quad, after dinner. "That fat ass is causing all the trouble. Look here, he's got to be found."

"We can't find him!" groaned Bob. "I'd like to find him quick, and kick him hard. But we can't find the fat owl."

"Looks as if something happened to him before he got far from Greyfriars," said Harry. "He's never been seen, and a fat owl like Bunter would be remembered by anybody who'd seen him. I'm really afraid that something's happened to him. What about hunting for him this afternoon?"

"Where?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Blessed if I know, but we might pick up a clue somewhere," said the captain of the Remove. "He must have gone somewhere when he left the school, I suppose."

"Rather like looking for a needle in a haystack," said Frank Nugent. "He seems to have vanished like a giddy ghost."

Vernon-Smith came along and joined the Famous Five as they were discussing the matter. There was a thoughtful frown on the Bounder's face, and a rather curious expression in his eyes.

"Somebody's been in my study this morning," he said.

"That grub-raider from the Fourth again?" asked Harry Wharton. All the Remove had decided that the mysterious grub-raider belonged to the Fourth, strenuously as it was denied by Temple, Dabney & Co.

"Looks like it! Somebody's scooped my things while we were at class this morning."

"But the Fourth were in class, too," said Harry.

"But a fellow can make an excuse to get out of the Form-room," remarked

Bob Cherry. "We know that nobody in the Remove did, so it's clear it was a Fourth Form chap."

"What's missing, Smitty?" asked Wharton.

"Some stuff I got in a parcel from home—chocolates and grapes and things," said Vernon-Smith. "I left the hamper in my study, and it's empty now."

"It's getting too thick," growled Johnny Bull. "It's as bad as having Bunter back again. Let's go and rag the Fourth this afternoon."

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "We've had enough ragging from Quelch. Let's pass it on to the Fourth."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, let the Fourth rest a bit," said Vernon-Smith. "What we want is to find that fat villain Bunter. It looks as if we're going to have a dog's life till he comes back."

"It does," said Harry. "Quelch's really getting near the limit. There'll be trouble if he keeps on."

"The esteemed likefulness is not worth the liveliness, in the present execrable circumstances," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"But we can't find Bunter," growled Johnny Bull. "I'd give anything to be within kicking distance of him. But it can't be done."

The Bounder's eyes glimmered. "I've been thinking," he said. "I think I've got an idea. Bunter may not be so jolly far off as you think."

"He's disappeared," said Nugent.

"I know. Just as if the giddy earth had opened and swallowed him up," said the Bounder. "But the giddy earth hasn't, all the same. Doesn't it strike you as jolly odd that not a single soul seems to have set eyes on him since he left Greyfriars?"

"It's odd enough," agreed Wharton.

"Looks as if he may have tumbled into a chalk-pit or something."

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Address

In the event of my winning, I prefer a Lady's—Gent's—Bicycle. Cross out the word not applicable.

"Bunter's too jolly careful of his fat carcass for that. He's somewhere all right; and as we know he had no money, what's he living on all the time?" said the Bounder quietly. "You fellows remember he wanted to borrow money of you to bolt on. You didn't give him any. I don't suppose he had enough to take a railway ticket. Well, a chap can't travel far or fast without money—especially a fat slacker like Bunter."

"That's so; it makes it all the more surprising that he vanished like that as soon as he got outside Greyfriars."

"It would make it jolly surprising—if he got outside Greyfriars," assented the Bounder.

"If!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes. They've been searching for him everywhere outside the school, and haven't found a trace of him. But there's one place where nobody's thought of looking."

"Where?"

"Inside Greyfriars," said the Bounder.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Smoked Out!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stared at the Bounder. His words took them utterly by surprise.

"Inside Greyfriars!" repeated

Bob Cherry.

"My only hat!"

"Smithy—"

"Well, that's my idea," said the Bounder coolly. "I don't say I should have thought of it—only this grub-raiding has set me thinking. Bunter's idea was to dodge his flogging, and he was willing to take the risk of running away from school for that. But he hadn't any money; and I don't believe he was a fellow to start on a journey in the middle of the night, either—he hadn't the nerve for it. But he was cute enough to make fellows believe he had bunked, while he was hanging somewhere about all the time. Lots of places where he could hide."

"Great Scott!"

It was a startling idea to the Famous Five.

Certainly it had never occurred to them that Billy Bunter, searched for far and wide outside the school, might be lying in some secluded hiding-place within the school walls all the time. Yet now they thought of it, now that the acute Bounder had suggested it, it really seemed more probable than otherwise. The mysterious grub-raiding in the Remove and Fourth studies would be accounted for, on that theory. For certainly, if Bunter was hidden somewhere in the school, he could not live without eating—without, in fact, having plenty to eat. That was a most important consideration to Bunter.

"I suppose it's possible!" said Harry Wharton, after a long and thoughtful silence.

Johnny Bull gave an expressive grunt.

"And he's giving us all this trouble, and laughing up his sleeve at us all the time!" he said.

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"By gum! If he's in the school we'll jolly well find him, and rag him bald-headed," he said.

"The ragfulness will be terrific."

"It's awfully thick, if Smithy's right," said Nugent. "Giving us all this trouble, and alarming his own people because—"

"Oh, Bunter wouldn't think about that," said the Bounder, with a laugh. "All he's thinking of is to keep his fat

hide away from the Head's birch. I'm going to look for him; you fellows can join up if you like. I'm fed-up with Quelehy's tantrums."

"Same here!"

"The samefulness is terrific."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"The sooner he's found the better for him," he said. "If this goes on it won't be a flogging for him—it will be the sack. And if he's in the school all the time he must be found sooner or later. Let's look for the fat bounder—but where?"

"In the old tower, perhaps—" said Nugent.

"In the House!" said the Bounder.

"He's somewhere where he can sneak out while we're in class, and raid our studies. Somewhere in touch of the Remove and Fourth studies."

"That's so."

"We'll begin in the box-rooms," said Vernon-Smith. "If he's there at all, he must be hiding in the disused attics. Let's draw the attics, and see."

"Right-ho!"

The Famous Five went into the House with the Bounder. In the Remove passage they came on Peter Todd, and Toddy was acquainted with the Bounder's suspicion. Peter caught on at once.

"It's so," he said. "Clear as daylight. I wonder I never thought of it. Let's draw the attics."

The seven juniors proceeded up the staircase to the Remove box-room. Farther up the narrow stair there were several attics, belonging to the ancient buildings, and never used. Old lumber had been stacked in some of them, and unnumbered spiders had made their happy homes there. But the empty, dusky rooms were searched in vain; there was no sign of an occupant, and no sign of the dust having been disturbed recently.

The searchers returned to the Remove box-room rather discouraged.

Vernon-Smith, however, did not seem discouraged. He had given the matter a good deal of thought before speaking to the Famous Five. In the box-room he pointed to a square wooden trap in the ceiling. That trap gave access to the space between the ceiling rafters and the slanting roof of red tiles. In the roof above there was a corresponding trap, designed for use in case of fire.

The juniors looked up.

"Up there!" ejaculated Bob.

"That's about the safest place for

him," said the Bounder. "And I notice that two boxes have been dragged under the trap—look! Somebody's stacked one on another—and I fancy it was Bunter getting on to the roof."

"Looks like it," agreed Wharton.

"I say, are we going crawling over the giddy rafters, looking for the fat bounder up there?" asked Nugent doubtfully.

"No need," said the Bounder coolly. "If Bunter's there, we'll make him come out."

"He jolly well won't answer, if you yell," said Peter Todd.

"There's more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream," said the Bounder. "Leave it to me."

"Go it!" said Harry Wharton, quite willing to leave it to the Bounder, though a little puzzled.

Vernon-Smith opened one of the boxes and took out an armful of straw packing. He stacked it in the box-room grate, closed down the damper, and lighted it. There was a howl of protest from the juniors as the room began filling with thick and acrid smoke.

"What the thump—"

"Smithy, you ass—"

There was a rush out on the landing. The smoke eddied and thickened in the room. Unheeding it, Vernon-Smith stepped on the stacked boxes under the trap in the ceiling and pushed up the trap.

A thick volume of smoke rushed up into the space above, spreading under the sloping tiles of the roof.

"Fire!" shouted the Bounder.

He jumped down from the boxes, and joined the juniors on the landing, outside the open door of the box-room.

"Oh, my hat! What a wheeze!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "You're a giddy genius, Smithy, old man! If Bunter's there—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fire!" yelled the Bounder.

The box-room was thick with smoke now, eddying up into the roof through the open trap. Harry Wharton & Co. waited breathlessly. If Bunter was there, there was little doubt that the alarm of fire, backed up by the smoke, would draw him out of his hiding-place.

They had not long to wait.

Beyond the smoke there came a sudden yelp of terror, and then the sound of a crash!

Something heavy—very heavy—dropped from the trap-door in the ceiling upon the boxes below. From the boxes it rolled to the box-room floor with a heavy bump.

"Yarooooh!"

