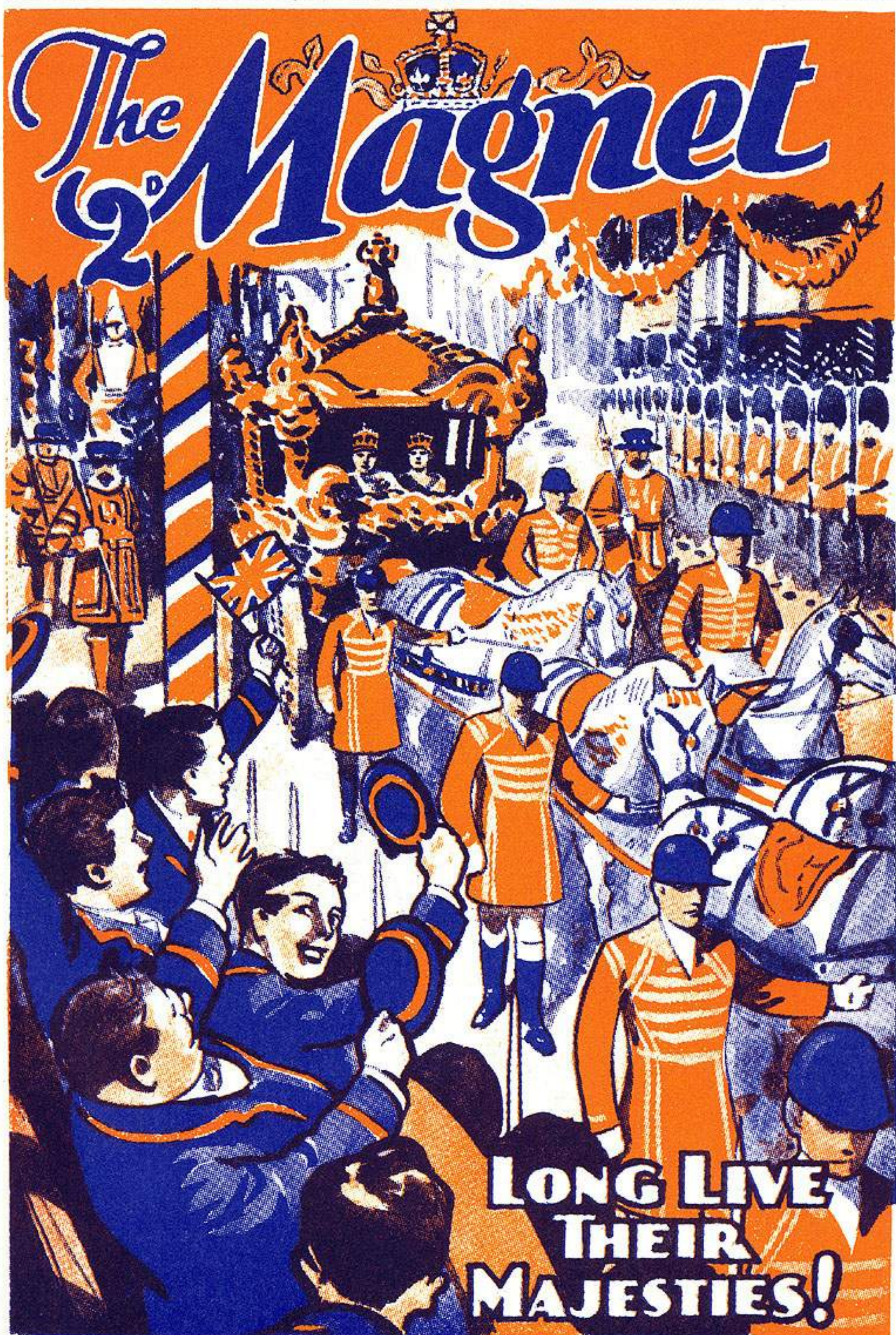
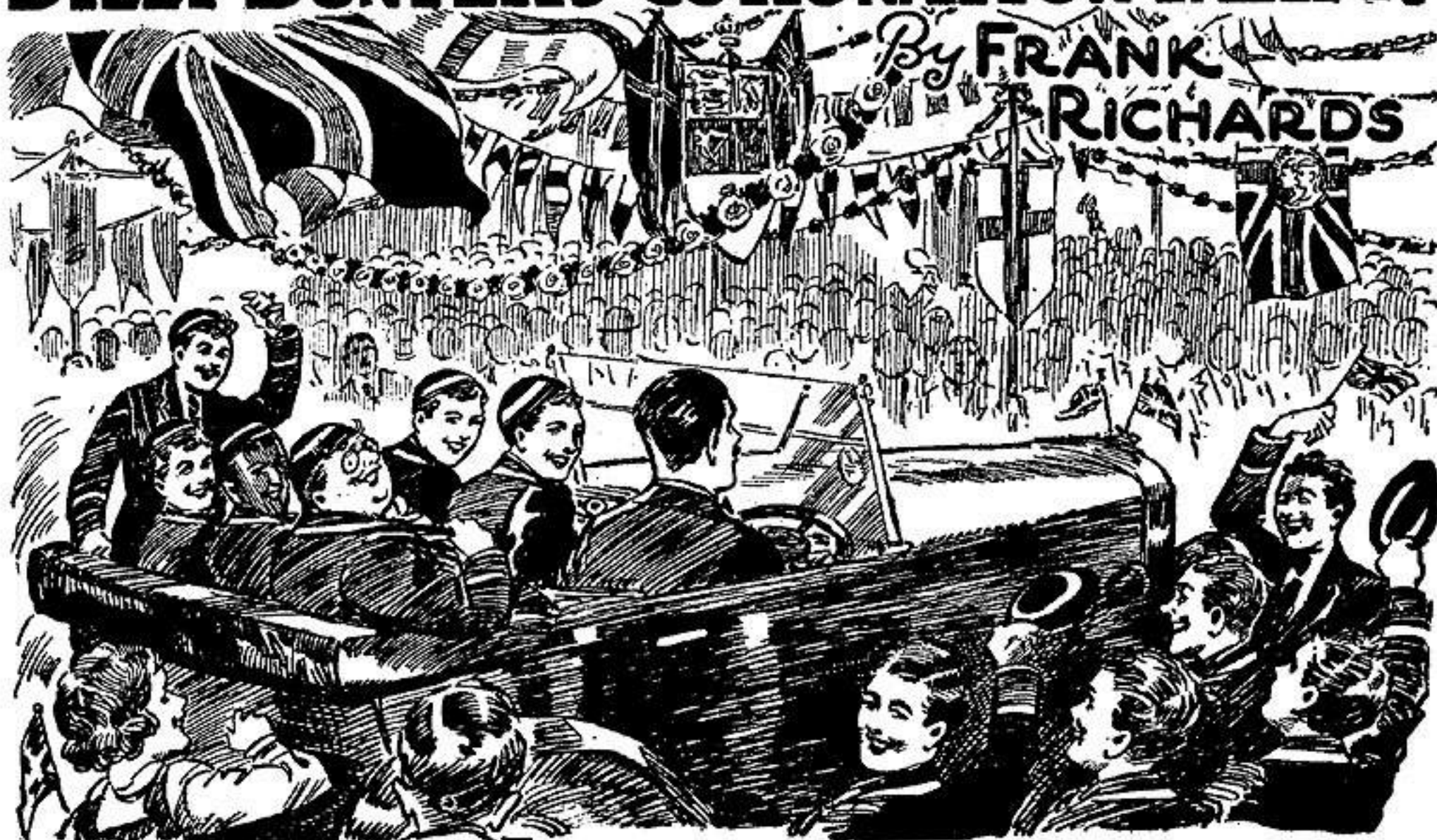


