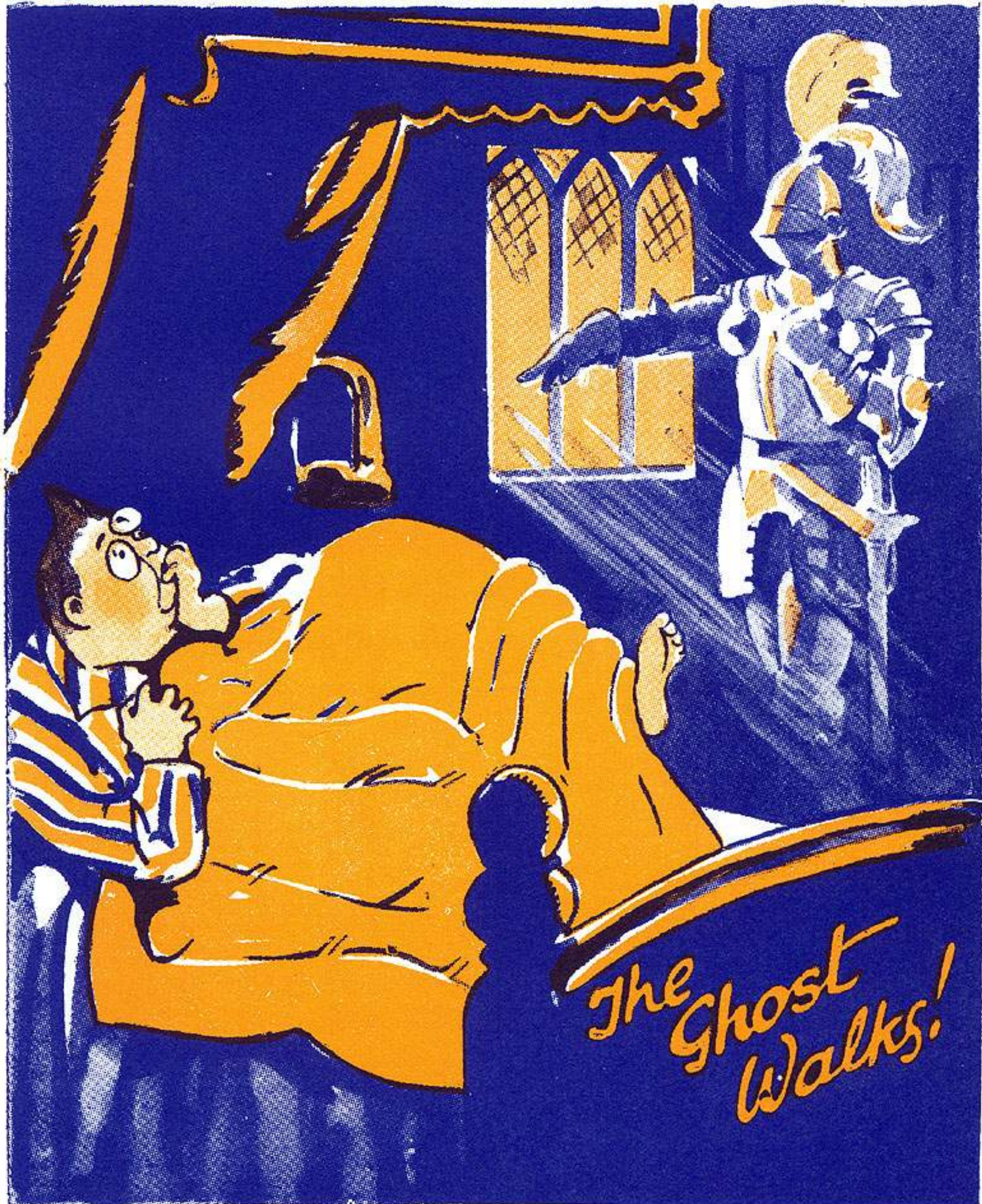


A Merry Christmas Number!

The MAGNET 2



The Ghost Walks!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Slippery!



"COME on, Bunter!" bawled Bob Cherry. "I say, you fellows—," "Come on, fatty!" "I say! Seen Mauly?" "Never mind Mauly. Come on and slide!" called Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter sniffed. Sliding did not appeal to Bunter. It was a form of exertion, and exertion was not in his line.

Besides, he had more important matters to think of.

It was only a couple of days now before breaking up for the Christmas holidays, and Bunter's arrangements for the holidays were not yet made.

That was not Bunter's fault. It was Lord Mauleverer's fault. Bunter had long been willing to fix it up definitely.

There had been a fall of snow, and the old quad of Greyfriars School glimmered white in the December sunshine. In a secluded corner, between the old elms and the school wall, some of the Remove had made a slide.

Harry Wharton & Co. were enjoying themselves, with a dozen other Remove fellows. They spun merrily along the slide, one after another, and tramped

back through the snow to start again. The Famous Five shouted to Bunter cheerily to join up. Bunter kept carefully away from the slippery spot.

"I say, you fellows, Mauly came this way. I say, hold on a minute. I want to speak to Mauly rather particularly."

"Ha, ha, ha!" About six feet from Bunter Lord Mauleverer was standing, leaning against an elm, with his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, watching the other fellows sliding. Billy Bunter did not see him for the moment. He blinked anxiously at the chums of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, there's nothing to cackle at," he said peevishly. "I want to see old Mauly very specially. I hear that he's leaving a day early, and we haven't fixed up about Christmas yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Lord Mauleverer, grinning, detached himself from the elm and backed round it.

Evidently he was not so anxious to fix up about Christmas as William George Bunter was.

For days and days his lordship had been dodging Bunter.

He was a kind-hearted soul, and hated saying "No" to anybody—even to Bunter. Besides, Billy Bunter was not the fellow to take "No" for an answer.

"I say, you fellows—," "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five.

It struck them as comic to see Mauly escaping, just ahead of Bunter. A few

moments more and Mauly would have been gone.

Then Bunter blinked round. "Oh, there you are, Mauly, old chap!" he exclaimed. "I say, where are you going? I say, I'll walk back to the House with you, old fellow. I've been looking for you, you know."

"Oh dear!" groaned his lordship. "Caught!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "The catchfulness is terrific!" chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, really, you fellows, I wish you wouldn't butt in when I'm talking to a pal. I say, Mauly—"

"Follow on, Mauly!" shouted Bob Cherry, and he went whizzing along the slide.

Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, whizzed after him.

"I say, Mauly!" A fat hand caught Lord Mauleverer's arm as he was about to follow. "I say, hold on!"

"I'm goin' to slide." "Look here, you don't want to slide, Mauly. You jolly well know you don't. You weren't sliding when I came up. Now I'm here—"

"That's why!" exclaimed Mauly. "Oh, really, old chap—"

"Let go, old fat bean! I'm goin' to slide."

"Hold on, old fellow! I say, I hear you're leaving a day before the school breaks up—"

"Yaas." "The car's coming for you from Mauleverer Towers—"

"Yaaa."
"You never mentioned it to me, Mauly," said Billy Bunter reproachfully. "You might have left me behind. You wouldn't like that, I suppose?"

"Yaas."
"Oh, really, Mauly! Here, I say! Hold on! I haven't finished yet! I say, Mauly!" roared Bunter.

But if Billy Bunter had not finished, Lord Mauleverer had. He jerked his arm away, jumped to the slide, and started. No doubt he hoped to escape at the other end.

But Billy Bunter was not to be beaten so easily as that. He did not like sliding. But circumstances alter cases. As Mauly whizzed out on the slide, Billy Bunter made up his fat mind on the spot and whizzed after him.

Bunter was as useful on a slide as anywhere else. He got going at quite a good rate. He whizzed close behind Mauleverer. Then one of his feet, for reasons unknown to Bunter, left the slide, and he proceeded, stork-like, on one leg for a little distance, spluttering.

Then there was a bump as he sat on the slide.

"Yaroooooh!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

By that time, however, Bunter had gathered speed, and he shot onwards, sitting down. He finished on his back, with his fat little legs sawing the air, amid yells of laughter.

"Ow! Oooogh! Yooooop!" roared Bunter. "Oh crikey! Ow! Stop me! Hold me! Save me! Rescue! Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Crash!

It was quite an exciting finish.

Billy Bunter crashed into Lord Mauleverer, sent him spinning in the snow, scrambled up, slipped, and rolled over him.

"Ooooooogh!" came in an agonised gasp from his lordship as Billy Bunter's extensive weight landed on him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Groooogh! Ooooh!" Billy Bunter sat up, on Lord Mauleverer's waistcoat, and gasped for breath and gouged snow from his crimson, fat face. "Ow! Ooogh! I say, you fellows—Ooooch! Where's Mauly? Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. Bunter seemed unaware that he was sitting on the unfortunate Mauly.

"Ooooooogh!" came in a suffocated gurgle from Mauleverer. "Ooooooh! Draggimoff! Woooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, I've had a bump! Ow! Wow! I say, where's Mauly?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oooogh! Gerroff!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Ooooh!" He struggled spasmodically under Bunter's avoirdupois.

Bunter, having cleared his spectacles of snow, blinked down at him, apparently surprised.

"Oh, there you are, old chap! Did you get in the way? I say, wait a minute till I get my breath!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Mauleverer did not wait a minute, or even a second. He made a terrific effort and rolled the fat Owl off.

"Oh crikey! I say—Groooooogh!"

Lord Mauleverer scrambled up breathlessly. For once his placid lordship seemed excited. He grasped Billy Bunter by the back of the collar and proceeded to rub his face in the snow.

"There, you silly ass!" gasped Mauleverer. "There, you fat chump! There, you benighted walrus!"

"Ooooooogh!"

"There, you blithering bander-snatch—"

"Gr-r-r-rg! Gug-gug-gug!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrrrrrgg!"

"There!" gasped Mauleverer, and, leaving Bunter for dead, as it were, his lordship walked away.

Bunter sat up. He clawed snow from his fat features and gasped and gurgled wildly.

"Groooh! Ooooch! Beast! Rotter! I won't come home with you for Christmas now! Yah! Rotter! Ooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts! Give a fellow a hand up!" yelled Bunter. "Wharton, you beast, I—"

Harry Wharton, laughing, kindly gave the Owl of the Remove a hand up. Bunter staggered to his feet, puffing and blowing.

"Ow! I say, old chap—grooogh!—I'm going to turn down that rotter, Mauly, now. Oooooogh! I'll come home with you instead, old bean. I say, Wharton, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you—"

But Wharton was gone, leaving Billy Bunter to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

"There's nothing to cackle at, Toddy," said Bunter, with dignity. "I feel that it's up to me, at this time of the year, you know; and I'm going to forgive him and—and go home with him for the hols, just the same."

"Does he know?" grinned Toddy.

"I haven't mentioned it to him yet. I don't seem to be able to get a chance to speak to him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you wouldn't cackle when a chap's speaking, Toddy. I hear that Mauly has asked Wharton and his lot for Christmas. As they're all my pals we shall make a jolly party—what? I thought of putting in a word for you, Toddy—"

"Fathead!"

"Only, it would hardly do," said Bunter, shaking his head thoughtfully. "We're friends here, of course, but you're hardly the chap I should care to take to a place like Mauleverer Towers, Toddy. You don't mind my mentioning it? I say, Toddy, wha-a-at are you going to do with that die?"

"Guess!" said Toddy.

Bunter did not need to guess, as the dictionary landed the next moment on his podgy chest.

There was a yell in Study No. 7.

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast! Wow!"

"Now shut up," said Toddy, "and you'd better do your prep. You'll be here to-morrow, old fat bean. Mauly's asked me, as a favour, to kick you across the quad if you show up anywhere near his car to-morrow morning—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I've promised to do it. I'm a man of my word. Now shut up!"

"Why, you awful beast—"

"Dry up!"

Billy Bunter dried up. He gave Toddy a glare that almost cracked his spectacles and rolled to the door.

"Prep, you ass!" said Peter Todd. "You'll have Wingate on your track if you wander about in prep."

"Blow Wingate!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study.

He blinked up and down the Remove passage. It was a prefect's duty to keep an eye on the Lower Fourth during prep. But there was no prefect in sight at the moment. The Owl of the Remove rolled along to Lord Mauleverer's study.

The door of that study was half-open, and Bunter heard the voices of the inmates as he approached—Lord Mauleverer and his relative, Sir Jimmy Vivian.

"I wish you were coming home with me, Jimmy! But you'll have a good time up in Scotland, with Ogilvy."

"Yes, rather, Mauly! What time will the car be here?"

"Soon after brekker in the mornin'."

"Done your packing?"

"Yaas; the trunk's in the lobby."

"Mind Bunter doesn't get in the car with you, Mauly!" chuckled Sir Jimmy Vivian.

Lord Mauleverer chuckled, too.

"That's all right. I've asked Toddy to kick him if he comes around."

"I'll kick him, too!" said Vivian.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter. He paused for a moment, to shake a fat fist at the study. Then he rolled on to the open doorway and blinked in.

"I say, Mauly, old chap—"
Lord Mauleverer was stretched at
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Harry Wharton & Co. celebrate a Merry Christmas in an old-time mansion, with an old-time ghostly legend to make their pulses thrill—and Billy Bunter thrown in into the bargain!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!



CHRISTMAS—"

"Prep!"

"Oh, really, Toddy! I was going to say, Christmas—"

"Prep!" repeated Peter Todd.

"No prep for me to-night, fat-

head!" answered Billy Bunter. "I shan't be here to-morrow."

Peter Todd, in Study No. 7 in the Remove, looked up from his books. It was time for prep; all the Remove were in their studies. Billy Bunter, leaning back comfortably in the study armchair, was evidently not thinking of prep. He was blinking at Peter with an expression of owlish seriousness on his fat face.

"You getting off early, like Mauly?" asked Peter.

"Yes, old chap! I hope you won't miss me, Toddy."

"Not at all!" answered Toddy politely. "If you're doing this to make me feel bucked on the last day of term, much obliged."

"Beast! I say, Toddy, Christmas is the time for peace and goodwill and forgiveness and things, isn't it?" said Bunter. "I feel that, you know. Mauly treated me rottenly to-day, on the slide—unfeelingly. But I'm going to forgive him."

Peter Todd chuckled.

ease on his luxurious sofa. He stared round in dismay at the sight of Bunter.

"Oh gad! Is—is that you, Bunter?"
"Yes, old chap!" said Bunter affectionately. "I say, about to-morrow, Mauly—"

Groan!
"Mauly, old fellow—"

Groan!
"Feeling ill, Mauly?" asked Bunter, in surprise.

"Yaas."
"What's the matter?"
"You!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"
"Run away, old fat bean," said Lord Mauleverer. "What about prep? You've got your prep to do, you know. Wingate may spot you out of your study—"

"Never mind Wingate—"
"Queleh may call on you to construe in the mornin'—"

"Never mind Queleh!"
"You don't want a lickin', last day of term, Bunter! I say, you buzz off and do your prep."

"Never mind prep!"
Lord Mauleverer groaned dismally.
"About the hols—" said Bunter.

Groan!
"I say, don't be an ass, old chap!" said Bunter. "We've got to arrange something definite, you know. Smithy's asked me to go abroad with him; he's going on the Continent, with his father—"

"Good egg! Close on it, old bean!"
"I hardly care to go with the Vernon-Smiths—hardly my class, you know. Toddy wants me to go home with him and—"

"That's right—stick to Toddy!"
"But I've declined. Not quite my style, you know. Temple of the Fourth was rather keen for me to go with him, but I told him I was sticking to my old pal, Mauly. I thought I'd speak to you, old chap, before mentioning it to Queleh. I shall have to ask Queleh for leave to go a day early, you know. Now—Ow!"

Bunter broke off suddenly as there was a grip on his fat shoulder from behind. He blinked round at Wingate of the Sixth.

"What are you doing out of your study?" asked the prefect.

"Ow! Leggo! It's all right, Wingate. I haven't any prep to-night, as I'm going a day early. I'm going home with Mauly, in the morning."

Wingate looked dubiously at the Owl of the Remove. Then he looked at Lord Mauleverer.

"Is Bunter going with you to-morrow, Mauleverer?"

"Oh gad! I hope not!"

"You young ass!" exclaimed Wingate. "I suppose you know whether Bunter is going home with you for the holidays or not."

"Well, I say he isn't, but Bunter says he is," answered Mauleverer plaintively. "I've got an awful feeling that he may be right."

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"I've asked Toddy to kick him if he comes near the car in the morning!"

"Look here, Mauly, you beast—"

Wingate laughed.
"Come back to your study, Bunter."

"I—I say, Wingate—I say—yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as a finger and thumb closed like a vice on a fat ear. "I say, leggo! Yow-ow-owooop!"

"This way!" said Wingate genially.
"Yow-ow-ow!"

Bunter was led back to Study No. 7. Wingate twirled him into that study.

"Now, if I catch you out of your study again—" he said.

Leaving the rest to Bunter's imagination, the prefect drew the door shut and departed.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.
He rolled across to the armchair, and sat down. Toddy and Tom Dutton worked at prep; but the fat Owl did not join them. He sat with a wrinkle of deep thought in his brow—thinking. Billy Bunter had a problem to solve—and he had to solve it before Lord Mauleverer departed in his car the following morning. Bunter had no time for prep.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mysterious!



Mauleverer's trunk was an outsize in trunks, but extensive as it was it did not seem to hold his lordship's many possessions comfortably. Mauly was exerting himself to fasten the lid when Bunter blinked in.

An offer of help from any other fellow

NOTE—

Next week's "Magnet" will be on sale

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would have been grateful and comforting. But Mauly did not want to see Bunter—very much indeed he did not want to see him.

"I'll sit on it, old chap!" said Bunter.

"Think the trunk will stand it?" asked Lord Mauleverer, rather anxiously.

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

Bunter sat on the trunk.
The trunk stood it—it was a well-built trunk. The lid snapped shut. Bunter's weight was not to be resisted.

"Got the key, old fellow?" asked Bunter.

"I believe it's somewhere," answered Lord Mauleverer. "But it's all right—it fastens all right. No need to lock it. Thanks, old bean! Ta-ta!"

"Hold on a minute, old chap! I say, Mauly, about Christmas—look here, you rotter, if you walk away while a fellow's talking to you—Beast!"

Lord Mauleverer faded out of the picture, leaving Bunter sitting on the trunk.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

There was a faint chuckle from the distance as Lord Mauleverer vanished into space.

Billy Bunter snorted. He sat on the big trunk and frowned. It began to look, even to Billy Bunter, as if he was not going home with Lord Mauleverer, after all. Bunter had settled it in his own mind long ago, and he had counted on Mauly's good nature. But Mauly seemed to have developed unexpected powers of resistance.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter. "After all I've done for him, too! Talk about the thankless tooth of a serpent's child! I've a jolly good mind to turn him down, only—only I won't! I wonder—"

Billy Bunter was thinking again. He rolled off the big trunk, and stood blinking at it through his big spectacles with a sort of calculating blink. A fat grin spread over his podgy visage. Evidently an idea had occurred to the powerful intellect of the Owl of the Remove.

He measured the big trunk with his eye, and then measured it with his fat hands, and gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Big enough—plenty! And they wouldn't notice the weight getting it on the car. It's not as if I was a heavy chap," murmured Bunter. "Bit of a surprise for old Mauly if I arrive with him after all! He, he, he!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came into the lobby in time to hear that fat cachinnation. "Enjoying life, old fat bean? What's the jolly old joke?"

"Eh! Nothing!" said Bunter hastily. "I—I wasn't thinking of going home with Mauly without his knowing anything about it, Cherry."

"Eh!" ejaculated Bob. "How the thump could you manage that, Bunter?"

"I—I couldn't, of course, I wasn't thinking of anything of the kind. Still, it would be a pleasant surprise for him, wouldn't it, if I turned up when he got home?"

"It would be a surprise," chuckled Bob. "I don't know about the pleasant."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, as you fellows are going to join Mauly for Christmas you'd be glad to find me there, wouldn't you?"

"What on earth put that idea into your head?" asked Bob in astonishment. "How could anybody possibly be glad to find you anywhere?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, disdaining any further remark. He was grinning when he rolled into Study No. 7 in the Remove again. Peter Todd was there, sorting out some of his possessions to pack.