It was the familiar voice of the Owl of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smoked out!" yelled Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Fire! Help! Rescue! Yoooop!" came in a terrified howl, and a fat figure bolted out of the smoky box-room and cut across the landing to the stairs. And it bolted right into the waiting group of juniors, and half a dozen pairs of hands closed on the Owl of the Remove and held him. The vanished ventriloquist was captured at last.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

BILLY BUNTER wriggled in the grasp of the Removites.

His fat face was terrified.

"Ow! Leggo!" he howled.

"Fire! The house is on fire, you dummies! Run for it—run for your lives! Fire! Help! Leggo!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, are you potty?" shrieked Bunter. "Do you want us all to be burned to death? Help! Leggo!"

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

Bunter struggled frantically to escape. His impression was that Greyfriars was on fire, and that there was not a second to be lost. But, in spite of his frantic struggles, he was dragged back into the box-room, yelling and wriggling.

Vernon-Smith pushed up the damper, and the smoke was directed up the chimney. Nugent opened the window wide. The smoke cleared off from the box-room.

Billy Bunter's struggling ceased.

It dawned upon his fat brain that there was no fire, after all. The last fragments of the straw burned out in the grate.

Bunter blinked from one fellow to another through his big spectacles.

"You—you beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There wasn't a fire!" gasped Bunter.

"Only a little straw in the grate!"

grinned the Bounder.

"You—you rotters! You've taken me in!"

"Go hon!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"You knew I was there!" howled Bunter.

"Smithy suspected it!" chuckled Peter Todd. "So that's where you've been all the time, Bunter, while the Head thinks you've run away from school."

Bunter grinned.

"Rather neat, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Neat!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yes. You fellows wouldn't have thought of strategy like that," said Bunter complacently.

"No, I don't think we should," said the captain of the Remove. "I hope not, at any rate."

Billy Bunter closed the box-room door.

"Keep this dark, of course, you fellows," he said.

"Keep it dark!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes. You're not going to give me away, of course."

The juniors stared at Bunter.

That fat and fatuous youth seemed quite complacent again now. He sat on a box and blinked at the chums of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, of course, you can't give a chap away," he said. "I rely on you."

"You've got to show up!" said the Bounder gruffly.

"No jolly fear!"

"Do you think you can stay here, and come down raiding our studies when you want grub?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Well, a fellow must eat," said Bunter. "I brought a good bit of stuff with me, you know."

"From my study!" growled Vernon-Smith.

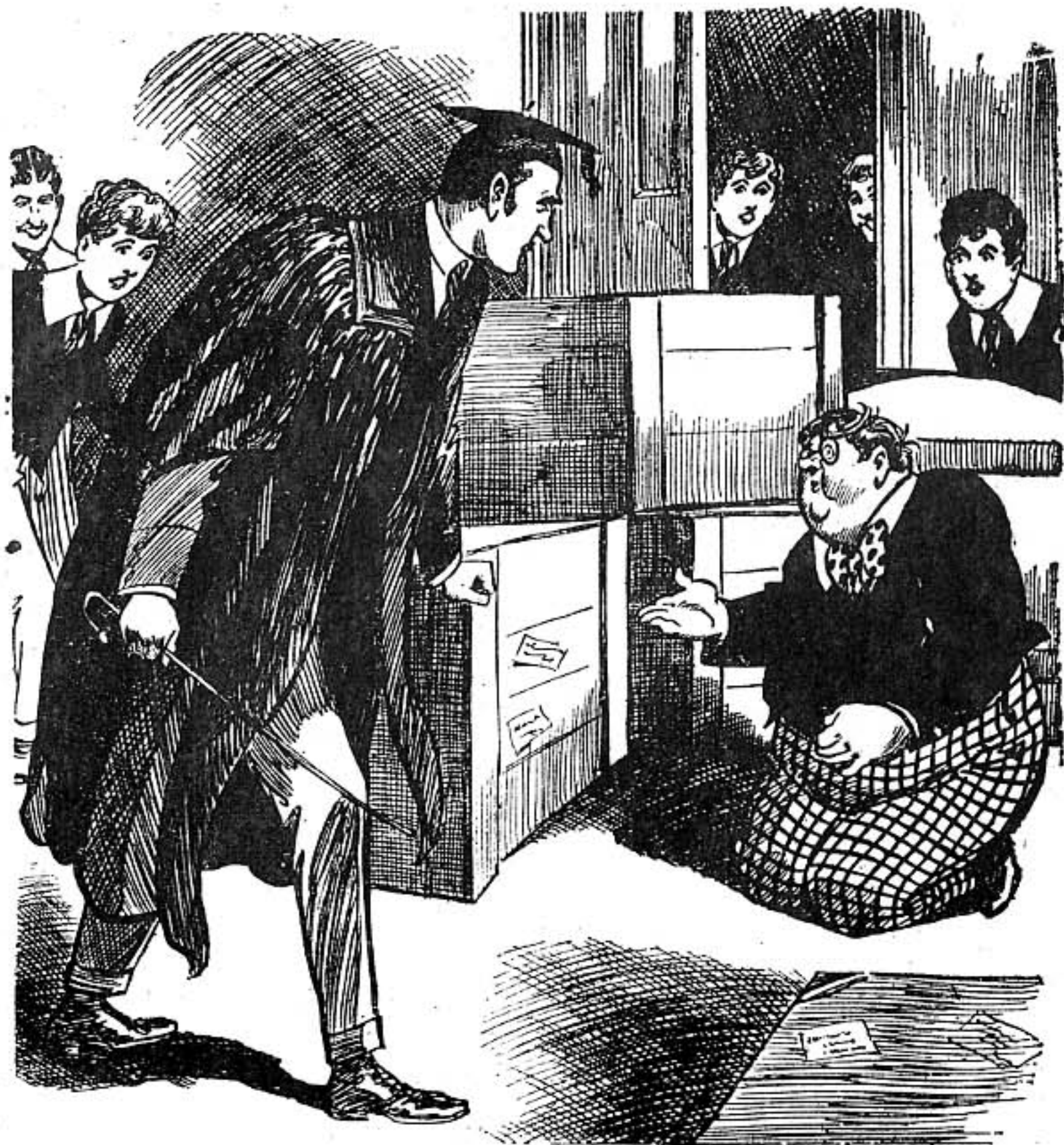
"I shall settle for it, of course," said Bunter, with dignity. "You can keep an account, and I shall square every penny. I'm expecting a postal-order shortly, from one of my titled relations."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The grub gave out, and a fellow had to do something," said Bunter. "I can tell you it was jolly lucky Smithy had that cake in his study, and lucky that Temple had laid in the stuff for a supper yesterday. And your hamper to-day came in very handy, Smithy. Did Russell miss the 'Holiday Annual'?"

"The 'Holiday Annual'!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes. I bagged it from his study. I wanted something to read," said Bunter. "You see, a fellow can't sleep all the time."



"Atchooo—chooo—atchooooooogh!" Mr. Quelch jumped. "What—what—" he began. "Ow! Atchoo!" "There is someone else here," rapped the Form-master, recovering from his surprise; "someone in concealment!" He nearly collapsed in astonishment as he strode forward and looked round the boxes. "Bunter!" "Ow!" groaned the fat junior. "It isn't me, sir. I—I—I'm not here, sir! Oh, lor'!" (See Chapter 13.)

"So it was you!" gasped Nugent.

"The fact is, it was a bit of a bore, hiding in the roof all on my own," said Bunter. "I couldn't really have stood it, only I'm not the fellow to submit to injustice. I refuse to be flogged. The Head is bound to relent in time—don't you fellows think so? Even Quelchy will get a bit tender-hearted, thinking of me wandering about the world on my own, without even enough to eat. See?"

The juniors stared blankly at Bunter. Apparently the Owl imagined that his absence would have a softening effect on the Head and his Form master, on the principle that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Bunter's powerful intellect was generally "out" in its calculations. But certainly it had never before been so far out as this.

"You—you—you fat dummy!" gasped Bob Cherry at last.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You—you think Quelchy is getting tender-hearted!" roared Johnny Bull. "Why, he's been like a wild Hun ever since you went—or since he thought you went, you fat idiot! When he sees you again he will scalp you!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"And the Head's in a royal wax," said Wharton. "I hear that he's been ragging even the Sixth. He jaws Quelchy, and Quelchy jaws us! There's been an awful time in the Remove!"

Bunter grinned.

"It's not a laughing matter," hooted Peter Todd. "I can tell you we've been

through it, you fat bounder, and all on your account!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" retorted Bunter.

"What?"

"You never treated me well, after all I've done for you, too!" said Bunter. "Serve you right, Toddy! Serve you all right!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Toddy. "I—I say, you fellows, don't you really think the Head will relent after feeling anxious about me and all that?" asked Bunter.

"No jolly fear! I think he'll take it out of your skin for upsetting everything, and the longer you keep it up the harder he will lay it on," said Harry.

"Oh, lor'!"

"The best thing you can do is to show up at once," added the captain of the Remove.

