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THE SECRET OF THE OAK!

Featuring Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars,
and Ponsonby & Co., of Highcliffe.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Painful for Prout!

"PROUT!" said Bob Cherry.

"Cheek!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent nodded assent. They fully agreed.

It was Prout who was coming up the Remove staircase—and it was "cheek" of Prout to come.

The four juniors were leaning on the banisters. They were waiting for the fifth member of the Co.—Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Hurree Singh had lines to write for Mr. Quelch, the Remove master. Those lines had to be written before the dusky junior could join his comrades and get out for the afternoon.

In Study No. 13 Hurree Singh was racing through those lines at express speed. The Co. waited on the stairs.

Probably they were the only members of the Remove who were within doors. It was a half-holiday, and a glorious summer's afternoon. Even slackers like Skinner & Co. were tempted out—even Lord Mauleverer had found energy enough for a walk abroad. Save for the Nabob of Bhanipur, in Study No. 13, and the Co. waiting on the stairs, the Remove quarters were deserted and silent.

It was not like the strenuous Co. to be loafing about idly. But sink or swim together was the motto of the Famous Five. Minutes were precious on a half-holiday; but the Co. waited cheerfully for their dusky chum to get finished and join them.

Then Prout happened.

Mr. Paul Prout, master of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, came slowly up the stairs. Prout's movements were generally slow. Prout's girth was ample, his weight considerable. In his Form he was likened unto the

"huge earth-shaking beast" mentioned in Macaulay.

The afternoon was hot. The stairs were steep. Prout grunted as he came. Slowly, majestically, moving with the ease and grace of an out-size tortoise, Prout negotiated the Remove staircase.

Harry Wharton & Co. cast glances of disfavour at Prout. What the man wanted in the Remove quarters was rather a mystery. The Fifth Form master had absolutely no business there.

But Prout was one of those masters who butt in where they have no business. Not a man on the Greyfriars staff was ever quite safe from fussy interference from Prout. Like many fussy old gentlemen, Prout mistook a desire to meddle for a strong sense of duty.

Up came Prout, the sunshine from the staircase window gleaming on the bald spot on his head. That spot fairly shone.

Prout became suddenly aware of the presence of the four Removites. No doubt he had expected the passage to be totally deserted on that sunny half-holiday, as it would have been had not lines kept Hurree Singh from going out with his chums.

"Oh!" said Mr. Prout. He came to a halt and blinked at the Co. He was surprised, and seemed annoyed.

"Want anything, sir?" asked Harry Wharton respectfully.

Prout did not answer that question. He frowned at the four. It was clear that he was annoyed at finding Removites there.

"Wharton! Why are you not out of doors?" asked Prout, in his deep, fruity voice. "You should not be frowsting about the House, Wharton, on a half-holiday, and in this splendid weather."

Harry Wharton opened his lips, and closed them again. It was impossible for a junior to tell a master he was an offensive ass.

And really there was no other answer to be made to Prout. In the first place, he had no right to ask a Remove man questions at all; in the second place, he had no right to assume that the juniors were frowsting about the House because he happened to find them apparently idle and unoccupied. Even Prout ought to have had sense enough to know that these strenuous members of the Remove were not slackers and frowsters.

Prout raised a plump hand and pointed down the stairs.

"You had better go out!" he said.

"What?" demanded Bob Cherry.

The man was actually giving Remove men orders, in their own quarters, on a half-holiday.

"Mr. Quelch would not like to see members of his Form idling about, loafing about, in this slack way," said Prout. "You had better go out of the House at once!"

"Indeed, sir!" said Frank Nugent, with great politeness.

The Co., with great self-restraint, refrained from telling Prout what they thought of him. But they did not stir. They were not taking orders or directions from the Fifth Form master.

"Have you nothing to do this fine afternoon?" continued Prout.

That the Co. were waiting for a pal did not occur to Prout's plump brain. He was unaware that they were not

only willing to get out, but eager to get out. Prout was not perspicacious.

"There is cricket," said Prout, "or the river. Or—or a walk, studying the beauties of Nature!"

The juniors grinned. As a matter of fact, they had plans laid for that half-holiday. They were going to look for Ponsonby, of the Highcliffe Fourth, and kick him if found. A kicking had been due to Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, for a long time. But they could not confide this to Prout.

"Come, come!" continued Prout. "This slacking, this laziness—this will never do! I recommend you to go out at once."

"Thank you, sir!" said Wharton, without moving.

"Many thanks, sir," said Bob Cherry, also without moving.

"You're very good, sir!" remarked Frank Nugent, settling back more comfortably against the old oak banister.

Johnny Bull only grunted—having no politeness to waste on Prout.

"Well, are you going?" snapped the Fifth Form master, a little puzzled.

"Oh, no, sir!" answered Wharton.

"Not at all, sir," said Nugent.

"Thank you for your advice, sir, all the same," said Bob. "But we're not going."

Prout compressed his lips. A command trembled on those plump

fill in time while we're waiting for old Inky."

Prout could be heard rolling heavily up the passage. The four juniors left the staircase and followed on, and sighted Prout again.

The Fifth Form master did not seem to have any business in the Remove studies. He rolled up the passage, towards the short stair at the other end, which gave access to the box-room.

Apparently the Remove box-room was his destination.

At that stair Mr. Prout paused, perhaps to renew his supply of breath before ascending. He glanced round at the sound of footsteps, and stared at four smiling faces. He frowned as he grasped the fact that Harry Wharton & Co. had followed him up the passage.

"What do you boys want?" snapped Prout.

"We were rather wondering what you wanted, sir!" answered Harry Wharton politely.

Prout reddened a little. Moved by that powerful desire to meddle, which he so unfortunately mistook for a strong sense of duty, Prout was giving his attention to Mr. Quelch's business that afternoon, while the Remove master was out.

But perhaps it dawned on him now that there was something just a little surreptitious about these proceedings of his. He felt, perhaps, that an explanation was due.

"It is my intention, Wharton, to make an investigation in the Remove box-room!" he said with dignity. "I have the best of reasons to believe that that room is used, on certain occasions, for surreptitious smoking. This fact seems to have escaped the notice of your Form master, and it is my intention, Wharton, to bring it to his notice."

"Mr. Quelch will be frightfully obliged to you sir!" answered the captain of the Remove, with polite sarcasm.

"Cigarette-ends," said Mr. Prout, "have been found there. This has come to my knowledge. At this very moment, indeed, Remove boys may be smoking there—unsuspected by Mr. Quelch. The matter is serious. Very serious indeed. You boys are probably aware of it."

Harry Wharton & Co. were fully aware of the fact that Skinner and his friends sometimes smoked in the box-room. They would not have mourned had Mr. Quelch caught the young rascals there. But it was no business of Prout's. Prout had plenty of business in his own Form, for that matter; smoking went on in some of the Fifth Form studies. But Prout gave so much attention to the business of others that he had to work short time at his own.

Mr. Prout started up the box-room stair.

The juniors exchanged indignant glances.

It was within the bounds of possibility that Skinner & Co. were smoking cigarettes in the room above at that very moment. But that did not concern Prout. Indeed, it would be very awkward for Mr. Quelch if Prout reported it to him. Quelch loathed Prout's meddling, but he would be at a disadvantage.

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lips—a command to these juniors to leave the House at once.

But it dawned upon Prout that such a command would not be obeyed, which would place him in rather a ridiculous position. He had no right whatever to give such an order to Mr. Quelch's boys, and they would be fully within their rights in disregarding it. Quelch, if appealed to, would only ask Prout, in a snappish manner, to reserve his attentions for his own Form, and leave the Remove to their own Form master.

Prout gave the cheery juniors a long, long look, and then rolled on up the Remove passage, slow and stately as a Spanish galleon under full sail.

He disappeared from the view of the juniors on the staircase, and they looked at one another and smiled.

"Cheeky ass!" remarked Bob.

"What on earth is he up to here?" asked Harry Wharton, perplexed. "He's up to something, and doesn't want us about. What the dickens is old Prout butting into our passage for?"

"Isn't he always butting into something?" grunted Johnny Bull. "He's nosing in here because Quelch is out this afternoon. He wouldn't dare, if Quelch were in."

"But what the thump does he want?" asked Nugent.

"Just nosing!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Come on!" said Bob, with a chuckle.

"Let's keep an eye on Prout. It will

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry suddenly, at the foot of the box-room stair, in a voice compared with which the roar of the Bull of Bashan was a gentle whisper.

Prout jumped.

The juniors, chuckling, backed away along the Remove passage. If there was anybody in the box-room at that moment, Bob's stentorian roar must have put them on their guard. Prout realised it, and he snorted angrily and accelerated his ascent to the box-room.

"Silly old ass!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Why the thump can't he mind his own business? Let's go and see if Inky's finished."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

The four proceeded towards Study No. 13. But they stopped suddenly at the sound of a sudden and terrific uproar above. They spun round towards the box-room stair in amazement.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Wharton.

"What the dickens—"

Somebody evidently was in the box-room! Something was happening to Prout. Whoever was there, it seemed incredible that hands should have been laid on the Fifth Form master! Yet it seemed that that was what was happening. The four Removites listened in utter amazement.

There was a trampling—a thudding of feet—a muffled yell—and then a rolling, rumbling sound on the box-room stair.

Bump, bump, bump!

Something heavy was rolling down from the box-room.

Bump, bump!

"Oooooogh!"

It rolled into the Remove passage. Harry Wharton & Co. fairly gasped as they saw what it was.

It was Prout!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Mystery of the Box-room!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stared blankly, almost unbelievably, at the Fifth Form master of Greyfriars.

Mr. Prout sprawled at the foot of the box-room stair.

He sprawled and spluttered.

It was not, fortunately, an extensive staircase. But such as it was Prout had rolled down it helplessly.

No doubt it was lucky for Prout that he was a plump gentleman. His fat had helped to protect his bones from some severe jolts.

Still, he was hurt.

No elderly gentleman could roll downstairs without getting hurt. It was not to be expected.

Howls, gasps, and gurgles came from Prout in a confused stream. He sat up, still howling, gasping, and gurgling.

The juniors gazed at him in real horror. Prout was an interfering ass; he never could mind his own business; he had continually to poke his portly nose into what did not concern him. Nevertheless, it was utterly unheard-of at Greyfriars for a master to be "handled." For a master to be collared and rolled downstairs was absolutely unthinkable!

Yet that evidently had happened to Prout. It was amazing—horrifying—flabbergasting!

"Good gad!" gurgled Prout. "Scoundrels! Villains! Ruffians! Oooooogh! Upon my—groogh!—word. Ow!"

The juniors ran towards him. Prout was in need of help.

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"Let's help you up, sir!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Let's help you to your study, sir!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh, yes! Let's!" said Nugent.

Prout staggered to his feet with the help of the Removites. But he was not to be helped to his study.

Perhaps he suspected the juniors of wanting to give the fellows in the box-room a chance to escape. Anyhow, Prout was not giving them a chance.

"Come on, sir!" urged Johnny Bull.

"Silence! Oooooogh! Release me!" snapped Prout. "I am not going—I am staying! Those young scoundrels—ow! I shall take them—ooogh!—to the headmaster—ooogh—" He leaned on the wall and spluttered. "I have been attacked—I have been assaulted—I have been— Oooooogh! Wharton!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Harry.

"Who are those boys in the box-room?" hooted Prout.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Three—three boys—juniors—they must be Remove boys—ooogh!" gasped Prout. "You warned them that I was at hand, Cherry!"

"D-d-did I, sir?" gasped Bob.

"You did!" gasped Mr. Prout. "They heard' you shout! That is why they covered their faces with handkerchiefs in time to prevent me from recognising them as I entered—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton. "I—I say, sir, won't you come to your study, sir? We'll help you—"

If Prout had not recognised the fellows in the box-room they had a chance, if only Prout could be got off the spot.

Not that Harry Wharton & Co., of course, "stood for" such a lawless and ruffianly action as pitching Prout downstairs.

Still, Prout was butting in where he had no concern, and they were not anxious for Remove men to be expelled.

Expulsion from the school was an absolute "cert" for any fellows who had handled Prout like this. Whoever the fellows were, they would be "bunked" as soon as they were taken to the Head. That was certain. And Harry Wharton did not like the idea; taking it for granted that the fellows in the box-room belonged to the Remove. They could hardly belong to any other Form; though it was amazing enough that Remove men should have acted in this extraordinary way.

But Prout was not to be persuaded away. He gasped and gurgled, he puffed and blew, and remained where he was.

"You do not know who is in the box-room, Wharton?" he gasped.

"Haven't the faintest idea, sir."

"Not the foggiest!" said Bob Cherry.

"There are three—three young scoundrels—Ow!" Prout rubbed his bumps. "Wow! I am hurt—seriously hurt! Ow! They seized me as I entered, and thrust me—rolled me, in fact—out! Oooooogh! I was taken by—ooogh!—surprise."

Wharton stared up towards the box-room. Nobody was in sight, and there was no sound from above.

Apparently the three fellows who had rolled Prout were keeping quiet and lying low. Not that it was likely to serve them, for there was only one way out of the place—down the stair, at the bottom of which Prout was gurgling. They could not escape unseen, unless they cleared off by the window and the leads below it. And in broad daylight they could hardly do so without being discovered.

"My esteemed chums—" Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came out of Study No. 13. "What is the absurd matterfulness?"

Prout's crash had reached the ears of the nabob.

"Hurree Singh!" rapped Prout. "Do you know who is in the box-room?"

"The knowfulness is not terrific, esteemed sahib."

"Well, I shall soon ascertain," gasped Prout. The Fifth Form master had his second wind by this time. "I shall ascertain! I shall not leave this spot until I have ascertained."

Mr. Prout turned to the box-room stair again. He ascended slowly. The juniors watched him. This time Mr. Prout was on his guard. He was not going to be taken by surprise this time.

On his first entrance into the box-room, obviously, he had been rushed on, seized, and rolled out before he knew what was happening. Naturally, he had never expected anything of the kind.

Now he was on his guard, and woe betide any reckless junior who attempted to lay hands on his majestic person.

He reached the little landing outside the box-room, hurled open the door, and strode in.

"Now—" hooted Mr. Prout.

He broke off.

The box-room was empty.

The window, which looked over the flat leads, was wide open. There was no one in the room.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Prout.

Apparently his assailants had fled by the window. Prout rolled across and stared out.

The flat leads were bare. Beyond lay the kitchen gardens, in the rear of the school buildings. No one was in sight. Active fellows could have scrambled down from the leads to the ground and bolted. But they might have been seen from a dozen windows. One fellow, possibly, might have dodged away unseen, but three fellows! And Prout knew that there had been three!

Prout's plump face was purple with wrath.

He rolled back to the stair and descended. Harry Wharton & Co., in the Remove passage, watched him as he came, surprised to see him alone.

"They—they are gone!" gasped Mr. Prout. "They had fled—fled by the window! But they must have been seen they shall be found. I—I—"

He broke off, gasping with wrath, and rolled away down the Remove passage. Bob Cherry whistled.

"Well, my hat!" he ejaculated.

"Who on earth could they have been?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Goodness knows!"

"Remove men, of course!" said Johnny Bull. "Couldn't have been men from any other Form here. Bit thick, rolling even an old donkey like Prout down the stair! But who—"

"Can't make it out," said Wharton. "Somebody's booked for the sack, I fancy. Let's look in the box-room."

The Famous Five ascended to the box-room. They looked round it. There was no scent of tobacco-smoke there. Skinner & Co., evidently, had not been holding one of their little smoking-parties in that secluded room, as they sometimes did. Certainly, Skinner & Co. were not the fellows to have nerve enough to roll Prout. But three fellows had been there, that was certain; and if their occupation was innocent, why had they taken the alarm when Prout arrived and taken the awful risk of rolling a Form master downstairs? It was inexplicable.

Whether they had gone by the window

or not, the mysterious three were gone. They had left behind no clue as to their identity.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" said Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I think they were Remove men at all. But who—"

"The whofulness is terrific."

"Let's get out," said Harry. "If you've done your lines, Inky—"

"The donefulness is preposterous."

The Famous Five, very much puzzled and perplexed, went down, and Hurree Singh, having deposited his imposition in Mr. Quelch's study, they left the House. The mystery of the happening in the box-room was amazing, but the chums of the Remove dismissed the matter from their minds. It was, after all, Prout's business; and they had business of their own to attend to that afternoon. There was Ponsonby of Highcliffe to be kicked, if they could find him. And they rambled cheerfully out to look for Pon.

And, as it happened, they had not far to look.

It dropped within a dozen feet of the Greyfriars fellows, much to their astonishment. They recognised Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School, instantly.

What Ponsonby was up to in an oak-tree so near Greyfriars, on ground that belonged to the school, was a puzzle. Cecil Ponsonby, the elegant dandy of Highcliffe, was not given to tree-climbing as an amusement. He was far too careful of his expensive clothes.

Harry Wharton & Co. stopped, in sheer surprise. They had walked out to look for Pon, to hand him the kicking that had long been due. A week ago Pon had kicked Billy Bunter, of the

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed Monson, staring round at the Greyfriars fellows.

"Those cads!" muttered Gadsby.

The three Highcliffians drew together. Harry Wharton glanced up at the thick foliage of the oak, then at the three.

"What the thump are you fellows doing here?" he asked.

Gadsby and Monson exchanged an uneasy glance. They looked like fellows who had been caught out, and did not know what to say. Ponsonby, however, recovered himself in a moment.

"No harm in climbin' a tree, I suppose," he remarked casually. "We're not here for a row with you fellows, and you can keep your distance."



There was a muffled yell as something heavy came rolling down the stairs from the box-room. Bump, bump, bump! "Oooooogh!" It rolled into the passage, and Harry Wharton & Co. fairly gasped as they recognised Mr. Prout of the Fifth!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Debt Repaid!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Pon!"
"My hat!"

Harry Wharton & Co., at a little distance from the school gates, turned into the coppice that bordered the road, to pass through it to the tow-path along the river.

In the middle of the leafy coppice grew the Friar's Oak, a gigantic tree, gnarled with centuries, which, according to legend, had been standing when the first stone of Greyfriars was laid.

The huge branches of the ancient oak overtopped the coppice, shutting off the blaze of the summer sunshine. As the chums of the Remove came under those vast, shady branches, their footsteps making no sound on the grass, a figure dropped lightly from the tree.

Remove, and had escaped unknicked himself. It had happened in that very coppice. The Greyfriars fellows were glad to see Pon, if it came to that; but they were surprised to meet him so near Greyfriars, and especially dropping from a tree. The Friar's Oak, too, was not easy to climb. There were no branches near the ground—the trunk was bare for a good distance up, and they would not have expected a fellow like Pon to tackle a difficult climb, if he tackled a climb at all.

Ponsonby had dropped with his back to them, and did not see them, for the moment. But he heard their ejaculations and spun round in alarm.

As he did so, another and another fellow dropped from the big branches of the oak. They were Gadsby and Monson, of the Highcliffe Fourth.

"My hat! The whole jolly family!" exclaimed Bob

"Yes; don't let's rag," said Monson.

"The ragfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Highcliffe sweep," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The kickfulness is due to the disgusting and absurd Ponsonby."

"Look here—" began Ponsonby.

"You kicked Bunter, here, last week," said Bob Cherry. "You dodged us in this coppice when we got after you. I fancy you hid in a tree when we were looking for you. Now you've been kind enough to come along and take your kicking, it's all ready for you. Turn round, Pon!"

"Hook it!" muttered Gadsby.