"I say, Toddy, can you lend me a gimlet?" asked Bunter.

"A—a—a what?" ejaculated Toddy.

"Gimlet, old chap."

"What the thump do you want a gimlet for?"

"Well, a fellow would have to breathe, you know," said Bunter.

"Breathe!" repeated Toddy blankly.

"Yes; a chap doesn't want to be suffocated."

"Suffocated!" gasped Toddy. "Are you off your silly rocker?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"You want to borrow a gimlet because you don't want to be suffocated," said Peter Todd. "What do you mean, you fat chump, if you mean anything?"

"Oh, nothing, old chap," answered Bunter. "I—I don't want a gimlet. Besides, I can get one out of Bob Cherry's toolchest, as he's downstairs. Not that I want a gimlet, you know—nothing of the sort."

And Bunter rolled out of the study before the astonished Peter could ask any more questions. Peter stared after him in amazement. He really wondered whether the Owl of the Remove was taking leave of his senses—such as they were.

Most of the Remove fellows gathered in the Rag after prep. But Billy Bunter did not turn up in that apartment.

Bunter, apparently, was busy elsewhere.

Nobody, however, was interested in Bunter's proceedings, and nobody, probably, gave him a thought.

Anybody who had given him a thought would hardly have guessed how he was occupied. Certainly it never occurred to

Lord Mauleverer that the fat Owl, with a gimlet from Bob Cherry's toolbox, was boring a series of holes in the sides and ends of the big trunk in the lobby. His lordship was aware that Billy Bunter was likely to leave no stone unturned to land himself at Mauleverer Towers for Christmas. But Mauly certainly did not dream of the amazing scheme that had been worked out in Bunter's brilliant intellect.

It was nearly bed-time when the Owl of the Remove rolled into the Rag. He looked tired.

Lord Mauleverer, who was reclining gracefully in an armchair by the fire, gave him a rather apprehensive glance. Bunter rolled over to him.

"I say, Mauly—"

"Go away, Bunter!" said Lord Mauleverer plaintively.

"Oh, really, old chap! I say, I'm sorry I shan't be able to come home with you to-morrow, after all!" said Bunter, blinking at him.

"Oh, good!"

"The fact is, they want me at home," said Bunter.

your trunk put on the car!" said Bunter earnestly.

"Eh? I shouldn't be likely to forget my trunk."

"Well, you're rather a forgetful ass, you know! Just like you to go off without it," said Bunter. "Look here! You'd better ask one of the fellows to remind you about that trunk."

"You're awfully good to bother about my luggage, Bunter," said his astonished lordship. "You can remind me in the mornin', if you like."

"You ass! How could I remind you when—"

"When what?"

cheerful group by the fire. Lord Mauleverer gazed after him in astonishment. Billy Bunter's deep concern for his luggage was really inexplicable.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I say, Mauly wants you to remind him about his trunk in the morning, in case he forgets it," said Bunter. "It's awfully important."

"We'll remind him," said Wharton. "Gosling won't let him forget it, either. Mauly shells out tips in currency notes."

"I say, you keep an eye on them when they're shifting that trunk, won't you?"



Bunter was whizzing along at quite a good rate behind Lord Mauleverer when one of his feet shot up from the slide and sent Mauly flying. "Yarooooh!" spluttered the fat junior, as he proceeded stork-like on one leg.

"Do they, really?" ejaculated Mauleverer.

"We're doing things rather in style at Bunter Court this Christmas," explained the fat Owl. "There'll be a lot of company—all my titled relations, and some of the princes will be coming—"

"Oh gad!"

"So, you see, I could hardly stay away," said Bunter. "Sorry, and all that, but there it is."

Lord Mauleverer gazed at him.

"I'll see you off if I can when you start in the morning," added Bunter. "But don't be surprised if you don't see me—he, he, he! If I'm not on the spot don't wait to see me before you go."

"I won't!" agreed Lord Mauleverer. "And mind you don't forget to have

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily. "The fact is, I'm going out after brekker. You'd better ask Wharton, or somebody."

"It's all right," yawned Lord Mauleverer.

"That's all very well. But you're a forgetful ass, as I said. Suppose you left the trunk behind?"

"They'd send it on by railway."

Bunter jumped.

"Oh, my hat! You silly ass! Why, that would take days—"

"Yaas."

"Look here! I'll speak to Wharton for you, Mauly, if you're too lazy."

"Don't trouble, old fat man!"

"No trouble at all, old fellow."

Billy Bunter rolled away to the Famous Five, who were standing in a

said Bunter anxiously. "Don't let them drop it, or anything."

The Famous Five all regarded Bunter. "What do you mean, you fat ass?" asked Johnny Bull. "What do you care whether they drop Mauly's trunk or not?"

"Well, I might get hurt—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, it might damage Mauly's things," said Bunter hastily. "You know what a careless ass Gosling is with luggage. Trotter, too! If they bumped that trunk down the steps, f'rinstance, it—"

"Anything in it to damage, if they do?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Yes, rather! I—I mean, of—of course not! Look here, you fellows! As

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you're going to stay with Mauly at Christmas, I think you might keep an eye on his luggage for him!" said Bunter warmly.

"If you're anxious about Mauly's trunk, you can keep an eye on it yourself, I suppose?" said Bob.

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat ass?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Bunter rolled away, leaving the Famous Five staring.

The Owl of the Remove was so very mysterious that fellows might have guessed something was "on" had they given Bunter any thought. But they didn't! Billy Bunter's unimportance was unlimited, and nobody bothered about Bunter.

He was grinning a fat grin when the Remove went to their dormitory that night. Whatever his mysterious thoughts were, they seemed to afford Billy Bunter considerable satisfaction.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

After Lights Out!



"GHOST story!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Mauly!"

Lord Mauleverer yawned.

Lights were out in the Remove dormitory, but nobody had gone to sleep yet. Even Billy Bunter's snore was not heard.

Generally, the fat Owl began his nasal solo a few moments after his bullet head

touched the pillow. On this especial night, however, Billy Bunter was remaining awake.

"Go it, Mauly!" said Harry Wharton. "Tell us the story of the jolly old ghost of Mauleverer Towers."

"Oh, yaas!" said Mauly. "I don't think I remember it all, but I'll tell you all I remember, if you like."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Look here! Don't you fellows keep Mauly awake!" exclaimed Bunter. "Mauly's got a journey to-morrow—"

"That's all right, old fat bean," said Mauleverer.

"Shut up, Bunter!" said a dozen voices.

"Shan't! Better get to sleep," said Bunter. "Mauly won't want to get up in the morning, if you fellows keep him awake! Go to sleep, Mauly."

"You silly ass!" roared Bob Cherry. "Dry up!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Chuck a boot at him, somebody!"

"Beast!"

"Go it, Mauly!"

"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer sleepily. "You know, Mauleverer Towers is a jolly old place—parts of it date from the reign of King Thingummy—"

"We haven't had that king in history class," remarked Skinner.

"I mean, King What's-his-name—"

"That makes it quite clear! Go on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, in the reign of somebody—I forget whom—there was an Earl of Mauleverer, who seems to have been rather a card. His name was—yaw-aw-aw—"

"Is that a family name?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, dear men, I was only yawning. His name was—was somethin', I forget what. But he was called the Red Earl, because—because—because he was, you know!"

"Couldn't be a better reason," said Vernon-Smith. "I say, this is jolly interestin', Mauly! You tell a story well."

"Yaas, I've told this story a lot of times, and I suppose practice makes perfect, and all that," said Lord Mauleverer placidly. "Well, this Red Earl got into some trouble with King What-do-you-call-him—"

"Not King Thingummy—" asked Skinner.

"Shut up, Skinner!"

"I say, you fellows, if Quelch comes round and hears all this jaw going on, he'll—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I think you fellows ought to go to sleep. I've got a journey before me to-morrow—I mean, Mauly's got a journey before him—"

"What does that fat idiot want us to go to sleep for?" asked Squiff. "Has he got a cake he wants to keep all to himself?"

"Oh, really, Squiff—"

"If you've got a cake, Bunter, you jolly well whack it out!" roared Bolsover major.

"I haven't! I don't want you fellows to go to sleep, you know! Nothing of the kind. I'm not thinking of going down!"

"What the thump are you going down for, after lights out?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I'm not going down—I said so!"

"Somebody left some tuck in his study?" asked Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Shut up, Bunter! Go on, Mauly, old bean!"

There was no reply from Lord Mauleverer, only a sound of gentle breathing from his bed. His lordship had fallen asleep.

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

"Buzz a pillow at him."

"Ow! Oh! I'm awake, you men!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "I—I think I nodded for a moment."

"Get on with the ghost story, ass!"

"Yaas. Where was I?"

"In the reign of King What-do-you-call-him," answered Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, yaas! Well, the Red Earl was wanted for high treason or something, and the king sent his—his thingummies—I mean his—his—what the thump did they call those blokes? It begins with a p—"

"Policemen?" asked Skinner.

"Nunno! It begins with a p—pursuivants," said Mauleverer, with a mental effort. "That's it! His Royal nibs sent his pursuivants to seize the Red Earl, and they arrived on Christmas Day, when the earl was holding high revel at the Towers. There was snow and ice and frost, and so on—all the reasonable things, you know—"

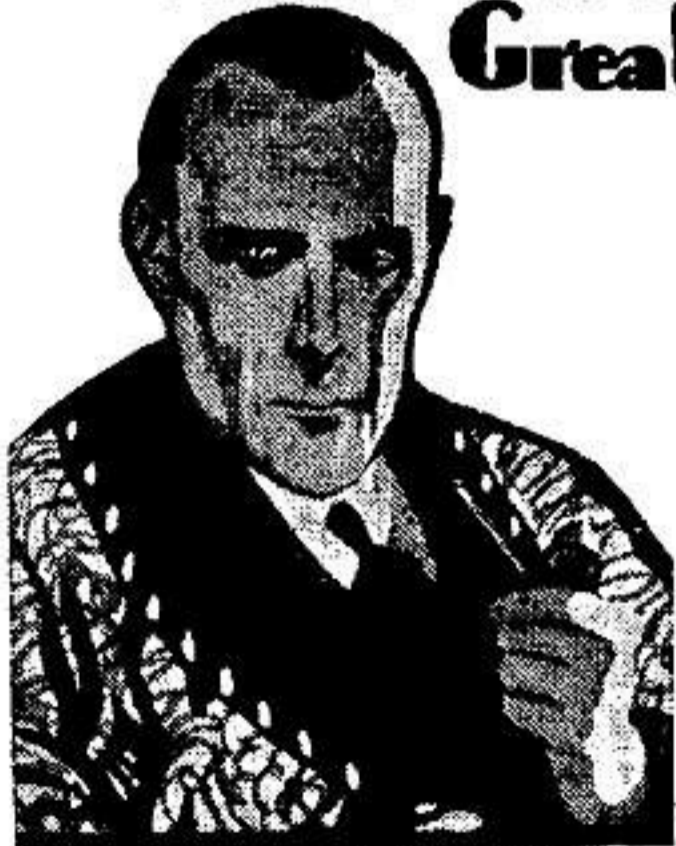
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The what-do-you-call-ems came tramping through the snow and ice and frost and things, and arrived at the mansion," went on Lord Mauleverer, "but the earl's chief thingummy rushed into the hall in the nick of time and warned him of his danger. He drew his sword, and passed it through the body of the king's chief pursuivant—"

"Well passed!" said the Bouncer.

(Continued on page 8.)

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BUNTER'S BOX OF MAGIC!

A Seasonable Recitation for a Christmas Party or Amateur Concert. By the GreyfriarsRhymester.



O YEZ! Oyez! Attend to me
And mark my story well;
I'll tell of a calamity
That has no parallel.
It is of Bunter, William George,
The fattest chap on earth,
That I relate this little tale—
A story that will turn you pale,
And drive away your mirth.

The day before the Greyfriars men
Broke up for Christmastide,
Billy Bunter's Uncle Ben
Rolled on to Little Side.
And when he saw his nephew Bill,
He promptly shook his hand,
And said: "My boy, why you're not ill
I cannot understand.
Day after day
You stuff away
Enough to feed the town.
You eat tarts at an awful rate,
And doughnuts by the hundredweight
You steadily choke down.
Therefore, this year, my Christmas gift
Is not composed of tuck—
You'll get no puddings or mince-pies,
If you're expecting otherwise,
You're sadly out of luck.

"This conjurer's compendium
I've bought for you instead;
These magic tricks and sleight of hand
Defy your friends to understand
And stupefy the Head.
The Young Magician's Cabinet,
As issued out to schools—
Two hundred tricks,
Price ten-an-six,
Complete with book of rules."

Now Bunter told the chaps about
The gift of Uncle Ben,
And said, "You know
I'll give a show
To-morrow morn, at ten.
The show will take place in the Rag—
One shilling each admission,
That is a nice,
Fair-minded price
To see the young magician."
Ignoring Harold Skinner's sneers
He planned this exhibition;
(But Skinner had his own ideas
Regarding the position).



U PON the platform in
the Hall
The school saw
Bunter stand
And state: "I now
will show you all
A little sleight of
hand;
I fancy that, upon
the whole,
You'll find that I
am able

To make a goldfish in a bowl
Appear upon that table."
He waved his wand with all his might
And sang a magic chant,
When promptly there appeared in sight
A monstrous elephant.

"Yaroooh!" screamed Bunter, dodging
back,
And gibbering with funk;
The creature fetched poor Bill a whack
With its enormous trunk.
Cried Bunter: "Ow! It's fish I want!
What is this awful rot?"
He waved his wand—the elephant
Then vanished on the spot.
Said Bunter, trembling on his legs:
"Crumbs! No more fish—no fear!
I'll now begin producing eggs
From out the atmosphere."
He then stretched forth his magic wand,
And said: "Now, chaps, I beg
You'll note what comes into my hand."
They looked, and saw—an egg!
There followed great applause, which took
The doubters down a peg,
While Bunter grinned and shouted "Look!"
They looked—another egg!
They shouted out, 'midst loud applause:
"Send them to Uncle Cleggs!"
They roared and cheered until—a pause,
A gasp—a dozen eggs!
They fell with a tremendous splash
On Bunter's tubby legs.
Came a reverberating crash—
A yell—a hundred eggs!



H OW Billy Bunter
waved in wrath
His wand, and
shouted "Beast!"
Eggs rained on him
from south and
north:
They rained from
west and east—
Eggs, eggs, more
eggs came sail-
ing by,

Till it began to seem
As if, on Bunter from on high
They poured in one large stream.
Eggs, eggs, and more eggs by the score,
The fifty and the hundred!
They made a pile upon the floor,
And Billy Bunter, with a roar,
Completely vanished under it—
And still the eggs came pouring down
To cover and surround him.
The fellows shouted: "Oh, what fun!"
As coloured streamers by the ton
Commenced to fall around him.
Then Bunter cried, with feeble squeak:
"I don't call this a joke!"
He gave a last despairing shriek,
And struggled—and AWOKE!

The rising-bell rang out its chime,
Said Bull, in manner tragic:
"Buck up! You won't get down in time
For your display of magic!"
Said Bunter: "What a dream I dreamed!"
And rose, and rushed downstairs,
Where he found out what must have seemed
A sad state of affairs.

The tragedy I must recount—
The Magic Cabinet
Had vanished on its own account,
And hasn't come back yet!

THE GHOST OF MAULEVERER TOWERS!

(Continued from page 6.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then he rushed up the winding stair into the turret, and was never seen again," went on Lord Mauleverer. "The place is supposed to be full of secret passages and things, and it was supposed that the Red Earl had a secret passage, or something, all ready. Anyhow, he disappeared, and they hunted for him and never found him. What became of him was never known, but when the next Christmas came round—I say, though, I don't want to make you fellows' flesh creep—"

"The creepfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Mauly!"

"Well, when the next Christmas came round, the new earl was feasting and holding revels, and so on, and there was snow and ice and frost and things—"

"Same bag of tricks as before?" asked Skinner.

"Yaas! Well, in the midst of the feast, a dragging footstep was heard—you fellows feeling scared?"

"Not quite! Get on with it!"

"A dragging footstep was heard, and a white figure advanced up the hall, and—and it seems that it was the ghost of the jolly old Red Earl, you know!" yawned Mauleverer. "It seems that he must have perished, or something, in his secret passage, or somethin' of the sort, and set out to haunt the place on the proper anniversary. Creepy, ain't it?"

"Frightfully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Absolutely uncanny, the way you tell it!" said Skinner. "I can feel my marrow congealing!"

"And ever since the reign of King What's-his-name," resumed Mauleverer, "the ghost of the Red Earl sort of creeps around with dragging footsteps—clad in white, you know, as I believe ghosts generally are. He doesn't seem to have been seen in recent times—"

"Go hon!"

"But whenever that dragging footstep is heard, and the touch of his icy cold hand is felt, it means that the johnny concerned is going to peg out. In the dead of night, you know, when the deadly stillness is only broken by the roar of the wintry storms—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When not a sound is heard, but the roar of the wind, and the crash of falling branches, and so on," yawned Lord Mauleverer. "Then the jolly old ghost creeps forth, and—and says his piece, as it were, you know. And the sound of a creeping footstep in the silence of the night— Good gad! What's that?" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer, breaking off suddenly.

"That" was the sound of a creeping footstep in the Remove dormitory! Several of the juniors sat up in bed.

"What the thump—"

"Who the dickens—"

"Who's out of bed?"

"I say, you fellows, I'm not out of bed! I'm—I'm fast asleep—"

"Bunter! You fat idiot—"

"I'm not out of bed, you fellows! I'm not going down!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "I—I'm asleep, you know! I mean, I'm just going to sleep! I wasn't going down to the lobby—"

"What the thump were you going down to the lobby for?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I wasn't! I've told you I wasn't!" There was a creak

as Bunter plunged into bed again. "I say, you fellows, I wish you'd go to sleep. You'll be awfully sleepy in the morning!"

"You fat chump! Go on, Mauly!"

"Eh! That's the lot!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I hope I haven't made your flesh creep, and given you nightmares and things."

There was a chuckle along the row of beds. The ghost story, as related by Lord Mauleverer, had not made anybody's flesh creep, apparently. Neither was it likely to cause nightmares.

"I say, you fellows, now Mauly's done jawing, I wish you'd go to sleep!" said Billy Bunter.

But the Remove fellows were not in a hurry to go to sleep. For quite a time, there was a buzz of talk from bed to bed. Billy Bunter, who, for some mysterious reason had determined to remain awake, had almost to prop his fat eyelids open. But he struggled manfully to keep Morpheus at bay, and by the time the Remove at last dropped into slumber, his snore had not been heard.

It was quite a late hour when Bunter sat up in bed and blinked round him in the darkness.

"I say, you fellows!" he breathed. "You fellows asleep?"

There was no reply.

The Owl of the Remove chuckled softly, and crept out of bed. He dressed in the dark, and crept to the door. Cautiously he crept into the passage, and cautiously he drew the door shut after him. Then, on tiptoe, he stole away.

If the Remove fellows dreamed, they certainly did not dream of Billy Bunter's mysterious occupation at that late hour.

Bunter was bending over Lord Mauleverer's big trunk in the lobby downstairs. The lid was open, and Bunter was removing all the articles his lordship had exerted himself to pack. It was rather a laborious task, for the trunk was large, and filled to the brim. But Billy Bunter worked industriously, and the trunk was emptied at last.

There were lockers in the lobby, and some of them were roomy. The fat junior proceeded to pack Lord Mauleverer's property out of sight in the lockers, wherever he could find room for it. Shirts and collars and socks and all sorts of things were mingled and mixed and crumpled and rumpled, but that could not be helped, and Bunter did not worry about it.

The last article disappeared from sight, and Bunter, grinning, closed the lid of the big trunk. He chuckled.

"He, he, he! That's all ready now! He, he, he!"

The fat junior crept away.

All was silent and still when he tiptoed back into the Remove dormitory. All the Remove, excepting Bunter, were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Bunter crept back to bed. In the dark he butted into somebody else's bed, and there was a startled ejaculation.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that?"

"Nothing, old chap!" gasped Bunter.