"I'm not going to be flogged."

"It will be worse than a flogging if you give the Head any more trouble. It will be the sack!"

Bunter sniffed.

"I don't care! I'd rather be sacked than flogged. I told the Head so! I'm jolly well not going to be flogged, I know that!"

"Look here, you crass ass—"

"You fellows have found me," pursued the fat junior calmly. "Well, that's all right. I can trust you. You are not going to sneak."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him. Vernon-Smith knitted his brows. They had only thought of finding Bunter, and hooking him out of his hiding-place. But they realised now that that was by no means the end of the matter. As Bunter said, they could not sneak. And to report their discovery to the masters was not in the game.

"It's all right," went on Bunter. "The fact is, I'm glad you've found me, as I can trust you. It's a bit lonely up here by myself, and it's rather dangerous coming down looking for grub. You fellows can come up here for a chat sometimes when it's safe——"

"Oh, my hat!"
"What cheek!"

"You can bring up grub, too," said Bunter brightly. "Don't worry about the money. I'll settle up all round when this affair is over and I get my postal-orders again."

"Great Scott!"
"You—you——"

"Look here! Do you think we're going to keep it secret that you're hiding in the school while the Head's worrying himself and everybody else over your dashed disappearance?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Yes, rather! You shouldn't have butted in!" said Bunter coolly. "Now you've butted in you've got to keep it dark!"

"Why, you—you——"
"Oh, really——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody's coming!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the box-room stairs creaked under a heavy tread.

Bunter jumped.

"I—I say, you fellows, that's Quelch's hoof!" he gasped. "Not a word—don't say a word—oh, dear!"

"Quelch!"

It was Mr. Quelch's well-known tread, and it was already on the landing outside the box-room door. There was no time for Billy Bunter to clamber into the roof again. The fat junior dodged behind the two stacked boxes in the middle of the room and crouched there, shaking with apprehension. He was barely in cover when the box-room door opened and Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow, strode in.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Chopper Comes Down!

MR. QUELCH fixed a stern glance on Harry Wharton & Co.

The juniors looked at him.

What had brought the Remove master to that sequestered box-room they could not guess. But he was there!

Mr. Quelch looked at the juniors and then looked about the room and sniffed. The last eddies of the smoke were clearing off by the open window.

"What has been going on here, Wharton?" demanded the Remove master sternly.

"Hem!"

"My attention was drawn to smoke pouring from the window!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"Oh!"

"Have you been playing dangerous tricks with fire here at the risk of setting fire to the school?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then what has happened? There was a great volume of smoke, though it seems to have cleared off now. You have given me the trouble of ascending these stairs. What does it mean?" Mr. Quelch looked at the grate. "You have been burning straw?"

"Ye-e-es, sir. Quite safe. In the grate, sir!"

Behind the boxes Bunter crouched and quivered. If Mr. Quelch had advanced a few more steps into the room he must infallibly have seen Bunter. But as yet the Owl of the Remove was unseen, and his presence unsuspected. But Mr. Quelch was in a very tart and suspicious mood. Something had been going on in the box-room, and the Remove master meant to know all about it.

He pointed to the open trap in the ceiling.

"What does that mean? You are well aware that it is strictly forbidden for you to climb there on the rafters."

"We—we haven't, sir——" stammered Peter Todd.

"Who opened the trap?"

"I did, sir," said the Bounder.

"And why?"

No answer.

"I intend to inquire very thoroughly into this," said Mr. Quelch grimly.

The Remove master had a cane under his arm. He let it slide down into his hand.

The juniors stood nonplussed. From where they stood they could see Bunter crouching behind the boxes and blinking at them with beseeching blinks. Mr. Quelch could not see him, and the juniors realised that they could not give him away and hand him over to punishment. But obviously there was punishment coming for somebody. Mr. Quelch was plainly in the "tantrum" state; indeed, more so than ever.

There was a pause, and the pause was broken in a sudden and startling manner. A last eddy of the clearing smoke caught Billy Bunter, and he sneezed. He felt the sneeze coming on and struggled against it. He resisted it almost frantically, and for a moment or two held it at bay. Then it came all the more emphatically for having been checked.

"Atchoo—choo—atchoooooooooooooogh! Grooogh!"

Mr. Quelch jumped.

"What—what——"

"Grooogh! Atchoooooooooooh!"

"There is someone else here—someone in concealment—what—what?" Mr. Quelch strode forward and looked round the boxes.

Then he very nearly fell down in his astonishment.

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Atchoo!"

"Bunter!" roared Mr. Quelch.

"Ow! 'Tisn't me, sir!"

"Bunter!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Oh! Oh, lor!"

Mr. Quelch's iron grasp on the fat junior's shoulder jerked him to his feet.

Bunter stood quivering in that iron grasp like a very fat jelly. For an awful moment there was silence. Mr. Quelch looked at the open trap and then at Harry Wharton & Co., and he understood.

"Bunter! You have been in hiding here?"

"No, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"I—I mean yes, sir."

"You boys found him here, I presume?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Very good. I think I understand the whole matter now. Bunter, you have lain in concealment here, causing anxiety to your friends and relatives, to your headmaster and to me?"

"I—I—I——" stuttered Bunter.

"You deliberately gave the impression that you had run away from school, Bunter, careless of the trouble you gave."

"You—you see, sir——"

"This is—is—is unspeakable," said Mr. Quelch. "You have thrown the whole school into a state of disturbance, Bunter, in order to evade a deserved punishment for a time!"

"I—I—I don't want to be flogged!" gasped Bunter.

"You unscrupulous boy——"

"Eh?"

"You young rascal! Come with me!"

With the iron grasp on his shoulder, Billy Bunter was marched out of the box-room. In a state of quavering funk the hapless Owl of the Remove was marched down the stairs. Mr. Quelch was taking him to the Head to answer for his many sins.

"Well," said Bob Cherry after a pause, "Bunter's found now. It's all the better for him."

"The betterfulness is terrific."

"He will get it hot, but he was bound to get it—he had to have it," said

(Continued on page 27.)

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See page 17.

THE LIMIT! That's what they think of Nugent Beasley Ailen in Storrydene. But he's worse than that. Boiling in oil is too good for the likes of him! Get ready to kick him out of the Villa, boys!



The Pact!

THE mean houses of Storrydene huddle together as though for warmth and mutual support in a slum district known as the Ditches. It was towards this squalid quarter of the town that Nugent Beasley Ailen made his way on a chilly morning in early November.

It was a wretched day—a day of Stygian gloom and frowning clouds—and the slight fog hung oppressively overhead. A curious stillness reigned over the Ditches, although occasionally a harsh, husky cough floated eerily through the mist, as though in peevish protest.

Life is never a thing of beauty in the Ditches, but a November fog seems to blot out any spark of brightness that ever struggled for existence in its mean streets.

The raw gloom that enveloped Nugent Ailen would have affected even the most incurable optimist, yet the young man looked very smug and self-satisfied as he made his way to Racknell's Rents, a block of inhospitable tenement houses.

Attired in a light tweed overcoat, a grey bowler, and white spats, Nugent looked a "sport" of the first water—a picture of blatant affluence. A more incongruous figure amidst such squalid surroundings would have been hard to find.

He turned into Racknell's Rents and mounted the narrow stone steps.

Looking round for a lift, Nugent's smug smile vanished as he found that the Rents did not boast such a luxury. He had regained his high spirits, however, by the time he reached the fifth floor and halted upon the draughty landing.

Facing him was a door, innocent of varnish and in a state of pitiful dilapidation. It creaked protestingly as the opulent visitor kicked it open with his foot. Crossing the threshold, Nugent found himself in a shabby living-room, and he sniffed with marked disgust as he gazed round at the worn linoleum and a few pieces of cheap furniture.

"What a hole!" he muttered. "I wouldn't keep a dog here!"

The sound of footsteps came from an inner room, and a moment later a haggard-faced young man came through the faded red curtains. He pulled up abruptly at the sight of his prosperous-looking visitor, and the unmistakable light of fear dawned in his dark eyes.

"Morning, Coyne!" said Nugent briskly. "Nice little place you've got here!"

He waved a yellow-gloved hand as he made the remark.

"Yes, sir," answered Coyne, uncertainty in his manner. "It does me very well, sir."

"H'm! That's rather a pity," said Nugent, taking a gold cigarette-case from his pocket and extracting a weed. He lit up, gazing at the haggard-faced young man through a haze of aromatic smoke.

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand, sir," said Coyne. "I've never complained; I'm perfectly satisfied."

"Exactly!" smiled Nugent. "Perfect satisfaction is not good for the soul, my dear Coyne! Adversity is a tonic—"

"I reckon I've had more than my share of adversity, sir," put in Coyne, his pale features twisted into a rueful smile. "First my mother's death, and now my wife's illness—"

"By the way," remarked Nugent, "how is Mrs. Coyne?"

"Bad, sir," said the footballer, glancing over his shoulder towards the faded red curtains. "The doctor's fee is stiff, and the special food he's ordered simply runs away with the money!"