The three Highcliffians made a sudden break, dashing away through the coppice towards the river.

The Famous Five rushed after them. On that occasion, a week ago, when Pon had kicked Billy Bunter, not THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,225.

wisely, but too well, he had escaped by climbing a tree. But he had no time for tree-climbing now; the Removites were too close at hand.

Pon & Co. had to run for it—and they ran!

The three of them separated, taking different paths, and Gadsby and Monson were allowed to get clear. The Famous Five gave all their attention to Ponsonby. They raced on his track as he raced for the towpath.

The chums of the Remove had agreed that Ponsonby had to learn that he could not kick Greyfriars fellows with impunity—even such unimportant fellows as William George Bunter. There was only one way of impressing that lesson on Pon—by an application of boot-leather on his elegant trousers.

The Famous Five had rather wondered what the Highcliffians had been "up to" in the Friar's Oak. But they forgot all about that in the excitement of chasing the dandy of Highcliffe through the coppice to the towpath.

It was a hot chase, for Ponsonby was fleet of foot, and he ran his hardest. He was still out of reach when he burst out of the coppice on the open towpath beside the Sark.

But it was a case of more haste and less speed.

Pon leaped out of the wood and turned up the river, and tore along the towpath without a second's pause, and he did not observe a fat figure in his way till he crashed into it.

Neither did Billy Bunter of the Remove observe Pon till he crashed. The crash came so suddenly that both were taken by surprise.

"Oh!" gasped Pon, reeling back from the shock.

"Ooooooooooh!" spluttered the Owl of the Remove, staggering back and sitting down. "Oooogh! Groooogh! Woooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five burst whooping out of the coppice, and before Pon could recover they had collared him.

"Got him!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The gotfulness is terrific."

"Hands off, you Greyfriars cads!" yelled Ponsonby, struggling.

"Ow! I say, you fellows—Whoop! I say—Yarooogh! Ow! I'm hurt!" gasped Billy Bunter. "Ow! Help! Fire! Whoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter sat up, gasping for breath, and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose. He blinked dizzily at the Famous Five, and the Highcliffe junior struggling in their grasp.

"Ow! I say, you fellows—Wow!"

"Let go!" yelled Ponsonby. "I'll jolly well hack your shins—"

"You'll get ducked in the river, if you do!" growled Johnny Bull.

And Pon didn't!

Bob Cherry grasped the Owl of the Remove and helped him up. Bunter stood spluttering. Bunter was short of breath at the best of times, and the crash had knocked out of him what little he had.

"Just the man we want to meet, old fat bean," said Bob.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, is it a feed?"

"Ha, ha! No! It's a kicking!"

"Look here, you beast, if you kick me—" Bunter backed away in alarm. "I say, you fellows, I never had the toffee."

"The toffee!" exclaimed Bob.

"Yes! I mean, no! I haven't been in your study to-day at all, old chap! If you've missed any toffee, it was that chap Linley! Or that Chinese beast Wun Lung! In fact, I saw him eating it."

"You fat villain—"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I haven't touched your toffee, and I never gave Skinner any because he saw me—"

"Never mind the toffee now," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Ponsonby's waiting to be kicked."

"Oh!" said Bunter. He realised that it was not his own podgy person that was to be kicked, much as it deserved a kicking. "Right-ho! The beast kicked me the other day! I'd jolly well have licked him, only—only—"

"Never mind why you didn't lick him," said Bob. "We can guess that, Bunter. You're going to kick him, same as he did you, Here he is."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bunter.

"Keep that fat fool off!" roared Ponsonby, in alarm.

Billy Bunter was grinning now. A week ago Pon had kicked him, hard; and for many good reasons Bunter had not given Pon the thrashing he deserved. He was quite eager to return that kicking with interest. Bunter, as a rule, was not a fellow who was keen on paying his debts. But circumstances alter cases! Bunter was fearfully keen to pay this particular debt.

"Hold him tight!" he said. "I'm not going to fight the fellow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Just hold him, and I'll jolly well kick him! Mind you hold him tight!" Ponsonby made a desperate effort to wrench himself loose. But he wrenched in vain.

"You rotten cads—five to one!" he panted.

"Dear man," said Bob Cherry, "if you're pining for a scrap you can pick your man, and the other four will see fair play."

"I'll fight Bunter, if you like—"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I've got to see a chap—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'm late already!" gasped Bunter. "I—I think I'd better hurry—"

"All serene, old fat man, Pon's not going to fight you," chuckled Bob Cherry. "If Pon wants a scrap, he's going to scrap with one of us."

"Oh, all right! I mean, I'd fight the cad with pleasure, only it's so jolly warm; too jolly warm for scrapping, you know."

"Take your choice, Pon, old bean," said Bob cheerily. "Bunter's no scrapper; but here's five fellows at your service."

"Go and eat coke!" snarled Ponsonby.

"You kicked Bunter! Bunter's going to kick you!" said Harry Wharton. "That's fair play. Here you are, Bunter."

Ponsonby gritted his teeth with rage. He was tempted to make a fight of it, rather than take a kicking from the fat Owl. He knew that he could depend on fair play from the Famous Five, if he picked one of that cheery Co. as an adversary.

But his heart failed him. Scrapping was not in Pon's line, unless he had odds on his side.

"Last time of asking!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hang you!" snarled Pon.

"Then here you are, Bunter."

Bunter rolled up, grinning. There was a heavy thud, as a foot was planted on Ponsonby's elegant trousers, with all Bunter's weight behind it.

"Ooooooh!" gasped Ponsonby.

"Goal!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now you can hook it, you worm!" said Bob, and Ponsonby was released.

"I say, you fellows, hold him!"



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No. 151—THE JOKER OF THE REMOVE.

yelled Bunter. "He kicked me a dozen times last week! Let me give him a dozen—"

"Go after him, and let him have it!" grinned Bob.

Ponsonby was departing up the towpath like a hare. One kick was enough for Pon. Bunter blinked after him through his big spectacles.

"I'd jolly well go after him," he said, "only—"

"Only you might catch him!" suggested Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

Ponsonby vanished up the towpath. Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, if you're going to the bunshop, I'll come with you," he said.

"Do!" said Harry Wharton.

"Certainly, old fellow!"

"But we're going on a six-mile walk first—"

added Wharton.

"Eh?"

"Come on, old fat man!"

"Yah!"

Six-mile walks did not appeal to William George Bunter. Harry Wharton & Co. walked on, unaccompanied by the fat junior. Billy Bunter rolled towards the school at the pace of a very old and very tired snail.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Up to Coker!

COKER of the Fifth frowned portentously. "It's the limit!" he declared.

There was a crowd in the Fifth Form games study after tea, and in that crowd of Fifth Form men there was one topic.

It was Prout!

Prout was Form master of the Fifth, and though the Fifth generally called him "Old Pompous," "Pompey," for short, they rather liked Prout.

Prout might be an ass. Few in the Fifth denied it. He might be a pompous ass. The Fifth admitted it. Still, he was not a bad sort of an old geezer, and all the Fifth said so, even Coker, who had his own special difficulties with Prout in the Form-room.

The Fifth had heard, with astonishment, indignation, and perhaps a little amusement, how Prout had been handled in the Remove box-room. They talked it over in the games study after tea, and Horace Coker declared that it was the limit.

Coker's Form fellows did not often agree with him. Now they agreed! It was the limit; indeed, as Blundell said, it was the outside edge. Form masters couldn't be handled like this by cheeky fags. Especially senior Form masters! Prout was their Form master, and this reflected on them; he was, so to speak, a poor thing, but their own! The Fifth were quite annoyed about it!

"But what was old Pompous buttin' into the Remove at all for?" asked Hilton of the Fifth.

"Oh, he's always buttin' in somewhere," remarked Price. "Is there a single spot in Greyfriars where Prout hasn't butted?"

"That's all very well!" said Coker darkly.

"From what I hear," said Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, "Prout heard that smoking was going on there!"

"That's not Prout's bizney," said Potter. "The Remove are up to Quelch!"

"Did Prout ever mind his own bizney?" asked Price.

"That's all very well!" repeated Coker.

"I suppose he caught some of the scrubby little scoundrels smoking," said Greene. "Still, it was a frightful nerve to pitch into him!"

"They'll be sacked!" said Fitzgerald.

"That's a cert! They're bound to be spotted, and they'll be sacked like a shot!" said Bland.

"But who were they?" asked Tomlinson.

Blundell shook his head. Blundell knew most about the matter; he had seen Prout, and Prout had told him. Prout had told a good many people. He had told the Head! He had told all the staff in Common-room. He was only waiting for Mr. Quelch to come in, to tell Quelch! Thrilling with wrath and indignation, Prout was ready to tell the world! But he had not been able to tell who had perpetrated this unspeakable, unheard-of, and heinous outrage. He did not know.

"Nobody knows," said Blundell. "Prout says young Cherry bawled out and warned them he was coming. Looks as if he was in it! But there were three fags in the box-room—and they had covered their hankies over their

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faces by the time Prout got the door open. Must be kids who go to the films, I should think, to get a wheeze like that! Masked bandit stunt, you know!"

"Why didn't Prout collar them?" asked Potter.

Blundell laughed.

"They seem to have collared Prout! Took him by surprise! Rolled him down the stairs! Poor old Prout! When he went up again, they had mizzled! The window was found open!"

"But three fellows couldn't get away by a window, unseen, in the broad daylight!" exclaimed Greene.

"They seem to have! It's at the back of the House, you know! Prout's been asking questions all over the shop, but nobody seems to have seen them mizzling!"

"Jolly queer!" said Potter. "They'll be bunked if they're spotted, of course. Cheeky young scoundrels! Still, Prout had no bizney there!"

"That's all very well!" said Coker, for the third time.

Each time Coker of the Fifth made this remark, he made it more emphatically. Coker seemed to be taking this matter to heart more than the rest of the Fifth.

This was easily explained. Prout, merely as Prout, was only Prout, and did not matter very much. But he was

Coker's Form master. This was a title to distinction, acknowledged, at least, by Coker.

Any number of Prouts might have been rolled down any number of staircases, at Greyfriars or elsewhere, without the serenity of Horace James Coker being in the least ruffled thereby. But when Coker's Form master was treated with disrespect, the matter became serious.

Coker was not the man to stand for that!

Coker took it personally.

An insult to the Fifth Form master was an insult to the Fifth—and the Fifth was Coker's Form. It was, therefore, practically an insult to Coker.

Coker himself had not always been respectful to Prout. Indeed, he had more than once cheeked Prout, and in private he often spoke of Prout in a way that would have made that gentleman's scanty hair stand on end, had he heard Coker's remarks. But that made no difference. Coker's view was that a man might, as it were, kick his own dog, but nobody else could be allowed to kick the animal.

"It's all very well!" said Coker, for the fourth time, "but it's the limit. It's too thick! It's got to be put down! When fags begin handling senior Form masters, I'd like to know what the school is coming to. My opinion is that the Remove are hopelessly out of hand. Quelch doesn't thrash them enough!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I've a short way with fags, myself!" said Coker. "Whop 'em! That's my idea! You can't whop a fag too hard, or too often!"

Coker was getting eloquent.

"There's been a lot of shindies in the Remove lately," he went on. "Rags in their dormitory, and all that! I was woke up one night by Quelch rooting about after raggars. They stuff Quelch, you know! He's rather an ass. Most Form masters are asses—I dare say you men have noticed that! Well, they stuff Quelch! They get up to ragging of a night in their dorm, and make out that fellows come from other dormitories and rag. Quelch takes it in! If he asked my advice—"

"Doesn't he?" asked Hilton, with a soft sarcasm that was a sheer waste on Horace Coker.

"He doesn't!" snapped Coker.

"Now I wonder why he doesn't?" said Hilton.

Some of the Fifth Form men laughed. Coker did not laugh, he frowned.

"Well, he might do worse," he said. "If he asked my advice, I should tell him to whop 'em! Whopping's the thing. And I can tell you men that I'm not letting this affair pass!"

"You're not?" asked Blundell.

"I'm not!" said Coker. "If they don't spot these young scoundrels I shall look into the matter myself!"

"And that will work the oracle, of course!" remarked Hilton.

"That's it," assented Coker, still blind and deaf to sarcasm. "All it needs is a little gumption!"

"Well, you've got a little gumption," conceded Hilton. "A very little!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Coker. "I fancy I can name the young rascals already. There's a specially cheeky set in the Remove—they've actually cheeked me more than once. I fancy that those young scoundrels who handled Prout were Wharton, Cherry, and Bull!"

"Wharton, Cherry, and Bull were with Prout when he went to the Remove box-room!" remarked Blundell.

"Oh! Well, if it wasn't Wharton, Cherry, and Bull, it was Hurree Singh, and Nugent, and another!"

"Hurree Singh and Nugent were with Prout—"

"Well, it was somebody!" said Coker, rather taken aback.

"Splendid!" said Hilton, admiringly. "I told you men that Coker would work the oracle! He's got it already! It was somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Coker, "but if the matter was left in my hands, I'd undertake to spot the young villains fast enough. And if Prout doesn't spot them, I shall take it up and spot them, see? Those cheeky fags are not going to be allowed to make game of my Form master. I don't say that Prout doesn't ask for it—but there's a limit! I've no doubt they left dozens of clues behind them. Cigarette ash, for instance—"

There was a chuckle from the Fifth Form men. Coker was a great reader of yellow-backed detective romances—which he fondly believed had some remote resemblance to life as lived on this planet.

Coker had often thought that, given a chance, he could have out-done even such masterly criminologists as Bandog Chummond, and the wonderful heroes of Edgar Wallace.

"Cigarette ash?" repeated Blundell.

"Yes, as Prout caught them smoking—"

"But he didn't!" said Blundell mildly. "He went there to look for smokers, but nobody was smoking!"

"Oh!" said Coker, taken aback again. "Then if they weren't smoking what were they up to?"

"Nobody knows!"

"I suppose they had some reason for pitching into Prout!" said Coker warmly. "They were alarmed at something!"

"Looks likely," agreed Blundell, "but there was no smoking, and cigarette ash, as a clue, is off—quite off!"

Coker grunted. In his favourite detective novels, offenders generally arranged the ash from their cigarettes in the most careful manner to afford clues to the crime investigators. Without a little cigarette ash to work on, a crime investigator was rather handicapped.

"Well, they were up to something," said Coker decidedly. "Card-playing, very likely. Nap or banker. They may have left a card lying about with finger-prints on it. Finger-prints are an infallible clue! Then there's foot-prints! They seem to have got away by the window. I don't suppose Prout has thought of tracing foot-prints on the leads. Then there's the process of elimination!"

"The which?" asked Potter.

"Elimination! Take all the fellows who might have done it, eliminate those who couldn't have done it, and what are left are the fellows that did it!" explained Coker.

"Oh!"

"You see, it was three of the Remove," further elucidated Coker. "Well, take all the Remove! Eliminate all those who can be proved to have been somewhere else. That will leave the three who were in the box-room."

"Fine!" said Blundell. "Only—"

"Only what?" yapped Coker.

"Only they may not have been Remove men at all," remarked the captain of the Fifth. "If it was a card-party the young sweeps might have picked that room as a safe place, and might have come from anywhere."

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"Rot!" said Coker decisively.

Coker had no use for suggestions such as this! It might be a fact; but facts, to have any value for Coker, had to fit in with his theory.

"Rot!" he repeated. "They were Remove men, of course! And if Prout leaves it to me I'll undertake to spot them. This is a thing that cannot possibly be passed over—and I'm going to ask Prout to let me cut prep this evening to look into it."

There was laughter in the games study when Coker stalked out of that apartment. Coker had no doubt that, if Prout gave him his head, he would spot the offenders in once, so to speak. It seemed probable to the other fellows that Prout wouldn't give him his head. Prout had an ever so much lower opinion of Coker's intellect than Coker himself had.

When the Fifth went to prep that evening, Potter and Greene found Coker in their study. Coker was frowning.

Potter closed one eye at Greene.

"Didn't you speak to Prouty, Coker?" he asked.

Snort from Coker.

"Lot of good speaking to that old ass!" he said. "What do you fellows think? He called me a fool!"

"Not really!" ejaculated Greene.

"Yes—me, you know," said Coker. "He hasn't spotted the young villains—doesn't look like spotting them, either. I told him that what was needed on the job was brains—"

"You told Prout?" gasped Potter.

"Yes, and he seemed annoyed. Blared at me!" said Coker bitterly. "Called me a fool! Me, you know! A fool!"

"Fancy that!" murmured Greene.

"I'm not let off prep," said Coker. "Nothing of the sort! I've a jolly good mind to throw the whole thing up!"

"I should!" agreed Potter.

"But I won't!" said Coker. "I'm taking it up, just to show Prout! I'm going to spot those young scoundrels. Nobody else can do it—that's pretty clear by this time! Well, it's up to me. Prout will be surprised when I point them out."

"When?" murmured Potter.

"Eh! What did you say, Potter?"

"Nothing, old chap!" said Potter blandly. "But if you're not let off prep, old bean, we'd better get going!"

Another snort from Coker.

"Prep!" he said. "Talk about Napoleon Bonaparte fiddling while Moscow was burning! Prep!"

"Oh crikey! Do you mean Nero fiddling while Rome was burning?" gasped Potter.

"No, I don't!" snapped Coker. "You don't know much about history, Potter. Here's the whole school buzzing with excitement, everything at sixes and sevens—nobody able to handle the matter excepting me—and I'm supposed to do prep! It makes me tired!"

"Well, prep's prep!" remarked Greene.

"Blow prep!"

"And Prout—"

"Blow Prout!"

Potter and Greene sorted out their books and sat down to it. Coker, with an angry snort, followed their example.

The amazing attack on Mr. Prout had caused all Greyfriars to rock with excitement. It was the one topic in every study and every passage. More amazing than the outrage itself was the circumstance that absolutely no clue could be found to the mysterious offenders.

Coker could have handled the matter—at least, he had no doubt that he could have! Instead of which, he had to sit down to prep, just like a common-or-garden member of the Fifth Form!

It was enough to make Coker tired! It was no wonder that Horace Coker snorted over his prep.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Caterpillar Takes a Hand!

PONSONBY sat in his study arm-chair at Highcliffe School, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, and a little curl of smoke rising from his cigarette. Cigarettes after tea were the rule in Pon's study at Highcliffe—but on this occasion Pon did not seem to be deriving much comfort from his smoke. His brows were knitted, and he was glaring at Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour, his knotty friends.

"Chuck it, Pon!" Gadsby was saying. "Enough's as good as a jolly old feast, you know."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour, with a nod.

"Too jolly risky!" said Monson.

"What are you funk'n'?" sneered Ponsonby. "I find a way of gettin' at the Greyfriars cads that's as safe as houses. We make them sit up, at precious little risk to ourselves. Now you begin funk'n'—"

"It was a jolly narrow escape this afternoon, and chance it!" said Gadsby sullenly. "If we hadn't got those hankies over our faces we should have been recognised—"

"And reported to the Head here, and jolly well sacked!" said Monson.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour—his usual remark.

Vavasour was a fellow of few words, and those few not valuable.

"Baggin' a master, and bundlin' him downstairs, may suit you, Pon, but it doesn't suit me," said Gadsby, shaking his head. "It's too thick."

"Only a Greyfriars beak!" snapped Pon.

"What do you think Dr. Voysey would say to it?" demanded Monson.

"He won't know."

"Well, he might! It's too jolly risky."

"Look here!" snapped Ponsonby. "It was a frost this afternoon, owin' to that old fool Prout buttin' in. But to-night—"

"Cut it out!" said Gadsby.