"It's not me!"

Bob Cherry sat up and blinked in the darkness.

"Bunter! You howling ass! What the thump are you up to?"

"N-n-nothing! I—I haven't been down—"

"What have you been down for?"

"Nothing, old fellow! I—I heard a noise, and thought it might be a

burglar! I mean, I haven't been down at all!"

"You silly owl!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter found his bed at last, rolled into it, and settled down. And in less than a minute afterwards, a Gargantuan snore was awakening the echoes of the Remove dormitory.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Trunk Mystery!



LANG! Clang!

Clang!

Snore!

The rising-bell rang out in the dim December morning. But there was one member of the Remove whom it did not awaken. Bunter snored on.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Snore!

Billy Bunter had missed a good deal of sleep the night before. He was making up for it now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Wake up, Bunter!"

Snore!

"You'll be late for prayers!"

Snore!

Bob Cherry kindly jerked the bed-clothes off Bunter's bed. Then the snore was changed for a wild howl.

"Ow! Beast! Grooogh! It's c-c-c-cold! Rotter! Wow!"

"Turn out, old fat man!" said Bob cheerily. "Feel cold?"

"Ow! Yes! Beast!"

"Think a spank or two would warm you up?"

"Ow! Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter.

He rolled out of bed. Undoubtedly it was cold, but Bunter did not want to be warmed up in the way suggested.

He rubbed his eyes and yawned deeply. He was grunting morosely as he went down with the Remove to early prayers. He was still morose when the juniors went in to breakfast. Loss of sleep did not agree with William George Bunter.

After brekker, however, Billy Bunter seemed to recover. A fat grin irradiated his face as he packed away the foodstuffs, and he was still grinning when he rolled out of Hall.

Lord Mauleverer gave him a rather apprehensive glance; but, to his relief, the fat Owl did not even look at him. Apparently, Bunter had abandoned his intention of going home with Mauly, and Toddy would not be required to kick him when the car came round.

Bunter, in fact, disappeared.

He was seen, soon after breakfast, talking in a corner with his minor, Sammy of the Second, and Sammy was grinning.

After which, nothing was seen of Bunter.

The fact was not remarked upon, for nobody, of course, had any desire to see anything of Bunter. Anybody who had been interested—which nobody was—might have noticed that the Bunters, major and minor, rolled into the lobby together, and that a little later Bunter minor rolled out by himself, grinning. But nobody, as a matter of fact, noticed either of the Bunters.

It was not till the big car came for Lord Mauleverer that anybody thought of Billy Bunter.

Quite a crowd of Remove men had

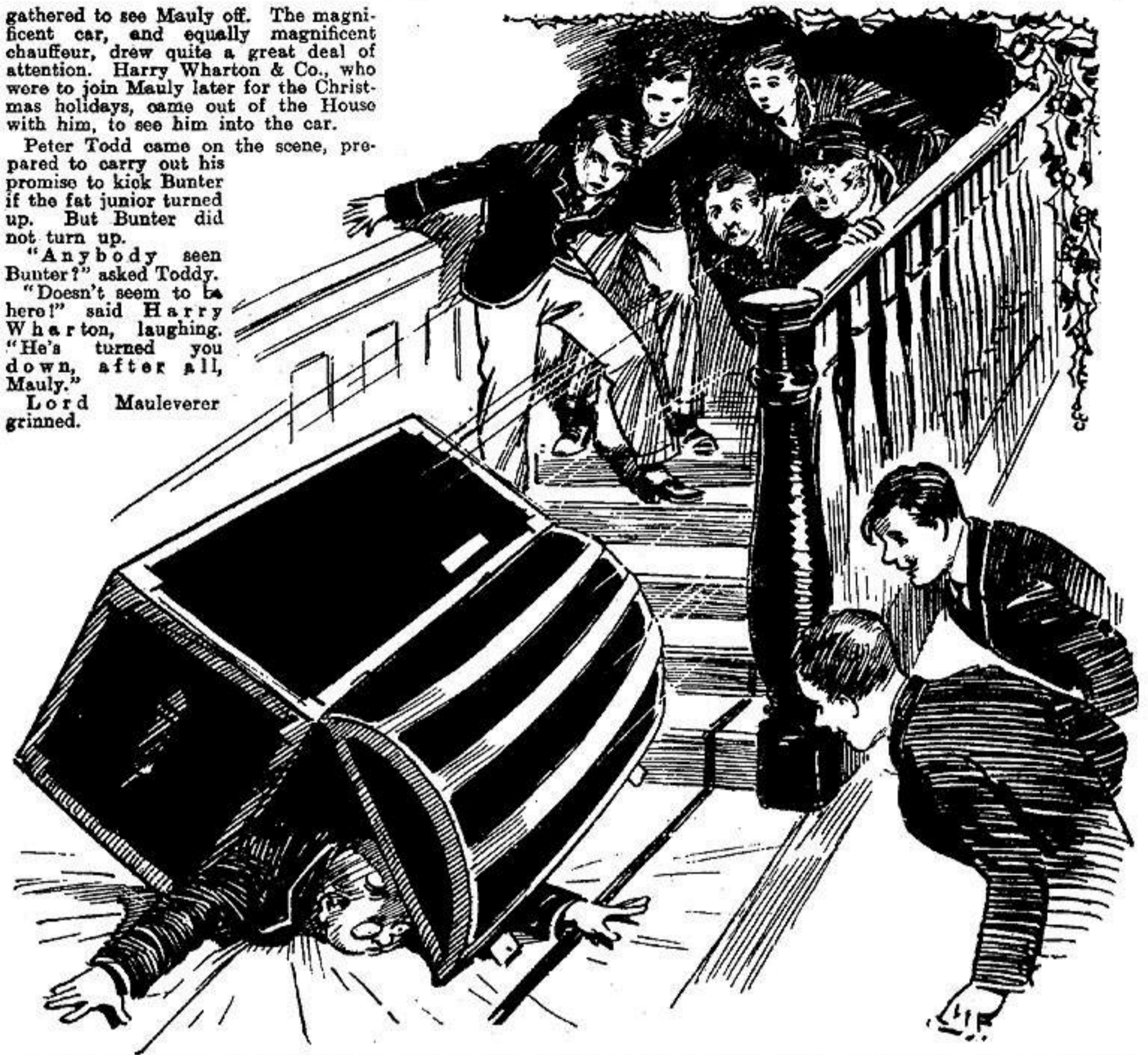
gathered to see Mauly off. The magnificent car, and equally magnificent chauffeur, drew quite a great deal of attention. Harry Wharton & Co., who were to join Mauly later for the Christmas holidays, came out of the House with him, to see him into the car.

Peter Todd came on the scene, prepared to carry out his promise to kick Bunter if the fat junior turned up. But Bunter did not turn up.

"Anybody seen Bunter?" asked Toddy.

"Doesn't seem to be here!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He's turned you down, after all, Mauly."

Lord Mauleverer grinned.



Crashing and bumping from step to step, the heavy trunk finally landed on the ground and burst open. There was a gasp of stupefaction from the onlookers as the fat figure of Bunter rolled out. "Yaroooh!"

"Mauly won't get off without him!" chuckled the Bounder. "Bunter is a sticker!"

"The stickfulness is terrific!"

"Somebody ought to tell him Mauly's going!" exclaimed Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For goodness' sake don't!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.

The Removites chuckled. Billy Bunter's arrangements for the holidays rather appealed to his Form-fellows as a merry jest.

"Rot!" said Skinner. "Let's tell him! Here, young Bunter, where's your major?"

Sammy Bunter had rolled out of the House and joined the little crowd.

Sammy chuckled. But he made no answer to Skinner's question. If he knew where his major was, he was not going to tell.

"Well, good-bye, you men!" said Lord Mauleverer, and he made a step towards the waiting car. Perhaps he was anxious to get off before Billy Bunter appeared in the offing.

"Hold on, Mauly! What about your jolly old trunk?"

"Oh gad, I forgot! Where's Gosling?"

"'Ere, my lord!" answered Gosling. The ancient porter of Greyfriars was

grinning an amiable grin as he touched his hat to Lord Mauleverer. His lordship exuded generous tips at the end of term.

"Mind gettin' my trunk on the car, Gosling?" said Lord Mauleverer politely. "Better get Trotter to help; it's rather heavy."

Trotter was on the spot, ready. He was no more likely than Gosling to be out of sight when Lord Mauleverer took his leave.

The porter and the page went into the lobby. But they did not immediately emerge from the lobby door with the trunk.

A sound of grunting and gasping was heard. Lord Mauleverer looked in at the door.

Gosling and Trotter were raising—or, rather, endeavouring to raise—the big trunk between them. But they did not seem to be getting on with it.

"My word! It's 'eavy!" gasped Gosling.

"'Eavy ain't the word!" gurgled Trotter.

"Now 'eave it up," said Gosling.

He heaved up his own end of the trunk. Trotter heaved at his end, and lifted it off the floor. But it landed again.

"By gad! I had no idea it was so heavy as all that!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer. "Hold on! I'll ask the chauffeur to lend you a hand."

"Which I'll be glad of it, my lord!" gasped William Gosling. "I've 'andled some 'eavy boxes in my time, my lord, but wot I says is this 'ere, this 'ere trunk is a corker, my lord, this 'ere trunk is!"

"'Arf a ton, at least!" gasped Trotter.

"It couldn't weigh more, if there was a bloomin hippopotamus in it!" said Gosling, wiping his brow with a horny hand. "Wot I says is this 'ere, 'ow we're going to get this blooming trunk on that blooming car I don't know, and I don't care 'oo knows it."

There were several steps down from the lobby door. Lord Mauleverer stood on the steps, and signed to the chauffeur, who was standing by the car like a stately graven image.

"Robinson!"

"Yes, my lord!"

"Please give a hand with the trunk!"

"Yes, my lord."

The chauffeur came in to help. There was a chuckle from the juniors as they

gathered round the doorway of the lobby.

Lord Mauleverer possessed a wardrobe far more extensive than that of any other Greyfriars fellow; but the weight of that trunk was really rather surprising. A dozen fellows watched the porter, the page, and the chauffeur as they grasped the trunk and heaved at it.

Many hands are said to make light work; but there was no light work to be made of that trunk. Gosling was muscular, ancient as he was, Trotter was wiry, the chauffeur was quite a powerful man. But they had to go all out to get the trunk off the floor.

"My word!" gasped Trotter.
"Old it!" gurgled Gosling. "Oh lor'! Wot I says is this 'ere— Ow! I never 'andled a weight like this before."

"My hat!" ejaculated Skinner. "I say, Mauly, have you packed Bob Cherry's boots by mistake?"

"You silly ass!" roared Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Lord Mauleverer was gazing at the trunk and its staggering bearers in astonishment. Certainly it had never occurred to his lordship that the trunk could possibly be so heavy as all that, though he had packed it full.

"Good gad! Can you manage it?" he asked. "Can't make out why it's so heavy! It's a giddy mystery!"

"He, he, he!" came from Sammy Bunter, who was blinking on with a fat grin. Sammy seemed entertained about something.

"'Ere, look out!" gasped Trotter.

Bump!
One end of the trunk smote the floor again. Even three pairs of hands did not seem quite able to deal with it.

"We'd better all pile in!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Anybody seen a moving job?" chanted Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lend a hand, you chaps," said Harry Wharton.

"I'm dashed if I can understand it!" said Lord Mauleverer blankly. "I know I packed a few things in the trunk, but—"

"Must be Bob Cherry's boots!" declared Skinner. "Nobody else at Greyfriars would make a trunk weigh like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five gathered round the trunk to help. Even then, many hands did not make light work. But the trunk was swung off the floor and carried to the doorway.

"My only hat! It's really heavy!" gasped Frank Nugent. "What the thump can Mauly have packed to weigh as much as this?"

"The muchfulness is terrific!" panted Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"All together!" gurgled Johnny Bull.

"Go it!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"Oh, my hat! Go it!"

The trunk was heaved through the doorway by the combined efforts of Gosling, Trotter, Robinson, and the Famous Five.

The juniors outside crowded back out of the way. The trunk bumped on the top step. Then eight pairs of hands grasped it again, to carry it down the steps.

"Hold on—"

"Look out—"

"She's going!"

"What-ho, she bumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand clear!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Crash! Bump! Crash! Bump! The heavy trunk had slipped from the grasp of the breathless bearers and rolled down the steps.

It crashed and bumped from step to step. With a final terrific crash it landed on the ground and burst open.

The contents shot out. But it was not an assortment of collars and ties, shoes and trousers, and other such-like things that were strewn on the earth. What was strewn on the earth was a fat figure that rolled and roared.

"Yarooooogh!"

There was a gasp of stupefaction from the onlookers. The terrific weight of the trunk was explained now.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bunter!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Left!



BILLY BUNTER sat up.

He grabbed at his spectacles, set them straight on his little, fat nose, and blinked round him dizzily.

"Bunter!" shrieked Harry Wharton.

"Good gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer, staring at the suddenly revealed Owl of the Remove as if he had been a fat ghost.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter!"

"The Bunterfulness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows— Ow! You've broken my back! Wow! My spinal

(Continued on next page.)

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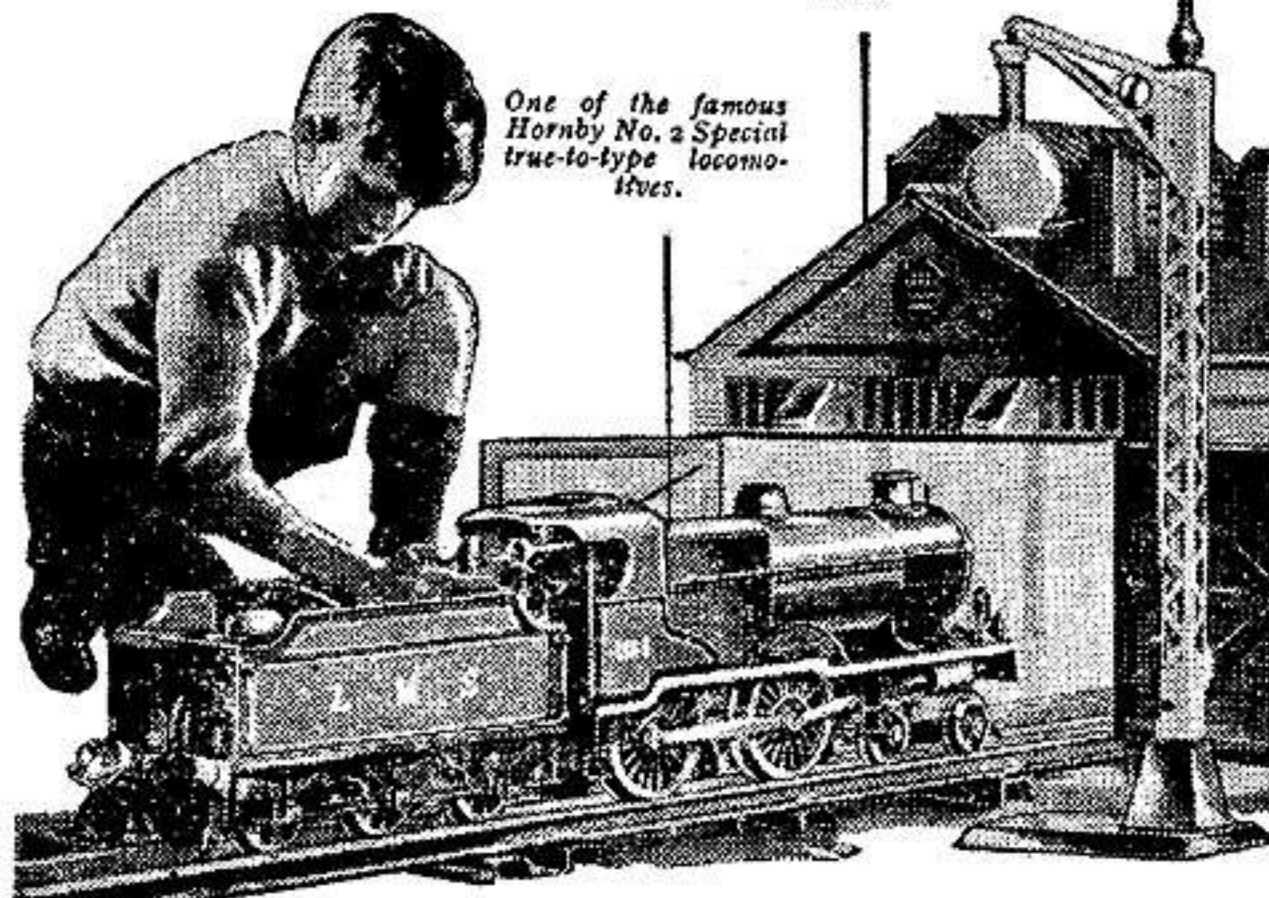
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column's dislocated! Yow-ow! I'm killed! Yooooop!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere!" gasped Gosling, staring at the fat Owl in amazement. "Wot was you doing in that there trunk?"

"Ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Removites.

"Bunter—in the trunk?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Oh, my only summer hat! My only aunt Selina Sempronia!"

"You fat villain!" roared Peter Todd. "So that's why you didn't turn up! You—you—you were going in the trunk!"

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's what he wanted the gimlet for!" gasped Toddy. "Boring holes in the trunk!"

"I—I say, I—I never bored those holes in the trunk! I—I don't know how they got there."

"That's why he went down from the dorm last night!" roared Bob Cherry. "Shifting Mauly's things out of the trunk so as to make room for his fat carcass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Bunter, you benighted chump—"

"Ow! My back's broken! What did you silly idiots drop the trunk for?" spluttered Bunter. "The spinal column in my left leg's broken! Ow! My neck's broken, too, I believe! Wow! You clumsy asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky we dropped the trunk!" chortled Johnny Bull. "You were taking Bunter home with you, after all, Mauly!"

"Oh gad!"

"Bunter, you fat idiot, you—"

"Beasts! Ow!"

"Where have you put the things out of that trunk, you fat villain?" roared Lord Mauleverer.

"Ow! Blow the things! Bother the things! Ow! I'm busted all over!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you might give a fellow a hand up. Ow!"

"Here you are, old bean!" said Bob Cherry, and he helped Bunter up with a grip on a fat ear.

"Yarooooooh!"

Bunter got up quite quickly.

The Removites were weeping with merriment. Bunter's wonderful scheme was clear now. He had packed himself up in Lord Mauleverer's big trunk, to arrive at Mauleverer Towers with his lordship. No doubt his arrival there would have been a surprise to Mauly. A pleasant surprise, Bunter hoped. Hope springs eternal in the human breast!

But the game was up now. Billy Bunter's tremendous weight had been his own undoing.

"So—so that was the game!" gasped Peter Todd. "Well, I promised Mauly I'd kick you, Bunter, if you wedged in—"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Here goes!"

"Yarooooooh!"

Billy Bunter fled.

A roar of laughter followed him.

"Poor old Bunter!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You've had a narrow escape, Mauly. If we hadn't dropped the trunk—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Now I've got to pack the trunk over again! What has that fat villain done with the things? By gad, I've a good mind to kick him round the quad! Oh dear!"

"We'll all help, old bean!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Lord Mauleverer's property was sorted out of the lockers and packed back into the trunk, after which the trunk, big as it was, was placed on the car without difficulty.

Then his lordship said good-bye to his friends and rolled away in the car, minus Bunter.

was the only fellow in the Remove who couldn't.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter peevishly. "I say, Harry, old chap, you're going home before you go to Mauleverer Towers? Well, look here, I'll come with you—"

"I don't think!" chuckled Wharton.

"Then we go on to the Towers together, see?"

"Not quite!"

"I suppose you want me this Christmas?" said Bunter warmly.

"Something wrong with your supposer, then!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Mauly will be jolly glad to see me, of course. It's only his fun, you know," explained Bunter. "If I'd got home with him to-day he would have been overjoyed when he saw me!"

"The overjoyfulness would not have been terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" chuckled Hurroo Jamset Ram Singh. "It would have been a boot on the other leg!"