SPECIAL CORONATION NUMBER!



"LONG LIVE THE KING! GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!" Tens of thousands of voices mingle in rolling cheers for their Most Gracious Majesties; but loudest of all are the wholehearted acclamations of the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove, members of—

BILLY BUNTER'S CORONATION PARTY!



Going at almost a snail's pace up Regent Street, Billy Bunter and the Famous Five were hailed by a bunch of fellows in Greyfriars caps.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"Gee-Up!"

"ANYBODY got any glue?" asked Bob Cherry.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You silly ass!" roared Billy Bunter.

Every face, except Bunter's, wore a grin in the party gathered on the drive at Seahill Park, where Harry Wharton & Co. were winding up the Easter holidays with Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Bunter was looking serious—in fact, very much annoyed.

The Greyfriars party were going riding that bright May morning. Riding was one of the many things that Billy Bunter fancied he could do—and do well. He had no doubt whatever about his ability to "witch the world with noble horsemanship."

But it often happened that when Billy Bunter came to do the things he fancied he could do well unexpected difficulties cropped up.

A groom held the horse's head; the animal stood quiet enough. With a helping "bunk" from Bob Cherry, the fat Owl of the Remove heaved his weight into the saddle. Why he slipped over the other side Bunter did not know; but he knew that he did, for he found himself sitting on the cold, unsympathetic earth, instead of on the horse. He sat and roared.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh were already in the saddle; they waited for Bunter. Smithy, who was also mounted, did not seem disposed to wait.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

"You fellows coming?" he demanded.
"Wait till Bunter gets on," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"If we're going to ride on the sands we'd better get through before the tide comes in," said Vernon-Smith; "it will be in in a few hours. Can't wait till Bunter sticks on that horse."