"You won't come?"

"No, I won't."

"Funk!" hooted Ponsonby.

"Rats!" retorted Gadsby.

And Gadsby threw away his cigarette, walked out of the study, and slammed the door after him.

Ponsonby scowled blackly.

"Look here, Monson—" he began.

"I've somethin' to say to Gaddy!" remarked Monson; and he walked out of the study and the door slammed again.

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Vavasour showed a strong desire to follow the two. He took the long amber holder of his cigarette from his mouth, and rose.

"Stay here, Vav!" said Ponsonby. "You're not goin' to let me down like those funks?"

"Well, you see—" mumbled Vavasour.

"A fellow doesn't want to do it alone," said Ponsonby. "Look here, where's the risk? We get in and out of Greyfriars secretly and safely. It was a bit of ill-luck a Form master buttin' into the box-room this afternoon—it's not likely to happen twice. Anyhow, it did no harm—he never knew us. Look here, you come along to-night, old chap!"

Vavasour shook his head.

"Too risky!"

"You funky fool!" roared Ponsonby.

"If you're goin' to be insultin'—," mumbled Vavasour; and he went to the door.

Ponsonby glared after him as he opened it. Ponsonby was feeling even more bitter than usual against his old enemies, the chums of Greyfriars, Billy Bunter's kicking having had that effect on him. It was intensely annoying to Pon to be let down by his friends in his campaign against the Greyfriars Remove.

"Look here, Vav!" he called out.

"Must be goin', old chap! Got to see a man!" said Vavasour; and he stepped out of the study.

"Then take that with you!" snarled Ponsonby; and he hurled the cushion from his armchair.

"Yaroooh!" spluttered Vavasour, as he took it—with the back of his neck.

He pitched headlong out of the doorway, and stumbled in the passage on his hands and knees.

"Oh! Ow! Oh gad! Wow!" gasped Vavasour.

Two Fourth-Formers were coming up the passage from the stairs, and they stopped, just in time to give Vavasour space to fall in front of them. They were Courtenay, the junior captain of Highcliffe, and his pal, the Caterpillar. Both of them stared at the stumbling Vavasour, as he collapsed.

"My hat!" ejaculated the Caterpillar. "Is this a game?"

"Wow-ow-ow!" gasped Vavasour. He sat up dizzily. "Pon, you cad—ow!"

"Come on, Caterpillar!" said Courtenay, and he walked on up the passage. He was not interested in a row in the knutty circle that forgathered in Cecil Ponsonby's study.

But the Caterpillar was mildly interested, and mildly amused. He stopped and glanced into the study, smiling at the sight of Pon's scowling face.

"Is this a jolly old game," he asked, "playin' skittles with your pals, Pon, old bean?"

Vavasour staggered up. He glared back into the study at Ponsonby.

"You dashed cad!" he howled. "I won't come—see? I jolly well won't come to-night, or any other night! Go and eat coke!"

And Vavasour walked away rather hurriedly, after that defiance. Pon looked as if he might come out into the passage after him, and Vavasour as not a fighting-man.

"My hat!" said the Caterpillar. "Is it a jolly old rift in the jolly old lute? Won't your jolly old pals come out blaggin' after lights out, Pon? Why this sudden reform?"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Ponsonby.

Then his manner suddenly changed.

He beckoned Rupert de Courcy into the study.

"Come in, Caterpillar, old man! Look here, are you game for a lark? You're not a funk like those rotters."

"Game for any number of larks," assented the Caterpillar cheerily. "But alas! I never break bounds after lights out, now. Since my dear old pal, Courtenay, snatched me like a giddy brand from the burnin', I've been a jolly old reformed character, and my line of business now is settin' a shinin' example to errin' youth. Nothin' doin', Pon!"

Don't keep a GOOD YARN to yourself, tell it to me and win a SHEFFIELD STEEL PENKNIFE!



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STEP IN AND WIN ONE, CHUM!

"I tell you it's a lark!" snapped Ponsonby. "Come in, and I'll tell you."

The Caterpillar lounged into the study. Perhaps he was rather curious. He was aware that something had been going on in the select knutty circle for some days past, though he did not know what it was. The Caterpillar was idly interested.

"Really, old bean, I oughtn't to step into the study!" he drawled. "There's a wise old proverb that says that evil communications corrupt good manners. But I'll chance it. Wire in!"

Ponsonby kicked the door shut.

"Of course, you keep it dark, whether you join up or not," he said. "It's up against Greyfriars. I know you and Courtenay are friendly with those Remove cads; but after all, a lark's a lark. A man ought to stand by his own school."

"Hear, hear!" said the Caterpillar.

"I've found out a way of raggin' the cads!" explained Ponsonby. "I can get right into Greyfriars any time I like without a soul knowin'."

The Caterpillar jumped.

"My hat! Are you pullin' my innocent old leg?" he asked.

"No, you ass! I found it out by sheer chance. I climbed into the Friar's Oak one day last week, when those cads were roolin' after me," said Pon. "You know that big old oak between Greyfriars and the river?"

"I know," assented the Caterpillar. "Historic landmark in these parts. It was standin' when William the Norman and his gang came over."

"Well, when I got into it, I found it was hollow," said Pon. "In fact, I fell inside, and couldn't get out again."

"Don't tell me you're there still!" murmured the Caterpillar. "That would be puttin' too severe a strain on my innocent credulity."

"Oh, don't be an ass! I found there was a secret passage leadin' from under the oak into Greyfriars School. There's a lot of secret passages in the place that they know of, and some they don't know of; and that's one that they don't know," said Ponsonby. "It leads to a spiral stair in the thickness of a wall, and there's a turning-stone that lets you out at the other end."

"Great pip!"

"You get into a room that's used as a box-room, at the end of the Remove passage," continued Ponsonby. "I got in one day last week, and ragged the Remove studies. I've been twice at night, with Gaddy and Monson, and ragged the Remove in their dormitory."

"Oh crumbs!"

"We went again this afternoon, but it was a frost. I reckoned that the Remove would be all out on a half-holiday, and there would be a chance to rag their studies again. Then, for some reason I can't understand, an old fool of a Form master butted into the room."

"Oh, what a surprise!" grinned the Caterpillar.

"Well, it would have been rather a rotten surprise for us; but some Remove man yelled—blessed if I know why—and we heard him. Up to that moment we had supposed that the coast was clear. You see, you have to crawl through the hole in the wall, one at a time, and there wasn't time to get away before old Prout came buttin' in. I can tell you, it was a jolly close shave!"

"Must have been!" agreed the Caterpillar. "Didn't Prout spot you?"

"He would have," said Pon. "But we tied our hankies over our faces just in time, so that he couldn't recognise us, and as he came in we bagged him and pitched him out again on his neck."

"Phew!"

"He rolled down the stairs—"

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

Ponsonby grinned.

"Well, I opened the window to give the idea that we'd got away over the leads, and then we bunked by the secret opening and shut it after us," he went on. "Safe as houses—owin' to my presence of mind, you know—and old Prout never knew us; never had the faintest idea that we weren't Greyfriars men. It was a close shave, but it turned out all right."

"A closer shave than I should have liked!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Our Beak would sack you for that, Pon!"

"I've had that from Gaddy and Monson!" granted Pon. "They've taken a scare, and won't come again. As it happens, Wharton and his friends came on us when we were gettin' down from the Friar's Oak afterwards, but they never had the faintest suspicion of what we'd been up to. It hadn't even crossed their minds, I'm certain, that a Highcliffe man had been raggin' in their school."

"What larks!" said the Caterpillar.

"They must be frightfully puzzled!"

"Well, what about comin' to-night?" asked Ponsonby eagerly. "I'd rather have you than those funky cads; they've got no nerve. It will be no end of a

lark. I'm goin', anyhow. I'd like you to come, Caterpillar."

The Caterpillar's eyes glimmered. It was plain that so peculiar an adventure appealed to him.

"Only a jape?" he asked. "None of your rotten tricks, Pon?"

"Look here, you cheeky ass—"

"Well, you know what you are, Pon!" said the Caterpillar dubiously. "You're the man to give a fellow a black eye in the dark, when he can't hit back. I hate mentionin' these unpleasant truths, but a fellow wants to know."

Ponsonby breathed hard.

"Only a jape, of course," he said. "They've japed us a good many times, and the idea is to mystify them and pull their leg. I'm goin' to take a pot of treacle, and mop it over Bunter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it a go?" asked Pon eagerly.

"It's a go!" said the Caterpillar chuckling. "No harm in a jape. I'm jolly curious to see that secret passage, too. I'll come."

Later, in his study with Frank Courtenay, the Caterpillar wondered whether he had been wise to join up with Pon in that "lark."

Certainly there was no harm in a lark, and the prospect was rather entertaining. After due reflection the Caterpillar came to the conclusion that he had not been wise.

But he had given his word, and that settled it for the Caterpillar. And after lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory at Highcliffe that night, when the rest of the Fourth were fast asleep, Rupert de Courcy heard Pon's whisper in the darkness, and stepped out of bed and dressed.

Ten minutes later they were out of the House, in the starry night, and following dusky, lonely lanes towards the coppice near Greyfriars.

They clambered into the Friar's Oak, and slid down the rope Ponsonby had fixed in the hollow interior.

Then Pon turned on the light of a pocket torch, and led the way through a low arch, where they had to bend their heads.

They followed the low, stone-walled, slimy passage far under the earth, and reached, at last, the spiral stair that led upward.

"We're in Greyfriars now!" whispered Ponsonby. "It's the oldest part of the place; shouldn't wonder if this is a thousand years old. This way!"

He led the way up the spiral stair, and the Caterpillar followed. They reached the little cell at the summit, and De Courcy stared round him in the light of Pon's pocket torch.

Ponsonby pressed the turning-stone, and an opening appeared in the wall. Beyond was darkness, with a faint glimmer of starlight from a small window in a room.

Ponsonby crawled through, and the Caterpillar followed him. They stood in the Remove box-room.

"My hat!" murmured the Caterpillar. His eyes were shining with excitement. "I say, old bean, this is no end of a catch! But mind, only a jape!"

Ponsonby grinned in the gloom. He was not likely to limit himself to a playful jape, when all the advantage

was on his side. Ponsonby was out for vengeance; though he had considered it judicious not to tell the Caterpillar so.

"Oh, of course!" he said. "Come on!"

And he led the way.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Raid on the Remove!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were sleeping the sleep of the just in the Remove dormitory.

They had been rather late in closing their eyes that night. There had been discussion of the mystery of the box-room, and the unaccountable attack on Mr. Prout.

That unprecedented outrage, of course, had been reported to Mr. Quelch; and the Remove master had assembled his Form and questioned them, grimly and severely; but with absolutely no result.

Not a man in the Remove admitted having been anywhere near the box-room that afternoon, and nearly every man could prove that he hadn't been.

Prout himself was a witness to the innocence of the Famous Five. Plenty of other evidence was found in favour of other fellows. Some had been at

regular breathing. There was a faint chuckle from the Caterpillar as he stood by Ponsonby's side peering into the dark dormitory.

"Safe in the giddy embrace of jolly old Morpheus!" he remarked.

"Quiet!" whispered Ponsonby.

"What's the odds?" drawled the Caterpillar. "They'll wake fast enough when you get goin' with the treacle."

"Dry up, you ass! If they hear our voices—" muttered Pon.

"My mistake!" yawned the Caterpillar. "If this got out, it would mean a frightful row for us at Highcliffe; especially after you handlin' the fat old beak to-day!"

"Quiet, I tell you!" snarled Ponsonby.

He led the way into the dormitory, and the Caterpillar followed him. The Caterpillar was grinning. The idea of smothering Bunter with sticky treacle appealed to his sense of humour. And the mystification of the Remove when they woke and found Bunter mysteriously and unaccountably treaced would be entertaining.

The Caterpillar was on friendly terms with Harry Wharton & Co., but he saw no harm in a playful jest on the Greyfriars Remove. With his usual carelessness, he forgot that Pon's jests were not likely to be merely playful.

"No difficulty in pickin' out the delightful Bunter," murmured the Caterpillar. "That sound of revelry by night comes from him, I fancy!"

"Quiet!"

They stopped beside Bunter's bed. Pon removed the lid from the can of treacle he had brought with him.

"Better wake him first!" whispered the Caterpillar. "Don't want to startle the chap too much."

"Shut up, you ass!"

But the Caterpillar coolly reached out and gave the Owl of the

Remove a shake. A jest was a jest, but the Caterpillar did not regard frightening the fat Owl out of his wits as a jest. His shake awakened Bunter, and the fat junior opened his eyes and blinked.

"Ooogh! I say, you fellows, wharrer you up to, wakin' a fellow up? I say, what— Whooooooogh!"

A stream of treacle from the upturned can descended on Bunter's fat face.

"Groooooogh!"

Bunter liked treacle! But he liked it taken internally! Taken externally, it was not nice.

The sticky stream swamped over Bunter's face, and ran over his hair, over his ears, and down his neck.

There was a terrific roar from Bunter.

It rang through the Remove dormitory, and startled all the sleepers. Fellows started up in their beds on all sides.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Who's that?"

"What's that?"

"What the thump—"

"Yarooogh! Groooooogh! Ooooch! I'm sticky! Beasts! Whoop! Groooooogh! Hoooch! Whooooooogh!" Bunter's voice, like the voice of the turtle of old, was heard in the land, and it was heard far and wide. "Yaroooooooogh!"

Harry Wharton leaped out of bed.

Twice already, in the past few days, mysterious ragers had visited the Remove dormitory in the night, and had escaped undiscovered. Instantly the

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cricket, some on the river, some on their bikes, some rambling about the lanes and fields, a few at the pictures; every man was able to give an account of his movements, and all seemed to have been out of the House.

It was a relief to Quelch.

He took the view that, whosoever had assaulted Mr. Prout in the box-room, it had not been anyone belonging to the Remove.

That decision took the matter out of Mr. Quelch's province; offenders in other Forms were dealt with by other Form masters, and Quelch was glad to be done with the matter.

Prout did not accept his view. Prout was certain that the offenders were Removites, and said so. To which Quelch rejoined with a strong hint that Prout had better look in his own Form for the offenders; a hint that made Prout roll away speechless with rage and indignation.

The matter continued a mystery; and after lights out that night the Remove fellows discussed it, and discussed it again, with a continual stream of remarks and suggestions and surmises from bed to bed, till an unusually late hour.

It was after ten o'clock when the Remove were all asleep at last.

It was more than an hour later than that when the door of their dormitory opened quietly in the darkness.

The deep and steady snore of Billy Bunter echoed through the gloom. From other directions came a sound of

captain of the Remove realised that the unknown ragers were at work again.

There was the scratch of a match.

Since the last visit of the ragers Wharton had kept a match-box by his bed, to get a light immediately if the ragers came again.

The flame of the match flickered in the darkness of the dormitory.

As it flickered, revealing Wharton, there came a sudden crashing blow, and a clenched fist landed in the captain of the Remove's face.

He crashed on the floor, with a yell.

Ponsonby, the next moment, was pinioned by the arm in a grasp of iron.

"You cur!" breathed the Caterpillar. "Is that what you call a jape? Get out of it!"

He spun Ponsonby towards the door.

Ponsonby had fully intended to follow up the attack, but the Caterpillar's intervention put a stop to that. He staggered in the darkness.

There were shouting voices on all sides now, mingled with the yelling of Billy Bunter. Matches were heard to scratch.

Ponsonby, gritting his teeth, dashed out of the dormitory. There was no time for further vengeance, and there was danger of recognition. The Caterpillar followed him, his eyes gleaming.

"You cur!" he muttered. "I've a good mind to go back, and put them wise to the whole thing. You rotter, punchin' a man's face in the dark—"

"You fool!" hissed Ponsonby.

"Shut up, and get out, you rotter!" They ran together down the passage. The Remove dormitory was in an uproar now, and the electric light had been flashed on. Some of the Removites were running out into the passage.

The two Highcliffians ran fast, and reached the Remove passage, and there Ponsonby stopped. The uproar was in the distance now; the dormitory was far from the studies.

"Get on!" snapped the Caterpillar.

"It's all serene!" muttered Ponsonby. "They won't come this way; they're bound to think it's ragers from another dormitory. We're safe here."

"What are you stoppin' for?" "I'm goin' to rag some of the studios."

"You're not!"

"You fool!" breathed Ponsonby. "I tell you we're safe here—they won't come in this direction. We've time—"

The Caterpillar's grasp closed on his arm, with a grip of steel.

"You're gettin' out," said the Caterpillar quietly. "I know your sort of jape now, you cur, and you're chuckin' it. I'd go back now and put them wise, only I can't give you away, cur as you are. But you're gettin' out now."

"Grooooooogh!" There was a terrific roar from Bunter, as a stream of treacle swamped his face, ran over his hair, over his ears, and then down his back. It rang through the Remove dormitory and startled all the sleepers.



"Let go my arm!" hissed Ponsonby. There was a howl from Ponsonby as his head was suddenly banged on the wall of the Remove passage.

"Ow! You rotter—" "Have another, or come quietly?" asked the Caterpillar.

Ponsonby gritted his teeth. The Caterpillar was sorry, by this time, that he had come with Pon, and probably Pon was sorry that he had brought him. He decided to come quietly, and they hurried on to the box-room.

There the Caterpillar saw Pon through the orifice in the wall first, and then followed him. The stone was closed, and Ponsonby, in the glimmer of his electric torch, gave his companion a deadly look.

"You rotter!" he hissed.

"Hold your tongue, and get on!" snapped the Caterpillar. "For two pins I'd give you the thrashin' of your life!"

In savage silence Ponsonby hurried away by the spiral stair, and the secret passage. The Caterpillar followed him. They clambered up the rope, and dropped from the Friar's Oak into the coppice.

Not a word was exchanged between them, as they followed the lanes back to Highcliffe.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Baffling Mystery!

MR. QUELCH stood in the doorway of the Remove dormitory and stared in.

At such an hour that dormitory should have been buried in repose. Instead of which it was in a wild uproar.

Nearly every fellow was out of bed. The light was on. Billy Bunter sat up

in his bed, streaming with treacle and yelling.

It was another midnight "rag," and the Remove master's face was almost pale with wrath.

This was the third time Mr. Quelch had been awakened at night by uproar in the dormitory of his Form. The most patient Form master might have been exasperated. And Henry Samuel Quelch was by no means the most patient of Form masters.

"Wharton!" rumbled Mr. Quelch. The buzz died away as the juniors became aware of their Form master's presence. All eyes were turned on Mr. Quelch—excepting Bunter's. Bunter's were thick with treacle.

"What does this mean, Wharton?" Wharton was dabbing his nose with a sponge. It was streaming crimson. It was red and bulbous. Ponsonby had put his beef into that savage punch, and it had hurt.

"Somebody's been here, sir," said Harry. "I suppose it was the same ragger that's been here before."

"Did you see him?"

"No, sir. He hit me as I was striking a match. I think there was more than one of them, but I'm not sure."

"Did anyone see them?" There was a general shaking of heads. Nobody had seen the ragers, in the darkness, and they had escaped before the light was turned on.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. "This passes all patience!" he exclaimed. "Wharton, have you no idea of the identity of the persons who have caused this disturbance?"

"No, sir. None at all."

"I cannot understand it!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "On a previous occasion I visited the other junior dormitories, and no one appeared to have been out of bed. However, I shall see."

Leaving the Removites in a buzz, Mr. Quelch hurried away. A few minutes later there was a ponderous tread in the passage, and Mr. Prout, in flowing dressing gown, looked into the dormitory.