"Beast! As we shall travel together, Wharton, old chap, to-morrow—"

"If we do there will be a dead porpoise left lying somewhere along the railway line!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"I was going to say I'm sorry I shan't be able to come with you to-morrow, Wharton. I'm sticking to Toddy for Christmas. He hasn't much of a place to ask a fellow to, but I feel bound to give him a turn. I wouldn't be found dead at Wharton Lodge!"

"You'll be found dead, or nearly, if you show up there!"

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled on to the House. The bell was ringing for classes now, and Billy Bunter joined Peter Todd as the Remove went in. He gave Peter a friendly dig in the ribs and grinned amicably as Toddy gasped and looked round.

"I say, Peter, old chap, you can rely on me!" said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"I'm sticking to you, old fellow!" said Bunter reassuringly. "After the way that rotter Mauly's treated me, I'm turning him down! There's nothing to cackle at, Peter; and it's rather ill-bred to cackle when a pal's talking to you. Wharton's rather keen on my going home with him; but I've told him it can't be done, old chap, as I'm sticking to you, although you haven't much of a place to ask a fellow to."

"Oh!" gasped Toddy.

"I shan't mind that," said Bunter. "I'm no snob, Peter! Of course, your people are not the sort I'm accustomed to mix with, especially at Christmas. But I've got tact."

"You—you—you've got tact?" gurgled Toddy.

"Yes, old chap; trust me to put my inferiors at their ease!" said Bunter. "I know your pater's only a poor solicitor, and your relations will be

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Christmas Greetings TO ALL MAGNET READERS



But as the chauffeur was tooling the car out of the gates a fat figure detached itself from the gateway, and a fat hand was waved to his lordship in the car.

"Hold on a minute, Mauly!" yelled Billy Bunter.

"Drive on, Robinson!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

"Hold on! I say, Mauly—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"I say, old chap—"

"Merry Christmas, old fat bean!"

"Hold on, old chap! Stop, you beast! I say, old fellow— Listen to me, you rotter! I say— Beast!" roared Bunter, as the car turned into the Courtfield road and whizzed away.

Billy Bunter blinked after it through his big spectacles, with a dismal blink. Lord Mauleverer was gone!

The fat junior rolled back into the quadrangle. He blinked morosely at a yelling crowd of juniors. Bunter, at least, could see nothing to laugh at in the failure of his brilliant scheme. He

rather a scrubby lot; but you can rely on me not to tell the world what I think of them. As I said, I've got tact; fellows of really good family have to know. I—I say, Peter, what are you going to do with that?" added Bunter, as Peter Todd stooped and gathered a large handful of snow from the ground.

"I'm going to shove it down a fat idiot's back!" explained Peter.

"I—I—I say—yaroooh—stop it—yoooop—beast— Oh crikey! Owl!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you rotter, I won't come home with you now! I say— Groooooogh! Ooooooh!"

Billy Bunter was late for class that morning. It took him some little time to extract the snow from his back. And he had quite given up the idea of going home with Peter Todd. It really looked as if Billy Bunter was booked for home, sweet home!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Homeward Bound!



HARRY WHARTON & Co. were in great spirits the following day. So were most of the Greyfriars fellows. Breaking-up day was rather jolly; Christmas was going to be jolly; in fact, as

Bob Cherry declared, it was a jolly old world altogether.

But there was one countenance in the Remove that wore a worried look. That was the fat countenance of William George Bunter.

Everybody else had his arrangements made for Christmas. Most fellows were going home, and glad to go there. Other fellows were going with other fellows. Billy Bunter, apparently, was going home; but, in spite of the unlimited wealth and general magnificence of Bunter Court, he did not seem glad to go there. As the poet has remarked, "Tis distance lends enchantment to the view." The magnificence of Bunter

Court was likely to fade on a close inspection. Attractive as that palatial residence was, it seemed to have no attraction for William George.

Breaking-up, therefore, was not quite so joyful to William George Bunter as to most of the fellows.

The Remove were still chuckling over his trunk adventure, and the Bunder was offering three to one in dough-nuts that Bunter would still land himself on somebody for the hols, without finding any takers. But what seemed a merry jest to the Remove fellows, was a serious problem for the fat Owl.

He kept a wary eye—and a wary pair of spectacles—on the Famous Five that day. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent were going to their various homes; but Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh was going with Wharton—Bhanipur, in far-off India, being too far away for vacations. As Wharton's people lived in Surrey, and Bunter also honoured that beautiful county with his residence, there was no reason why they should not take the same train, and arrive, if Bunter could manage it, at the same destination. Lord Mauleverer had left him in the lurch, but the fat Owl still had great faith in his sticking powers.

In the crowd that gathered on the platform at Courtfield Station, Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, were still on the Famous Five. Bob Cherry and Nugent and Johnny Bull departed in their train, seen off by their chums—and Bunter. Wharton and Hurree Singh were going by the next train, and as they waited on the platform Bunter rolled up.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Looking for your minor?" asked Wharton. "I saw him at the other end of the platform."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"The esteemed Sammy will miss your excellent and execrable company, my absurd Bunter," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, which train are you taking?" asked Bunter, apparently not deeply concerned about his minor.

"We're not taking a train," answered Wharton.

"How are you getting home, then?"

"A train's taking us."

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter.

It was no time for frivolous jesting—in Bunter's opinion, at least.

"Let us walkfully exercise our esteemed legs!" suggested Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "The coldfulness is preposterous."

"Let's!" assented Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you! Oh, all right, I'll stroll along if you like."

"The likefulness is not preposterous."

"Oh, really, Inky——"

"Hadn't you better look for your minor?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Hallo, there's the train!"

A good many fellows were crowding into the train. Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh entered a carriage and the Owl of the Remove promptly rolled in after them. Three seats were available, and Bunter annexed one in the corner.

"Rather jolly to be travelling together, isn't it, old chaps?" he remarked, as he sat down.

"Oh, frightfully!" said Wharton.

"Have you got a rug, Wharton?"

"No!"

"You might have brought a rug! You jolly well know I like one! But that's you all over—selfish as usual."

"Sorry, old bean!"

"Beast! I say, Inky, what about a lunch-basket?"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh looked thoughtful. Billy Bunter eyed him hopefully. In the same train with the chums of the Remove, he had great hopes of arriving, somehow, at the same destination. But his immediate thoughts were fixed on tuck. That important matter was never long absent from Bunter's fat mind.

"Do you thinkfully opine that there is time to order an esteemed lunch-basket, my ridiculous Bunter?" asked the nabob.

"Oh, lots!" exclaimed Bunter eagerly.

"Don't be an ass, Inky!" said Wharton. "You'll lose the train, and we don't want a lunch-basket, anyhow."

"You shut up!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "You let old Inky do as he likes, Wharton! Inky's not mean like you! I say, Inky, if you cut off at once there's lots of time. I'll keep your place for you."

Hurree Singh closed one eye—the one that was farthest from Bunter—at his chum.

Wharton grinned.

He divined what the nabob was thinking of—not a lunch-basket for Bunter.

"Let us chance it, my esteemed Wharton," said the nabob. "The absurd Bunter will keep our places for us——"

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter. "I say, you fellows; don't lose time! I say, I'm hungry, you know."

Wharton and Hurree Singh stepped from the train. They walked down the platform. There was another train in half an hour, which had the advantage of not having William George Bunter on board. It was worth waiting for.

"I say, you fellows, hurry up!" shouted Bunter from the window; and the two juniors, chuckling, disappeared in the crowd on the platform.

Billy Bunter waited anxiously. He was hungry—he generally was—and the mere thought of a lunch-basket made him hungrier.

"Here's some places!" Bolsover major of the Remove tramped into the carriage. "Come on, Skinner!"

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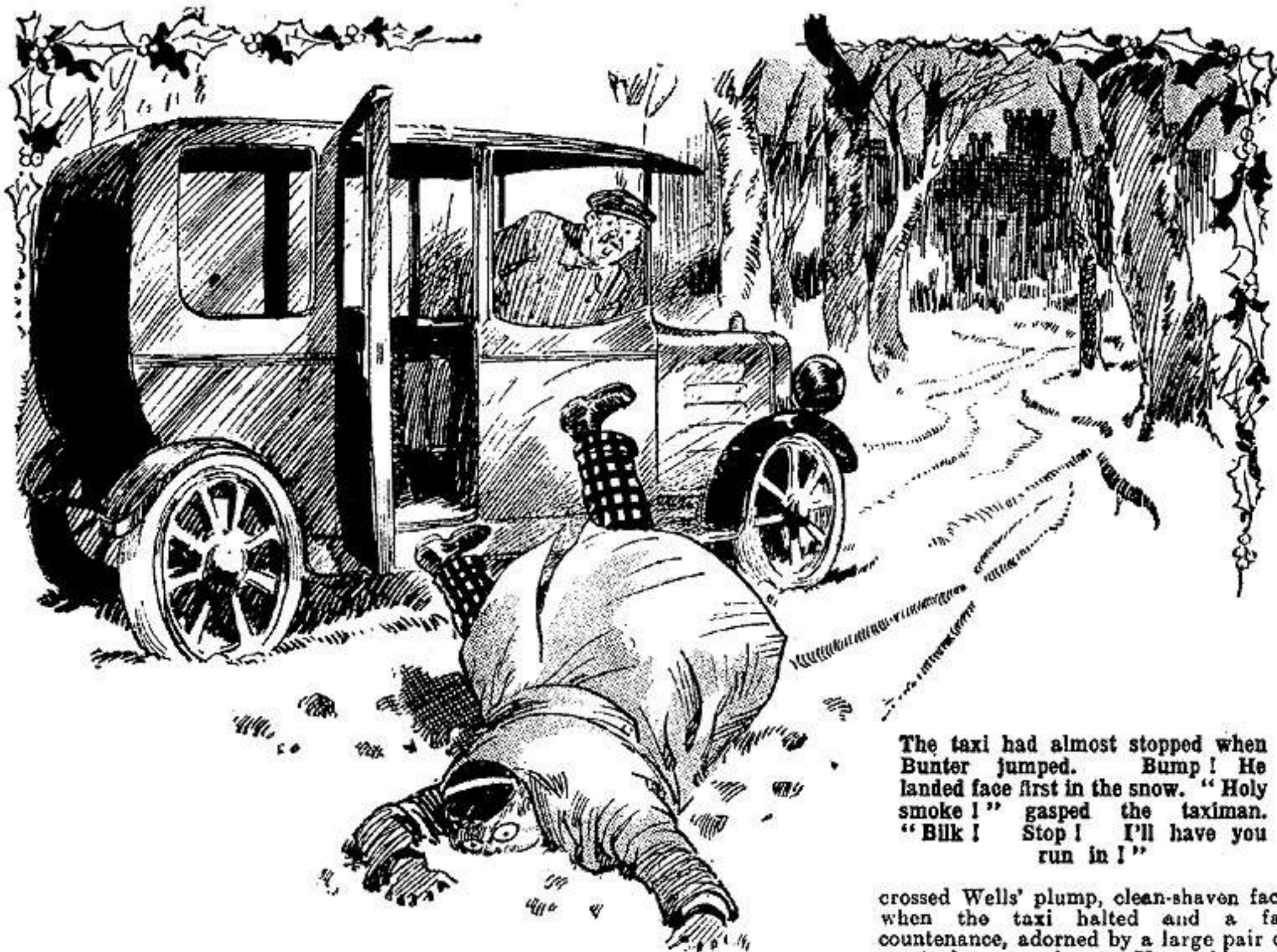
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The taxi had almost stopped when Bunter jumped. Bump! He landed face first in the snow. "Holy smoke!" gasped the taximan. "Bilk! Stop! I'll have you run in!"

"I say, you fellows, those places are taken!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "Wharton and Inky—"

"They haven't left anything on the seats!" said Skinner. "They should leave something on the seats if they've taken the places."

"They should jolly well sit in the places if they want them!" grunted Bolsover major. "I know I'm not getting out again." And he sat down.

"I say, they'll turn you out, you know!" expostulated Bunter. "I say, I'm keeping those places for them—"

"I'd like to see anybody turn me out!" said Bolsover major.

"Same here!" grinned Skinner. And he drew the door shut and sat down.

"Well, they'll jolly well have to stand," said Bunter. "Serve 'em right—they needn't have got out if they'd brought a lunch-basket! But I say, leave that door open, Skinner—they'll be in a hurry—"

"Keep that door shut!" said Bolsover major. "There's a draught!"

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"We don't want people standing in this carriage, either. There's room along the train."

"Look here—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"There goes the whistle!" said Skinner, with a grin. "If they're coming back they haven't much time."

Billy Bunter blinked anxiously from the window.

"The silly asses! They'll lose the train!" He slid down the window in the carriage door and put his head out and blinked along the platform. "I say, you fellows! Wharton! Inky! Hurry up! The train's going—"

The train was in motion now, the platform gliding rapidly away. Bunter

gave a last blink back. He spotted two laughing faces—and two hands were waved to him from the distance.

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Merry Christmas, my absurd Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He sank back in his seat. His very spectacles gleamed with wrath. He comprehended at last! He was not going to get that lunch-basket! Neither was he going to travel with the chums of the Remove! The train whizzed out of the station, and the last that Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh saw of Bunter was a fat fist shaken from the window.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!



HARTON LODGE

glistened white under a mantle of snow. It was a snowy Christmas-tide. Wells, the butler, stood at the open doorway of the Lodge, looking out into the bright, cold.

keen December morning. Wells looked plump and comfortable and cheerful.

There were to be no Christmas celebrations at the Lodge, the family being away, and there was an unaccustomed quiet about the old house—unaccustomed, at least, in holiday time. Wells, looking from the doorway, watched a taxi-cab grinding up the drive through powdery snow, and wondered who it contained. And a faint smile

crossed Wells' plump, clean-shaven face when the taxi halted and a fat countenance, adorned by a large pair of spectacles, peered out. He could guess that William George Bunter was unaware that the Lodge was tenanted only by the household staff.

The owner of the fat face and spectacles alighted.

He came up the steps and blinked at Wells. Wells was standing in the middle of the doorway, and he did not move.

Many a time had William George Bunter stayed at the Lodge, but the more he was seen there, the less, somehow, Wells had seemed to like him. Billy Bunter rather prided himself on a way he had of keeping servants in their place. This did not, perhaps, make him popular below stairs. The faint smile on Wells' face grew rather more pronounced and a trifle sarcastic.

"Er—good-morning, Wells!" said Bunter.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Wells gravely, and still without stirring.

"Colonel Wharton at home?"

"No, sir."

"Miss Wharton at home?"

"No, sir."

"I suppose Harry's here?"

"No, sir."

"Or Inky—Hurree Singh, you know?"

"No, sir."

"All gone out?" asked Bunter peevishly.

"Colonel Wharton and Miss Wharton are at Bournemouth, sir," answered Wells suavely. "They left yesterday, sir."

"Oh! Away for Christmas?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose that's why Wharton's going to Mauleverer's," grunted Bunter.

"Wharton and Inky gone out?"

"Master Harry and Prince Hurree Singh are not here, sir."

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(Continued from page 13.)

"They'll be back to lunch, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"When are they coming back, then?"

"I understand that they will be back for a few days at the end of the vacation, sir, before returning to school."

Bunter jumped.

"Mean to say they've gone?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh crikey!"

Wells smiled. John, the footman, who had appeared behind him in the hall, gave a little chuckle. Wells glanced at him severely, and John immediately became grave.

Billy Bunter blinked at Wells.

"The rotters!" he ejaculated.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said Wells.

"The beasts!" exclaimed Bunter wrathfully.

"Really, sir—"

"It's only two days since we broke up at Greyfriars! I thought Wharton would be at home. I asked him specially, and he said distinctly that he would be at home some days before we went on to Mauleverer's."

"Two days is some days, sir!" suggested Wells helpfully.

Bunter snorted.

Having spent a couple of days of the vacation at home, Bunter had had enough of the delights of Bunter Court, more than enough of the society of his brother, Sammy, and his sister, Bessie—a feeling that was fully shared by Sammy and Bessie! And certainly he had expected to find Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Rām Singh still at Wharton Lodge. Possibly he hoped that they would be glad to see him, after the lapse of a couple of days, during which they had missed him—or ought to have missed him.

"This is jolly awkward, Wells!" said Bunter.

"Indeed, sir!"

"You see, I was going on to Mauleverer Towers with Wharton," explained Bunter, "and—as it happens, I've left all my money at home. That wouldn't have mattered if I'd been travelling with friends. As it is, it's rather awkward."

"No doubt, sir!" said Wells sympathetically.

"There's a pound run up on the taxi," said Bunter. "I was going to borrow a pound from Wharton when—when I found I'd left my money at home. It's rather awkward to find nobody here."

"It must be, sir!" assented Wells.

"In the circumstances, Wells, I think you had better pay the taxi and mention it to Wharton later."

"I am afraid, sir, that that would be taking a liberty!" said Wells, shaking his head gravely.

"That's all right," said Bunter. "I'll

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tell Wharton how it was, see? It's quite all right, Wells."

"Not quite, I think, sir."

Billy Bunter breathed hard. He had a suspicion that Wells was being cheeky! Many times at Wharton Lodge he had suspected Wells of suppressed cheek. Now it was not so suppressed.

"Look here, Wells, are you going to pay that taxi?" he demanded.

"No, sir!" said Wells urbanely.

Bunter breathed harder.

He gave Wells a long, long blink. Wells met it with a suave and quite deferential smile. Yet Bunter had an impression that this cheeky menial was laughing up his sleeve.

Slowly the fat junior turned away. It was evident that there was nothing doing at Wharton Lodge! He tramped down the steps to the taxi. Wells, with a sedate smile, watched him enter the taxi and grind away down the drive. Something seemed to be amusing Wells.

The taxi turned out of the gates of Wharton Lodge, and rattled away. Billy Bunter leaned back in his seat, with a wrinkle in his brow.

He had ample food for thought.

He had told the taximan to drive back home. But who was going to pay him when he arrived there Bunter did not know. It was obvious that the taximan would want to know.

"Oh lor!" murmured Bunter.

He had counted on finding Wharton at home, and upon his good nature and the genial influence of Christmastide. He had felt that a pal could hardly refuse to lend him a pound to pay the taxi. And Wharton was a hundred miles away, in another county. And by the time the taxi got back to Bunter Villa the fare would be nearer two pounds than one. It was quite unpleasant.

Besides, how was he to get to Mauleverer Towers, in far-off Hampshire? Railways were run on sordid commercial lines—and Bunter was not in possession of the sum required to pay his fare. He had counted on his old pals for that—after all he had done for them!

It was quite a problem!

More pressing was the problem of paying for the taxi when he got home. His cash resources were limited to two pennies—one of which was a French one—and neither Sammy nor Bessie could be relied upon to help. They were not so fond of William George as so excellent a brother deserved. Mr. Bunter would have to pay—and if Mr. Samuel Bunter had to pay nearly two pounds for a taxi for his hopeful son, that hopeful son's life would scarcely be worth living afterwards. Bunter shuddered at the prospect.

Half-way home Bunter made up his fat mind. He realised that a fellow might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. He tapped on the glass, and the driver glanced round and halted. Bunter leaned from the window and blinked at him.

"I've missed my friends," he explained. "They've gone on to Hampshire without me. I think, on the whole, I'll go right on."

"Cost you ten pounds, sir!" said the taximan.

"That's all right," said Bunter airily, jingling an English penny against a French one in his pocket. "Get on the Winchester road—Mauleverer Towers is the place—about ten miles from Winchester. I'm going to stay with my friend Lord Mauleverer there, you know."

"I shall have to stop for juice, sir."

"Buck up, then!"

Bunter leaned back in his seat.

He had still more food for thought as the taxi ate up the miles westward. Bunter was not accustomed to meeting troubles half-way—or to meeting them at all if he could help it. But even Bunter could not help feeling that his present proceedings were of rather a risky nature. Still, as there was nothing else to be done, what was a fellow to do?

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Haunted!



HE jolly old haunted turret?"

"Yaas."

"I hope the jolly old ghost's at home!"

"The at-homefulness is probably not terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Rām Singh.

Harry Wharton held up a lamp, and the light glimmered on walls of panelled oak, black with age.