Nugent Ailen nodded his sleek head, but there was no sign of sympathy upon his bloated features.

"You know, Coyne," he drawled, adopting the patronising air that he sometimes borrowed from his father, "you people of the lower class have no right to indulge in the luxury of these expensive illnesses!"

He continued to smirk at his own cheap cynicism as he watched a mantle of colour overspread the footballer's haggard features. Every human instinct prompted Coyne to send his hard fist crashing into that smug face, yet he knew that he was at the mercy of this bounder, who seemed to take a fiendish delight in a fellow-man's tragedy.

"It—it is kind of you to have inquired about my wife, sir," said Coyne, praying that there was nothing underlying the unexpected visit.

"Yes," smirked Nugent, flicking his cigarette-stump into the grate. "I am the soul of kindness, Coyne, although there are moments when my tenants think me hard. My tenants, for instance those—"

"Your tenants—" began Coyne, a puzzled frown puckering his brow.

"Exactly!" smiled Nugent. "As you know, these tenements were bought by my father, Sir Aubrey; but what you don't know is that he has very generously passed them over to me. I am your landlord. An agent looks after my affairs, and he tells me that you are some months in arrears with your rent. Times are hard, Coyne—deuced hard—"

and I scarcely know how to make both ends meet!"

The footballer knew this to be a lie, of course, for Sir Aubrey was reputed to be worth half a million; so he wondered what was at the bottom of the affair.

"My wife will be better soon—" began Coyne, a pleading note in his voice; and Nugent waved the remark aside.

"Soon! It's always 'soon' with you people!" said Ailen brutally, his suavity dropping from him like a cloak. "You've either got to pay up or get out, for I want these rooms for my personal use. That may sound strange, but I can't afford to live in decent chambers whilst people like you refuse to pay their debts."

Again Coyne knew that his visitor was lying, but he also knew his would be a hopeless case if he took it to court, for Sir Aubrey was chairman of the local bench. A suspicion, half formed and vague, came to him, and a flush mantled his haggard cheeks. Nugent, seeing that flush, understood.

"Yes, my dear Coyne," said the latter, "there are more ways than one of paying our just debts!" He smiled, stroking his little moustache. "Indeed," he continued, "I think we might come to an amicable understanding!"

His words were full of meaning, and the footballer nodded.

"Go on, sir," he said, lowering his voice and glancing towards the room of sickness. "I'll—I'll do anything!"

"Splendid!" said Nugent. "I like a man who can rise to an emergency. You are in a position to do me a favour—quite a trivial service, you know. In return, I shall see that you are not troubled about this wretched rent business! I am not a man who believes in beating about the bush, so I will go straight to the point at once." He paused, taking another cigarette from his massive gold case. "As you can imagine, I am not in love with the brass-faced young hound who has taken my place in the team—"

"You mean Voyce, sir?"

Nugent nodded.

"Shut up!" he said. "I'll do the talking. We are at home to Ironville United to-morrow, and it is my wish that I should play in the team. The directors will not hear of it, however, for they regard young Voyce as a little tin idol on wheels; so my only chance of playing rests with you."

Coyne positively gasped.

"Me?" he asked. "Wh-what can I do? You're not suggesting that I should—"

"Not at all!" put in Nugent. "I do not believe in violence—at least, not in the present case! My plan is quite simple; for all you have to do is to stand down!"

Coyne's mystification showed plainly upon his haggard face.

"But how?" he asked. "I know I don't look very well, for I've been up all night; but I shall be fit enough to turn out against Ironville."

"Pardon me," smiled Nugent, "you will not be fit enough! The strain of nursing your poor wife is going to prove too much for you!"

"But—"

The footballer was more bewildered than ever.

"Listen!" said Nugent, walking across the faded linoleum; and in low, tense tones he outlined his scheme.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 375.

The Taunt!

SATURDAY was a typical November day, damp and cold, but the wretched weather made no difference to the high spirits of the thousands of Villa supporters who swarmed along Fore Street to the spacious ground out at Bedwell Park.

The home club's colours were very much in evidence, many "fans" sporting black-and-white silk hats and enormous rosettes, and the itinerant vendors of coughdrops, fruit, and nuts were doing a fine business. The proceedings were further enlivened by musicians who couldn't play and songsters who couldn't sing, whilst an immaculate nigger with a throaty voice seemed anxious to extract teeth at a penny a time. The gentleman of colour sold tooth-powder as a side line, which says much for his business acumen. He had a pull both ways, as it were.

The turnstiles started clicking merrily as soon as the gates were opened, and every inch of space seemed to be occupied fully a quarter of an hour before the advertised time for the kick-off.

Business was looking up with Storrydene Villa, and Jonas Trimble, a director, was beaming as he watched the steady influx from the balcony of the club-house.

"Hoppy's the drawing card," he declared, turning to Craggs, another director—"Hoppy and young Voyce!"

Craggs, a taciturn individual, nodded his big head.

"And Sir Aubrey, t' goop, wanted to drop the kid!" he scoffed.

Nobody—with the possible exception of Craggs—knew anything about a goop or its habits, although a goop seemed to be any person with whom the director disagreed.

"We're going to stop that sort of thing!" growled Trimble, scowling across at the portly baronet, who was smoking a big cigar at the far end of the balcony. "This isn't a one-man show any longer. As for Nugent, the puppy, he shouldn't have been signed on in the first place. He can't kick a ball!"

"That's so, Jonas," agreed Craggs; "and if we could only get Tibbitt and Grizzle to back us up we'd heave the young monkey out on his neck! Is he playing for the reserves to-day?"

Trimble snorted.

"Not likely!" he growled. "He's pleased to stay at home and call himself a first reserve! It strikes me that he'd be better employed selling programmes and chocolates, only he might make a mistake with the change!"

"Reserve, is he?" grinned Craggs.

"Sure!" grunted Trimble. "But he doesn't stand an earthly chance of playing, thank goodness! All our lads are fit, and we shall have the same eleven that beat Mersey Albion, unless some of 'em get run over on their way up to the ground. Mister Nugent will take a back seat to-day—and keep it! Even old Tippitt, who licks Sir Aubrey's boots, is getting a bit fed-up with the young bouncer. Voyce is the kid for me!"

"Same here," declared Craggs, feeling for his pipe.

Peter Voyce was the unknown youngster who had taken part in a trial match, and had been asked to sign forms that same evening; and within a week he had led the famous Storrydene club against Mersey Albion, and had, in addition, accomplished the hat trick.

This was something like a record, and it at once became obvious that he was a new force in football, an outstanding personality, and the newspaper men

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searched feverishly through their dictionaries for superlatives with which to describe the new "star."

Leaving school prematurely on account of family misfortunes, his father having speculated unwisely on the advice of an unscrupulous financier, the youngster had tried to settle down to clerical work; but he quickly found that he was stifled within the four walls of an office. The open air called insistently to him, and he decided to try his luck with Storrydene Villa. Football was in his blood, and his wonderful display in the scratch match had made an immediate impression upon the directors. The unknown youth was an undoubted "find."

The one person who did not welcome the newcomer with open arms was Nugent Beasley Ailen, the manager's son, and he did everything in his power to make his father send young Voyce about his business. But weight of opposition went against Nugent, especially when it became obvious that he had a personal grievance against Voyce. Peter, as a matter of fact, had been Ailen's fag at Rundle's, but the nature of their quarrels was not divulged to Sir Aubrey or the directors.

Nugent, mean-spirited and vindictive, had done everything in his power to make things uncomfortable for Peter, and his jealous rage had known no bounds when the new centre-forward had scored three remarkable goals against Mersey Albion.

Never missing an opportunity of making himself objectionable, Nugent—an objectionable young man at any time—found his cheap sneers and covert gibes very poor weapons against the armoury of Peter Voyce's habitual good-humour; yet most of the players realised that the breaking-point was fast approaching. There would, they declared, dawn a day when Peter's smile would freeze upon his lips, and it was then that Nugent Beasley Ailen would have to look out for squalls. Peter, of course, was a couple of stones lighter than Nugent, but he was in perfect condition; whilst Ailen, on the other hand, was flabby and running to fat.

As usual, a quarter of an hour from the kick-off found the dressing-room a scene of animation, for the players were like a crowd of schoolboys now they had struck a winning streak. Nugent, sitting on a locker near the window, did not add his harsh voice to the lighthearted banter.

Leaning back, with folded arms, he kept his frowning gaze upon Peter, hoping to embarrass the youngster; and the big fellow writhed as Peter continued to ignore his very presence. Nugent reached that stage of pent-up feeling where he wanted to do his enemy a physical injury, and it was with this end in mind that he opened fire.

Peter had changed, and was standing in his footer rig, a magnificent specimen of virile young manhood; and his easy demeanour, that subtle something that is breeding, taunted Nugent with the fact that he, the son of a baronet, lacked something that this "common pro" possessed.

A muttered expletive broke from Nugent's thick lips, and he flushed hotly as Peter turned to him with smiling eyes.