"The Fifth Form master gave a snort. "Disgraceful!" he ejaculated.

"My esteemed and absurd sir—" began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Sandalous!" said Prout. "Such a disturbance at such an hour of the night—"

"We're not to blame, sir," said Nugent. "Somebody's been here—"

"Rubbish!"

"We were woke up—" said Bob Cherry.

"Nonsense!"

Evidently Mr. Prout was under the impression that the Removites had been ragging among themselves.

"This Form," said Mr. Prout, "is a disgrace to Greyfriars. I have been disturbed, awakened, in the dead of night. I—"

"I tell you it was a rag!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Some fellows have been here from another dormitory. Look at Bunter!"

"Grooooooogh!" contributed Bunter. "Oooogh! I'm sticky! Wooooogh!"

"Disgraceful!" snorted Prout, looking at Bunter.

"You'd better get a wash, old fat bean," said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "You look frightfully sticky."

"The stickiness is terrific. The washfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Bunter."

"Grooogh! I say, you fellows, I'm smothered with treacle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'm sticky all over!" howled Bunter. "Look at me!"

"Better get a wash, old fat man," chuckled Peter Todd. "I know you hate it; but even soap and water ain't so bad as treacle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled out of bed. Even Bunter realised that a wash was needed. Washing had never appealed to Bunter. Even his ordinary ablutions were generally scamped in a very perfunctory manner. Now he had to have an extra wash, and Bunter could not help feeling that he was an extremely ill-used youth.

However, there was no help for it. Bunter had to wash—and he washed!

He was still washing off sticky treacle, when Mr. Quelch returned to the dormitory.

Mr. Quelch gave Prout a far from welcoming glance. He was intensely annoyed by the presence of the Fifth Form master.

"May I ask why you are here, Prout?" he inquired acidly.

"I am here, sir," boomed Prout, "because I have been disturbed, sir, awakened, sir, in the dead of night, by the uproar in this dormitory, sir. This Form, sir, is a disgrace to Greyfriars."

"Sir!"

"I repeat it, sir—a disgrace to Greyfriars. Three members of this Form assaulted me, sir, this afternoon, in a box-room, and now, sir, the whole Form appear to be indulging in a—a—a wild jamboree, sir—in the dead of night—"

"My boys are doing nothing of the kind!" exclaimed the Remove master indignantly. "Their dormitory has been entered by boys of another Form."

"And the delinquents, sir?" demanded

Prout. "Have you discovered them? It should be easy to ascertain—"

"It is far from easy!" said Mr. Quelch. "I have visited all the junior dormitories, in turn, and all the boys are in bed. I have questioned them, and they deny having been out of bed."

"And I fully believe their denials," snorted Mr. Prout. "I have no doubt that these boys have been indulging in a disorderly jamboree—"

"I accept the assurance of my boys, Mr. Prout, that the disturbance did not originate with them."

"And I do not accept it, sir," hooted Prout. "Your boys, sir, denied knowledge of the outrage in the box-room. That proves that no reliance is to be placed on their assurances."

"Rats!" called out a voice, and Prout glared round at the Removites.

"Silence! Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Upon my word—" breathed Prout. "Wharton! You are absolutely certain that this disturbance was caused by intruders in this dormitory?"

"Quite certain, sir," said Harry. "No Remove fellow would have knocked me down in the dark. Besides, though the rotter—I mean the fellow—knocked me down before I could see him, I could see that he was dressed. I had a glimpse of him, though not of his face, and I am certain that he was dressed. But when the light was turned on, all the Remove were here, and nobody was dressed."

"That is conclusive," said Mr. Quelch.

"Far from it!" snorted Prout. "Your investigations, Quelch, have demonstrated that no other juniors came here. That is conclusive."

"Not quite, sir," said Vernon-Smith coolly.

"What? What do you mean, Vernon-Smith?" snapped Mr. Prout.

"I mean what I say, sir!" answered the Bounder. "It's proved now, as it was proved before, that no juniors came here ragging. So they must have been seniors—Fifth Form fellows."

"What?" roared Mr. Prout.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The expression on Prout's face was, as Skinner remarked afterwards, worth a guinea a box. The suggestion that his own boys—Fifth Form men, seniors—might have been guilty of so very undignified a proceeding as ragging after lights out, almost dumbfounded Prout.

The Bounder, as a matter of fact, did not quite think so himself. The suggestion was made chiefly to get Prout's "rag" out. Undoubtedly it had that effect!

"Upon my word!" gasped Prout, when he recovered his voice. "This—this impertinence, this insolence, this—this—this—Quelch, am I to understand that this insolent suggestion is to pass unpunished?"

Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted. He was fed-up with Prout and his fussy interference, and was rather pleased to see the tables turned on Mr. Prout in this manner.

"I cannot regard the suggestion as insolent, Mr. Prout," he said. "It appears to me to be reasonable. Some persons have been here, and as it appears that they were not juniors, there is at least a probability that they were senior boys."

"The suggestion is ridiculous, sir!" boomed Prout. "The Fifth Form, sir, are not likely to enter into such disorderly and disgraceful proceedings as these. I refuse, sir, to listen to any such suggestion!"

And Mr. Prout, purple with wrath,

marched away. Mr. Quelch, glad to be relieved of Prout, at any rate, turned to Wharton.

"Wharton, is it your opinion that the intruders here belonged to a senior Form?"

The captain of the Remove hesitated. "Well, no, sir," he answered. "I can't say I think so. But if they weren't the Fourth or the Shell, I can't imagine who they were—unless the Fifth."

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"Well, you may go back to bed now," he said. "The matter is extremely puzzling. But I accept your word, without question, that the fault does not lie with my Form."

The Remove turned in, and Mr. Quelch put out the light and left them, a very perplexed and irritated gentleman.

It was long before the Remove settled down to sleep again. Even Billy Bunter's snore was not heard for some time. He had had a wash, but he was still sticky in many places, and he grunted and grouched for some time before settling down. The other fellows discussed the Bounder's suggestion that the raiders had belonged to the Fifth; and there were many of them who took the view that the Bounder was right.

"Can't imagine the Fifth playing the goat like that," said Bob Cherry, "but I'm blessed if it doesn't look like it. If it wasn't Fifth Form men, who was it?"

"The whofulness is terrific!"

"It's a giddy mystery," said Wharton. "But I'm jolly well going to find out who punched my nose in the dark, and give him some of the same!"

It was a mystery, and the Removites had to give it up, as they had given it up before. It seemed assured that the raiders had not been juniors, yet it seemed unlikely that they could have been seniors. That they came from outside the school, and did not belong to Greyfriars at all, was a theory that, naturally, occurred to no one. The whole thing was utterly mysterious, and mysterious it remained.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Coker Asks for It!

"**T**HAT," said Coker of the Fifth, "tears it!"

"Does it?" yawned Potter. "What does?" yawned Greene lazily.

Coker's manner was stern, serious, almost dramatic. So far, however, from realising how serious the conjuncture of events was, Potter and Greene did not even seem aware of what Coker was driving at.

This sort of thing often happened to Horace Coker. Fellows hardly ever seemed to realise that when Coker was speaking it was time for the whole round globe to sit up and take notice; if not even for the stars in their courses, to hold on and listen.

It is not uncommon for those strong, silent, stern men to find themselves disregarded by thoughtless and frivolous persons. The reason, perhaps, lies in the fact that those strong, silent stern characters always want to do more than their fair share of the talking.

Thus it was with Coker. Strong and silent and stern, Coker had no doubt that he was; but it was a fact that Coker was talking so continually that he resembled the little brook that went on for ever. Potter had actually compared him to a gramophone. Greene had declared that he was like some awful sort of wireless that couldn't be shut off.

So Coker's words often fell on unregarding ears. There were so many of them that, really, a fellow couldn't listen to the lot.

"That tears it!" repeated Coker. "Tears it off, you men! They're at it again—right at it!"

It was morning break, and Coker & Co. were walking in the quad. If Coker had been asked how they were occupied, he would have said that they were having a chat.

The chat was, as usual, a one-way affair. Coker chatted, and Potter and Greene, without giving attention, were conscious of an unending drone in their ears, which might have been the buzzing of wasps, but was really Coker. They made occasional interjections to give an impression that they were heeding. Coker did not like his remarks to pass unheeded.

"Going it, you know," continued Coker. "Going it strong! Yesterday they ragged Prout in a box-room.

"Oh, my hat!" said Greene. "Those Remove kids are turning the whole school into a bear-garden, with their raggings and rows," said Coker; "and they make out that somebody comes ragging in their dorm; and it's been proved that the Fourth and the Shell haven't; and some of them have had the check to suggest that it was the Fifth."

"Young asses!" said Potter. "Young sweeps!" said Greene. "Do they think that senior men would rag with silly kids after lights out?"

"Well, that tears it!" said Coker. "I'm on this! They've ragged my Form master, which is pretty serious, now they're insulting my Form! It's pretty clear, of course, that some young scoundrels in the Remove are at the bottom of the whole thing. Three, I think. There were three who handled Prout, and there seem to have been two or three starting the trouble every time there's been a disturbance. The same

was engaged as a spotter, and they were thankful for small mercies.

"Here!" said Coker, planting himself in the path of Harry Wharton & Co. "Here, you kids!"

The Co. came to a halt, and gazed at him.

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry affably.

"The hearfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Coker," said Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"Don't jaw," said Coker. "I've a few questions to put to you kids. I may as well tell you, fair and square, that I'm going to spot the gang of young rotters who have been raising Cain the last week or two. There are three of them, and they belong to the Remove. You kids seem to have proved a sort of alibi, which lets you out. But—"

"It's your lower jaw that moves, isn't it, Coker?" asked Bob Cherry, with an air of respectful interest.

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Last night, I hear, they were kicking up a terrific hullabaloo in their dormitory. This is the third or fourth time in a week. Well, that tears it!"

"Um!" said Greene. "Making out, from what I hear, that fellows raid their dorm," said Coker. "Quelch goes up and down the dorms of a night, waking fellows up and asking them if they've been rooting about in the Remove dorm. Of course, they haven't! And they're making out it was the Fifth."

Potter and Greene did take a little notice at last. "Eh? Who's making out that it was the Fifth?" asked Potter. "Haven't you been listening to me?" snorted Coker.

"Um! Ah! Yes! But—"

"It's like you!" said Coker bitterly. "You fellows jaw and jaw. You're like sheep's heads—all jaw! And when a fellow gets in a word edgewise you can't listen!"

lot, of course. I'm going to spot them. The Head can do nothing; Prout can do nothing; Quelch can't or won't do anything; and now they'll find that they're up against me. And if I don't spot them you can use my head for a football!"

With that Coker left his friends and marched across to the Famous Five of the Remove, who were strolling under the elms.

"Fancy using Coker's head for a football!" murmured Potter.

"Nothing in it to damage!" remarked Greene.

"No, but a wooden football—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter and Greene walked away, smiling. They did not think it probable that Horace Coker would spot the mysterious raggings, whose mysterious proceedings were causing excitement and astonishment all through Greyfriars School. But at least they had a rest from his strong, silent "jaw" while he

"Eh? Don't be a cheeky young ass, Cherry. I'm locking into this matter, as nobody else seems to be able to handle it. You kids are to tell me all you know. Three men in the Remove are raising Cain, and keeping it dark. Now, have you any idea who they are?"

"It's nobody in the Remove, Coker," said Harry Wharton. "That's rot! There are three fellows causing a lot of trouble, but they're not in our Form. They come to our dorm ragging."

"Rubbish!" said Coker. "They're Remove kids, of course. If they're not, who are they?"

"Well, they might be in the Fifth," said Frank Nugent. "We thought they were Fourth Form chaps at first; but Temple of the Fourth swears they're not. Hobson says they're not in the Shell. They can't be fags of the Third or Second. So—"

(Continued on page 16.)

THE SECRET OF THE OAK!

(Continued from page 13.)

"So they must be Fifth Form men," said Bob. "Are you one of them, Coker?"

Coker jumped.

"Wha-a-at?" he ejaculated.

The Famous Five chuckled. The expression on Coker's face, as Bob asked that question, was quite entertaining.

"Well, you're fool enough, you see," said Bob argumentatively. "It seems a bit thick for Fifth Form men to be ragging like kids after lights out, and only a fool would do it. Well, you're a fool, aren't you? I mean to say, that's pretty well known."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So the question arises," continued Bob, "whether there are two other fools in the Fifth as big fools as you are, Coker. What do you think?"

Horace Coker did not say what he thought on that subject. Words failed Coker.

He had taken up this matter as an investigator, and he had started to ask the Famous Five for a few details, in the proper manner of an investigator. But Coker, if he possessed the other gifts of an investigator, did not possess the calm detachment of mind that was needed. Instead of smiling inscrutably, as a crime-investigator should have done, Coker lost his temper and made a jump at Bob Cherry.

Bob was grinning. But he ceased to grin as Coker grasped him. Coker's grasp was a powerful one. Nature had been rather unkind to him in the matter of brains, but there was nothing wrong with his muscle.

"Oh! Ow! Wow!" roared Bob, as he whirled in Coker's mighty grasp. "Whoop! Rescue, you men!"

Like one man the Co. rushed to the rescue.

Coker, as had often happened before, found that he had bitten off more than he could masticate. Coker was strewn in the quadrangle, roaring.

He roared and struggled and yelled, what time the five cheery Removites smashed his hat, jerked off his collar and tie, and banged his head on the hard, unsympathetic earth.

Then they walked away, leaving Coker for dead as it were.

Coker sat up.

"Oooogh!" he said. "Groogh! Gug-gug-ug! Woooooh!"

The bell rang for third school by the time Coker had got his second wind. Coker's further investigations into the mystery had to be unavoidably postponed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Big Idea!

"My ridiculous chums!" Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's dusky brow was lined with deep thought.

After prep that evening the Famous Five had gathered in Study No. 1 instead of going down to Hall or the Rag. They had gathered to discuss the mysterious affair of the raggings.

The thing was, as Bob Cherry remarked, getting altogether too thick. Some blighter was making a dead set against the Remove, and scoring all along the line. That blighter had to be found out, and "paid" put to him.

Coker's belief that the mysterious raggings belonged to the Remove itself was shared by many fellows in other

Forms. And, indeed, the juniors had to admit that it rather looked like it.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Fourth, knew nothing. Hobson & Co. of the Shell knew nothing. All the Fourth and the Shell denied knowledge of the raggings. The Third and the Second professed a similar ignorance.

The Fifth did not take the trouble to deny the imputation that they had a hand in the matter; they disdained such a suggestion, and treated it with contempt. Really, it looked as if some mysterious trio of Removites were at the bottom of the business only that, the Famous Five were assured, was not the case.

Indeed, had it been possible for outsiders to gain admittance to the school, after it was closed and locked for the night, they would have supposed that the mysterious raggings came from outside—and they would not have been long in thinking of Ponsonby, of Highcliffe.

But that such a thing was possible never occurred to their minds. They had not the faintest suspicion of the existence of the secret passage from the Friar's Oak, which Ponsonby had accidentally discovered.

The affair was growing intolerable. Whoever the raggings were, they seemed to have the Remove at their mercy; and at the same time the Remove were under the suspicion of having the raggings in their own ranks.

Mr. Quelch, fortunately, trusted his Form, and took their word that they knew nothing of the mysterious and invisible raggings. But he was very puzzled, very perplexed, and very annoyed, and his temper was suffering in consequence, with rather disagreeable results to the juniors in the Form-room.

The Head, they knew, had an eye of suspicion on them. As for Mr. Prout, he made no secret of his belief that the unknown young rascals belonged to the Remove, and held forth on the subject in Common-room at great length.

The thing had got to be put a stop to—the chums of the Remove agreed on that. But how, was the question.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was thinking, while the other fellows discussed, and as he broke his silence they looked at him hopefully. The astute nabob was the fellow to find a solution, if anyone could.

"My ridiculous chums!" repeated the nabob.

"Go it, Inky!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "If you've got a wheeze in your old black noddle cough it up!"

"I was about to make a suggestive remark, my esteemed and idiotic chum," said the nabob.

"If you mean a suggestion, fathead, or a remark, go ahead."

"The mysteryfulness of this ridiculous affair is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed and absurd raggings come darkfully at dead of night, and there is no discoverfulness of their disgusting identity. But the stitch in time saves a cracked pitcher from becoming a bird in the bush, as the English proverb observes—"

"Good old English proverb!" chuckled Bob. "That jolly old moonshee at Bhanipur who taught you English was a whale on proverbs, Inky."

"But what's the idea, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

"The absurd raggings have always caught us napping," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But if we should keep watch instead of seeking the esteemed embrace of Morpheus, we might catch the ridiculous raggings nappingly."

"Um!" said Bob. "We couldn't keep awake all night—"

"And every night—" said Nugent.

"The big idea is to take it turnfully," said Hurree Singh. "One esteemed person on the absurd watch would be sufficient."

"But the brutes would bolt the moment they heard a match strike," said Bob. "They've done that before. And Wharton got a dot on the nose last night while he was striking a match."

"I have not finished yet, my absurd chum. The idea is for a fellow to keep watch outside the dormitory," explained the nabob. "Then, when the idiotic raggings enter, he will follow them in and lock the door—and the catchfulness will be terrific."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob.

"Good egg!" ejaculated Nugent. "That's the goods! If they come again I'm blessed if I see how they will get out of that."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's the big idea!" he declared. "One of us can keep watch at a time. After all, it will only be till midnight. They've never come later than that. We'll take it in turns, outside the dormitory."

"Keep it dark, though," said Bob. "Quelch would get his rag out if he knew."

"Keep it dark, of course. We don't want the rotters to be put on their guard," said the captain of the Remove. "The less said the better. They're pretty certain to come again, and next time it will be a catch. The fellow on the watch isn't to make a sound till the rotters are fairly inside the dormitory; then he will follow them in, bang the door shut, and turn the key. Then we shall have them!"

"Good egg!"

"Inky's worked the oracle!" declared Bob Cherry. "It simply can't fail, if they come again, and they're sure to. My beloved 'earers, we're going to bag those sportsmen by the short hairs!"

"It jolly well looks like it!" agreed Wharton.

And the matter having been fully discussed, and details all settled, the Famous Five went down to the Rag, much relieved in their minds.

In the Rag, after prep, there was continual talk on the subject, all sorts of surmises being made. The mysterious raggings were almost the sole topic at Greyfriars now, especially since the handling of Mr. Prout in the Remove box-room. That the unknown trio who had handled Prout were the same fellows who ragged the Remove, was taken for granted. It was not likely that there were two sets of mysterious raggings at work.

Who they were, and what they were doing it for, mystified all Greyfriars. Outside the Remove, most fellows believed that some of the Removites were at the bottom of it. In the Remove that idea was scouted, but nobody had any light to shed on the subject.

Skinner remarked that it was up to Wharton, as captain of the Form, to do something in the matter. Wharton heard that remark without being "drawn" on the subject. The little scheme laid by the Famous Five was kept a dead secret in their own select circle. It would be time to talk when the mysterious raggings had been bagged.

Wingate of the Sixth saw lights out for the Remove that night. He gave the juniors a rather grim and suspicious look before he turned out the light.

"No larks here to-night, you young sweeps!" he said gruffly.

"The larkfulness will not be terrific,

my esteemed Wingate!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Better tell the Fifth that!" suggested the Bounder.

Wingate grunted. He certainly did not believe that the mysterious ragers belonged to a senior Form.