Mauleverer Towers was an ancient building, some parts of it dating back to Saxon times, some to early Norman. But the residential parts had been modernised, and the ghost of the Red Earl—had that phantom really walked at Christmastide—would no doubt have been surprised and disconcerted at finding itself among electric lights, bathrooms, garages, wireless installations, and other things that certainly would have made any returning spirit from Tudor times sit up and take notice.

But the Haunted Turret had not been changed—there was no electric light there, and all was dark and shadowy when the chums of Greyfriars visited it. The old square turret was approached by a winding stair of stone, and it had not been inhabited for centuries, though it was quite near the quarters of Lord Mauleverer's guests. From the turret there was a wide view over the hills and meadows of Hampshire, in the daylight. In the December night it was wrapped in gloom.

"Jolly old show!" said Johnny Bull, looking round the square room, with its tall, pointed slits of windows, and walls of blackened oak that glimmered in the lamplight. "If I were you, Mauly, I should make this my den. But you'd want a few modern improvements put in."

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

"This part of the old show is never goin' to be changed," he answered. "Sort of historic relic, you know. People trot up here for the view, but it's never occupied. You can see as far as What's-its-name, and almost as far as—as What-do-you-call-it on a clear day."

"Fine!" chuckled Bob. "And I suppose when the visibility's really good you can see as far as Thingummy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Must be jolly old," said Nugent, looking round.

"Yaas. It dates from Saxon times, or Norman times, or somethin'," said Mauly, rather vaguely. "I know it dates from some time or other. My uncle can tell you all about it—old Brooke's got a wonderful memory. But I know it dates from the reign of some king or other, or else a queen—I'm not quite sure which."

"When they tax the nobility out of existence, Mauly, you'd better get a

job as a Cook's guide," said Bob. "You do it so well."

The Famous Five chuckled. It was their second day at Mauleverer Towers, and they had left it till after dusk to visit the Haunted Turret—perhaps in the hope of seeing some sign of the historic ghost. That ghost was due to appear at Christmas-time, but could naturally not be expected to show up in the daytime—a thing no ghost was ever known to do. "And this is where the Red Earl disappeared, in the reign of King Thingummy?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yaas."
"Well, if it really happened there must be a secret panel or something," said Bob. "I dare say there's a secret door behind this oak, Mauly! Have you ever looked for one?"

"I've often been goin' to!" said Mauly.
"There isn't one known, then?" asked Harry.

"No; but it's very likely."
"You could find it, if it's there, by having the panelling taken down," suggested Johnny Bull.

Lord Mauleverer looked at him. "Oh, yaas!" he gasped. The idea of having that ancient and historic turret handed over to such vandalism seemed to be a shock to his lordship.

"Might find it by tapping on the walls," said Bob. "If there's a hollow place it ought to sound when you tap."
"Rather a lark to find it," said Nugent. "Then if the ghost doesn't walk this Christmas we could go and look for him. If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, you know, Mahomet has to go to the mountain."

Bob Cherry stepped to the blackened oak wall, and lifted his hand to tap. "I—I say—" murmured Mauleverer. Bob looked round.
"My hat! You don't really believe in the jolly old ghost, Mauly!" he ejaculated.

"No fear! But, you see, I've been brought up on that ghost," said Mauly. "I believed in it when I was a kid. And—and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "I believe you half-believe in it now, old bean."

Lord Mauleverer laughed, too. "Rot!" he answered. "Still, before you tap on the wall I may as well tell you that the ghost ain't supposed to like it—sort of particular about his private residence, you know. I've heard that he was heard to groan when somebody tapped on the wall."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"But go ahead, if you like," said Mauly. "It's all rot, of course."

Bob raised his hand again. Wharton held up the lamp. Lights and shadows danced round the group of juniors. From without came a faint whine of the winter wind. The place was silent, lonely, eerie, and even the cheery Bob hesitated for a moment before he tapped. Then, with a laugh, he smote.

It was rather a smack than a tap, and it echoed through the turret-room and down the winding stone stair.

"If the jolly old ghost's there, that will wake him up!" chuckled Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What—what's that?"

Groan!
The juniors started almost convulsively.

From somewhere—where they could not guess—that deep groan came, in response to the tap on the wall.

It died away, and there was a dead silence.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another.

Lord Mauleverer's face was a trifle pale. The other fellows looked utterly startled.

"What—what—what was that?" stammered Nugent.

"Great pip!" breathed Johnny Bull, staring round him blankly. "I—I say, you heard that—"

"What the thump—"

"Not one of you fellows larking?" asked Bob, looking round.

"No, you ass!"

"Then, what the dickens—"

"Must be somebody larking, trying to pull our leg!" said Harry Wharton at last. But he spoke without conviction.

"There's nobody in the place at present but ourselves, my Uncle Brooke, and the servants!" said Lord Mauleverer.

The juniors were silent. They had left Sir Reginald Brooke downstairs in the library when they came to explore the turret. They could hardly imagine that the stately old gentleman was playing tricks. It was even less imaginable that any of the well-trained household staff at the Towers could be doing so. The thing was a mystery.

"Nobody knew we were coming up here, so nobody could have got ready for us—even if anybody knew a secret way up!" said Nugent, in a low voice.

"But—but—" stammered Wharton.

The juniors stared at one another blankly. The happening was utterly inexplicable, unless indeed there was a phantom haunting the ancient recesses of Mauleverer Towers. Mauly shivered.

"I say, it's rather chilly up here!" he said.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Bob, and he raised his hand to tap on the wall again. But he let his hand fall without tapping.

In spite of himself, an eerie feeling was creeping over him.

"I—I suppose we didn't imagine it!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"We couldn't all have imagined the same thing!" said Harry. "I heard a groan distinctly."

"The groanfulness was terrific!" said Hurreo Jamsset Ram Singh. "But perhaps it was an esteemed echo."

"These old places are full of queer echoes," said Bob. But he spoke very dubiously.

Lord Mauleverer looked at his watch.

"Better not be late for dinner!" he murmured.

The juniors left the turret-room. They descended the winding stone stairs in silence. The Haunted Turret was left to silence and darkness again, and the Greyfriars fellows were glad to find themselves back in warmth and light.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Tribulations of a Bilk!



BILLY BUNTER blinked through December darkness and a light, powdery falling of snow. He knew the great gateway, with the light burning over it, flanked by great pillars

surmounted by stone lions. He had arrived at Mauleverer Towers.

It had been a long run. The winter dusk was deepening into darkness when Bunter arrived. He had stopped twice for refreshment on his way—which was not only necessary, but indispensable, to Billy Bunter; but which, indispensable as it was, would have been impossible, had not the taximan listened to the voice of the charmer.

Bunter felt that he had got through the journey well—that he had managed it rather cleverly. Few fellows, stranded as Bunter was, could have managed it so well. He could not help feeling that.

Still, his difficulties were not yet over. In fact, they were only beginning.

Bunter felt—he could not help feeling—that Lord Mauleverer ought to be glad to see him—that Harry Wharton & Co. ought to rejoice at this fascinating addition to the party at the Towers.

But it was an undoubted fact that fellows did not always feel as they ought to feel!

It was possible, at least, that Lord Mauleverer might kick him out.

It was possible—quite possible—that Harry Wharton & Co. might not rally round him, and urge upon Mauleverer that he, Bunter, was the one thing needful to make that Christmas party a success. It was even possible that they might add their boots to Mauleverer's

(Continued on next page.)

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in inducing him to take a prompt departure.

Obviously, a fellow who arrived for Christmas in the way Bunter was arriving, had to be wary.

Bunter realised that.

During that long run in the taxi he had had plenty of time to think and make plans. And he had decided not to knock boldly at the door, like an expected visitor—being such a very unexpected one. Especially as somebody had to pay the taximan twelve pounds—which Bunter obviously could not do with two pennies, one of which was French.

A better plan, Bunter considered, was to land himself at the Towers, and watch for an opportunity of entering unnoticed. He knew the place—he had been there before—he knew what quarters the Famous Five would be occupying; he knew how to reach those quarters once he was within the building.

He felt that it was wiser—in the peculiar circumstances—not to let his presence be discovered, if he could help it, until so late an hour that it would be practically impossible to kick him out. Beast as Mauly was, he would have to give him a night's shelter, at least—and once Bunter was landed there for the night, he felt that he could depend on his fat wits to prolong the stay.

After all, Mauly was "soft." And it was Christmas-time! And Bunter was a pleasant, charming, fascinating sort of fellow—the kind of fellow any fellow would be glad to have, if he only realised it. Once the difficulty of getting installed in the house was got over, Bunter felt that he could feel fairly confident about the result.

But there was the rub!

Bunter was prepared to sneak in at one of the servants' doors, or even to climb in at a window—indeed, he would rather have dropped down a chimney than have stayed outside. But there were difficulties in the way. Still, difficulties were only made to be overcome.

The first thing, evidently, was to get rid of the taximan. With the sordid selfishness Bunter was accustomed to expect from his inferiors, this man would be thinking about his fare—he would want to be paid. Bunter, of course, wanted him to be paid. Bunter was no bilk. But he could not pay him himself, and so he did not want to figure in the scene. He had done with the man now, and wanted to see the last of him; having landed him at Mauleverer Towers, the taximan had, so to speak, outlived his usefulness.

"This the place, sir?"

The driver leaned round and asked the question.

"Yes; drive in."

The great gates stood wide open. An immense drive curved among snowy oaks and beeches towards the distant house. The taxi turned in, passed the lighted windows of a lodge, and ground on up the drive.

Bunter's fat heart palpitated.

The crucial moment had arrived.

Mauleverer Towers stood on high ground, and the drive was rather steep. The taxi went slowly. Bunter had calculated on that.

He opened the door.

With the taxi going slowly, he could jump out and vanish. The driver would arrive at the house with an empty vehicle. What would happen after that was no concern of Bunter's.

But even with the taxi going very slowly, Bunter found, at the last

moment, that he did not like the idea of jumping. These things were easier to plan in advance than to carry out when the moment came.

His fat heart fluttered as he stood in the doorway ready to jump, but hesitating to jump.

The driver glanced round at him. No doubt he was surprised. Bunter had intended to jump out unknown to the driver, but he had hesitated too long. The driver stared hard—very hard—at his passenger, whose proceedings were so peculiar.

"We ain't half-way to the house yet, sir," he said.

Bunter started.

"Oh! Yes. No. All right! I—I wasn't going to jump out!" he gasped.

"What?"

"I—I was just looking at the scenery," gasped Bunter. "It—it's rather—rather beautiful, you know. Drive on!"

A CHRISTMAS BOX of a topping POCKET KNIFE

has been forwarded to Clifford Gregory, "Sunnyacre," Long-down Lane, Ewell, Surrey, in exchange for the amusing storyette herewith.



"Now," said the school teacher, "we all know about Noah's Ark. Can any little boy or girl tell me of another Ark?"

"Yes, miss," came a voice from the rear, "'Ark the 'Erald Angela sing!"

The driver was not only staring now; he was glaring. Perhaps he had had to deal with bilks before, in his career as a taxi-driver.

"Go slow," added Bunter. "Drive very slowly. I'm not going to jump out, you know; but don't go fast. I don't want to break my neck, you know."

"My eye!" said the taxi-driver.

"Get on!" said Bunter peevishly. "We—we shall be late for dinner! Don't keep looking round! Look where you're going."

"My eye!" repeated the driver blankly.

"Nothing to look round for," said Bunter. "I'm not going to jump out before you get to the house. Why should I?"

Quite an extraordinary expression was coming over the driver's face. Even in the gloom Bunter could see it. The man was suspicious! Why he was suspicious Bunter did not know; but he could not doubt the fact. He realised that he was going to have trouble with this man!

It was neck or nothing now. The taxi

had almost stopped, and it was Bunter's chance.

He jumped!

Bump!

"Yarooooooh!"

Bunter rolled and roared.

"Holy smoke!" gasped the taximan.

He stopped the car and stared after Bunter. Bunter owed him a pound for the drive to Wharton lodge, ten pounds for the drive to Hampshire, and another pound that he had borrowed en route. And he was escaping before the house was reached!

The driver jumped down.

"Bilk!" he gasped.

The taximan was not, perhaps, closely acquainted with the manners and customs of the nobility. But he knew that this was not the way a nobleman's guests usually arrived at a nobleman's residence.

He had no doubt that he was dealing with a particularly impudent bilk, who had "diddled" him into driving a hundred miles by pretending that Mauleverer Towers was his destination. This made him very anxious that his peculiar passenger should not escape.

Bunter scrambled to his feet.

He blinked round him.

The taximan was rushing towards him. Even in the gloom Bunter caught a deadly glint in the taximan's eyes.

"Ow!" he gasped.

He bolted.

Barely escaping the clutch of an outstretched hand, the fat junior bolted into the trees that lined the drive.

"Bilk!" roared the taximan. "Bilk! Stop! I'll have you run in! I'll knock your blooming nose through the back of your 'ead! Stop!"

If Bunter had been disposed to stop, the prospect of having his nose knocked through the back of his head would have urged him onward.

He fled wildly.

He heard a tramp of heavy feet behind him. Leaving the taxi on the drive, the taximan pursued Bunter.

"Oh crikey!" gasped the hapless Owl.

He bumped into a tree and yelled, and recovered himself, and dashed on. Behind him he heard the tramping feet and a voice raised in wrath. He had not calculated on this.

He caught a glimpse of the lighted facade of the great house, shining through the winter dusk. He was tempted to rush towards it for refuge. But he realised that the very worst way to arrive at the Towers for Christmas was running for his life with an enraged taximan at his heels. Such an arrival could not possibly make a good impression.

But he had to escape that obnoxious taximan. The wintry dusk befriended him. But there was a powdering of snow on the ground, and Bunter's fat figure showed up on the snow. To his horror, he heard the deep breathing of the pursuing taximan behind. The wretch was getting nearer and nearer.

"Ow! Oh! Wow! Keep off!" gurgled Bunter.

"Gotcher!" gasped the taximan.

But he had not quite got Bunter. The fat Owl dodged desperately and got away again. Where he was running now he hardly knew. He ran for his fat life, panting and puffing and blowing, streaming with perspiration, in spite of the December cold. He had lost sight of the lights of the house, and was barging among trees and drifted snow. He heard a bump and a howl behind him; apparently his pursuer had slipped, and landed in the snow. Bunter tore on. A bank of snow appeared before him, dim in the gloom. He

clambered over it desperately, and the next moment, with a yell of terror, he felt himself falling through space.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. Way In!



BILLY BUNTER yelled.

It was enough to make any fellow yell.

He had clambered over the snowbank, expecting to continue his wild fight beyond.

was evidently this old well into which he had pitched.

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bunter.

He was safe from the exasperated taximan. That was something. But he was aware that the old well was deep—very deep. And he realised, with a shudder, that had it not been half-choked with snow his fall would have caused him very serious damage indeed.

As it was, the snow had broken his fall. He had dropped upon it almost as softly as on a bed of down, and he was undamaged, though nearly buried. He scrambled up, slipped, rolled over, and found himself in utter darkness, on cold earth, that was free from snow.

He sat up and spluttered

It dawned upon him that he had, by a strange chance, discovered a secret of Mauleverer Towers that was unknown to the proprietor.

The ancient well, he knew, had not been used for centuries; not the remotest trace was left of bucket or chain or windlass. It was simply a relic of the past, and probably it had never occurred to anyone to descend it—there was no imaginable reason for doing so. Bunter certainly would not have descended if he could have helped it—and nobody but the short-sighted Owl of Greyfriars would have blundered into it.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

He struck another match.

Obviously the passage in which he

Instead of which, he had plunged headlong into an unseen and unsuspected opening and shot downwards into the interior of the solid round globe.

Bump!

Bunter landed.

"Oooooogh!"

He sat in thick snow and gasped.

What had happened and where he was, he did not know for some moments. His first impression was that he was killed; but even Bunter's fat intellect quickly realised that this was not the case. His second impression, swiftly following the first, was that he was half killed, crippled, smashed, and dislocated. But even this proved to be unfounded. And he realised at last that he had fallen into deeply piled snow, and was not hurt at all, save for the knocking out of all his breath.

And his breath came back.

"Oooooogh!" murmured Bunter.

Then he was silent. If that enraged taximan was still searching for him, Bunter did not want to give him a clue. And he suspected that the man would go on searching; for there was no doubt that the taximan had been in a bad temper—obviously annoyed about something!

Having recovered some of his breath and made the happy and interesting discovery that he was not damaged, Bunter blinked about him. He was at the bottom of a circular opening in the earth, of which the sides appeared to be bricked. The top was open to the sky, and the opening was surrounded by a stone wall, covered now with snow, which Bunter, in the gloom, had scrambled over, without knowing what it was. But now he realised what had happened. From a former visit to Mauleverer Towers he remembered that there was an ancient well, long since dried up, in the grounds, a couple of hundred yards from the house, and it



Bunter struck a match and examined the panel of the haunted turret before closing it. Then, pressing a fat finger on the carved lion's head, he discovered that it concealed the spring that worked the secret panel.

Round him was deep darkness, and a noisome smell of earth and closeness. It was a narrow opening, through which he had rolled, and the snow glimmered outside, almost choking it.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bunter.

He fumbled in his pocket for a match-box.

He blinked round him in amazement in the flickering light of a match. It was not, as he might have supposed, a gap broken by the passage of time in the bricked side of the old well, into which he had rolled. It was a narrow passage, with bricked walls, leading away into dense darkness.

His little round eyes almost bulged through his big round spectacles in his astonishment.

stood led somewhere. It was one of the secret passages that were known to exist at Mauleverer Towers, though all knowledge of them had long been lost.

Billy Bunter's intellect was not of the brightest. But even Bunter could guess that this secret passage leading out to the old well under the trees could only have been planned as a secret way of escape from the mansion—in the old days when builders put in secret passages in a nobleman's residence as a matter of course. If that was the case—as certainly it must be—the passage led to the mansion.

Bunter grinned.

He had trusted to luck—and it looked as if luck was befriending him!

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There was no way up from the well, except by shouting for help—a method that was more likely to attract the exasperated taximan than anyone else after dusk. Bunter seemed to have found a way out without going up.

Scratching match after match, he trod cautiously along the narrow passage. It was so narrow that the fat Owl scraped the sides as he went.

"Ow!"

He uttered a sudden ejaculation as he banged a fat shin on a stone step.

Holding up another match, he saw a flight of narrow steps winding upwards spirally, disappearing into gloom.

Very carefully he tested the steps before he ventured to mount. But they were as solid as in the ancient days when the masons had laid them—solid as rock.

Slowly, but steadily, the fat Owl clambered up the steps.

He could have no doubt now that the secret passage led into the house. The spiral stair could mean nothing else.

Up and up he went, puffing and blowing and gasping with his exertions. Bunter did not like stairs; he had too much weight to carry up. But he clambered on manfully.

It seemed to him that the spiral stair would never end. He knew that he must have passed beyond the level of the ground—the stair wound on upwards in the thickness of an ancient wall. Match after match lighted him on his way.

Everything has an end, and the spiral stair ended at last. It ended in a small stone cell, and Bunter, gasping for breath, leaned on the wall and rested in the darkness.

Silence as of the tomb had reigned round him during his ascent. But as he stood breathing hard and deep, leaning on the wall, sounds came to his ears.

He started and listened.

It was the sound of voices that reached him.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

Evidently he was within the mansion. A murmur of voices came to him, and then they came more clearly, as if the speakers were approaching. And he grinned as he recognised the tones of the Famous Five. Harry Wharton & Co. were within a few feet of him!

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter.

There was a wall between him and the juniors. So far as he had seen by the flickering match the walls surrounding him were of solid stone blocks. But it was clear that the sound of voices did not come through solid stone; in some spot the wall was thinner.

Bunter did not venture to strike another match lest a gleam of light should betray him. But he felt his way along the wall, and felt an opening in the stone.

It was a narrow doorway—or, rather, recess.

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He groped into it. His fat fingers came in contact with cold, hard wood.

This obviously was the way in.

And now the voices in the room beyond came clearly to his ears, muffled by the thick oak, but easily distinguished.

Bunter grinned as he listened, hearing every word as the chums of the Remove in the turret-room discussed the ghost of Mauleverer Towers and the possible consequences of tapping on the wall.