"There are times," said Nugent, being deliberately offensive, "when I should like to remove that grin from your face."

The remark, uttered in a loud voice, rang through the room, and every eye turned towards Ailen.

"And there are times," remarked Peter quietly, "when I wish you would try. The present is one of them!"

The youngster was still smiling, but

the clear brown eyes had become strangely hard, and the lean jaw was set, altering the whole expression of the face.

Peter Voyce looked dangerous at that moment, so Nugent Beasley Ailen changed the subject.

"That was a nice little bit of fluff you had with you this morning, Voyce," he remarked, his bloated features twisting into a coarse leer. "I've had my eyes on her ever since I came down from my 'Varsity!"

Slowly, very slowly, the smile faded from Peter's lips, and his tanned face was absolutely expressionless as he looked straight into Nugent's little eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said, speaking very distinctly.

"I said that it was a nice bit of fluff you had with you this morning," repeated Nugent. "Brown hair and eyes. Pretty little bit of goods!"

"And you've had your eyes on her ever since you were kicked out of your 'Varsity?" asked Peter; and his taunt went home, bringing angry blood to the other fellow's face.

"You mind your own blamed business!" shouted Nugent, looking as though he would leap from his perch and hurl himself at the grim-faced youngster.

"I am," said Peter. "You see, that girl happens to be my sister!"

There was a fine shade of meaning in the quietly-spoken words, and it was not lost upon Nugent Ailen.

"And what about it?" he demanded. "Aren't I good enough to know her, the daughter of a bankrupt?"

"As a matter of fact," answered Peter, "you're not!"

A deep chuckle broke from "Hefty" Hebble, the giant back, and the sound had anything but a soothing effect upon Nugent Ailen. He swallowed hard, his beady eyes goggling from his head.

"Why—why, you penniless rotter, you dare talk to me like that?" he shouted. "You—"

"You need a little talking to sometimes," put in Peter quietly. "You're not a fit person to know any girl, and I'm not at all sure that I would introduce you to a self-respecting bo-constrictor!" The youngster became confidential. "You know, Ailen, you're a most unpleasant type of fellow. There is something about you that leaves a nasty taste in one's mouth, if you can get my meaning. Take your face, for instance. That is an offence, you know. You're all right, because you're behind it; but—"

A shout of laughter echoed through the dressing-room; but Nugent, seated by the open window, looked like a person petrified.

"To return to your face—much as I dislike doing so," continued Peter. "Can nothing be done for it? Why not buy a mask? You've no consideration for your fellow-men; you've—"

A howl of rage broke from Nugent, as he prepared to leap from the top of the locker, and the next moment a sponge flashed through the air, caught him full in the face, and sent him backwards; and a shriek of fear rang out as his legs shot upwards, and he disappeared through the open window!

The Ruse!

IT was but a short drop to the flower-bed, but Nugent Beasley Ailen found no crumb of comfort nor consolation in the fact. Escaping with nothing worse than a severe shaking, although his immaculate suit was badly soiled, he looked scarcely sane as he



"Look out!" roared Nugent in a blind fury. "I'm going to——" The rest of the exclamation was lost as a number of sponges whizzed through the air. Plop! Plop, plop!! Plop, plop, plop!!! The air became thick with flying missiles. Gasping and stuttering, Nugent raised his hands and staggered before the fierce attack. (See this page.)

scrambled to his feet, and raced round the clubhouse to the players' entrance. The terrific kick he aimed at the door of the dressing-room split one of the panels.

"Look out!" he roared, rushing into the room. "I'm going to kill——"

The rest of the bloodthirsty threat was lost as another soaked sponge whizzed through the air and caught him full in the mouth, sending his head back with an unpleasant jerk; and that shot, fired by Peter Voyce, was the signal for an intensive bombardment.

Plop!

Plop, plop!!

Plop, plop, plop!!!

The air became thick with flying missiles, and the stuttering, infuriated Nugent raised his hands and staggered before the fierce attack.

Sponges to the right of him, sponges to the left of him, they squelched and they soaked him; sponges in his eyes, sponges in his ears, they moistly provoked him; and the laughter of footballers volleyed and thundered.

Nugent Ailen found it difficult to believe that there were so many sponges in the world, whilst the yelling players wondered why the trainer had not ordered another hundred dozen. Ammunition was giving out, just when the bombardment was at its height.

The attack was slackening off by the time the din brought Sir Aubrey and Spudge Dixon on the scene, and the pompous baronet halted in almost comical amazement as his eyes rested upon the bedraggled figure of his drenched offspring.

Sir Aubrey, in a moment such as this, always jammed his gold-rimmed monocle into position.

"Nugent," he said severely, "what is the meaning of this? Is this some foolish joke on your part? You're not a child now, you know, and you must curb your high spirits!"

Nugent Beasley Ailen breathed hard.

Was it a foolish joke? He must curb his high spirits! And he was soaked to the skin!

"You—you—you——" he stuttered. "Do I look as though I've been enjoying a joke, you old idiot?" he demanded fiercely, grabbing his father by the lapel of his frock-coat and shaking him. "I've been attacked—assaulted—and by these roughs! I'll have the law on them! You're a magistrate! You must give them five years apiece! Do you hear?"

The question was superfluous, for Nugent's bellow could be heard outside the clubhouse, where a crowd of interested listeners had congregated.

"Perfectly, my boy," answered Sir Aubrey; and he glared up at Spudge, the elongated trainer. "This is no occasion for ill-bred amusement, Dixon," he admonished. "Now—er—about this note from Coyne——"

"Hang Coyne!" shouted Nugent wildly. "What about me?"

"I will attend to you later, when——" said the baronet.

"But I shall catch cold and die!" declared his moist son.

"You will do nothing so inconsiderate," said Sir Aubrey severely.

It seemed extremely unlikely that a person so pompous and self-important could have a sense of humour, yet his remark sent the players into shouts of laughter.

The referee popped his head into the room at this moment, and he also looked in surprise at the scene that met his gaze.

"Are you fellows nearly ready?" he asked, spluttering in an unofficial manner as he caught sight of Nugent. "You've got less than three minutes!"

"Worry not, lad," bade Spudge. "Eleven handsome young Englishmen will grace the sward in a matter of seconds! Avaunt! That's Latin for 'Hop it'!"

Sir Aubrey, frowning at such levity, turned to Hefty Hebble, the skipper of the side.

"Er—Hebble," he said, his manner patronising, "it seems that Coyne will not be able to turn out this afternoon."

The burly back looked serious,

"Has anything happened to his wife, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"I think not," returned the baronet shortly. "But that is beside the point. Coyne, I understand, has had scarcely a wink of sleep for the last few nights, and the doctor has warned him against playing to-day. Coyne should have told us before, of course, for he has cut things very fine. We have but one reserve available—Mr. Nugent—and he will play in Coyne's place at inside-right!"

Something very like a groan broke from two or three of Hebble's men.

"Why not play ten men?" asked Sceptre meaningly.

Nugent looked almost dangerous as he clenched his fists and glowered at the smiling winger.

"That's the sort of thing I have to put up with, gov'nor!" he declared. "We'll have a clean sweep of the whole bunch before I'm through with them!"

"Meanwhile," said Hefty Hebble, "it might be as well if you change. We're due on the field in half a minute!"

Scowling and muttering, yet with an exultant thumping of his heart, Nugent Ailen strode across the dressing-room, and commenced to divest himself of his soaked clothing; and seldom did his smouldering gaze leave the stalwart, brown-haired figure of Peter Voyce. His ill-humour vanished as he slipped into his black jersey, and there was an unpleasant gloating smirk upon his heavy features as he prepared to follow the other fellows out of the room. His scheme of revenge was working like a charm; and Peter, glancing across at his enemy, was puzzled at what he saw in the depths of Nugent's eyes.

"Everybody ready?" asked Hefty Hebble. "You all right, Ailen?"

"Of course I am!" grunted Nugent. "And—er—Hebble!"

"Hallo?"

The burly back was scowling as he swung round.

"Kindly remember that I am 'Mister' Ailen to you fellows!" said Nugent with dignity.

"Then get a move on—Mister Idiot!" grunted the skipper, and he strode away down the corridor.

Under Cover of the Fog!

A HEAVY, brownish gloom enveloped the ground as Hebble and his men trotted across the cinder-track and took the field, but the weather conditions were not bad enough to depress the thousands of "fans" who had parted with their pieces of silver at the turnstiles.

"Villa! Villa!"

"Here they are!"

"There's Hoppy! Three of the best for Hoppy!"

Hoppy Hawkins was the goalkeeping genius who had been with the Storrydene club for less than a fortnight. Dropping from the blue, as it were, he had introduced himself as the greatest custodian of the age, and within a matter of minutes he had proved that he was practically unbeatable between the sticks.

A youngster of sixteen or so, with sharp, birdlike features and bright eyes, he was seldom seen without a green Homburg hat that was about three sizes too large for him; and the fact that he had a wooden leg rather added to his bizarre appearance.