He turned out the light and left the dormitory.

It was some time before the Remove went to sleep. But they slept at last, with the exception of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The first watch fell to the nabob, and his eyes did not close.

Not till the rest of the Form were fast asleep did Hurree Singh creep silently from his bed.

He dressed quietly in the dark, and stepped on tiptoe to the door. Without a sound he opened the door and stepped out into the passage, closing the door soundlessly behind him.

The passage was dark. Hurree Singh took up a position a few feet from the doorway, leaned on the wall, and waited. In the darkness he was quite invisible.

He waited patiently, listening intently for a sound. It was probable, of course, that the ragers would not come again so soon; indeed, it was likely that they would give the Remove a miss that night, after the alarm of the previous night. But that they would come again sooner or later was a certainty, and a watch kept every night could hardly fail to succeed in the long run.

Eleven o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower. The strokes died away, followed by deeper silence.

Then Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gave a sudden start.

From the direction of the stairs, a faint sound came to his ears. His eyes gleamed in the shadows.

It was a stealthy footstep!

Someone was coming—and he could only be coming to the Remove dormitory! He was coming in the dark, treading softly and stealthily!

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, able to see nothing in the dark, waited and listened, with gleaming eyes—ready to act the instant the unscen, stealthy figure entered the Remove dormitory.

alarmed. Knowing nothing of the fact that Horace Coker was out of bed, seeking to waken him, he naturally did not think of Coker. He saw a shadowy figure by his bedside, and felt a grasp on his nose, and was alarmed. Vague

thoughts of ragers, and of burglars, mingled in Potter's startled mind. He did what most fellows would have done in the circumstances—he hit out.

There was a thud. It was what a novelist might have called a dull, sickening thud. It was caused by sudden contact being established between Potter's fist and Coker's waistcoat.

"Ooooh!" gasped Coker. Potter sat up. Coker sat down. Potter had been taken by surprise in the first place, Coker in the second.

"What the thump—" gasped Potter. "Oooh! You silly ass! I'm winded! Oooooogh!"

"My hat! Is—is that Coker?" Potter thought he recognised the voice. "Oooooogh! Yes! You mad idiot! Oooooogh! Hitting a chap in the bread-basket! Ooooooooh!"

"Well, you silly owl, what were you pulling my nose for?" demanded Potter indignantly.

"Oooooooogh!" "What's that row?" came Greene's voice from the next bed drowsily.

"Only Coker playing the goat!" said Potter. "Goodness knows what he's playing the goat at this time of night for, but he is!"

Coker picked himself up. He was gasping a little. Potter had punched promptly, and he had punched hard. Coker passed a hand tenderly over his waistcoat. He was feeling severely jolted.

"You idiot!" he said, breathing hard.

"What's up?" yawned Greene.

"I am!" grunted Coker, "and you fellows are going to be! I was just going to waken you, Greene! I was waking Potter, when the silly ass punched at me. Now, turn out, both of you!"

"Turn out!" repeated Greene. "Don't yell! No need to wake all the dorm!" grunted Coker.

"But what—" exclaimed Potter. "Don't roar! The fellows are asleep! Leave them in the embrace of Mephistopheles," said Coker.

"Oh crikey! Do you mean Morpheus?"

"No, I don't! Don't jaw, Potter! Get up!"

"What the merry thump are we to get up for in the middle of the night?" hissed Potter.

"To back me up!" explained Coker. "It's the lion and the mouse over again, you know! You fellows haven't much sense, and you're not much use; but you can back me up. Turn out!"

"But what—" "Don't shout! I told you men that I was going to bag those ragers," said Coker calmly.

"Well, I've thought it out, see? Knowing that they belong to the Remove, the thing's simple enough—to a fellow like me, I mean. I'm going to keep an eye on them."

"Oh crumbs!"

"We're going to the Remove dormitory," further explained Coker. "We're going in quietly—" "We—we—we're what—" gurgled Potter.

"Going in quietly, and keeping mum! That's the idea! As soon as the young scoundrels start playing tricks, we shall nab them. We shall be on the spot. See? I've thought it out. Come on!"

Potter and Greene stared at Coker in the gloom.

That Coker of the Fifth was every known kind of an idiot they, of course, know. But they had fancied, hitherto, that there was some sort of a limit

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AUSTRALIAN CHUM WINS ONE OF THIS WEEK'S FINE LEATHER POCKET WALLETS!

For the snappy Greymfriars limerick illustrated herewith, W. R. Watson, of 5, Napoleon Street, Battery Point, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, has been awarded one of our useful prizes.



Said Loder to Carne, with a grin:



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THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Going It!

"POTTER!" "Oooooooogh!" "Potter! Wake up, Potter, old man!"

"Grrrrrrrg!" Potter of the Fifth seemed unwilling to wake. Coker's urgent whisper had had no effect on him.

Perhaps it was natural. The hour was late, and the Greymfriars Fifth had long been asleep. At that hour there was not, or ought not to have been, a single wakeful soul in the whole school. Potter was sleeping the sleep of the just. He mumbled and grunted, but did not wake.

But Coker was not to be denied. He groped for Potter to shake him.

It was dark, of course, in the Fifth Form dormitory. No doubt that was the reason why Coker, groping for a hold, fastened on Potter's nose. He shook.

"Oooooop!" Potter woke up then.

Being shaken by the nose was likely to waken the soundest sleeper. Even Rip Van Winkle could hardly have resisted that.

Potter started out of slumber. He was startled, surprised, a little

to Coker's idiocy. But it seemed, after all, that there was no limit.

"We—we—we're to butt into a junior dorm, in the middle of the night, and—and watch—" gurgled Greene.

"That's it!" assented Coker. "Rather masterly—what?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"You see, without keeping watch, those young villains will never be caught. And watching outside their dorm is no good. Right on the spot, we shall catch them in the act. Three of the young sweeps are up to this game, and nobody knows who they are. We shall spot them. See?"

"My only hat! And suppose those ragers are not Remove men at all?" gasped Greene.

"No good supposing that. Leave that to me," said Coker. "But come on! It's late already."

"And suppose we're caught out of our dorm?"

"Never mind that!"

"And suppose the Remove wake up and sling us out on our necks—"

"You're wasting time, Potter! Come on!"

Potter did not come on. He glared at Horace Coker.

"You silly ass!" he said, in measured tones. "So that's what you woke me up for! I'm glad I punched you. I wish I'd punched you harder. If you don't shut up and go back to bed I'll jolly well punch you again."

"Same here!" agreed Greene. "Shut up, and go back to bed, Coker! I know you can't help being a fool, old chap, but be a fool by day-time, not at night."

Coker glared at one, and then at the other. He had laid his plans rather carefully for bagging the ragers. Potter and Greene were to help. It was the mouse and the lion over again, as Coker tactfully put it—Coker being the lion and Potter and Greene the mice. But there seemed a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Potter and Greene.

Certainly, fellows found out of their dormitory late at night were booked for a row. Coker was prepared to risk that. Potter and Greene weren't. Fellows who butted into another dormitory—especially the Remove dormitory—were asking for trouble. Coker cared nothing for that. Potter and Greene cared a lot. Coker was prepared to sacrifice his night's rest nobly in order to deal with this matter. Potter and Greene preferred to sleep o' nights. There was an irreconcilable difference of opinion.

"Are you coming?" asked Coker ominously.

"Are we coming?" repeated Potter. "No, you fathead, we're not coming! No, you piffing ass, we're staying in bed. Can't you mind your own business?"

"He can't," said Greene. "He never could. But he ought to try. You ought to try, Coker!"

"What's all that row?" came Blundell's sleepy voice. "Who's that jawing nineteen to the dozen?"

"That idiot Coker—"

"That fathead Coker—"

"What the thump—" came Hilton's voice.

A good many of the Fifth seemed to be waking up now.

Coker breathed hard and deep. The whole Form would soon be awake, at this rate; and Coker did not want general attention drawn to his proceedings.

"Are you coming, Potter?" he hissed.

"No. I— Oooooogh!" gasped Potter as Coker grasped him and jerked

him out of bed. "Oh, my hat! Why, you fathead—"

"Now, buck up!" said Coker. "I've told you I want you. That's enough. Now then, Greene—"

Greene rolled out of bed in Coker's grasp.

Coker supposed that that would settle it. Potter and Greene being out of bed, they would naturally make up their minds to it, dress themselves, and follow their great leader. So Coker supposed.

But he was in error.

Potter and Greene did not dress themselves and follow Coker. They seized the pillows from their beds and turned on Coker like tigers.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "Yooooop! Wharrer you at? Keep off! Stoppit! Oh crikey!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Coker staggered right and left. Potter and Greene were putting their beef into it.

"You—you rotters! Oh, my hat! Oh crumbs!" gasped Coker.

Swipe, swipe!

Coker dodged away. It was clear, even to Coker, now, that Potter and Greene were not going to follow him on the warpath. Breathing wrath and indignation, Coker dodged the swiping pillows and ran to the door.

The door was heard to open and shut. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Greene. "He's gone!"

Coker was gone! Aided or unaided, Coker meant business. Having laid a masterly scheme for bagging the ragers, Coker was going to carry it out. The Fifth Form dormitory was left in a buzz. The Fifth-Formers were all awake now. Coker gave them no heed. He shut the dormitory door behind him and tramped away.

Five minutes later Coker of the Fifth was stealing cautiously along the passage that led to the Remove dormitory.

The hour was late; the whole House dark and silent. Coker heard nothing, saw nothing, as he came up the passage with stealthy steps. If another rag was planned for that night it had not started yet.

Coker reached the door of the Remove dormitory. He groped for the handle and opened it silently.

He stood and peered into the sleeping dormitory.

All was still; all was silent, save for the deep snore of Billy Bunter. Coker grinned.

After all, he did not need Potter and Greene. He could carry out his masterly scheme without them. He had only to wait and watch, and bag the ragers when they started. And when he had done that and solved the mystery which puzzled and perplexed all Greyfriars, Potter and Greene would be sorry that they had failed him. They would realise that Coker's masterly scheme was, after all, the goods; and they would be properly ashamed of themselves for having failed to back up their great leader.

Coker stepped softly in.

He closed the door behind him.

He was prepared to wait and watch. And, indeed, if the ragers had been members of the Remove, as Coker believed, and if they had planned another rag for that night, no doubt Coker would have solved the mystery. It was rather unfortunate that Coker was on the wrong track; and still more unfortunate—for Coker—that a Remove man was on the watch in the passage.

What happened next came as a complete surprise to Coker.

The door, which he had closed, reopened.

He heard it, and spun round in amazement.

A dark figure stepped swiftly in. The door was immediately closed again, and the key turned in the lock.

Then the electric light was suddenly switched on.

Coker simply blinked.

It was Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, whom he had naturally supposed to be in bed, like the rest of the Remove, who had followed him into the dormitory and switched on the light. And as Coker, flabbergasted with astonishment, goggled at him, the nabob gave a yell.

"Wake up, my esteemed chums! Here is the ridiculous rager!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

"COKER!"

"It's Coker!"

"Coker, after all! Collar him!"

"Bag him!"

"Grab him!"

Remove men leaped out of bed, all along the dormitory. Some of them grabbed pillows and bolsters as they turned out. All of them rushed on Horace Coker.

Coker, in a state of utter astonishment and dismay, stood goggling in bewilderment, and he went over helplessly under the rush.

"Ow! Gerroff!" gasped Coker, finding his voice at last. "Gerroff! Oooooop!"

"Bag him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"We've got the rotter!"

"I knew it was the Fifth! I said it was the Fifth! And it's Coker!"

"Coker, all right! We've got him at last."

Coker struggled wildly under a swarm of Removites. Pillows and bolsters smote him on all sides. Hands grasped him everywhere. Coker had simply no chance.

The Removites, at long last, had captured the mysterious rager. At least, they had no doubt that they had.

There hardly seemed room for doubt.

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh had been on the watch in the passage, to trap the rager if he came. Coker had come and had been trapped. It was scarcely possible to doubt that Coker was the mysterious rager. He had come alone this time; the other two were not with him. But there could be no doubt that Coker was the rager.

It was a joyful triumph for the Remove. They had got him at last!

Breathless, gasping, gurgling. Coker of the Fifth sprawled in the grasp of the triumphant Removites.

"Fancy Coker!" gasped Harry Wharton. "I could hardly believe the ragers were seniors—but this settles it!"

"Yes, rather! Coker—and I suppose the other two must have been Potter and Greene!" said Bob Cherry. "Anyhow, one of them was Coker—because here he is."

"Yes, rather!" chuckled the Bunder. "The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Sit on him! Here, Bunter, sit on him!"

Even Billy Bunter had turned out of bed to take a hand in the game. Bunter had not forgotten the treacle.

"Sit on him, Bunter!"

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter; and he sat.

There was an anguished gasp from Coker, as the weight of the fat Owl landed on him. He collapsed.

"I say, you fellows, give him jip!" exclaimed Bunter. "I say, he's the

Instead of following Coker, Potter and Greene seized the pillows from their beds, and turned on their study-mate like tigers. Swipe, swipe, swipe! "Oh! Ow!" gasped Coker, staggering right and left. "Wharrer you at? Oh crikey!"



beast that treacleed me! I say, pitch into him!"

"Mooooogh!" came in a feeble moan from Coker.

"Well, it's cleared up now," said Harry Wharton, with satisfaction. "I can't understand even Coker being such a fool; but there's no doubt now. We've got one of the ragers, at least."

"What-ho!" chortled Peter Todd.

"I say, you fellows, wallop him! I say, I'm still sticky from that treacle! Wallop the beast!"

Bang, bang! It was a sudden knocking at the door of the dormitory. The handle had been turned from outside; but the door did not open.

"Oh, my hat! That's Quelch!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Boys!" The Remove master's voice was almost a shriek. "What is going on here? Open this door immediately!"

Nugent ran to the door and unlocked it.

It swung open, and Mr. Quelch stalked in. His gimlet eyes fairly blazed at the Removites. For the moment he did not observe Coker. Bunter was sitting on Coker's chest, and six or seven fellows were standing on him, and the rest were gathered round him. Coker, for the moment, had vanished from sight; and his voice, usually well to the fore, was silent—Bunter's weight squeezed all the breath out of Coker.

"Boys! How dare you! I—I—" gasped Mr. Quelch.

He was interrupted by a deep booming voice from the passage. Mr. Prout loomed in the doorway.

"Quelch! This is another disturbance

late at night! Quelch, I am compelled to tell you that this is beyond all bearing! If you cannot keep your Form in order, Quelch, I shall speak to the Head on this subject."

"Mr. Prout—"

"I repeat, sir, it is beyond bearing!" hooted Prout. "Again and again I have been disturbed at night by uproar from this dormitory! It is scandalous! It is outrageous! It is—"

Mr. Quelch set his lips.

"Allow me to speak, Prout! Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Harry.

"This disturbance, Wharton, cannot have been caused by boys from another dormitory! I found the door locked when I arrived here. Therefore—"

"Absurd!" boomed Prout. "Of course, it was not caused by boys from another dormitory! I have told you that on previous occasions, Quelch. Some of these young rascals dared to insinuate that Fifth Form boys came here to create uproar. Now, sir, it is perfectly clear—"

"Wharton, explain this at once—"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the captain of the Remove. "It's the rager, sir—"

"The door was locked—"

"Esteemed sahib, my absurd self locked the ridiculous door, to keep the execrable rager from bolting!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Mr. Quelch started.

"What? What? Wharton, has any boy from another dormitory entered this room since lights out?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"A Fifth Form boy?" asked Mr. Quelch, with a gleaming eye on Prout.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I repudiate the suggestion, sir!" boomed Prout. "I dismiss it with scorn, sir. No boy of my Form—"

"Really, Mr. Prout—"

"Really, Mr. Quelch! I repeat, sir, I repudiate the suggestion! These boys—these disorderly young rascals, sir—have created the disturbance, and they dare to insinuate that a senior boy—a boy of my Form—is concerned in the matter! I scorn the insinuation, sir!"

Mr. Prout broke off suddenly.

The Removites who were standing on Coker stepped off Coker. Billy Bunter rose from his seat on Coker's manly chest. Coker was revealed!

"Coker!" said Mr. Quelch coldly. "A Fifth Form boy!"

Prout could not speak. He could only gaze. He gazed at Coker as if Horace's rugged face fascinated him.

"Coker," repeated Mr. Quelch grimly. "Coker, kindly explain what you are doing in the Remove dormitory at this hour of the night!"

Coker struggled for speech.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Prout faintly.

"Coker, what have you to say?" demanded the Remove master.

"Groooooogh!"

"What—what? Answer me, Coker!"

"Oooooooooooooogh!"

"Mr. Prout!" Quelch's gimlet eyes fairly glittered as he turned them on the Fifth Form master. "Mr. Prout! The affair which has puzzled and scandalised the whole school is now cleared up! The boy responsible for these continual disturbances is a boy of your Form, sir! Mr. Prout, you have used the words

disgraceful and scandalous! I agree with you, sir, that this conduct in a boy of your Form is both disgraceful and scandalous! I must insist, Mr. Prout, upon your keeping Fifth Form boys in better order than this, or I shall speak to the Head on the subject!"

Prout could only gurgle.

He was taken utterly aback.

He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes as he stared at Coker. All the wind was taken out of his sails.

"I am compelled to tell you, sir," went on Mr. Quelch, in sardonic parody of Prout's own words, "that this is beyond all bearing."

Prout gasped.

He strode to Coker, and dropped a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Come!" he snapped. "You will be expelled for this, Coker! Come!"

"I—I—I—" gurgled Coker.

"Come!" roared Prout.

Coker was marched out, with Prout's hand on his shoulder, Prout glaring at him as if he could have eaten him.

There was a faint smile on Quelch's face. Never had the tables been turned so completely on the portly, overpowering Prout.

"You will go back to bed, my boys," said Mr. Quelch. "The matter is now cleared up; the disturber of the peace has been found. I have no doubt that Coker will be flogged—as he richly deserves."

Mr. Quelch turned out the light and left his Form to repose.

There was a buzz of excitement in the Remove. Hardly a fellow had really believed that the mysterious ragers belonged to the Fifth; and the proof was startling.

And in the Fifth Form dormitory, after Prout had landed Coker there and left him, with dire intimations of what was to happen in the morning, there was a sound of chuckling and chortling. Coker did not chuckle, and he did not chortle. He could see nothing comic in this extraordinary disaster. But the rest of the Fifth could; and they chuckled and chortled loud and long.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Chuck It, Coker!

"**F**LOGGED or sacked?"

"Or both?"

That was what the Greyfriars fellows asked one another, when Coker of the Fifth was taken before the Head after prayers in the morning.

Even at that early hour the school was buzzing with the news.

But the reports were contradictory.

The Remove, to a man, believed that one, at least, of the mysterious ragers had been caught, and that he could name the others if he liked.

The Fifth, on the other hand, told fellows that Coker had only been playing the giddy ox, as usual, and that it was all a mistake.

Later, it was learned that the Fifth Form view was the correct one.

Coker had explained, to an astounded headmaster and an exasperated Form master, in Dr Locke's study.

Coker was not the ragger! He was not one of the mysterious three! He had been after the ragers! He had been caught in mistake for one of them! That was how it was!

Mr. Prout, no doubt, was relieved to find that his Form, after all, were not responsible for the raggings. But he was intensely exasperated with the ineffable Coker.

Coker was neither flogged nor sacked,

but his Form master gave him a thousand lines, and gated him for the rest of the term as a punishment for leaving his dormitory after lights out. Which reduced Coker to a state of breathless indignation.