Then came the tap.

And Bunter groaned.

He gave a deep, hair-raising groan—partly because the beasts jolly well deserved to be frightened, partly because he wanted to frighten them away from the spot while he searched for a way in unseen.

He grinned in the darkness as he overheard the breathless discussion that followed that unexpected groan.

Then, to his great relief, he heard the sound of receding footsteps and a closing door.

They were gone!

The Owl of the Remove waited till all was silent. Then he struck a match and examined the recess in the stone wall.

He remembered the story Lord Mauleverer had told in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars. That story, he had no doubt, was true; for this was the mysterious way out of the turret by

which the Red Earl had escaped the king's pursuivants in those far-off days. Where there was a way out there was a way in, and Bunter had only to look for it.

By the light of matches he blinked over the thick black oak that closed the recess. He found a large knob.

Grasping it, he pulled.

A panel in the oak came open so suddenly that the fat Owl almost sat down.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped.

He recovered himself and put his head through the opening in the wall. The room beyond was dark, only a pale glimmer coming in the tall slits of window from the December dusk without.

Bunter clambered through.

He struck another match and blinked round him. He chuckled. He knew where he was now—in the haunted turret-room.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter. "If they jolly well knew!"

He struck several more matches to examine the panel before he closed it. The old oak was strangely and grotesquely carved, and Bunter found a lion's head, corresponding to the knob on the other side. Evidently this concealed the spring that worked the panel.

Having found the secret—easy enough when the secret door was open—Bunter snapped the panel shut. He knew how to open it again now if he needed to retreat. But he was not thinking of

retreat. He would not need to use the panel unless the beasts came back—which they were not likely to do. And he did not intend to leave the turret-room yet. His presence in Mauleverer Towers was not to be discovered until it was too late to kick him out.

Fortunately—with great forethought, in fact—he had expended a couple of shillings out of the pound he had borrowed from the taximan on toffee and chocolates. He sat down in the turret-room and proceeded to munch toffee and chocolates alternately—deriving considerable comfort therefrom, as well as from the reflection that that unpleasant and disrespectful and suspicious taximan was probably still hunting for him in the snow and darkness.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Where is Bunter?



"Y lord!"

"Yaas, Por-

son?"
"A—hem—a—a, person desires to see your lordship." Person coughed apologetically, apparently fully realising how cheeky it

was of any "person" to desire to see his lordship.

"Yaas," yawned Lord Mauleverer.

He sat up.

Harry Wharton & Co. were grouped before a crackling log fire, and Lord Mauleverer had stretched his noble and elegant limbs on a settee. The Greyfriars fellows were in an apartment which had anciently been an armoury, and which was used by Mauly as a "den"—a rather magnificent den, with trophies of arms on the walls, and suits



(From the Editor):

The words, "A Merry Christmas!"
How frequently they're spoken.
Like promises, they're sometimes meant,
But very often broken.

Three words! And very cheap to print.
You read the same words yearly.
Read them again—they come from one
Who writes them most sincerely.

Your EDITOR.

(From Frank Richards):

Sometimes I think a tale I write
May make some reader's Christmas
bright,
And "fill one home with glee."
If any tale of mine has brought
My readers happiness, the thought
Brings far more joy to me.

With sincere wishes for a right royal
time this Christmas.

FRANK RICHARDS.

(From the Office-Boy):

When I asked the boss for a Christmas
Box
He gave me one—on the ear!
So I wishes to all, but the Edditor,
Merry Chrissmas and Happy Noo
Year!

of armour worn in bygone days by dead-and-gone Mauleverers reflecting the bright glow of the fire.

"Who is it, Porson?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "I'm rather busy just now—in fact, frightfully busy."

Whereat the Greyfriars fellows grinned. Lord Mauleverer was "busy" in taking a rest before dinner. But that, no doubt, was very important.

"The person's name is Brown, my lord," said the butler of Mauleverer Towers. "He is the driver of a taxi-cab."

"One of you men phoned for a taxi?" asked Mauly.

The Famous Five shook their heads.

"The—the person states that he has driven from Surrey to-day, my lord, with a passenger who told him that he was a guest of your lordship's," said Porson. "He is—hem!—a little excited. He states that his passenger jumped from the cab in your lordship's grounds, and, to use his own expression, my lord, bilked him."

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The same thought occurred to all the juniors at once. A passenger from Surrey who had bilked the taximan was not likely to be anybody but William George Bunter.

"I have informed the person, my lord, that your lordship can know nothing of any such matter. But—"

"Show him in," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Very well, my lord!"

Apparently Porson had done his best to "shoo" away the taxi-driver, but that person had refused to be "shoo'ed" away. His fare had vanished in Lord Mauleverer's grounds, and no doubt the hapless taximan nourished a hope of collecting his money from somebody.

Porson showed him into the armoury. Lord Mauleverer rose gracefully to greet him. Cap in hand, with a very red face, the taximan blinked at the schoolboy earl.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "Sorry to trouble anybody. But a man can't afford to lose twelve pounds, sir, if he can help it."

"Hardly," agreed Lord Mauleverer.

"The bloke had your name quite pat, sir, and your address, too, and I s'pose you know something of him," said the taximan. "Picked me up at Reigate, in Surrey, this bloke did, and tells me to drive him to Wharton Lodge this morning, sir."

"Wharton Lodge?" ejaculated Harry.

"Yes, sir. Then he tells me he's missed his friends and is going on to Hampshire, sir."

"The fat villain!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"I see you know him, sir. Fat he is. Never saw such a cove with so much on his bones, if he's got any bones. A fat bloke in specs," said the taximan. "I don't know his name, but I'd know him again if I see him anywhere. Borrowed a pound of me on the way, he did."

"That's Bunter!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The Bunterfulness is terrific!"

"And I drives in at your gates, sir," said the indignant taximan, "and he jumps out and dodges away, with me after him, sir, guessing what he was up to. I been hunting for him for a whole hour and more, but he's got away. But what struck me, sir, was that he never hooked it out of the gates. He's still about somewhere, so I reckoned he might be known here, sir."

GREYFRIARS HEROES.

No. 12.

In keeping with the spirit of Christmas the Greyfriars Rhymester has selected a seasonable subject in Larry Lascelles' hero—Charles Dickens, the famous author of "A Christmas Carol."

THE hero of Larry Lascelles
Is the hero of hundreds of
others—
Young men love the tales that
he tells,
And grandfathers, sisters, and mothers.
All sorts and conditions of folk
Are fond of the books he has written,
For laughter and tears they evoke
From every odd corner of Britain.

Pick up any novel or book
Which has come from the pen of
Charles Dickens;
You may not care much at first look,
But after your interest quickens
You'll read from beginning to end,
And when you have read it again, you
Will feel you've discovered a friend
You know will indeed entertain you.

Now Larry Lascelles is a judge
Of writings of classical order;
He revels in *Barnaby Rudge*,
And laughs himself hoarse at
Micawber,



"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer. "Fat fellow, as broad as he is long—what?"

"That's him, sir!"

"With a big pair of specs, and a face like—like—like an over-ripe tomato?" asked Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully.

"I see you know him, sir," said the taximan. "And if he's here, sir—seeing as he told me he was a guest here—"

"Not at all! But I'm glad you've mentioned the matter," said Lord Mauleverer. "How much has he bilked you of?"

"There was a pound from Reigate to Wharton Lodge, and ten quid for the drive to this place, sir, and a quid he borrowed—"

"Bunter doesn't do things by halves!" murmured Nugent.

"That's twelve pounds, sir," said the taximan, "and bilked at the finish! If I get 'old of him—"

"You're not likely to get hold of him, Mr. Brown," said Lord Mauleverer, shaking his head. "I feel convinced that he will never let you see him again if he can possibly help it. But you need not waste your time looking for him, as I'm sure he hasn't any money, even if you found him."

The taximan breathed very hard.

"But if he's a friend of yours, sir—"

"He isn't!"

"If he's here—"

"Thank goodness, he isn't! If he



At *Pickwick*, *Sam Weller* and *Pell*,
At *Snodgrass* and *Tupman* and
Winkle.
When he's reading that masterpiece—
well,
You ought to see Larry's eyes twinkle!

At Christmas-time in the deluge
Of happiness, Dickens has merits.
What chap hasn't heard of old *Scrooge*
Who went for a walk with the spirits?
Of *Gabriel Grub* all have heard—
That cross-grained, hard-bitten old
sexton,
Who was collared by goblins, and feared
What adventure he'd find himself next
on.

The hero of Christmas is he,
As well as the hero of Larry;
He captured the spirit of glee,
And showed us all how to be merry.
And then we must never forget
The evils that Dickens has banished;
He laughed at our prisons for debt,
And shamed them until they all
vanished.

His books may each reader enjoy,
And may he delight in perusing
The works in which grown-up and boy
Can find something fresh and
amusing;
Like Larry Lascelles, we may find
In Dickens the joy we are after,
And take all our cares from our mind
In the pleasure of light-hearted
laughter.

turns up here, I'm relyin' on my friends to kick him out!"

"Depend on us, old bean!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The kickfulness will be terrific!"

"I ain't losing twelve pounds!" said the taximan, showing signs of excitement.

"Certainly not!" agreed Lord Mauleverer soothingly. "That would be rather hard cheese, by Jove! But you're really not likely to get it out of Bunter, so perhaps you would not object to my payin' it?"

Lord Mauleverer looked inquiringly at the taximan. The taximan looked at Lord Mauleverer. Really, there was no doubt on the subject, and the inquiry was superfluous.

"You're a gentleman, sir!" said the taximan.

"Thank you very much!" said Lord Mauleverer urbanely. "I believe I've got a wallet somewhere. Yaas, here it is. Let me see. Two fivers and two pound notes—I mean three. That's right—what? Porson!"

"Yes, my Lord?"

"This gentleman has driven from Surrey to-day. A very long and cold drive in this weather, Porson. You will see that he has refreshment before he drives home, Porson."

"Yes, my lord!"

It was a happy taximan who followed
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Porson, though still troubled with a lingering desire to get hold of his late passenger.

Lord Mauleverer sank down on the settee again.

"There's time for a walk round before dinner," remarked Bob Cherry, with a glance at his chums.

"Yes, rather!" said Harry Wharton. Lord Mauleverer grinned, and did not inquire what his guests were going to look for when they walked round.

They looked for Bunter. Naturally, it did not occur to them that the fat Owl was within the walls of the mansion, biding his time till it was safe to put in an appearance. Had they guessed that, undoubtedly Billy Bunter would have taken a prompt departure, with five boots to help him on his way.

As it was, they looked for him in vain. At dinner that evening Lord Mauleverer had rather a thoughtful look. But if he feared an announcement of the arrival of a visitor he was agreeably disappointed. There was no announcement. Bunter, apparently, had vanished into space after landing at the Towers. And the Famous Five, loyally prepared to stand by their noble host to the extent of kicking William George Bunter a considerable distance on his homeward way, came to the conclusion that the fat Owl had decided, after all, to depart unbidden. Which showed that, even after their long experience of him, they did not quite know their Bunter.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Only Bunter!



NORE!

"My hat!"

Snore!

Harry Wharton stared blankly.

Hours in holiday-time were rather later than at school, and so it was past his usual bed-time

when Harry Wharton said good-night to his friends at his door and came into his room, and he was rather sleepy.

But sleepiness vanished at that unexpected sound from his bed.

He jumped and stared.

Wharton's room was large and comfortable, with a canopied bed of ancient solidity, and a log fire burning in an ancient grate. For a moment he fancied that he must have mistaken the room as he heard the sound of that deep and hefty snore. But it was his room, obviously already occupied. And as he wondered blankly who could be there, something familiar about that deep snore struck him. It was an old, familiar sound that he had often heard in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

"My only hat! Bunter!"

Snore!

Wharton stepped to the bed.

There lay a fat figure, fully dressed. Its eyes were shut and its mouth was open, and round the mouth were many smears of toffee and chocolate.

Harry Wharton gazed at that sprawling figure as if he could hardly believe his eyes—as, indeed, he hardly could.

"B-b-bunter!" he gasped.

The sight of the ghost of Mauleverer Towers could hardly have startled him more. He stared blankly at the snoring fat junior.

Bunter did not awaken. He had not gone to bed—apparently he had lain down to take a little rest, after which, of course, he had fallen asleep. Now he was deep in slumber and snoring away at a terrific rate.

"Bunter! How the thump—"

gasped Wharton. He seized the sprawling Owl by a fat shoulder and shook him. "Bunter! You fat scoundrel! What are you doing here? How did you get in, you villain?"

"Groooogh!"

"Wake up, you fat burglar!"

"Oooooogh!"

Billy Bunter's eyes opened, and he blinked at Wharton over his big spectacles. He sat up on the bed.

"Oh! You!" he grunted. "I thought this was your room, old chap. I say, you're jolly late up to bed, ain't you? I'm hungry!"

"How did you get in here?" roared Wharton.

The Owl of the Remove rubbed his sleepy eyes, blinked at him, and grinned. Billy Bunter had no intention of explaining how he had got into Mauleverer Towers. That little secret was his own. That unknown and unsuspected "way in" might come in useful again, if Bunter did not receive the hearty Christmas welcome which so agreeable a fellow had a natural right to expect.

"Oh, I just walked in!" he answered airily.

"Did Porson let you in?"

"Eh! Yes! Exactly!" Bunter chuckled. "Just that, old chap."

"Then I'd better ring for him to show you out again!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You fat villain! You must have sneaked in somehow without being seen!" growled the captain of the Remove. "Mauly doesn't know you're here."

"Go and tell him, old chap—in fact, bring him here," said Bunter. "I want to see Mauly. I want some supper."

Harry Wharton went to the door. Evidently Lord Mauleverer had to know that his unexpected visitor had, after all, arrived.

Bunter rolled off the bed, grinning. It was too late for him to be turned out, he felt sure of that. Mauly was a beast, but not such an inhospitable beast as that. He was safe for the night, and he relied on his fat wits for the rest. The matter of the most pressing immediate concern was supper. Toffee and chocolates were all very well; but there was an aching void inside Bunter that a Christmas dinner could hardly have filled.

"Oh gad!"

He heard Lord Mauleverer's voice.

The schoolboy ear came in, and after him came the Famous Five. All the Co. were amazed by the news that Bunter was there. They stared at him as if he had been the ghost of a fat owl.

"How did the villain get in?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, glad to see me?" asked Bunter affably. "I've had a nap while I waited for you to come up to bed. But, I say, I'm hungry. Mauly, old man, what about supper?"

"You fat sweep!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"How did you get here?"

"Friend of mine gave me a lift in his car from Surrey—one of my titled relations, in fact," grinned Bunter. "Quite a good run, in my friend's Rolls. What are you grinning at?"

"Your titled relation's stuck Mauly for the taxi fare!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter started.

"Oh crumbs! Did that beastly taxi-man come up to the house? What a nerve! I—I thought he'd gone. I suppose he's gone now, if Mauly paid him. I'll settle with you after the hols, Mauly. I'm expecting a good many

rather substantial Christmas tips—from my titled relations, you know. I say, what about supper?"

"Say the word, Mauly, and we'll sling him out for you" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"The slingfulness is the proper caper!"

"Look here, you shut up!" said Bunter. "Mauly was expecting me here for Christmas, weren't you, old chap?"

"Yaas," groaned Lord Mauleverer. "I was afraid so."

"Oh, really, Mauly! If I'm not welcome here," said Bunter, with dignity, "I'll go at once, of course! I hope I'm not the fellow to butt in where I'm not wanted. You've only to say the word, Mauly."

"Oh, good! I'll order the car, then," said Lord Mauleverer, brightening up. "I'll let the chauffeur take you all the way home to Surrey, Bunter."

"Of course, it's too late to-night," said Bunter calmly. "We'll talk it over to-morrow, shall we? What about supper?"

Lord Mauleverer breathed hard and deep.

"Let's kick him out, Mauly," urged Johnny Bull.

"Well, it's rather late," murmured Mauly, "and—and—the car can run him home to-morrow. And—and—I'll tell Porson to fix up a room for you to-night, Bunter, and—and some supper and—and—"

"That's all right, old chap. I don't want much—a cold chicken or two, and some beef, and—"

"Come along!"

"Certainly, old chap!"

Billy Bunter followed Lord Mauleverer from the room. He gave the Famous Five a triumphant blink as he went.

He was feeling quite secure now. He was landed in Mauleverer Towers; and he had great sticking powers and great faith in them.

The chums of the Remove did not disperse to bed. They were not thinking of bed now—but of Bunter.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Only Way!



SAY, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton & Co., seated round the log fire in Wharton's room, glanced round as Bunter rolled in.

It was an hour later; but the

juniors had not yet gone to bed. And Bunter had been busy. His fat face shone, and his breathing was a little stertorous. Apparently he had done well at supper.

He grinned as he rolled in. He seemed to be in a cheerful and expansive mood—which was not shared by the Famous Five.

"Well, you fat sweep!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, I've had rather a decent supper," said Bunter cheerfully. "Not like what I should have had at Bunter Court—but pretty decent. Mauly's not here? Gone to bed, I suppose. I say, Mauly isn't ill, or anything, is he?"

"Not that I know of," said Harry.

"I've told him I'm sticking to him over the vac," said Bunter. "He seemed in low spirits about something, though. I say, you fellows, I shall want some of you to lend me a few things.



Scarcely knowing what he did, Bunter grasped his pillow and made a frantic smite at the ghost. Crash! The sudden action on the fat junior's part seemed to take the ghost by surprise. It staggered back as the pillow landed and crashed on the oaken floor!

"I've come here without any luggage. I was going to ask Mauly; but he seems to have gone off to bed. I suppose you've got some pyjamas I can have, Wharton?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Oh, all right—I'll go and wake up Mauly—"

"You can have some pyjamas, fat-head!"

"Thanks! I'll get my things along later from Bunter Court. I say, you fellows, if my things don't arrive in time, I suppose I can rely on my old pals? Your evening clothes will fit me, Wharton—you won't mind if I slit the waistcoat up the back—I'm not bony like you, you know. I can do with shoes, Inky."

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—"

"I shall want some socks, and ties, and collars, and shirts, and things—but we'll arrange all that to-morrow—"

"You fat villain!" said Johnny Bull.

"That will do, Bull!" Bunter wagged a fat forefinger at Johnny. "I want you fellows to understand one thing—if you're staying on here—"

"If we're staying on here?" repeated Nugent.

"Yes; if you're staying on here for Christmas I shall expect you to be civil. I don't expect a lot from you in the way of manners, of course, but you simply must remember that you're not in the Remove passage at Greyfriars

now. There's going to be a lot of company here over Christmas, and people will know that we belong to the same school, and so I don't want you fellows to let me down."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Hazeldene will be coming, and bringing his sister Marjorie," went on Bunter. "Some of the other Cliff House girls, too. I don't want you butting in too much when Marjorie's here, Cherry."

Bob Cherry opened his lips, and closed them again.

"Marjorie can't stand you, you know," said Bunter, blinking at him. "You'd better not get asking her for a dance, or anything like that. I'm going to look after Marjorie, and give her a good time here. The fact is she's only coming because I told her I should be here."

"I'm going to kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Shut up, Bull! If you can't behave yourself here I shall ask Mauly to give you a hint to clear," said Bunter. "I'm blessed if I quite know what he's asked you for—I suppose you wangled it somehow."

"What?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"If there's one thing I despise it's a fellow fishing for invitations and shoving himself in where he's not wanted," said Bunter scornfully.

"Oh, ye gods!"

"Not my style," said Bunter. "But you fellows would hardly understand, of

course—you're not sensitive. Trot out those pyjamas, Wharton, and I'll get off to bed—I'm sleepy."

The captain of the Remove, in silence, sorted out pyjamas, and Bunter put them over a fat arm and departed.

"My esteemed and idiotic chums," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh, as soon as the door closed on Bunter. There was a thoughtful wrinkle in the dusky brow of the Nabob of Bhanipur. "My ridiculous friends, a wheezy idea has occurred to my idiotic brain."

"Nothing doing!" grunted Johnny Bull. "You can't think of a way of making Bunter come unstuck?"

The nabob grinned.