His happy smile and masterly goal-keeping had quickly made him a great favourite with the Storrydene crowd; and he now shared popularity with Peter Voyce.

"Now, three of the best for young Peter!" roared a clarion voice from the grandstand.

Three resounding cheers were given with all the power of leathern lungs, and the ground was still in a state of pandemonium—chattering rattles, tin trumpets, and blaring bugles contributing their quota of ear-jarring sound to the din—when the stentorian voice in the grandstand again made itself heard.

"Blow me, lads, if that ain't our little Sissy!"

Red-faced and excited, the speaker stood up in his seat and pointed towards Ailen.

Nugent Beasley had been known as Sissy since his inept display against Newcastle Athletic, though why the effeminate name should have been bestowed upon the illustrious son of Sir Aubrey is a profound mystery that nobody troubled to unravel.

Sissy he was, and Sissy he would remain as long as he stayed in Storrydene.

Every eye in the crowd searched through the light mist for the somewhat obese figure of Nugent, and a moment later a shower of questions and remarks broke out from all sides:

"What do YOU want, Sissy?"

"Got your knitting with you, Sissy?"

"Where's old Coyne?"

"What have you done with Coyne, Hefty?"

Strange though it may seem, Nugent showed no signs of displeasure at receiving such a hostile reception. He merely thrust his hands deep into his pockets and smirked, and his little eyes were still upon the well-knit figure of Peter Voyce as he strolled across the turf.

Coming up with the referee, he addressed the official in the patronising manner he adopted towards social inferiors.

"What do you make of the weather, Morecroft?" he asked.

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Morecroft raised an anxious face to the sky and gazed round.

"It wouldn't surprise me if we had to abandon the game later on," was his verdict. "It looks as though we're in for a pig of a fog. But I hope I'm wrong!"

"So do I, old man," smiled Nugent. And he lied.

Another deafening outburst of cheering announced the fact that the visitors had taken the field, and the sky cleared as Berrington led his men across the cinder-track. Ironside looked a very trim crowd in their red jerseys and white knickers, and the first thing that struck the spectators was the uniform height and build of the eleven. The average football team is made up of all shapes and sizes, but there was not a man in the visiting side that was a shade under five feet eleven in height.

Ironville had been dubbed the "Team of Giants," and not without good reason.

The teams, according to the official programme, would line up as follows:

Storrydene Villa—Black jerseys, white knickers.

Goal: Hawkins. Backs: Grace, Hebble. Half-backs: Denning, Thirl-boy, Craye. Forwards: Sceptre, Coyne, Voyce, Noyle, Battle.

Ironville United—Red jerseys, white knickers.

Goal: Berrington. Backs: Harrop, Lloyd. Half-backs: Coward, Cross, Brand. Forwards: Cohn, Page, Smith, Cole, Corner.

There was only one change, of course, Nugent, Ailen playing in place of Coyne at inside-right.

There was little in the toss for choice of ends, for the air was very still—too still thought many weather prophets in the crowd. Luck was with Berrington, however, and the Ironville supporters regarded the incident as a good omen.

"Well done, Jack!"

Jack Berrington, a big, imperturbable, smiling giant, was a great favourite with the folk from Ironville way. Even the most trying situation failed to flurry him, and he remained cool and smiling during the hottest bombardment. It was rumoured that he would be "capped" this season, but the prospect of "keeping" for England did not seem to disturb his serenity of mind.

Taking up his position between the sticks, he pulled his cap over his eyes, and lounged easily against an upright, and even when the ball went out to Sceptre, and the winger beat Cohn and Coward in turn, the smiling giant retained his unconcerned attitude. Having tricked the left-half, Sceptre sprinted off down the line in characteristic fashion, his head thrust forward, his arms extended, and a wild yell broke from the Villa supporters when the outside man shot off at a tangent, out-raced Harrop, the back, and took a terrific drive at goal.

Dropping to his knees, Berrington gathered the ball in his great arms, weighed it in his right palm, and then threw it out to Brand. And the right-half, getting his fair head to it, sent it out to Corner. Tall and thin, with a mop of black hair that had a trick of falling over his eyes, the winger took the pass on the run, and set off towards the home goal, and Craye, shooting along the turf with outstretched leg, just managed to push the ball off Corner's foot.

Taking the throw-in, the half-back placed the ball perfectly, and Peter Voyce, with a clever overhead kick, sent the leather soaring clean across the ground to Sceptre. And Sceptre was

ready for the pass. Coward, who was following the fleet-footed winger like a shadow, was tricked for the second time in a matter of minutes, and again a wild yell broke from the Storrydene fans as their man went away down the line, his feet twinkling as he ran.

"Up, up, UP!" roared thousands of voices, hoarse with excitement; and then a sudden silence reigned as Harrop and the winger raced neck and neck for the corner flag. Pulling up with a jerk, Sceptre tried to bluff the back, but a burly leg shot out and the ball went over the line.

"Corner!"

The shout was like a thunderclap, and the referee pointed to the flag.

"Now then, boys!"

"Let's hear from you!"

The crowd of players in the goalmouth looked eager and expectant as they watched Sceptre give the ball a twist with his fingers, and a hush settled over the ground when the winger, having taken three jerky hops, swung his foot.

Boomp!

Sailing gracefully through the air, the leather swerved in flight, and a fitful gust of wind, coming from nowhere, caught it in spectral fingers and carried it past Berrington's outstretched hands.

A moment later the ground was rocking with a tumult of sound.

Sceptre had scored from a corner kick.

"Goal!"

"Well done, lad!"

The Storrydene "fans" were not in the habit of concealing their emotions, and on the present occasion they went almost mad with jubilation. Hats and caps soared into the air like a mass of crows, and the grand-stand seemed to tremble with the thunderous volume of sound.

The only player who did not grip the flushed winger by the hand was Nugent Ailen, the passenger; but he was wearing a smug smile as he strolled up the field. The crowd was quick to notice this attitude, and many were the personal remarks that were hurled at the young man.

"Hi! When are we going to hear from you, Sissy?"

"Pull your socks up!"

"It is strange," remarked Nugent, falling into step with the referee, "that the lower orders are never happy unless they are being impertinent to their betters!"

Morecroft, a hard-bitten, grey-faced man, looked down at the speaker from his superior height.

"Really?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "I'm very fond of the fans, and if there is one individual I dislike it is the incompetent amateur who gets into first-class football through influence. I understand that you play such a fellow—a purse-proud young bounder with the manners of the pigsty—"

He did not finish his remark, for Ailen, red-faced and fuming, had faded away, wondering whether Morecroft had gone out of his way to be rude.

"Common cad!" muttered Nugent.

Pheep!

Touching the ball to Cole, Smith darted forward and snapped up the quick return, and he was a very surprised young man when Peter Voyce took the leather off his toe, passed to Noyle, and started a three-handed passing movement. It was clever work that bewildered Cole and Brand, and Lloyd looked somewhat worried as the three forwards swept down the field, carrying all before them.

Short-passing is always a pretty sight to watch, but Lloyd probably had his own views upon the matter at that



Shaking like a person with the ague, Ailen was led off the path and guided into the heart of the coppice. When the party came to a halt, the terror-stricken prisoner looked down and found that he was standing upon the edge of a yawning abyss. And at his feet—so near that he could have kicked it—was an empty coffin. "Ooooh!" gasped Nugent in terror.

(See page 26.)

moment. Rushing at Battle, he was just too late to intercept a pass to Noyle, and Noyle, timing the back's second rush to a fraction of a second, pushed the leather along the grass to Peter Voyce. And Peter, standing on the edge of the penalty area, did not hesitate. Taking a first-time shot, he sent the ball crashing against the crossbar; but he made no mistake as he caught the sphere on the rebound.

Boomp!

Berrington was seen to leap across the goalmouth—but he leapt in vain. The ball was already twirling in the back of the net, and Storrydene Villa were two goals up.

A brownish haze was creeping over the ground when the players lined up for the resumption of hostilities, and fitful gusts of wind played tricks with the ball whenever it was lifted.

The early reverse put the visitors on their mettle, and it was obvious that they meant to thrust their way through the opposition, relying upon their superior weight to sweep everything before them. Their tactics were scrupulously fair, however, even though two or three of the home players were sent staggering.

It was a human avalanche that descended upon Hoppy Hawkins, and for a full minute he was called upon to deal with rasping shots from all angles; yet his quiet smile was in evidence all through the ordeal. Hopping about beneath the crossbar, he used his bony fists with perfect judgment, and he thought he had a chance of easing the pressure by throwing the ball out to Nugent Ailen, who was standing apart from the mass of players that seethed round the goalmouth.

"Get rid of it, Sissy!" roared the Storrydene fans. And Nugent, losing his head, kicked blindly, lashing out

with all the power of his foot. It was a magnificent shot, and it gave Hoppy Hawkins not a ghost of a chance; and Nugent, grinning smugly, had scored his first goal of the season.

But he had netted for Ironville United!