It was fortunate for Coker that, the previous night, he had roused out Potter and Greene and most of the Fifth. They were able to bear witness with what intentions Horace had left his dormitory.

But for that circumstance, Coker's frantic asseverations might have been discredited, and he might have been adjudged guilty! Really, he had asked for it.

The evidence of Potter and Greene, and half of the Fifth, cleared Coker, so far as that went. Coker, the school learned, was not the ragger; he was not one of the mysterious and unknown gang. He was only a born idiot!

That, of course, was no news!

"Not Coker, after all!" said Bob Cherry, when the Removites learned about it in break. "The howling ass never came to rag, after all—he came to hunt the ragger! I suppose it's true!"

"Oh, it's true," said Wharton. "Coker wouldn't tell whoppers about it, to get out of a row! Besides, most of the Fifth knew. I hear that Potter and Greene tried to stop him!"

"We haven't got the ragger yet!" said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "I thought we had him last night—"

"Same here!"

"The samefulness was terrific!"

"But we hadn't!" said Johnny Bull. "That idiot Coker thinks the ragers are in the Remove. Of course, they're not. But I'm blessed if I really believe they're in the Fifth!"

"Then where are they?" asked Nugent.

"Goodness knows!"

"It's rather rotten," said Harry Wharton. "Last night I thought the matter was cleared up! But it's as jolly mysterious as ever. There's at least three fellows playing rotten tricks on us, and no evidence against anybody!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's jolly old Coker!" grinned Bob Cherry. "He looks as if he's enjoying life—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker of the Fifth did not look as if he were enjoying life. His rugged brow was dark and grim. He glanced at the grinning juniors, and frowned portentously, and strode on. But grinning faces greeted Coker wherever he went. Even Potter and Greene grinned when he joined them in the quad.

Coker gave them a rather bitter look.

"Funny, ain't it?" he said sardonically.

"Well, if you ask me, it is!" admitted Potter. "You ought to be on the front page of a comic paper, old chap!"

"That's your place, Coker!" assented Greene. "You're wasted here!"

"I've had a thousand lines from Prout," said Coker, "and gatings! That's Prout's brand of gratitude!"

"Eh?"

"I take up a mystery that nobody else can handle, I handle it in what I can only call a masterly manner. What's the result? My friends refuse to back me up. My Form master misunderstands me! I get lines and gatings! I can tell you men, I'm fed-up!"

"Why not chuck it?" suggested Potter. "After all, you're not bound to play the goat!"

"Yes, chuck it, Coker," said Greene. "You can't help being an ass, but you needn't be a silly ass, chuck it, old man!"

Coker breathed hard.

"Prout was ragged—and I took it up," he said. "The whole school's mystified, and I practically got my finger on it. All I get in return is mockery and misunderstanding. Well, they can rag Prout bald-headed if they like, after this, and I shall refuse to take any notice. They can rag the Head, himself, if they choose, and I shan't stir a finger! See?"

Evidently Coker was fed-up.

"And if you fellows grin at a fellow like a pair of silly hyenas I'll jolly well bang your heads together!" added Coker hotly. "What is there to grin at, I'd like to know?"

"Well, there's you, old bean!" grinned Potter.

"Just you!" chuckled Greene.

That did it!

Coker's temper had been sorely tried. Now it failed him! He jumped at Potter and Greene, and grasped them with either hand, to bang their heads together, as they richly deserved.

Bang!

Potter's head banged on Greene's. There was a simultaneous and fiendish yell from Potter and Greene.

"There!" said Coker victoriously. "Now—oh, my hat! Leggo! Whoop!"

The next few minutes were hectic—for Coker. Potter and Greene seemed quite excited. They jammed Coker down on the quad, they rubbed his features there, and when they left him, feeling better, they left Coker feeling as if several earthquakes had happened to him.

Coker staggered up dizzily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. seemed to find Coker's aspect amusing. Coker gave them a glare, and rushed on them.

Once more he smote the quadrangle. Once more his rugged features were rubbed on the unsympathetic earth.

This time Coker was slower to rise. The famous Five strolled away and left him gurgling. When Coker picked himself up, at last, and tottered into the House, he met Mr. Prout in the doorway.

Prout looked at him. Coker's face was crimson, where it was not of the earth, earthy. Prout glared.

"Coker! What does this mean? Your state is disgraceful! Cannot you behave yourself, Coker? You are the most troublesome boy in my Form! You are a disgrace to the Fifth Form, sir! Go and wash yourself!"

"I—I—I—" gasped Coker.

"Not a word! You are dirty—revolting—uncleanly. Go and wash yourself at once!" thundered Prout.

And the unhappy Coker went.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Billy Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

It was Saturday afternoon, which was a half-holiday at Greyfriars. But that afternoon there was games practice, which quite spoiled the half-holiday for Bunter, or would have spoiled it, if Bunter had let it.

Bunter did not like games practice. It was a form of exertion. On compulsory days, Bunter's excuses for slacking were many and various. On the present occasion he had explained to the captain of the Remove that he had a pain in his inside, and therefore could not turn up. To which Harry Wharton had replied that if he did not turn up he would have a pain in his outside, also.

After which, Billy Bunter felt that he had done all that he could, and that he was justified in disappearing from the scene.

He hoped he would not be missed. After all, Wharton, though a beast, would not report a fellow if he could help it, and Wingate might forget his fat existence. So, having "borrowed" a packet of toffee from Smithy's study, to keep him company, Bunter rolled away.

It was necessary to keep out of sight, for which reason the fat Owl rolled into the coppice between the school and the river, and selected a shady spot to sit down and rest, and eat Smithy's toffee. Sitting under a tree was ever so much more restful than urging the flying ball on the cricket ground. If the beasts looked for him, they were not likely to find him there.

Bunter sat and ate the toffee, and was happy and sticky. The sound of footsteps in the coppice did not alarm him. He was hidden by a great mass of hawthorns that grew close by the Friar's Oak, having selected his cover with considerable care. He grinned as he heard footsteps in the coppice.

Rather to his surprise the footsteps stopped under the branches of the Friar's Oak, not a dozen feet from him.

Bunter sat very still. If the beasts were hunting him, to round him up for games practice, he was well screened!

Then, as a voice came to his ears through the hawthorns, he realised that the fellows under the oak were not Greyfriars fellows. It was the voice of Cecil Ponsonby, of the Highcliffe Fourth, that came to his fat ears.

"Give me a bunk, Gaddy!"

Bunter almost ceased to breathe.

Discovery by the Remove men, and compulsory games practice, was bad enough; but discovery by Ponsonby & Co. was worse. If the Highcliffe fellows found him in that solitary spot, Pon was likely to repay Bunter's kicking with liberal interest.

"Oh, all right!" Gadsby's voice sounded sullen. "Blessed if I half like it, Pon!"

"Don't be a funk!"

"That's all very well," came a third voice—Monson's.

"But we jolly nearly got caught on Wednesday—"

"That old fool Prout isn't likely to be buttin' into the box-room again!"

"I know! But—"

"Oh, pluck up your courage!" sneered Ponsonby.

Gadsby and Monson grunted. They were keen enough to rag the Greyfriars Remove, so far as that went. But their narrow escape on the occasion when Mr. Prout had butted into the box-room had alarmed them. For several days they had obstinately refused to take part in any further raids.

But Pon had had his way at last, as he usually did with his knutty pals. The three ragers were on the warpath again.

"It's safe as houses, you funks!" grunted Ponsonby. "I've had it from Skinner that the Remove are at games practice this afternoon. It's a compulsory day, and you know what a strenuous crew they are. Not a man will be 'missin' from the cricket."

"Yes! But—"

"There won't be a soul in the Remove studies! What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid! But—"

"We can clear before they come in from the cricket. This time we'll make a regular wreck of the studies—three of us to do the job! Come on—give me a bunk!"

There was a scrambling sound as Ponsonby was bunked up the trunk of the massive old oak. Bunter sat silent, hardly breathing, lost in wonder. He almost wondered whether he was dreaming.

If he had heard aright, these three Highcliffe fellows were the mysterious three who had ragged Prout in the Remove box-room. They were the mysterious ragers who had mystified the Remove. Now they were going to rag the Remove studies while the fellows were at games practice and the coast was clear. But how?

How? Bunter was simply astounded. It seemed to him that he must be dreaming this.

He heard the sound of a rope slithering down the trunk of the great oak. He ventured to stir and peer through the hawthorns. His little round eyes fairly goggled behind his big round spectacles as he saw Gadsby clambering up the oak with the aid of a rope from above. Gadsby disappeared into the oak, and Monson followed him.

Then the rope was pulled up.

Bunter could hear vague sounds from the interior of the great tree. It sounded like fellows sliding down into the interior, and it dawned on Bunter that the Friar's Oak was hollow.

"Oh drikey!" gasped Bunter.

Silence followed.

Ponsonby & Co. were gone.

(Continued on next page.)

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Long minutes passed, and there was no sound. Pon & Co. were gone—where? From what they said, they were going into Greyfriars. Billy Bunter crawled out of the hawthorns and stood blinking at the Friar's Oak. Slowly understanding dawned on his fat brain. "Oh crikey!" he repeated.

It was amazing, but there was only one explanation. There was some secret way from the interior of the ancient oak to the school. Secret passages existed at Greyfriars; there was one that led to the old priory in Friardale Wood, which had been boarded up. Evidently there was another of the same kind, and Ponsonby & Co. had found it.

The mystery of the mysterious raggings was a mystery no longer. Bunter knew!

For a long time Bunter stood blinking at the oak. There was no sound from its hollow interior now; the Highcliffians were far away by that time. Evidently they were following some hidden route that gave them admittance to the school.

Bunter chuckled. This was the way the raggings got into the school. That was clear. This was the way they escaped afterwards. This was the way they would flee, after they had ragged the Remove studies. But not if Bunter could help it!

The fat junior rolled nearer to the Friar's Oak and scanned it through his spectacles. It was not easy to climb—and Bunter was no climber. But the Owl of the Remove was determined to get into the oak, and his fat brain was working under uncommon pressure now. Pon & Co. had slid down a rope into the hollow trunk. Obviously they would need that rope to climb out again. Bunter's idea was that that rope was not going to be available.

He could not climb the oak. But one of the wide-spreading branches intermingled with a beech at a little distance. Bunter tackled the beech, which was an easier proposition.

Puffing and blowing, the fat junior clambered into the beech. Then he crawled along the thick branch of the oak into the oak-tree.

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Bunter. As he reached the spot where the oak branches jutted out on all sides, he peered before him very cautiously.

In the centre of the massive old trunk was a deep, dark opening.

A rope tied to a branch dangled in the opening. The oak, evidently, was hollow to the roots, and the hollow extended farther.

Bunter had no desire to explore those subterranean recesses. He grasped the rope and pulled it up.

It was a thick, strong rope, and nearly twenty feet long. Bunter hauled it in, and dropped it outside the tree to the ground. He left it dangling outside the oak.

"He, he, he!" Bunter chuckled gleefully.

He could see only a little distance into the dark interior of the hollow oak. But he could see that it was impossible to climb inside without the aid of the rope. The descent was sheer. There was no hold for a climber inside the hollow tree; and in fact, if there had been, the rope would not have been needed and would not have been there. There was no doubt that the retreat of the Highcliffe raggings was effectually cut off.

"He, he, he!" The fat junior grasped the rope and slid down to the ground. Then he rolled out of the coppice, and rolled grinning back to the school.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Raggings' Last Raid!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"I say, you fellows—"
"Here's the fat bounder!"
"I say—"

"You fat slacker, where have you been?" demanded Harry Wharton.

Games practice was going on on Little Side. All the Remove were there, according to rule. Bunter had been missed, and Wharton had wasted a few minutes looking for him, but certainly he had never thought of looking as far as the coppice by the river. But now that the fat junior rolled into view he gave him his attention.

"I say, keep that bat away, you beast!" roared Bunter. "If you prod me with that bat—Yaroooh!"

"You haven't changed!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "What—"

"Keep off, you silly ass!" roared Bunter. "If you want those beasts to rag the studies without stopping them—"

"What?"
"I say, you fellows, they're at it now, and I've found them out! If this is all the thanks I get—"

"What the thump do you mean?" demanded Wharton.

"Who's at what?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter—"

"I say, you fellows! I've found them out! That's what I've been doing while you fellows have been playing cricket! Yah!"

"You've found out the raggings!" roared Bob Cherry.

"What do you think?" grinned Bunter.

"Gammon!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Well, who are they, if you've found them out?" demanded Wharton.

"Highcliffe cads!"

"WHAT!" roared a dozen Removites.

Remove men gathered round Bunter on all sides now. The fat Owl grinned with satisfaction.

Bunter liked to be the fellow who brought startling news! He was that fellow now, with a vengeance!

Bunter held the spotlight! The Removites fairly hung on his words!

"Highcliffe cads!" repeated Wharton blankly. "What do you mean? How could they be Highcliffe men? How could they get into the school?"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"The rotfulness is terrific!"

"That's all you know!" sneered Bunter. "Well, I've found them out! There's a secret passage or something—"

"Bosh!"

"From the Friar's Oak in the coppice to—"

"Rubbish!"

"I tell you, I saw them!" roared Bunter. "And they're in the Remove studies by this time—Pon and Gaddy and Monson—ragging the studies while you silly asses are sticking to silly games practice—"

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "If it's possible—"

"It isn't!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Hold on, though!" exclaimed Bob excitedly. "You remember Wednesday afternoon—we came on Pon & Co. dropping out of the Friar's Oak—we wondered what on earth they'd been up to."

Harry Wharton started.

"And that was after Prout had been

pitched out of the box-room—three fellows with hankies on their faces!" he exclaimed.

"I say, you fellows, they're there now—in the Remove studies. I say—"

"Look here, you fat chump!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "If this is one of your fatheaded yarns we'll jolly well burst you all over Greyfriars! We'd better go and see, you men!"

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Some of the juniors were already starting for the House. The Famous Five started at a run. After them went the rest of the Form. Not a man remained on the cricket ground.

Billy Bunter rolled after them, puffing and blowing.

The cricketers surged up the staircase in a crowd. They came racing into the Remove passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Look!"

He pointed into the open doorway of Study No. 1.

That study was a wreck.

Evidently, raggings had been at work. "They've been here!" gasped Bob.

"I say, you fellows, I told you so!"

"Hunt for them!" gasped Wharton. "Look along the passage—"

The Removites streamed along the passage, looking into the studies. But the mysterious raggings were gone. Two other studies were found in a state of havoc—No. 2 and No. 3. Evidently the raggings had begun at the beginning, intending to work along the whole of the passage. They had been interrupted. And it was easy to guess that one of them had been on the watch at a window, and had seen the excited Remove streaming towards the House.

The raggings had been there; but they had taken the alarm and fled in time.

Up and down and round about the juniors hunted. But it was soon clear that the enemy were gone.

"Gone!" growled Bob Cherry.

"The gonefulness is terrific!"

"He, he, he!" came from Billy Bunter.

"What are you cackling at, you fat image?" growled the Bounder. "They've got clear away."

"He, he, he! They can't get out!" chuckled Bunter.

"What?"

"I say, you fellows, if you'd let a fellow speak—"

"Buck up, you fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"What do you mean, you fat dummy?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Give him a prod with a bat!"

"Beast! They can't get out of the Friar's Oak!" roared Bunter. "I've taken their rope away! See?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"They can't get out without the rope—and I've taken it away."

"You did!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"How the thump did you have sense enough for that, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, you beast—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

In an excited crowd, the Removites hurried out of the House. Games practice, though it was a compulsory day, was forgotten. In a breathless crowd the Remove fellows cut off to the coppice. They crowded under the Friar's Oak—and Bob Cherry caught hold of the rope that dangled down the outside of the trunk.

He clambered up the trunk, with the

help of the rope. The next moment he shouted down to his comrades.

"It's hollow! My hat! I can see a light below! They're there!"

"Then we've got them!" said Harry Wharton.

"The gotfulness is terrific."

A dozen fellows clambered into the Friar's Oak. There was no doubt that they had "got" the raiders now! On that point there was no possible, probable shadow of doubt; no possible doubt whatever!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Liekings for Three!

PONSONBY stared up.

Gadsby and Monson stared up.

Pon flashed his pocket-torch and fro in the hollow trunk of the oak.

"It—it—it's gone!" he stammered.

"The—the rope——" faltered Gadsby.

"Gone!" breathed Monson.

"I—I can't understand it!" muttered Ponsonby. "But it—it's gone!"

The three ragers gazed at one another.

They had escaped from the Remove passage in time. They had fled by the turning-stone in the Remove box-room. They had traversed the secret passage, nothing doubting that the way of escape was open. And now—

The rope was gone.

"I—I fancied there was somethin' up when I saw that mob rushing for the House from the window!" muttered Gadsby. "They've found out——"

"How could they find out?" hissed Ponsonby.

"Well, where's the rope, then?"

"It's been taken away!" muttered Monson.

"You fool, Pon! You benighted idiot!" hissed Gadsby. "You've landed us now! You silly fat-head——"

"You couldn't let well alone!" muttered Monson. "We told you it was risky——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

A well-known voice boomed down the hollow trunk of the tree. Ponsonby gave a convulsive start.

"That—that's Cherry——"

"The game's up!" groaned Gadsby.

"They're in the tree——"

"They've got us!" muttered Monson.

"Oh, you fool, Pon——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "You can come up, my pippins! Here's your jolly old rope!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rope slithered down the hollow trunk. The end of it caught Pon in the eye, and he gave a howl.

"May as well give in now!" muttered Monson. "You dummy, Pon——"

"I'm goin' back!" muttered Pon.

"Might have a chance of gettin' away by a window——"

He turned into the low stone arch,

and tramped back along the secret passage. Gadsby and Monson followed him. The chance of escaping through the school was slim: but there was no chance whatever of escaping through the crowd of Removites in the coppice.

"Are you coming up?" roared Bob Cherry. "Like me to come down and help you?"

There was no answer. Pon & Co. were hurrying desperately back through the secret passage towards Greyfriars.

"Come on, you men!" shouted Bob, and he slid down the rope into the hollow tree.

The Co. followed him fast, and six or seven other Remove men. They landed on the heap of leaf mould at the bottom of the hollow, and the winking light of Pon's electric torch showed them the way the Highcliffians had gone.

"This way in!" chuckled Bob. And the Famous Five hurried along

hand grasped him from behind, and his ankle was seized.

"Got one of them!" roared Bob.

"Ow! Leggo! Rescue!" shrieked Gadsby.

He rolled over in Bob's grasp. But Pon and Monson did not turn back to his aid. They tore on desperately. Leaving Gadsby sprawling on the spiral stair, the Famous Five tramped over him and hurried up and on. Again Bob Cherry grasped an unseen leg, and there was a howl from Monson.

"Here's another!" roared Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monson sprawled and spluttered; but Ponsonby could be heard racing on, and the Famous Five raced after him.

Gasping for breath, streaming with perspiration, Ponsonby reached the stone cell at the top of the stair. He almost staggered to the turning-stone, pressed it, and it rolled open. He



As Ponsonby plunged through the opening leading to the box-room, Bob Cherry grasped the dandy of Highcliffe by the legs. "Got him!" he yelled.

the secret passage after the Highcliffians.

"They're after us!" panted Monson.

"Hurry!" snarled Ponsonby.

With bent heads under the low-arched roof of the passage, the ragers hurried on. Fast on their track came the Famous Five. Pon & Co. reached the spiral stair once more, and clambered desperately up.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry's voice behind them. "Here's a jolly old staircase! This way up, old beans!"