"The esteemed Bunter is a terrifico funk," he remarked, "and there is an honourable and ridiculous ghost that haunts this idiotic mansion."

"Fathead! I jolly well wish there was a ghost, and that he would scare that fat scoundrel into fits! But there isn't!"

"There are more ways of killing an absurd cat than the chokefulness with cream," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "If the ridiculous ghost should walk to-night—"

"There isn't a ghost to walk, ass!"

"But an esteemed ghost might be manufactured, my worthy Johnny, for the benefit of the absurd Bunter."

"Oh!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

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"Good old Inky! If the jolly old Red Earl dropped in on Bunter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

"We can bag his old suit of armour from Mauly's den!" exclaimed Bob.

"And the jolly old ghost can walk!" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not a word to Mauly, though!" chuckled Bob. "We're going to do good by stealth—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Five grinning faces reflected the glow of the fire—five cheery heads were put together. And while the chums of the Remove discussed that startling wheeze for causing William George Bunter to come "unstuck" a deep sound from the distance reached their ears, like the rumble of distant thunder, or the breaking of surf on a rocky shore. Billy Bunter was asleep—and snoring!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost Walks!



CLANG!

Billy Bunter started in his sleep.

It was past midnight.

The December night was dark and wintry. Round the

ancient turrets of Mauleverer Towers the wind howled and moaned. Snow, falling steadily, drifted against the casements, and piled thick on window-sills and ledges, on red old chimneys and creaking, leafless branches.

The ancient building was full of strange sounds—cracking of old wainscot, echoes of the winter wind, thudding of fallen stacks of snow that slid from slanting roofs. But Billy Bunter was deaf to the eerie sounds of midnight. Indeed, in Bunter's room such sounds were quite drowned by the nasal solo the fat Owl was putting up. Billy Bunter's snore was going strong.

But when that loud metallic clang rang through Bunter's room, even Bunter's snore took a second place.

Clang!

Bunter did not awaken. He was not easy to wake. But he started and shifted in his sleep.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Bunter's eyes opened. He awakened at last.

There was a log-fire burning in the wide, old-fashioned hearth. It was burning low at this late hour, with a deep red glow from the heart of the embers, and occasionally a leap of blaze. It shed a dim light through the room.

Bunter blinked round sleepily.

Something had awakened him. He lifted his fat face from the pillow, and blinked round to ascertain the cause.

Then he gave a jump.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He raised himself on a fat elbow, and blinked. In the red glow a figure in armour appeared, passing with a heavy, clanking stride between Bunter and the fire.

The armour-clad figure clanked on, and disappeared in the shadows. Bunter lay on his fat elbow, transfixed.

Was he dreaming?

He had been dreaming while he slept, but not of the ghost of Mauleverer Towers. He had dreamed of turkeys, of mince-pies, and Christmas pudding—a happy dream, which had caused him

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to smile in his slumber. Was this a dream, of dreadful reality?

With a shaking fat hand he groped for his spectacles, jammed them on his fat little nose, and blinked again.

Clank! Clank! Clank!

From the shadows by the farther wall the armour-clad figure came clanking back, again passing between Bunter and the red glow of the fire.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles.

It was the figure of a knight of old, clad in armour from head to foot, the barred vizor closed.

Clank! Clank! Clank!

The old oaken planks of the floor rang to the heavy stride.

Bunter scarcely breathed.

Bunter did not believe in ghosts—not in the daylight, at all events. At midnight, in the gloom and solitude, it was a different matter. Ghosts did not seem so improbable then.

Bunter remembered, with a shudder, the ghost story Lord Mauleverer had related in the Remove dormitory. At Christmas-time, when the winter winds howled, and the winter snows gleamed on roof and sill, the ghost of the Red Earl was wont to walk its ancient round, and the touch of its icy fingers spelled death to the hapless beholder. Bunter, with his eyes starting through his spectacles, watched the ghostly figure as it clanked on towards the door. From the bottom of his fat heart, he hoped to see it vanish through the door.

But, at the door, it turned and came clanking back.

This time it did not pace across the room before the fire. It paced towards Bunter's bed.

"Ow!"

It was a terrified squeak from the fat Owl.

Nearer and nearer came the armour-clad figure, towering over the fat junior as he lay blinking in terror through his big spectacles.

It halted by the bedside.

A gauntleted hand was raised, pointing at Bunter's fat, scared face. To Bunter's horror, the out-stretched hand approached closer and closer to his fat nose.

"Ow! Help! Fire! Murder! Keep off!" yelled Bunter.

Scarcely knowing what he did, the fat junior grasped his pillow, and made a frantic smite at the ghost of Mauleverer Towers.

Crash!

That sudden action on Bunter's part seemed to take the ghost by surprise.

It staggered back as the pillow landed, slipped, and stumbled over, and there was a terrific crash of armour as it landed on its back on the oaken floor. That terrific crash rang far and wide.

"Ow! Help!" yelled Bunter.

"Ooooooogh!" came a gurgling gasp from within the closed helmet of the ghost.

Bunter did not heed it—if he heard. He leaped from the bed and darted to the door.

Bunter's movements were not often swift, especially after supper. Now he crossed the room at about seventy miles per hour.

He reached the door, tore it open, and dashed out into the corridor.

Crash! Bump! Thud!

"Ow! Oh, my hat!"

"What the thump—"

"Oh crikey!"

The dusky corridor outside was not deserted, as Bunter had naturally supposed it would be at that hour of the night. Four shadowy figures were gathered close by Bunter's door, and

the fat junior hurtled into the midst of them, knocking them right and left.

"Ow! Wow! What the merry thump—"

"Who the thunder—"

"What the terrific dickens—"

"Ow! Oh crikey!" spluttered Bunter. "Ow! Help! Ghosts! Murder! Fire! Rescue! Help!"

He clutched at a shadowy figure as he stumbled and fell, and dragged it down in his fall. There was a wild howl in Frank Nugent's voice.

"Oh, my hat! Leggo! Ow!"

"Help! Ghosts!" yelled Bunter. "Keep off! Help!"

"Oh, you fat idiot!"

"It's Bunter—"

"Oh! I say, you fellows!" Bunter recognised the voices at last. "I say, gerraway! It's the ghost! I say, help! Oh crikey! Get a light! I say, don't stop me! Oh crumbs! Ow!"

He scrambled to his feet. Frank Nugent lay gasping on the floor. Three other fellows were staggering breathlessly. A door opened farther along the corridor, the door of Lord Mauleverer's room, and a light shone out. The terrific din had awakened his lordship. Mauly, in a dressing-gown, peered out in amazement.

"Good gad! What the dooce—"

"Ow! Help! Ghosts!" yelled Bunter.

"What the dickens—"

"Ow! Save me!" yelled Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer switched on the corridor light, and came hurrying up in amazement. Frank Nugent picked himself up. The four chums looked at one another—expressively Bob Cherry was not to be seen. Billy Bunter clutched Lord Mauleverer's arm.

"I say, it's the ghost!" he gurgled. "I say, ring for Porson! Order the car! Do you hear! I'm not staying here! I'm going! I—"

"Good gad! But what—"

"I tell you I'm going!" howled Bunter. "I tell you I won't stay in this beastly place another minute! Ow! I'm going home! You can keep your beastly ghosts! Ow!"

"My dear man, there isn't any ghost!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Nothin' of the sort! It's your supper—"

"You silly idiot!"

"The second chicken, you know—"

"I tell you I saw it!" shrieked Bunter. "It's in the room now! I tell you I'm going! Oh dear! I won't stay here another minute! Ow!"

Bunter blinked round in terror at the open doorway.

Clank! Clank! Clank!

"It's coming!" yelled Bunter. "Look out! Help!" He dodged round Lord Mauleverer, still clinging to his startled lordship.

"Good gad! What—"

Clank! Clank! It was not the clanking stride of the armour-clad figure, however. It sounded as if the steel-clad ghost was beating a tattoo on the oaken planks.

"But what—" gasped Mauleverer. "Let go, you fat duffer—"

"Help!"

Clank, clank! Clatter! Crash!

"Help! Keep it off!"

"Lend a hand here, you silly asses!" came a half-suffocated voice. "For goodness' sake lend a fellow a hand!" "That's Bob!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

"Ow! It's the ghost! Ow! Help!"

Lord Mauleverer reached into the room and switched on the electric light. He stared blankly into the doorway. The sudden illumination revealed quite a strange scene.

A figure in complete armour was stretched on the oaken floor. It was making frantic efforts to rise; but in vain. The armour clanked and crashed, and rattled and clattered, as it strove to get on its feet. But, as often happened to knights in ancient days when once they lost their footing, the "ghost" could not get up. Imprisoned in the heavy, cumbersome armour, it sprawled, and struggled in vain to resume the perpendicular.

"Who—who—What—" gasped Mauleverer.

"Ow! Lend a fellow a hand, can't you?" yelled the ghost. "I can't get up in these beastly things! Can't you help a chap, somebody? This blinking helmet is suffocating me! I can't get it off! I can't get up! Are you going to leave me like this all night, you dummies!"

It was the voice of Bob Cherry, in tones of considerable excitement.

Clank! Clatter! Bang!

"Oh gad! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mauleverer.

"I say, you fellows—"

The armour-clad figure heaved itself up with a terrific effort. But it slipped and rolled over again, with a terrific crash. There was a frantic yell from the closed vizor.

"Ow! Oh crikey! Will you help a chap, you dummies? Will you give a man a hand, you fatheads?"

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. There was a gasp from Bunter—a gasp of relief and comprehension. Even Billy Bunter was not likely to believe that a genuine ghost would talk in that strain and in the well-known voice of Robert Cherry.

Bunter grinned.

"I say, you fellows, 'tain't a ghost!"

gaped Bunter. "It's that silly ass Cherry, playing the goat—he, he, he!"

"The game's up!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"The upfulness is terrific!"

Crash! Clank! Clatter!

"Will you lend me a hand?" came in concentrated tones from the unfortunate ghost. "Will you help a chap, you dummies?"

"He, he, he!"

The Co. ran to the aid of the ghost. They grasped the armour-clad figure, and, with a combined effort, dragged it up. They got the barred vizor open, and Bob Cherry's crimson face was revealed in the light. He was gasping spasmodically.

"You silly asses! Why couldn't you help me up?"

"You silly ghump! What did you want to sprawl over for?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"How could I help it, you fathead, when that fat scoundrel biffed me with a pillow—"

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter was himself again now. He rolled back into the room, grinning.

"But what's the game?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "What the thump are you doin' in my jolly old ancestor's armour, Bob? It's a bit heavy for walkin' about in, isn't it?"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "The silly ass was playing ghost! He fancied that he was going to frighten me! He, he, he!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mauleverer.

"Trying to frighten a fellow away!" chuckled Bunter. "Not likely to frighten me! I've got pluck—"

He broke off with a yell, as Bob

Cherry—safe on his feet once more—made a clanking stride towards him.

"Here, you keep off! Beast! Keep off!" Bunter dodged round the bed.

"I say, Mauly, keep him off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it, old man!" chuckled Lord Mauleverer, catching Bob by the arm. "I catch on, and I'm much obliged, but chuck it! This way, old bean, and for goodness' sake don't tread on my feet."

The ghost of the Red Earl was led out of Bunter's room, much to Billy Bunter's relief. Its clanking stride died away down the corridor. Harry Wharton & Co. gave the fat Owl an expressive look, and followed. Bunter blinked after them from the doorway, grinning.

"I say, you fellows! Try it on again, if you like! He, he, he! I knew it was a jape, all the time! He, he, he! You can't pull my leg, you know! He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter, chuckling, closed his door, and this time he locked it. Then he went back to bed. A minute later his deep snore was once more awakening the echoes of Mauleverer Towers.

Billy Bunter had not "come unstuck," after all. It had been a near thing; but he was still sticking. The ghost had walked in vain, and Billy Bunter cheerfully settled down at the Towers as a member of Lord Mauleverer's Christmas Party.

THE END.

(Now look out for the next yarn in this topping Christmas series, entitled: "THE UNKNOWN HAND!" It's a real corker, boys!)

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Reunited!

WHAT on earth is it, dad?" Silas Merger looked through the field-glasses his daughter Beryl handed him, and stared hard at the snake-like line of men advancing up the long avenue leading to his mansion on the shore of Lake Titicaca.

He thought it was a gang of convicts being drive along by their warders, until he focused the face of the youngster who was bringing up the rear.

"By th' great horn spoon, it's young Rick Dare and that Cockney engineer of his—what's his name? They've got nine or ten men all roped together like an old-time slave gang! What th' dooce has that young daredevil been up to? That kid's always up to mischief!"

When Rick and Alf Higgs arrived with their prisoners, and told their story of their long chase by the Flying-Bandit and the manner in which they had captured his gang and his wonderful wireless plane, however, Silas Merger and his guests could not make enough of them.

"I hope you've got over the idea that I'm a burglar, sir?" Rick asked at length.

"Gee, forgit it, lad!" cried the old Westerner, his face crimsoning. "I ought to have known better, but that bogus 'tec had sure hot me up with yarns. If I could only lay hands on him, I'd give him something to be goin' on with!"

Rick and Alf Higgs laughed.

Silas Merger looked at Rick's grimy face.

"Had a goodish tramp, lad, hey?" he asked.

"Sixty miles, sir, and most of it through virgin forest. But the worst of it was, either Alf or I had to be on guard night and day, otherwise some of those beauties might have thought fit to chance their arm and have a stab at getting away. Old Alf fairly put the wind up them by making the most bloodcurdling threats as to what he would do if any of them tried any hanky-panky, and kept asking me in a loud aside to let him shoot one or two as an example to the rest, and thereby save us the fag of looking after them!"

"Twarn't that so much as kep' 'em quiet, sir," grinned Alf, who was getting outside a large drink. "They looked on us as bein' unnatural bein's, 'avin' dropped five or six thahsand foot wi'out so much as crackin' th' shell, as yer might say. I told 'em we was wot they calls hinvulnerable, so that stopped 'em gittin' too saucy!"

The prisoners were bundled in a large cellar until such time as they could be

handed over to the authorities, and loud were their curses at the man who had left them in the lurch and escaped himself.

"Yer needn't fret yer fat abaht that," Alf assured them. "'E's nearly at th' hend of 'is tether, doncher forgit it. Me and th' young guv'nor's goin' arter 'im as soon as we've made hadequate harrangements, an' then Mister Oom will be no more!"

"By jinks, I couldn't have believed it possible!" cried Silas Merger, as Rick gave a minute description of their drop from the giant plane, and their sensations before the "angel's wings" cloak opened out. "You were absolutely risking a crash without knowing whether an untried invention would work or not—"

"Oh, as to that—old Tom's inventions always work, sir!" laughed Rick airily. "I wasn't a bit afraid of that. The only thing I didn't feel sure of was whether it would support two—"

"Ave a look at this 'ere snuff-box Oom gave me!" said Alf.

There was a roar of laughter as Rick told the story of the manner in which Alf had been discovered by the bandit, and of how the Cockney had eventually induced the American Commandant to "allow" them to take the plane.

"That box is pretty valuable, Senor Gomez, is it not?" Beryl asked a bald-headed old man who had been examining it very carefully.

Senor Gomez shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Alf.

"Its value as a jewelled gold box is perhaps forty, feefy t'ousand dollars, but as it is probably a heestorical piece it may be worth—just whatever a collector would like to geeve for it!"

"'Old me up!" muttered Alf. "I'd 'ave taken ten bob for it, heasy!"

As he cast his eyes skywards, the Cockney suddenly sat up with a fixed look and yelled:

"'Ere, look there—there's some feller shootin' th' moon, sure as I'm alive! Bust me, if it ain't old Tom!"

He vaulted over the railing of the veranda and rushed down the lawns towards the lake, waving his arms and yelling like a madman, while the remainder of the party stared skywards to see a small dot in the distance which gradually grew larger in the moon-light.

"It's a plane right enough, but how can he tell who's in it?" queried Silas.

"He can tell Tom's flyin' at first sight, and, by jingo, he's right!" shouted Rick excitedly, as the plane circled round the edge of the lake and then began a leisurely and graceful descent to the grassy slope. "Tom always lands like that—"

Rick was over the rail and rushing towards the plane by the time it landed, and, in a few minutes, was gripping his brother's hand and asking questions nineteen to the dozen.

"Why, 'ere's old Ham, large as life, an' twice as hugly!" crowed Alf, jumping up to grip the negro's huge paw. "Wot are yer givin' me yer left for?"

"Mah right hand's tem'pry out o' order, Mister Higgs!" replied Ham with great dignity. "Ah wuz wounded in a battle with de heathen back dar in de mountains—"

"Is there a doctor handy?" Tom asked, as the guests surged round to congratulate the young airman. "We've got two casualties. Terry Page is pretty badly wounded and wants immediate attention, and Ham stopped a fourpenny one, too!"

Luckily, one of the guests was a medical man, and in a very short time Terry was tacked comfortably away in bed. Then Tom had to give a detailed account of their escape from Oom's stronghold.

The guests listened in wonderment as he modestly related how he had succeeded in circumventing the Flying-Bandit's large force, and getting free at last, after smashing up his wireless power plant.

"It was you who gave him the final blow, then?" cried Rick. "Thank'ee, Tom! In another five minutes he'd have had us cold. You couldn't have done it better if you'd seen us trying to dodge him!"

"I couldn't see you, but I could hear you, old man," said Tom quietly. "At least, I didn't absolutely know it was you, of course; but I sort of had a hunch it might be, so I took the chance. The scoundrel's still at large, though. I shan't be happy until we've absolutely downed him for good and all, and smashed up his organisation and released his prisoners."

"Yes, he'll be able to fly back to his blessed stronghold in that De Hay bomber, and once there, he'll set to work to repair his wireless power and—"

"That's going to take him a month of Sundays!" grinned Tom. "I wrecked those good and proper. I studied the details of the plant, too, and I've got a scheme at the back of my mind for building one as powerful—perhaps even more so—in a very short time."

"We'll go into that in the morning, my boy," said Silas Merger briskly. "You've got workshops on your island; perhaps you could set up your plant there."

"Thank you, sir! I had an idea you'd look after the financial part of it," grinned Tom. "I've got all the plans

in my head. Oh by the way, we clipped Oom's wings a bit in another fashion! Would you mind having Ham up here for a minute, sir?"

Silas gave the order, and in a few minutes Ham, with a grin from ear to ear and his arm in a sling, sidled into the room. He was a bit nervous at first at being asked to present himself before "ladies an' gem'men," but Silas soon put him at his ease.

"It was really Ham who found out Oom's secrets which led to our eventually getting away," said Tom. "Now, Ham, bring forth the pretty things we got out of Oom's safe. Hope you haven't lost 'em?"

"No, Mass' Tom, no, sah. Ah done got ebbery one ob dem all safe an' sound."

He withdrew a large bandana handkerchief from his pocket, which fairly bulged with its valuable contents, whilst Tom produced another assortment. As they spread their loot on the table where the gorgeous jewels glittered in the rays of the electric, the guests fairly gasped with amazement.

"Of course, these will be handed over to the authorities and their owners traced," said Tom. "Luckily, I got possession of a sort of diary, in which is given details of every one of Oom's raids, so that the ownership of most of these can be traced. He's methodical, is Oom, the Terrible!"

Tom is Confident!

FOR the next two weeks the island in Lako Tititeaca was like a beehive. Practically the whole of Merger's household removed there, and a huge camp was formed of the workmen whom the millionaire had imported by the hundred, with Tom Dare in sole command.

The young airman inventor hardly went to bed at all himself, for he alone knew just what machinery was needed for setting up the powerful, yet simple, wireless plant which would transmit power to any part of the world.

With the backing of the millionaire and the enormously wealthy syndicate behind him, it was a simple matter to procure and assemble the delicate machinery which would send that wonderful force into the air, to be collected by the apparatus on board the plane.

Tom had a mind like a photographic plate when it came to machinery or aerial flying. He had stored away in his brain the exact arrangement of each and every "gadget" which went to make up that extraordinary powerhouse which had for so long been the heart and lungs of Oom's dastardly raids upon society.