What the home team's supporters said to Nugent need not be recorded in cold print, but the fact remains that they were obviously displeased with him. Shouts, hot and sulphurous, were hurled at him from all sides, but he was brazenly unrepentant as he turned on his heel and strolled away towards the centre.

None of the players spoke to him, but a homicidal light burned in the eyes of Hefty Hebble, his skipper.

The light was getting worse, a brownish vapour creeping up from the north in waves, and to Berrington, lounging against a goalpost, Grace and Hebble looked like phantoms. Hawkins, in the Villa goal, was blotted out.

Mr. Morecroft looked anxious as he placed the whistle to his lips, and scarcely had Peter Voyce put the ball in motion than a curtain of brown fog descended and swallowed the players up.

A shout of surprise and laughter went up from the crowd—a shout that was hollow and eerie; and faintly came the voices of the players, calling each other by name.

The whole thing was uncanny, mystical, and the footballers were groping their way towards the grandstand, when the air was split with a loud report.

Crack!

It was the unmistakable sound of a shot, and at that second the curtain of fog lifted, revealing the outstretched form of Peter Voyce, a rivulet of blood trickling from his forehead.

Peter's Idea!

NATURE was in playful mood that afternoon, for scarcely did she reveal the still form of Peter Voyce than the curtain of fog descended once more, blotting out the whole scene from the wild eyes of the crowd.

The damp air was vibrating with shouts, of course, and a thunder of feet shook the turf as hundreds of people vaulted the barriers and raced across the grass.

"Young Voyce has been shot!"

"It's murder!"

The tragic words passed from lip to lip, and an ugly snarl drifted through the brown fog.

Hebble and Thirlboy were beside Peter, and they lost no time in lifting him and carrying him towards the clubhouse, being guided solely by instinct and Spudge Dixon's roar of "This way! This way, Hefty!"

Once in the dressing-room, Peter was placed tenderly upon a bench; and he opened his eyes and smiled wanly as the door was thrust open and the doctor bustled into the room.

Dr. Mace was gruff and sarcastic, but he was a man who knew his job.

"Hallo!" he grunted, glaring down at Peter's pale face. "What have you been up to? What do you mean by getting shot?"

A swift examination followed, and he shook his tousled head.

"Warm water, somebody!" he snapped. "There's nothing to worry about. Might have been worse—much worse. What happened, young man?"

He put the question as he commenced to bathe the youngster's forehead.

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"I don't know exactly," confessed Peter. "The fog came down, and I stood quite still, and then I heard someone walking towards me. I said, 'Is that you, Noyle?' and a moment later I think I saw a flame. Anyway, I didn't know anything more until I came to just now."

The doctor pursed his thin lips.

"H'm! Strange—very," he grunted. "You've no idea who was near you, I suppose?"

It so happened that Peter was gazing straight at Nugent Ailen at that moment, and he saw the fellow give a slight start.

"No," he answered, after an age-long pause; and his eyes were still upon Nugent.

The referee, anxious and worried, joined the group, and he heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that nothing really serious had happened.

"But," said Dr. Mace grimly, "it might have been murder!"

Peter was strangely pale as he sat up, yet he was very calm for a young man who had escaped death by a hair's-breadth.

"Are we going to carry on?" he asked.

The referee shook his head.

"No; the fog won't lift again," he answered. "I have abandoned the game. You don't realise it, young Voyce, but you've had a pretty bad shaking, so I suggest that you run off

**TELL ALL YOUR PALS
ABOUT THIS WONDER-
FUL OFFER, AND**

home and get to bed. You'll be fit again in the morning."

"You're right—quite right," said the doctor. "One of you fellows see him home."

"But—" began Peter.

"You'll do as I say!" snapped the doctor testily. "You either go to bed or else I put you on the sick list for a month! What's it to be?"

"I'll go to bed, sir," said Peter meekly.

Hebble, Sceptre, Thirlboy, and Hoppy Hawkins accompanied the youngster to the little house in Park Villas, and there did not appear to be much the matter with the youngster as he and the other players sat down to a "high tea." Cold meat, pickles, and bread and cheese vanished like dew before the sun, and no sooner was the hearty meal at an end than Peter rose and smiled round at his guests.

"I promised Sawbones that I'd go to bed," he said, "but I didn't say for how long, so I think I'll turn in for half an hour!"

A shout of laughter broke from the others.

"Then we'd better clear off," said Hefty Hebble.

"By no means!" returned Peter. "I want you all to come upstairs and sit round the patient's bed! I've got something I want to get off my chest!"

True to his promise, Peter slipped between the sheets, but he appeared to

be a very robust invalid as he addressed the grinning pros.

He put a sudden question.

"Who do you think fired that shot?" he asked.

"Nugent Ailen!" said Hebble, without a second's hesitation.

"It seems a bit thick to accuse him off-hand," remarked Thirlboy, "yet I wouldn't mind betting that he's at the bottom of the dirty business. Voyce is the blue-eyed boy with everybody else!"

"I agree with you fellows," said Hoppy, his eager, birdlike face rather flushed. "But the thing is—how are we going to prove it?"

"I'll tell you," said Peter readily. "Lend me your pretty pink ears!"

Peter spoke for less than a minute, but the end of that period found Hefty Hebble and his friends convulsed with laughter.

"All we require is an orange-box," said Peter.

"I'll fake that," grinned Hebble. "My father's a carpenter."

Buried Alive!

THE last stroke of twelve was still reverberating upon the chilly night air when Nugent Beasley Ailen groped his way down the



steps of the Storydene Sporting Club and set off through the brown fog. The unsteady manner in which he tacked his way along the wet pavement suggested that he had been imbibing too freely. Nugent was the type of young man who thought it very clever to order a large whisky-and-soda with a lordly air, and on this particular evening—it was the evening following the game against Ironside Villa—he had insisted upon buying drinks for anybody who would be bored with his company. The inevitable had happened, of course, for Nugent had crossed the narrow line that divides sobriety and the other thing.

The fact that the pavement rocked beneath his feet did not seem to worry the young "blood" in the least, and there was a snatch of song upon his lips as he reached the massive iron gates of Dene Lodge, his father's mansion. The Lodge stood in its own grounds, and Nugent had to walk up a long drive in order to reach the set of rooms that had been furnished for his private use.

Fuddled though he was, he seemed to have no difficulty in finding his way through the fog; but he had the fright of his life when a number of phantom figures loomed up through the mist and threw themselves upon him.

He tried to shriek, and found that he

could not articulate, and a second later a gag was thrust between his teeth, his arms were bound, and a sack was dropped over his head and shoulders.

Groaning feebly, he shuddered, for he had a horror of suffocation.

"Struggle," hissed a terrible voice, "and we'll fill you with lead! Get that?"

Shaking like a person with ague, Nugent Ailen was led off the path and guided into the heart of the coppice, and he was almost paralysed with fear when the sack was whipped off his head and he was able to get a glimpse of his captors.

Standing in the light of a small torch, the figures would have struck a shaft of terror into the stoutest heart, for they were dressed in smocks and cowls, the eye-slits in the cowls being rimmed with scarlet.

And Nugent, in his terror, thought of blood!

But that was not all, for the horror-stricken young man looked down and found that he was standing upon the edge of a yawning abyss—and at his feet, so near that he could have kicked it, was an empty coffin!

Everything was ominously still; the whole universe seemed to slumber; and the flickering torch flung eerie shadows in the brown fog.

"To-night," said a gruff voice, terrible, sepulchral, "you die!"

A wheezing gasp broke from Nugent

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as the gag was jerked from his mouth, and he would have fallen had not strong hands gripped him roughly.

"But—but—why—"

His voice was a whisper, his face a tragic mask.

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life!" chanted the sepulchral voice. "Peter Voyce—"

"But—but I didn't do it!" breathed Nugent, great beads of cold perspiration standing out on his narrow forehead. "He—he didn't die!"

"That was no fault of yours!" declared the voice. "You shot to kill, and therefore you must die! Do you admit your guilt?"

"Yes! No! I—I—"

Nugent Ailen was scarcely sane at that moment.

"You admit?"

"Yes! Yes! Anything!" cried the wretched Ailen, his staring eyes upon the coffin. "I didn't mean it! Have mercy! This is murder—murder!"

He of the sepulchral voice made an almost imperceptible sign, and ten seconds later Nugent Beasley Ailen was stretched out in the coffin, his face a ghastly sight in the yellow flame of the smoking torch.

"Lower the body!" commanded the leader.

Silently, slowly, the coffin and its petrified occupant were dropped into

the depths, and Nugent did not regain the power of speech until the shock of landing jarred every bone and nerve in his body.

"It's murder—cold-blooded murder!" he shrieked, fighting madly to free himself of the ropes that bound him.