Ponsonby & Co. panted up the stairs, loud footsteps ringing behind them. The three Highcliffians panted and gasped and spluttered with their efforts; but the Famous Five gained on them fast. Up and up went the fugitives. Up and up came the Removites on their track. Ponsonby had shut off the light, but that did not help. There was a sudden yell of terror from Gadsby, as a groping

plunged head first through into the Remove box-room.

"Got him!" yelled Bob Cherry.

He grasped Ponsonby's legs as the dandy of Highcliffe plunged through the opening. Pon kicked savagely, plunged on, and rolled into the box-room. The next moment Bob plunged through after him.

Ponsonby staggered to his feet, and leaped across to the window. Bob leaped after him.

"Got you, old bean!" chuckled Bob. His grasp closed on Ponsonby. "Come on, you men! It's our box-room. This is the way they got in! And I've got Pon!"

"Hurrah!"

The Removites crawled one after another through the opening. Gadsby and Monson crawled dismally after them.

"We've got them now. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hold him!" yelled Bob, as Pon,

(Continued on page 28.)

BANDITS of the LINE!



The four occupants of the room were hurled back blindly, as a vast sheet of flame enveloped them!

A Dreadful Doom!

SOMETHING in the astonished, kindly face of the man in the skull cap was familiar to the youngster. Suddenly he remembered. Ferrers Locke and he had seen this very man in the underground laboratory at Mendoza House!

At the time they imagined that he must be a member of the gang. But now, as Jack Drake gazed into the kindly face that stared back at him in such astonished bewilderment, the youngster felt convinced that this was no crook, this man with the kindly blue eyes and sensitive face.

"Who are you?" he breathed.

"My name is Moon. I—I—"

"Moon!" Jack Drake echoed the word with a note of breathless astonishment. "Then—then you are the railway engineer—"

"Yes," came the quiet answer. "I was a railway engineer before my retirement. My work was in South America. I came home—to fall into the hands of Dr. Lash and his gang of villains! They found out I had invented an apparatus for the radio control of trains, you see, and they have been forcing me to work for them, turning my inventions to their own evil uses. I am an old man now; I was powerless to defy them! But—but who are you?"

He was staring in bewilderment at the iron chain attached to Jack's ankle.

"I'm Jack Drake, assistant to Ferrers Locke, the detective!" replied the youngster. "I've been captured by Lash—"

"My heavens!" The old man's voice was suddenly hoarse with excitement.

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"Ferrers Locke, the Wizard Detective, as they call him? Then—then—"

"Yes, Locke is working against Lash and his scoundrels! We had heard of you; we thought you were a member of the gang. We found their lair at Mendoza House, all right, and the local police told us about you. Said you had gone abroad."

"That is the impression Lash cleverly contrived to give in the neighbourhood," came the bitter answer. "He told everyone that he was renting the house from me, while all the time I was a prisoner there, in my own house, forced to make my wonderful apparatus for him to use for his terrible work! If I showed defiance, as now and then I did, they tortured me—"

"Good heavens!" breathed Jack.

The youngster remembered the scream that he and Ferrers Locke had heard issue from Mendoza House that night when they had trailed Lash there by air—a scream which, till then, had never been explained. But he was beginning to understand many things now which had been bewildering till then. Among other things, he realised that the scrap of paper that he and Ferrers Locke had found in the old tower in Essex, bearing the name "Moon" and the crest of the clenched hand, had been some message to Lash concerning his prisoner, written on the notepaper of the house which bore the old man's crest, just as his crest was carved on the pillar of the gateway. Lash had torn the message up; all that they had found of it had been that single significant scrap.

For the moment Drake was so eager to learn the truth that he had forgotten the danger they were in. The footsteps

that had driven him into hiding, into the improvised laboratory, had passed by now.

"Who was the negro?" he breathed excitedly. "The man who—"

"The man Lash killed?" Moon's voice trembled. "He was a servant of mine, a South American negro I brought home with me. He was a scoundrel; he betrayed me to Lash, and joined his gang. But he was not wholly bad. He defended me at times against them. I think his conscience had pricked him at the end, for it was in a quarrel concerning me that he was killed, so I understand."

The old man passed a hand wearily across his brow.

"I have been through a—terrible time!" he quavered. "I have another invention, a death-ray, which Lash is forcing me to work upon. I have already completed the first apparatus, and I believe he intends to use it in his wicked exploits—"

"He won't get the chance, if we can escape!" snapped Drake. "We've got to escape! I got out of the cellar where they were keeping me. They mean to kill me; but I tell you I'm going to get clear—"

"Escape is impossible!" breathed the old man wearily. "This place is guarded too well. I know that. Nothing can save us from their merciless power!"

Even as the man spoke there was a sound behind Jack Drake.

The youngster swung round, to find that the door was opening. The next instant the muscular figures of two of Dr. Lash's men were framed in the doorway.

staring in at Ferrers Locke's boy assistant with amazed eyes.

"Thunder!" gasped one of them. "The boy Drake! How in blazes did he get here?"

He leapt forward as he spoke to grasp the youngster. In a flash Drake snatched up one of the big glass jars on the bench near him, and hurled it with all his force at the scoundrel's face. There was an echoing crash as it struck, sending the big figure hurtling backwards, with blood streaming from his cut forehead and jaw, blinded and dazed.

The second of the pair leapt at Drake with a furious imprecation. But the youngster's clenched fist caught him on the chin, sending him spinning sideways. He fell heavily against the glass apparatus on the bench, and there was a deafening crash. Chemicals splashed from their broken containers, and the next instant a thunderous roar filled the laboratory.

What the chemicals were, the criminologist's boy assistant never knew. But they had instantly formed a highly explosive mixture, and the four occupants of the room were hurled back blindly as a vast sheet of flame enveloped them.

The thunderous echoes died away, and Drake found himself lying on the flagstones, his senses swimming. He scrambled up, and realised that the explosion had flung him out through the open doorway into the passage beyond. Near him was the huddled figure of the old inventor.

From somewhere above came shouts and the noise of running feet. Excited figures came into view from the stairs at the end of the passage; and one of them was the gaunt, weird figure of Dr. Lash!

In a moment the youngster's dream of escape had been shattered.

Dishevelled, hair singed, his face burnt and bruised, one of the two scoundrels who had attacked Drake in the laboratory came reeling out through the fumes that filled the doorway. At sight of Lash he flung up a shaking hand, and pointed to Jack Drake.

"Stop him!" he cried thickly. "He's trying to escape!"

Jack was seized, and the old inventor, still senseless, was dragged to his feet. Dr. Lash faced the youngster with glittering eyes.

"Hold him!" he croaked, coughing, as the fumes from the wrecked laboratory drifted round his head. "Try to escape, would you, my young friend? And blow us up as well!" He cackled horribly. "Bring him up, men! And look after old Moon—look after him well! He mustn't get hurt, because we need him!"

Again he cackled in a horrible way, thrusting his lean face close into Drake's still dazed countenance.

"No, you're not going to escape! Oh, no! I am going to do to you as I told Ferrers Locke I should do, my young friend. You are going to die! And I'll tell you how!"

He clutched the reeling youngster's shoulder with skinny fingers.

"Old Moon, here, has invented a new ray—a death-ray! People have often talked of death-rays, but this is the first real death-ray to be invented! And I have it upstairs! It has only just been made for me, by the old man, and I

want a little demonstration of its powers, to make sure that it really works. Understand? You shall test it, my young friend! You shall be its first victim!"

He motioned to his men. Moon had already been borne away, an inert figure, up the stairs. Jack Drake was dragged after him—to the dreadful doom that awaited him up those stairs.

The Shed of Death!

AT the top of the stairs a door at the end of a short passage opened on to the yard in the centre of the rambling sheds and buildings that formed the old works. A light drizzle of rain was falling as Drake was dragged across the rubbish-littered yard towards a long black shed on the farther side by his captors, in compliance with an order from Dr. Lash. Lash himself had hurried off towards another of the sheds.

Drake struggled fiercely as he was hauled through the low doorway of the black shed that was to be the scene of his finish. But he was powerless in the hands of the two big scoundrels who held him. One of them, he saw now, was the man named Schlee.

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The interior of the shed was lit very dimly. The windows were small and covered with grime and cobwebs. The place was stone-floored and bare, with some great coppers and brick fireplaces at one side—evidently it had been used for distilling chemicals by old-fashioned methods, in the period when it had been used as a chemical works.

There were half a dozen of the scoundrels in addition to Schlee. Jack Drake realised that his struggles were worse than useless; he would do better to conserve his strength for any chance that might come later—though he realised only too well how faint his hopes were. Unresisting, he allowed himself to be tied to the rusted iron bars of one of the big fireplaces.

"You hounds!" he panted.

A harsh laugh from Schlee answered him.

"We've been waiting for someone on whom to test the new ray!" grinned another of the bandits—a rat-like little figure with a scarred cheek. "If it works, it'll be a perishin' useful weapon for us to have! They drove us off the bullion train, but they won't do it again if we've got this new ray—the death-ray—"

"It'll work all right!" grinned Schlee brutally. "It'll sizzle you up, you

young whelp, like a rasher of bacon!" Drake's face was very white as he stared back at his captors. But his lips were set steadily; he was not going to show the white feather to these villains.

"Where's the doctor?" growled one of them, glancing out through the open door of the long shed into the rain-drenched yard. "Ah, here he comes!"

A gaunt figure had appeared from one of the other sheds, hurrying across through the drizzling rain. He was carrying some heavy object covered by a cloth—an object that was revealed as a steel box, about a foot square—as he entered the shed, and flung the cloth aside before setting the instrument on a packing-case that stood by the wall.

From one end of the steel box projected a big, glimmering lens. One side of it was open, revealing within a complicated set of intricate machinery and a number of small steel cylinders. On the top was a circular gauge and a metal switch. The gaunt figure of Lash bent over it, adjusting the gauge, cackling shrilly.

"A pretty little toy!" he cackled hoarsely. "A clever invention indeed!"

He directed the lens towards one of the brick fireplaces next to that to which Jack Drake was helplessly bound. He thrust over the little switch, and with a sizzling sound from within the steel box, a pale blue ray of light, slim as a sword-blade, leapt forth from the lens. The brickwork upon which it was directed began to smoke and smoulder.

Lash cut off the beam and grinned at Ferrers Locke's boy assistant.

"Now I will just direct the lens towards my young friend here!"

He turned the instrument. With horror-struck eyes, Drake gazed fascinated at the glimmering lens, a dozen yards from where he stood bound so helplessly to the steel bars.

"A sad pity Mr. Locke declined to come to terms, was it not?" went on the

shrill, mocking voice. "Stand away, men! Back to the wall!"

Schlee and the half-dozen others obeyed readily enough. They had no wish to be in the path of that evil pale-blue ray when next their leader switched it on. They gathered against the wall, with Lash and the apparatus between them and the door of the shed.

"Now, doctor—" began one of the scoundrels eagerly.

The words froze in his throat.

The gaunt figure stooping over the apparatus had thrust over the switch, sending the thin, sinister ray leaping forth once more from the big lens. But the ray had not struck Jack Drake!

A moment before moving the fateful switch the weird figure in control of the apparatus had swung it round, so that the pale-blue ray cut across the corner of the shed, close in front of Schlee and his six companions, pinning them in the corner as if by a fence of steel!

They pressed back in panic against the wall, eyes riveted in sudden terror on the glimmering ray that cut past within a few feet of them, at the level of their waists.

"Lash!" panted Schlee. "You fool! What in thunder are you playing at? Turn it off—"

"I think not!" came the answer.

It was the figure of Lash that had spoken; but it was not the voice of Dr. Lash—it was the voice of Ferrers Locke.

Before the amazed eyes of Schlee and the other scoundrels, and the youngster bound to the bars of the old grate, the weird figure of Dr. Lash straightened and became transformed. With a sweep of his hand, the man standing by the deadly apparatus snatched off the wig of straggling grey hair surrounding a high, bald crown; the lined face relaxed beneath its grease-paint, and, like the merging of one cinematograph scene into another, Dr. Lash, as they had all supposed him to be, became transformed into a figure that all knew well.

"Ferrers Locke!" screamed the little rat-like man with the scarred face. "My Heaven—it's Ferrers Locke!"

"Guv'nor—guv'nor!"

Jack Drake felt as though he must be dreaming.

How Ferrers Locke came to be there, disguised as Dr. Lash, so perfectly that, in the dim-lit shed, not even Schlee and his associates had suspected him for a moment, was a staggering mystery to the youngster. But he was scarcely

bothering to wonder how it had come about. All he knew was that he was saved from death, and that his guv'nor, with cunning cleverness, had their enemies trapped by the very ray that was to have brought about his own end!

That it was Lash who had been down in the underground rooms he knew. In some miraculous way, Ferrers Locke had changed places with the leader of the bandits while Drake was being taken to the shed and tied up. But how? Where had he come from? It was not surprising that both to Drake and the cowering scoundrels pinned in the corner by the glimmering blue ray, Locke's appearance in such amazing fashion seemed like black magic.

Already the detective was slicing through the cords that bound the youngster to the bars.

"Thank Heaven I came in time, young 'un! Got your hidden message, of course—that's how I was able to find this place! But I thought perhaps I wouldn't be in time!"

"Where's Lash?" gasped Drake.

The Baker Street detective chuckled.

"Trussed up in another shed! I had disguised myself to look like him already, hoping for just such a chance as did come. After I located this place I got inside and waited to find out my best move. And Lash walked right into my arms. I collared him at once, forced him to tell me what was happening, and came along with that villainous apparatus in his place. Thought it would be more effective than a gun for dealing with big odds."

From beyond the imprisoning beam of light, Schlee shook a gnarled fist at the smiling detective. The scoundrel's face was contorted with rage and fear.

"You're a clever hound, Looke; but it's not finished yet! Switch off that ray, or——"

A sudden sound from the door of the shed broke in on his words.

"Lash!" gasped Drake.

Dr. Lash was staring in at them, his eyes glittering with a malevolent light.

Ferrers Locke had had very little time in which to truss up his captive, lest by being long away he should arouse the suspicions of the others. It was evident that in his haste the detective had had no time to secure Dr. Lash as well as he had intended, and the man's desperate struggles had resulted at last in his escape.

And in his skinny hand Lash held a long, murderous knife.

"Look out, guv'nor!" cried the youngster, his voice a scream of warning.

But already Lash was leaping at Ferrers Locke, the thin knife upraised.

There was a shout of triumph from Schlee, and a gasp of horror from Drake. It seemed for a moment as though that knife would plunge into the Baker Street detective's heart.

But, like a streak of lightning, Ferrers Locke's fist flashed out. It crashed home on Lash's jaw, and the

"And all thanks to you, guv'nor."

"You as well, Jack."

There had been no difficulty in rounding up Lash's satellites that morning. Pinned in a corner of the shed where their leader had met his doom, with the death-ray that had brought about the end of Dr. Lash holding them as securely as a live-wire fence, Schlee and the rest had had no choice but to await the arrival of the police. It had been Jack Drake who had brought the police, while Locke remained in the shed on guard. But his presence had scarcely been necessary. Schlee and his companions had not dared attempt to leap over or to dive under the death-dealing ray; they had been far too much in terror of it. And the two men who had been looking after Moon, the old inventor, had been in another part of the buildings altogether. They had known nothing of their danger until they had found themselves face to face with the police.

Among the things discovered at the disused chemical works that Lash had turned into his headquarters had been a complete list of all the men used by him for the looting of the trains. Already the police were busy rounding up these pawns in the game. There

seemed little doubt that they would all fall into their hands.

"Poor old Moon!" said Ferrers Locke, breaking the silence as the two enjoyed their coffee. They had only just arrived from the North, and were in need of refreshment. "He has had a terrible time! But it's over now. And I fancy these inventions of his concerning the radio control of trains are going to bring him into a great deal of money. There's a future for such things. And even

that death-ray will no doubt be saleable to the Government. He'll be a millionaire."

"Good luck to him!" grinned Drake.

The Baker Street detective took out his pipe and filled it. Soon his head was wreathed in blue-grey smoke.

"An interesting case, my boy!" he said, smiling contentedly. "Very interesting! To-morrow we must file all details of it, with full notes. In the meantime, however, I fancy we have deserved a little relaxation. How about a show?"

"Rather, guv'nor!" answered Jack Drake cheerily. "Just time to get into a theatre before the curtain rises. There's a jolly good show on at the Hippodrome."

"Then phone up for a couple of stalls, young 'un," yawned Ferrers Locke smilingly. "Although I say it, I really think we deserve 'em!"

THE END.

(Look out next week for the first of a series of red-hot Western adventure yarns featuring High, Low, and Nippy, the inseparable three, or the boys who put the punch in punchers! You'll vote these pals the real goods, and will long to read more about 'em!)

HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S RIVALS.

Many readers of the Magnet are acquainted with Tom Merry & Co., the famous chums of St. Jim's, for they have ever been friendly rivals of the Greyfriars heroes. But do they know how Tom started his school career? In the special series of school stories in

THE GEM

readers will discover how Tom Merry, from being a comparatively new boy, quickly fought his way into the limelight and set his mind upon becoming the Junior Captain of the School. All Magnetites are recommended to read

"TOM MERRY GETS GOING"

By Martin Clifford

which appears in this week's GEM—Now on Sale—2d.—Editor.

man staggered backwards. The knife fell from his hand, and, with fingers clawing at the air, he tottered helplessly back towards the slim ray of light that cut across the corner of the shed between the deadly apparatus and a smouldering point of brickwork.

Locke had not the faintest intention of knocking Lash back into that death-dealing ray, and a hoarse cry burst from the detective's lips. He sprang forward, but it was too late.

Lash had reeled across the pale blue beam of glimmering light, and without a sound he collapsed in a crumpled heap.

"Well, that's that, guv'nor!"

Jack Drake spoke in cheerful tones.

It was late that night, and the youngster and Ferrers Locke were back at Baker Street, seated in the cosy study. Sing-Sing, a bland smile on his yellow face, had just glided into the room and set two cups of excellent coffee on the little table beside them, and vanished again noiselessly.

"Yes, that's that, Jack!" nodded the criminologist in a grim tone. "Lash is dead, and all his chief satellites are in the hands of the police. The dreaded railway bandits will terrorise no more."



Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address:
The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, the Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

NEXT WEEK'S THE WEEK!

ONLY a few more days now, chums, and then you will be the proud possessor of our

FIRST FREE GIFT!

It's a beauty, too, is this Schneider Glider and Catapult. You've nothing to assemble. This remarkable Free Gift is all ready for flying, and, believe me, boys, it flies like a fighting scout. Tell all your pals about it, and you'll be doing me a favour; but first make absolutely certain of your own Free Gift by ordering next week's MAGNET in advance. In addition to this novel glider, there is an exceptionally attractive programme which I have described at length on page 21. Without the Free Gift the good old MAGNET is worth a bob, so for the modest charge of twopence all of you will be getting the best bargain of the week. Another reminder, boys—there are in all

THREE SUPERB FREE GIFTS

—the first one next week, the Magic Camphor Ship the week after, and a ripping Boomerang and Shooter the third week. All these numbers of the MAGNET will be much sought after. See that you don't get disappointed. In short give your newsagent

A REGULAR ORDER FOR THE "MAGNET"

to-day; that's the only way to be on the safe side. 'Nuff said!

Here's a cheery little yarn which earns a prize of one of our topping books for K. M. Richards, of 40, The Grove, Uplands, Swansea, Glam.