Tom and Rick had several interviews with the chiefs of police and the other authorities who were so deeply interested in the Flying-Bandit's doings, but they were both mighty careful in what they said. They were determined that if anyone was to capture the World's Greatest Bandit, as he had been described, they were entitled to the honour, and in this Silas Merger backed them up.

Another reason for their seeming reticence was that in all honesty they did not actually know where the stronghold was situated. Even the very members of Oom's band were just as ignorant. They would have been perfectly willing to turn State's evidence had they known, for they one and all, were bitter against the chief whom they felt had betrayed them and left them in the lurch in the hour of need.

It must be remembered that when the brothers Dare were forcibly taken to the secret stronghold, they did not really know whether they were still on the South American continent or not.

Likewise, when Rick had been brought away by Oom for hours, all he had seen through porthole and transparent floor was the tops of mountains.

When Tom, with Ham and Terry Page, had escaped, it had been in the darkest hours, and they had been flying "blind." Before they could pick up any landmarks at all they had simply streaked away in a general eastwards direction, trusting to luck to get straight.

As a matter of fact, Tom declared, they very nearly flew away from South American altogether!

Tom made a rigorous search through the diaries and other documents he had taken from Oom's study. But gathered nothing from them as to the location of the stronghold.

"You can bet your life he was too smart to leave any evidence about for either his gang or prisoners to get hold of. When you come to think of it it

was easy enough for him to keep the place secret, for he could always do the actual piloting from that tiny wheelhouse sort of place in front of the cabin and next to the instrument-room, and though some of his men were real good engineers, they hadn't a dog's knowledge of navigation."

"That's so," agreed Rick. "And if you remember, the actual crew's quarters were sort of shut in by the formation of the plane. They'd never be able to see a thing of what was passing underneath them, and probably never troubled 'emself, either! They looked on Oom as a sort of omnipotent being, and stood in such awe of him and his science that they never thought of questioning him or thinking things out for themselves!"

"Yes, when we do get started we'll have to sort of fumble our way about in the Andes until we find some landmark that'll give us a clue," laughed Tom.

They had taken Alf and some of their expert mechanics to the forest, where the great plane was still lying derelict. Alf nosed around the engines and every part of the giant machine, and at last declared that he "twigged" how to run it.

"Simple as a dollar watch!" he declared, with grudging admiration. "Oom's a blinkin' thief, an' crooked as a dorg's 'ind leg, but give 'im 'is doo, 'o's a masterpiece at suckin' other's brains, and 'o's got all th' hup-to-datest gadgets gathered together in that 'ull wot's simple in haiction, but effective. Given th' power, I c'ud run them henginees blindfold—"

"You'll get the power all right, Alf, and in a very few days now," responded Tom confidently. "You'll be flying this plane with twice the power that Oom had on tap, take it from me!"

Rick felt a cold chill run through him at his brother's words, and he glanced at the pale and worn face of the young inventor, who had been sparing neither himself nor those who worked under his direction. He knew that Tom was getting but half the necessary amount of sleep, and was wearing himself to a shadow.

Still, what Tom had set out to do he would accomplish.

(Look out for another gripping instalment of this fine serial in next week's bumper CHRISTMAS WEEK ISSUE of the MAGNET, chums!)

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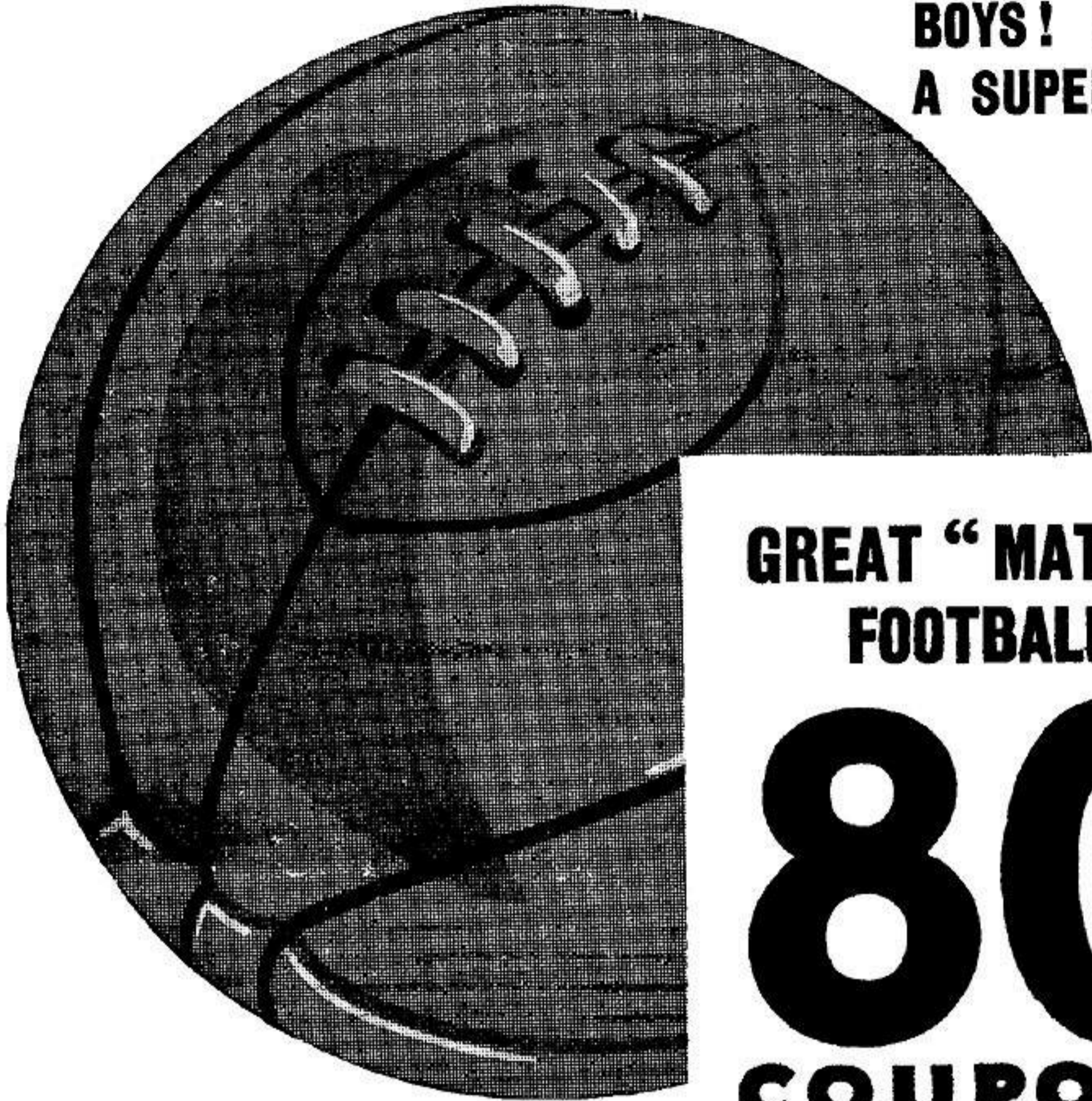
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*Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
A merry old soul was he,
He called for his pipe,
He called for a light,
And he called for his B.D.V.*



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Chree Cheers for Christmas

Greyfriars Goes Gay

Blow lessons! Just have a jolly good time! "Thank you, sir!" we gasped. A wild and whirling carnival was soon in progress. The fun was fast and furious. As soon as he saw that the enthusiasm was dying down a little, the Head raised his hand for silence.

"You may leave as soon as you begin to feel a little bored, boys!" he said. "You will find Goshing outside the door. He has been left instructions to present each boy with an orange and a bun on leaving!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!" we chanted.

Bunter led a rush for the door, and in a matter of moments the class-room had emptied. Of course, none of this is true. But we know our readers don't mind having their legs pulled once a year, do they?

Thanks, old beans! We thought you didn't!



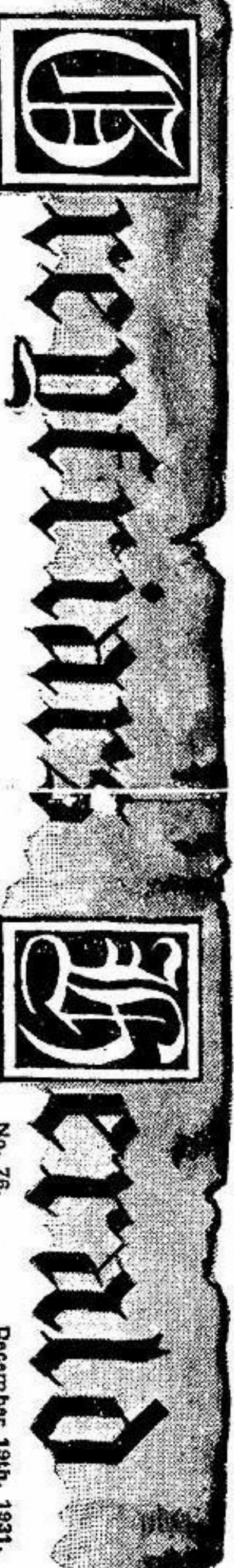
William Wibley, 6d.—The words of Mr. Wibley, son of a celebrated actor, must be read with respect. We gather from this book that the essential thing in running an amateur play is to see that you get in your party an actor of brilliant genius, then give him a free hand. Yes, but where is there such a genius? We asked Mr. Wibley yesterday, and his reply was: "Well, where do you think, you silly ass?" What that means we shall have to leave it to our readers to determine.

Give Books This Xmas

Latest Publications Reviewed

"QUIETUDE AND DEPORTMENT AT P.A.R." By W. G. Bunter. (Fishes Duplication Publishing Co., 44d.)—In this valuable book Mr. Bunter gives us the benefit of his extensive knowledge of how to be well-mannered at parties. One extract will suffice to indicate the nature of the information revealed by the author: "Don't, under any circumstances, ask for a seventh helping of anything until somebody else has had a second helping." A very useful present for a young man just entering society.

"PARLOUR GAMES AND TRICKS." By P. Bolsover. (Pentold's Publications, 7d.)—Indispensable to those who aspire to organize parties and entertainments. Our only criticism is that some of the games recommended by the author seem a little rough. In "Biffo," for instance, the players take it in turns to hit one of their number on the nose till he drops. Again, in "Walk



EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY TIS HAPPY CHRISTMASTIDE.

No. 76.

December 19th, 1931.

CO ALL YOU YOUNG RIPS!

'Eere's wishin' you all a Very Merry Christmas an' a Bright an' Prosperous New Year. Wat I say is this 'ere: I shall be on dooty at the gates all day on Breakin'-up Day, if any young gent wants to see me particular. Mind you, I ain't suggestin' nothin', but if any young gent offers me five bob or so, I shan't turn 'im down!

Yours respectful,
 WM. GOSLING.

Make Your House-party a Success

How to Do It - - By Harold Skinner

see if they make friends! You may find that this results in a slightly strained atmosphere. This gives you a chance of playing a few practical jokes. Hand round cardboard biscuits, wooden rolls, and so on; signal to the servants to spill the soup over people's heads and tip sauce down their necks. Very soon the welkin will be ringing again!

Dinner being over, organise games. Insist on everybody joining in. If two fellows sneak off for a quiet chat or a game of chess, make up your mind that they're not enjoying themselves, and see that they do enjoy themselves.

When bedtime comes and your guests reluctantly tear themselves away from the fun, jape them all, so that the evening ends with a final laugh. Put a hedgehog in one bed, a clockwork mouse in another, load water-bottles in another. They'll simply roar!



Finally, in the middle of the night, dress up as a ghost and trot round, waking them up and giving them a real nocturnal thrill!

It's all quite simple, you see. Of course, it needs a good deal of hard work on your part; but when you see the happy smiles on the faces of your guests when they say good-bye you'll feel amply repaid.

We don't know what Skinner intends spending the Christmas eve.—but should it be at his home nobody from Greyfriars will be there.

"I Believe in Ghosts!"

Coker's Dramatic Confession

Remarkable Disclosures

TO my utter amazement, it was locked! I knocked loudly on the door. "There's a ghost in your room!" I shouted. "There's a ghost in your room!" I heard a stifling sound from inside the room, and Potter's voice replying: "Shan't be a minute, and bean!" Half-a-minute later Potter opened the door. I rushed in, then blinked round me in astonishment. The speaker had vanished!

"Didn't you see the ghost?" I asked Potter. Potter, who was panting a little from fright, I suppose—shook his head.

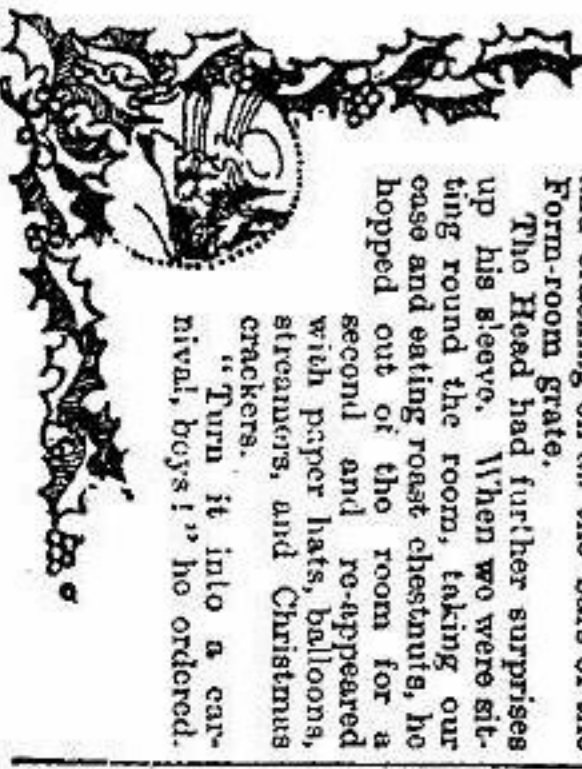
"Mean to say you didn't see a ghast dash in here and look the door?" I demanded incredulously.

"I certainly didn't!" Potter replied.

"Well, that beats Barney!" I remarked.

"It must have vanished into thin air. In other words, it must have been a real ghost!"

The mystery was never solved. And now you know why I believe in ghosts. Sometimes I recall the incident to Potter and Greene. They usually snigger to themselves.



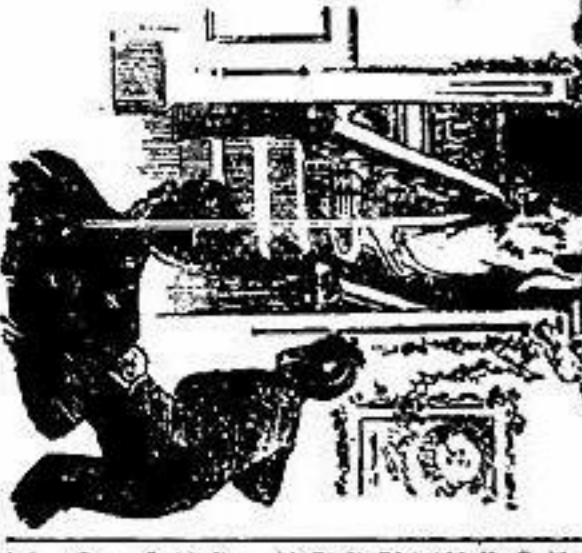
Oh, thank you, sir!" There was a wild rush to obey. In a few seconds chestnuts were sizzling and cracking on all the bars of the Form-room grate.

The Head had further surprises up his sleeve. When we were sitting round the room, taking our ease and eating roast chestnuts, he hopped out of the room for a second and re-appeared with paper hats, balloons, streamers, and Christmas crackers.

"Turn it into a carnival, boys!" he ordered.

Amateur Actors Wanted at Once!

For Warrimoth Christmas Entertainment, "ROBINSON CRUSOE" Must learn parts and do six rehearsals in next 24 hours, or no good. Regular actors all taken to hospital after eating mince-pies made by Warrimoth's sister.—Wire, phone, or call, WILLIAM WIBLEY, c/o Richard Rake, Park Avenue, London, W.



Brilliant Affair at Cliff House

End-of-Term Ball

Crash! Crash! Crash! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Crash! Crash! Crash!

Calm your fears, dear readers. Don't imagine far ornament that it's a mad elephant or an earthquake. As a matter of fact, it's merely the Remove contingent at the Great Cliff House ball!

And now, following the example of the B.B.C., we will give a broadcast account of this brilliant social gathering by our two expert radio commentators, Messrs. Frank Nugent and W. G. Bunter.

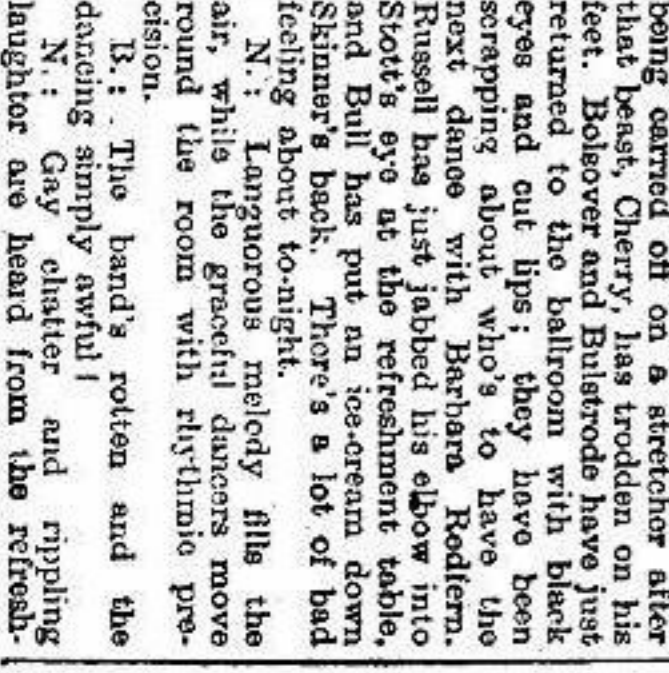
NUGENT: Good-evening, everybody! Here I am at the Cliff House Christmas Ball. Happy, smiling faces are to be seen everywhere. All around me is merrily, jollily, unrestrained gaiety, and good will.

BUNTER: There's the Bouncer, being carried off on a stretcher after that beast, Cherry, has trodden on his foot. Bolsover and Bustrade have just returned to the ballroom with black eyes and cut lips; they have been scrapping about who's to have the next dance with Barbara Rodfern. Russell has just jabbed his elbow into Scott's eye at the refreshment table, and Bull has put an ice-cream down Skinner's back. There's a lot of bad feeling about to-night.

N.: Languorous melody fills the air, while the graceful dancers move round the room with rhythmic precision.

B.: The band's rotten and the dancing simply awful!

N.: Gay chatter and rippling laughter are heard from the refresh-



ment table, where youth and beauty sample the viands set out for their needs.

B.: The refreshment table looks more like a Rugby scrum than anything else. Follows are fighting like Trojans to get near the grub.

N.: The lighting and decorations of the ballroom are exquisite!

B.: Half the blessed lights seem to have fused. You can hardly see the decorations—which is just as well, considering, by the look of them, they haven't been dragged out since the Boer War.

N.: Rogged manly beauty and feminine grace are to be seen here to their greatest advantage.

B.: There goes that weedy bouncer Jacop with my fat sister Dossie!

N.: The choicest snacks that human ingenuity can devise are provided for our refreshment.

B.: The grub's simply awful!

N.: I'm enjoying myself immensely!

B.: I'm going home.

We really must tell you that Bunter's interval refreshments got mixed up with the refreshments intended for the orchestra. Bunter finished tloirs in five minutes, but they managed to get through only half of his, after twenty minutes' determined eating. It's literally true this time that Bunter beats the band!

Christmas Pudding

Recipe

1 lb. Suit. This won't suit everybody, but you can't leave it out.

2 ozs. Flower. Not the kind of flour you get from the florists, of course!

1 lb. Raisins. These are needed for more raisins than one.

1 lb. Candied Peel. Why they put such stuff in we candidly can't say.

1 lb. Grated Bred. This is recommended by all cooks who have been well-bred.

6 Ex. Goodness knows why it should be egg-sactly six!

Put in a basin and boil for ours.

Q. Why not for yours? A. Sorry, wesouldhave said FOUR HOURS!