"Listen!" said he of the sepulchral voice, standing on the edge of the abyss and looking down at the horrified victim. "This morning, when the blood-red sun rises over the hills, we shall return to complete our work! To-day at dawn we shall cover your cold body with purifying earth! You will be no more, Nugent Beasley Ailen! The miracle may happen, however, and you may escape, for the Brothers of the Crimson Triangle are not without mercy! You will find a knife in the bottom of your coffin! And now mark well the words of the Brotherhood of Vengeance! Should you escape from your living tomb, you are advised not to come within a thousand miles of Storrydene, for as sure as you do so you will die! We have spoken!"

Dawn broke cold and chilly, but no blood-red sun peeped over the hills. And neither did the Brothers of the Crimson Triangle loom up through the mist.

Perhaps they guessed that the orange-box was empty!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Monday's sensational long complete footer story, by this popular author. The rascal, Nugent Beasley Ailen, is introduced in fresh guise, with a mask to cover his bloated features! Look out for the title: "The Starlight Boys!" and be prepared for something extra good.)

THE VANISHED VENTRILOQUIST.

(Continued from page 20.)

Nugent. "If the silly ass had had the sense of a bunny rabbit he would have faced the music and got it over."

"Yes, rather!"

Harry Wharton & Co. came down from the box-room.

The mystery of the vanished ventriloquist was a mystery no longer. In ten minutes or less all Greyfriars knew that Billy Bunter was back—that he had been found hiding in the House and had never been outside Greyfriars at all.

It was an amazing discovery, and it was discussed up and down Greyfriars with great excitement. The next item on the programme, as the Bounder expressed it, was the flogging—long deferred, but bound to come off now.

But the school, rather to their surprise, were not summoned to Big Hall to witness an execution. Neither was Gosling sent for to the Head's study. There was intense curiosity to know what was going on in that study. A crowd of fellows gathered at the end of the Head's corridor to wait for Bunter to appear. Skinner, in a venturesome mood, crept as far along as the Head's door, and returned with the information that the beak was going hot and strong.

The Head's door opened at last.

Billy Bunter came out.

He walked down the corridor quite jauntily.

A crowd of fellows surrounded him at once. Curiosity was at burning-point now.

"Bunter—"

Bunter smiled.

"I'm let off the flogging, because

"Because what?"

"Because I'm sacked."

"Sacked!" yelled the Removites.

Bunter nodded calmly.

"Yes. The Head says that what I've done is too serious to be punished by a flogging," he said cheerily. "So he's sacked me instead. See?"

The juniors stared at Bunter.

"Sacked!" said the Bounder. "And you—you—you don't mind?"

"No jolly fear!" said Bunter. "I'm fed-up with Greyfriars! I shall get my pater to send me to a better school than this—"

"Why, you cheeky Owl—"

"And I hope I shall meet a more decent set of fellows," said Bunter. "Couldn't change much for the worse, anyhow!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Sorry for you chaps, sticking here grinding lessons, while I'm going home to-morrow morning!" chuckled Bunter.

And the Owl of the Remove rolled on, leaving the juniors almost speechless. Fellows had been "sacked" from Greyfriars before; but certainly no hapless victim of that severe sentence had ever before taken it like this! But Billy Bunter's powerful intellect moved in its own mysterious way, its wonders to perform. And that evening one of the most cheerful faces at Greyfriars was that of William George Bunter—under sentence of the "sack."

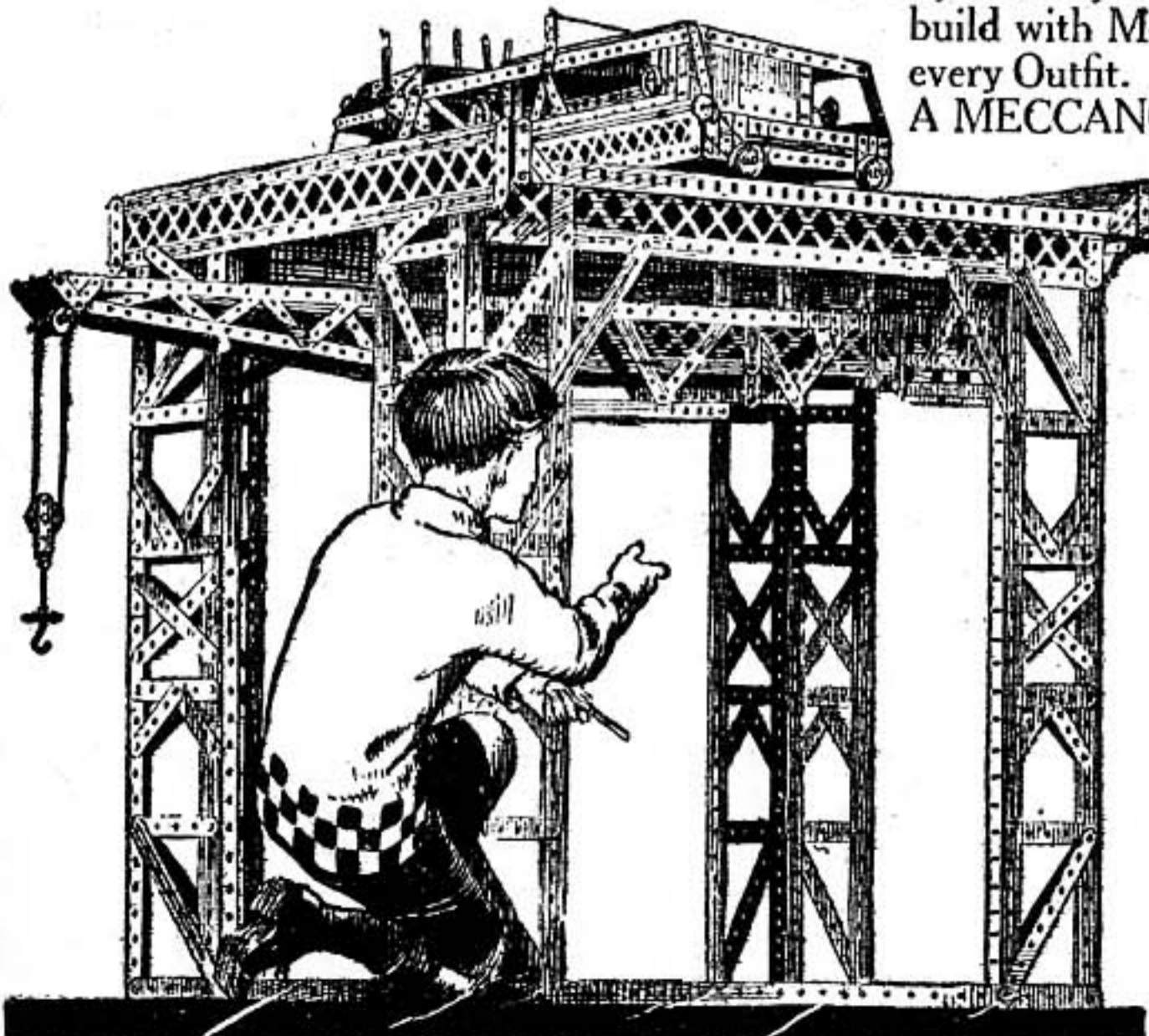
THE END.

(Billy Bunter has not yet shaken the dust of Greyfriars from his feet. There's a whole heap of fun in store for you before W. G. B. "hops it." Mind you read "The Bunking of Bunter!"—next week's ripping school story.)

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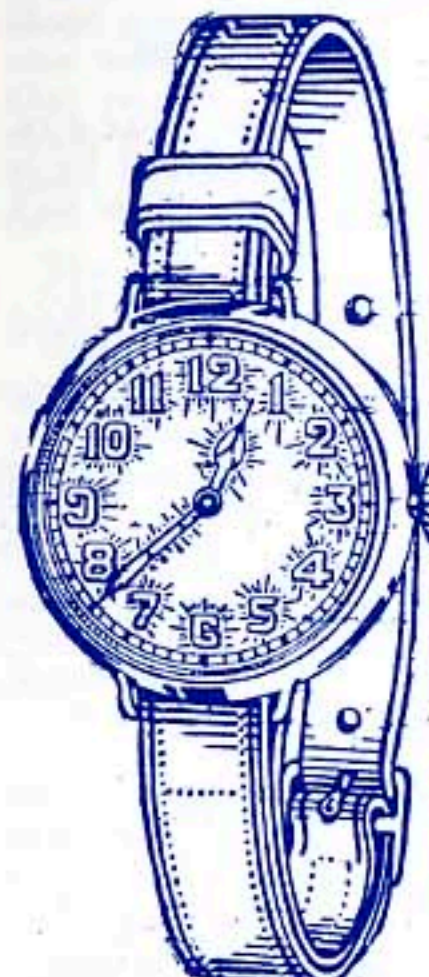
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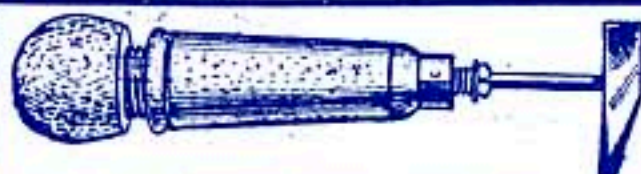


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