Soprano: "Did you notice how my voice filled the hall last night?"

Contralto: "Yes, dear. In fact, I noticed several people leaving to make room for it!"



The prizes which I am handing out to my readers for funny stories and humorous Greyfriars limericks are well worth winning. If you haven't already had a shot at winning one—do so now! And if you have, and been unlucky so far, don't forget the old adage about "Try, try, try again!"

HAVE you fellows ever wondered HOW WILD ANIMALS ARE TRAPPED?

One of my Grimsby readers asks me if I can tell him something about this subject, so here goes:

Elephants, which are worth a thousand pounds apiece to the trapper when caught alive, are trapped by means of "koomkies"—or tame elephants which are trained to

entice their wild brethren into captivity. The koomkie is sent into the jungle to make friends with a wild elephant, and, when it does so, it manages to persuade the wild one to follow it into a strong wooden enclosure. Once inside, the koomkie trumpets—and that is the signal for the natives to close the gates of the enclosure.

Sometimes herds of elephants are stampeded and headed into these enclosures. Once they are securely in the trap, koomkies are let in with them to calm the frightened captives.

Tigers are trapped by placing leaves in their tracks which have been smeared over with a sticky substance. The more the tiger tries to rub off the sticky leaves, the worse tangle he gets himself in, and when he has partly blinded himself by rubbing the stuff over his eyes, a net is thrown over him, and he is securely tied up.

Monkeys are caught in a variety of ways. One is to put some sweet things in a big jar with a small mouth. The monkey puts its paw into the jar, seizes the sweet things, and then closes its paw. It can't drag its paw out—and hasn't sense enough to let go its hold on the sweetmeat. After that it is easily caught!

You might think big snakes are difficult to catch—but they're not! When a snake has enjoyed a hearty meal, it always goes into a deep sleep—and before it can wake up, the hunter has lassoed it at the head and tail, and the snake is ready to be dragged into a cage! Other animals are caught by means of pits, which, having been dug in the ground, are covered over with a light camouflage of twigs. As soon as the animal steps on the covering—down he goes! Then he is netted and tied up at the hunters' convenience!

TRAPPING animals is certainly a hectic way of making a living—but there are other ways just as curious. Over in Hollywood, for instance, there's

A LEGION OF DEATH

composed of some of the "toughest

BOOKS, PENKNIVES and POCKET WALLETS offered for storyettes and Greyfriars limericks. All efforts to be sent to:

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DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY OF WINNING SOMETHING USEFUL!

guys" in the United States. These fellows will do anything and go anywhere, just to make thrills for the "talkies." Crashing aeroplanes, overturning cars while travelling at about 50 miles per hour; leaping from trains at full speed; diving from almost impossible heights—in fact, every risk it is possible to take. I heard of one the other day who [deliberately crashed a car into a brick wall at a speed of forty miles per hour! It was done to prove the durability of the tyres, which were not even damaged by the impact. The

lucky driver came out of the crash O.K., too—but the car was just a heap of junk afterwards!

You never hear of these fellows! Their names never appear on the films—because the credit is given to the "star" who happens to be playing the part of the "hero" in the film. But it strikes me that the real hero is the fellow who takes the risk, and keeps mum about it!

Now for a clever Greyfriars limerick in return for which Denis H. Hills, of 55, Annandale Road, Greenwich, S.E.10, receives one of our useful pocket-knives:

At Greyfriars there's a big ass,
Who never gets on in his class.
He's no knowledge-soaker—
Is Horace James Coker,
And exams he never can pass!

AS you know, I always like to help my chums with good advice whenever I can, and to give them tips on the choice of a career. This week, Ron Gordon, of Burslem, asks me

HOW TO BECOME A PRESS PHOTOGRAPHER.

This is a profession that is packed full of interest, but like all jobs connected with the Press, is not easy to get. A boy must start very early in life, and be prepared to commence at the bottom of the ladder—generally as a messenger, or as a helper in the dark rooms. Most newspapers have their own staff of photographers, and there are also big Press Agencies who cover every news item of note.

A boy who is lucky enough to get a job either with a newspaper or an agency, must, of course, have some knowledge of photography, and he can obtain this at a technical school. For the first few years, if he shows that he understands the job, he will be employed on developing, retouching, fixing, etc. Then he will get a chance of "outside work," and after that it's up to him! If he can bring in "red-hot" news, subjects, and snap "scoop" pictures which the other newspapers or agencies haven't been able to get, he is made! But, like a reporter, he's got to have a skin like a rhinoceros, and a capacity for getting in anywhere that would leave any "gato-crasher" far behind!

My chum should apply to his local education authority and inquire if there are any courses in photography which he can take up locally. Incidentally, those of you who are clever with your camera can make extra pocket-money by submitting your best snaps to the various newspapers. I am given to understand, too, the railway companies are willing to buy amateur photographs of beauty spots in the country served by their lines.

A final word here about next week's BUMPER FREE GIFT ISSUE of the MAGNET—be on the safe side by ordering your copy to-day.

Till next week, then,
Cheerio, YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,225.

THE SECRET OF THE OAK!
(Continued from page 23.)

with a desperate wrench, tore himself loose and rushed for the door.

Ponsonby tore the door open, and leaped out of the box-room. After him rushed the Removites. He tore down the stair into the Remove passage, and rushed along it.

Crash! There was a sudden collision. "Oh, gad!" gasped Ponsonby.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Oh, my hat— Quelch!" gasped Bob.

"What does this mean?" thundered Mr. Quelch. He grasped Ponsonby by the collar. "There has been a disturbance here. I came to see— Cherry, Wharton, what does this mean? What is this Highcliffe boy doing here?"

That question really did not need an answer. The game was up for Pon & Co., and their only comfort was that they had fallen into Mr. Quelch's hands, and escaped what had been coming to them from the Removites.

THE mystery of the mysterious rags was a mystery no longer.

All Greyfriars buzzed with the discovery.

Crowds of fellows went to explore the secret passage until the Head came on the scene; after which, Gosling was sent for, and the turning-stone was wedged securely and closed for ever.

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson had a painful interview in Mr. Quelch's study before they left Greyfriars.

"I presume," said Mr. Quelch, his gimlet eye glittering at the three, "that you admit that you have been guilty of the series of outrages, disturbances, and acts of ruffianism that have taken place here of late, by night as well as day?"

"Not at all, sir!" said Ponsonby airily. Pon had recovered his nerve by that time. "I don't quite know what you're alludin' to, sir. We've never used that secret passage before to-day."

"Never, sir!" said Gadsby and Monson.

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"We found it to-day, sir, by sheer chance, and were goin' to explore it when those fellows came on us!" said Ponsonby calmly. "They seem to have misunderstood what we were up to."

Gadsby and Monson nodded.

the matter to your headmaster. As you have chosen to enter this school, I shall deal with you personally."

Ponsonby & Co. ceased to grin.

Mr. Quelch picked up his cane. Seldom had the dandy of Highcliffe had such a licking. Gadsby's turn came next; and then Monson's. Mr. Quelch looked rather tired when he had finished. Pon & Co. crawled away, looking as if they found life scarcely worth living.

SPIN A YARN
and
ROPE IN A TOPPING BOOK

like John S. Jones, of 11, Wallis Street, Prestwich, Manchester, who submitted the following winning effort:—



Chinese Patient on Telephone: "Please what time you fixee teeth fo' me?"

Dentist: "Two-thirty—all right?"

Patient: "Yes, tooth hurtee me, all right!"

DON'T DELAY—POST YOUR JOKES TO-DAY!

Mr. Quelch gazed at them. "That is what you intend to say to your headmaster, when I report your conduct to him?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir!"

"Dr. Voysey may possibly believe you," said Mr. Quelch.

"I've no doubt of it, sir!" said Ponsonby cheerfully.

And Gadsby and Monson grinned.

"Quite so!" said Mr. Quelch. "I have no doubt, Ponsonby, that you will tell falsehoods, and I shall not report

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here they come!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting to see the Highcliffians before they left. They had various things in store for the raggars.

But as Pon & Co. came crawling out of the House, bent almost double, moaning and groaning, the Famous Five relented. Even to the eyes of the Removites, Pon & Co. looked as if they had had too much.

Harry Wharton looked at them and smiled.

"They've had enough!" he said.

"Let them rip!"

"The enoughfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

And the dismal three were allowed to crawl away.

The secret passage was closed, and could not be used again for surreptitious entrance into Greyfriars. But had the way been open, Ponsonby & Co. would never have trodden it again. They were fed up with ragging the Remove.

THE END.
(Next week's FREE GIFT NUMBER of the MAGNET will contain another rollicking yarn of Greyfriars, entitled: "BILLY BUNTER'S HAT TRICK!" See that you order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE.)

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All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, UNION JACK SERIES, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Advice to Holidaymakers!

After gorging yourselves on ice-cream and doughnuts, wait at least five minutes before trying Swings, Roundabouts, Scenic Railways, Over the Falls, and Joy Wheels!—Issued solely in the interests of the public by ONE WHO HAS LEARN'T HIS LESSON.

Greyfriars Herald

No. 57.

LAUGH AND GROW FAT.

August 8th, 1931.

Edited by
**HARRY
WHARTON,
F.R.G.**

**LATEST
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Don't Waste Your Holidays!

Study the secrets of fascination and popularity while you've got the chance! Be the idol of the School next term; I can show you how it's done!—Send stamp for particulars to Percy Bolsover, Heavy-weight, c/o "Herald" Office.

WIBLEY'S PIERROTS

Seaside Serenaders Score "Smashing" Success

SUCCESSFUL SEASON CERTAIN



As a prelude to their forthcoming seaside season, Wibley's Schoolboy Pierrots held a dress rehearsal last week.

By permission of the Head, their performance was given from the veranda of the cricket pavilion. The spectators were provided with deckchairs, ranged in a semicircle in front of the pav. Amateur electricians had been busy during the afternoon, and at dusk, when the show began, the "stage" was brilliantly illuminated. Altogether the scene was as pleasing.

Both to actors and audience, as it was unusual. A distinguished audience included H. S. Quelch, Esq., George Wingate, Esq., and His Highness Baron Coker, who was provided with a special deckchair, well upholstered with tacks and liquid glue.

The principals in the troupe were Mr. William Wibley, dramatic actor, Mr. Mark Linley, clog-dancer, Mr. O. Kippis, conjurer, Messrs. Hazeldene and Penfold, tenors, Mr. Wun Lung, Chinese acrobat, and Mr. W. G. Bunter, ventriloquist.

Mr. Hobbins was at the piano.

The show opened with a rousing chorus, and after Mr. Penfold had rendered a sentimental song which left the audience in tears, Mr. Kippis gave an accomplished conjuring turn which will be a certain "draw" when the show gets going on the merry old seaside sands.

A humorous sketch written by Mr. Wibley was next on the programme. It created roars of laughter, and although it afterwards transpired that the audience had laughed at the serious parts and received the humorous parts with owl-like gravity, that circumstance will be no bar to its popularity.

Several other items achieved unqualified success before the half-way mark was reached. It would be pleasing to relate that Mr. W. G. Bunter scored a "hit."

We have no doubt that Mr. Wun Lung would have given an excellent show of Chinese acrobatics.

Mr. Mark Linley, unquestionably, would have brought down the House with his clog-dancing. But unfortunately, none of these "stars" had an opportunity of shining.

To begin the second half of the performance, Wibley's Schoolboy Pierrots gave a song-and-dance ensemble by the entire troupe.

The song was excellent. It was the dance that did it.

Mr. Bunter, as a member of the troupe, was dancing in the chorus, and owing to lack of foresight on the part of the builders who erected the pavilion, the veranda had been designed to stand no more than half a dozen violent impacts from a ten-ton weight.

The result was that, after he had completed half a dozen high-kicks, the weight of Mr. Bunter caused the entire veranda to collapse!

The performance ended in a wild howl from the startled pierrots, as they disappeared from view, and thunderous applause from the enthusiastic audience.

Mr. Bunter, we understand, has now resigned from the troupe—compulsorily!

From what we saw of Wibley's Schoolboy Pierrots, we confidently predict for them during the holiday season, a "smashing" success!

REMEMBER YOUR PETS

How to Leave Them During the Hols

Mr. H. J. Coker, a Fifth Form reader, has written us a long letter, in which he remarks: "Many young roughians in the Skool leave the pets to the mercy of the elements during the week. I warn all such malvactors that to do so this year will be courting a thick ear from your truly. Buy the way, what about publishing an article on the subject for the guidance of readers?"

We are only too happy to oblige Mr. Coker, and we trust that the following notes will fit the bill:

TAME MICE. The least troublesome way to dispose of

Chickens. May be left anywhere where they may have a run. (End of article, to give Mr. Coker a chance of escaping brain-fag.)

PER DOGS. These may be left to sleep in a cage, provided they are first turned turtle. (Interval of five minutes to enable Mr. Coker to see the joke.)

TORTOISES. Make them comfortable in the Head's garden. After all, we can never be too grateful for what the tortoise has taught us! (Interval of half an hour for Mr. Coker's benefit.)

SPECIAL HOLIDAY READING

To those seeking light and entertaining literature for holiday reading, Mr. H. S. Quelch, M.A., strongly recommends Entropius, Caesar, P. Vergilius Maro and Titus Livius. Titles, together with further recommendations, gladly sent on request. Apply early!

H. S. QUELCH,
Box No. 13,
"Herald" Office.

Remarkable Curiosities at School Museum

Will the Habit Spread?

Our attention has just been called to the existence of a unique collection of historical curiosities relating to Greyfriars.

The collector is Mr. Tom Brown, and a "Greyfriars Herald" representative who called on this popular Remonville recently, was shown several truly remarkable souvenirs.

For example, there was a piece of material measuring one square inch, taken from the trousers Bunscombe was wearing when, as a Third-Former, he was flogged for hurrying a ripe tomato at the Head.

There was also a square piece of wood sawn from the platform on which the Head stood to administer the flogging.

Another rare specimen was a cricket bat with which Coker of the Fifth, on one surprising occasion, actually scored two runs for the Fifth in a Form-match. We can hardly refrain

from mentioning the pair of shoes, which Lord Mander is alleged to have worn when he walked down to the village, also the set of unmarked cards with which Skinner played his first game of nap.

Mr. Tom Brown assured our representative that collecting Greyfriars curiosities has become an all-absorbing passion with him.

Well, that's all right as far as it goes, of course. But we can't help wondering what is going to happen if this queer collecting craze ever becomes popular in the school.

Already, we can foresee the time when a masked collector will be seen sinking across the quad in the dead of night, in quest of Gosling's school.

Of course, that seems to be carrying the thing into the realm of the fantastic. But you never can tell, can you?

"Not likely, old bean! I'm carrying the thing into the realm of the fantastic. But you never can tell, can you?"

"I'm not likely, old bean! I'm carrying the thing into the realm of the fantastic. But you never can tell, can you?"

STRANGE EPISODE AT GREYFRIARS

Foreigner's Weird Behaviour

A short, stout, bearded gentleman attired in the picturesque costume of a Swiss mountaineer, drew a good deal of attention to himself when he rolled through the gates recently.

He went up to Wharton and his friends, who were on their way to cricket practice, and addressed them.

"Bonjour, messieurs! I say, you fellows, do you want a good guide to conduct you over Switzerland during the vac?"

"Well, we might, if we were going to Switzerland," was Wharton's answer. "As it happens, we're not!"

"Best!," was the Swiss gentleman's surprising remark. "I say, you fellows, do you want a good guide to conduct you over Switzerland during the vac?"

"Well, we might, if we were going to Switzerland," was Wharton's answer. "As it happens, we're not!"

"Best!," was the Swiss gentleman's surprising remark. "I say, you fellows, do you want a good guide to conduct you over Switzerland during the vac?"



"Sorry, old bean! Quite impossible!"

"Best!," I mean, look here, messieurs, be sensible. I'm a jolly good guide, and I'll conduct you over any part of the world you like. All I want is my expenses amount for pocket-money—say, ten punds a week!"

"Make it tenpence a week, without your expenses and keep!" suggested Frank Nugent. "I might consider it, then!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! I mean, don't you, messieurs! I'm jolly well coming, any way! The fact is, I'm worried about you chaps. I don't like to think of you wandering about in some strange country like lost sheep. I took after you. Don't thank me!"

Wharton and his friends didn't thank the solicitous Swiss. They looked the reverse of grateful, in fact. "Scat!" was Wharton's brief injunction, as the Swiss guide followed them towards the practice nets.

The Swiss guide snorted. "Scat! Look here, side-whiskers or Dame Mumbler's spectacles. In the future, this kind of dialogue may become quite common: "Boy! You are expelled!" "Right-ho, sir! I would you mind accepting my collar and tie to place in the School Curiosity Museum?" "With great pleasure, my boy! Eray, hand them to the curator-in-charge as you go out!"

Or this: "Whack out that cake, Bob Cherry! You've had it locked up in the desk all the term!"

"Not likely, old bean! I'm carrying the thing into the realm of the fantastic. But you never can tell, can you?"

COKER TAKES UP GLIDING

THRILLS GALORE IN LATEST SPORT

(Special Contribution from Our Aviation Correspondent)



The great new sport of gliding has spread to Greyfriars! Several fellows in-vented taking it up during the vac, and Coker of the Fifth, got as far as practising in the neighbourhood of the school.

Our latest information is that he has decided not to do so, after all.

Coker's reasons are rather obscure (writes our Aviation Correspondent), but it's quite true that he didn't do a great deal of gliding on his first attempt, but it's equally true that he managed to fly quite a lot.

His machine was a box-kite, manufactured by Wun Lung, of the Remove.

Coker's experimental flight took place in secret on Courtyard Common. The arrangement was that he was to be towed by Potter on a motor-bike. (Coker's motor-bike, by the way!) The only witnesses were Greene, of the Fifth, and our Aviation Correspondent, who was disguised as a chump of course.

At the appointed hour Coker strapped himself in his Chinese glider, and gave the signal to Potter to go ahead.

Potter mounted the motor-bike and started her up. Tower and towee tore across Courtyard at a great rate.

The only drawback was that Coker didn't seem to rise. If you can call running across Courtyard Common at forty miles an hour "flying," he certainly flew. But instead of flying in the air, he only flew across the common!

Potter accelerated. Still, he didn't rise.

Potter "let her out" to her fullest extent.

BUNTER RINGS THE BELL

SAVE-OUR-PORPOISE FUND

Sequel to Big Punch

Roll up, ye wealthy citizens, and deposit your subscriptions with the Save-our-Porpoise Fund! Five pounds in solid cash must be found at once, or Bunter goes to chokky for a serious offence against the Courtyard bye-laws! Listen, ye shall hear:

On Tuesday last, at 6.30 p.m., in the High Street Courtyard, Kent, one William George Bunter, scholar, was tempted to insert a coin, to wit, one penny, in the automatic punchball machine outside the premises known as the Bunsbop.

With a view to preventing possible damage to his glasses,

the said Bunter placed them in his pocket before taking aim.

He then turned himself into a cathartic-wheel, thing him-self forward, and punched a mighty punch.

A terrific crash followed. The said Bunter, exhausted by his efforts, sat down on the pavement.

Two minutes later, there was a furious clangour in the street, and a fire-engine drew up.

The said Bunter put on his glasses again.

With their aid, he was able to see that what he had punched was not the punch-ball—but the FIRE-ALARM!

SENTENCE: Fined five pounds or one month's hard labour, plus costs. To-morrow may be too late!