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

He scrambled up to try again. He gave Bob Cherry a wrathful and indignant blink through his big spectacles.

"Don't pitch me over again, you fathead!" he yapped.

"Why, you fathead—"

"And don't jaw!" said Bunter crossly. "Just help me up without pitching me over. See? Look here. Wharton, you stand on the other side in case that silly idiot pitches me over again."

"Any old thing!" sighed the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, and he jumped down and came to render aid.

Up went Billy Bunter again with a hefty heave from Bob; over he went, and Harry Wharton caught him just in time.

The next moment he rather wished that he hadn't. The captain of the Remove was sturdy and strong; he braced himself to take the strain, but it booted not. Billy Bunter's extensive weight was too much for him—much too much. He crumpled.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Harry Wharton, as he doubled up under Bunter and went down.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the rest of the party.

"Ow!" Again Billy Bunter sat and roared. But this time he was not sitting

on the cold, unsympathetic earth; he was sitting on Harry Wharton's face. For the moment he did not notice it—though Wharton, naturally, did. "Oh! Ow! You clumsy ass! Wow!"

"Gurrrrgh!" came a muffled gurgle from under Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It's no good; we shall have to glue him on if he's going to stick on at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter rocked and rolled as his victim struggled.

Wharton scrambled up with a crimson face, panting for breath.

"You howling ass!" he roared.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Why didn't you hold me? Ow! That's the second time that clumsy idiot has pitched me over!"

"Look here, you fat ass," bawled Johnny Bull, "you can't ride! You'd better have a perambulator!"

"Beast!"

"Oh come on, and let that fat ass sit it out!" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently.

"Oh, really, Smithy! If that's the way you talk to a guest—"

"Fathead!"

"That's what you call manners here!" hooted Bunter. "Not the way we treat guests at Bunter Court, I can tell you!"

"Idiot!"

Smithy's remarks—considering that he was host, and Bunter guest—were not really polished, but a guest like William George Bunter was enough to try the patience of any host.

"I say, you fellows, are you going to help me on or not?" demanded Billy

Bunter indignantly. "I think you might lend a fellow a hand after all I've done for you!"

"What about getting him a ladder?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is a wheezy, good idea!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Even the absurd Bunter could mount ladderfully."

"You cheeky ass, I can ride your head off—and chance it!" howled Bunter. "Hold that horse steady, my man. Now, then!"

For the third time, up went Bunter. Marvellous to relate, he stayed in the saddle this time. Third shot was lucky. How long he was going to stay there was another matter. Really, a little glue, in the circumstances, would have been useful.

Lodged at last in the saddle, with his feet in the stirrups, Billy Bunter gathered up his reins and grasped his whip; he blinked round at the other juniors.

"I say, you fellows, what are we waiting for?" he snapped. "Aren't we ever going to start?"

They started at a trot. Grinning grooms were left behind. They followed a grassy path that led down to the sea wall and the gate that led on the beach.

Billy Bunter brought up the tail of the riding party. He was very careful and cautious to begin with, but as he found himself secure in the saddle his confidence revived.

"I say, you fellows, get on!" he squeaked. "We're not going to crawl, I suppose?"

"Fathead!" answered the Famous Five and the Bounder with one voice. Snort!—from Bunter.

It was like Billy Bunter as soon as he felt confident to feel over-confident. He was not going to crawl—not Bunter. He was going to show the other fellows how he could handle a horse.

They rode through the gateway out on the beach. There was a wide stretch of firm sand from the sea wall down to the blue, shining sea. It was an ideal spot for a morning gallop. Six fellows would have been glad to put on speed, but they were doubtful about Bunter; they knew what was likely to happen to the Owl of the Remove on a galloping horse.

"Better trot," said Harry Wharton.

"You can trot if you like," sneered Bunter. "I haven't come out to crawl about; I'm going to gallop. If you fellows like to keep your eyes on me you can pick up some tips about riding."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, I'm off!" declared Bunter.

"You soon will be if you gallop!" grinned Bob.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter elegantly. "Gee-up! Gee-up!"

Crack!

He gave his horse a cut. The startled animal jumped and burst into instant speed—"geeing" up with a vengeance.

"Look out!" shrieked Nugent.

"Yaroooo!"

Bunter rocked in the saddle.

He took a list to port, and then to starboard. What happened to his reins, his stirrups, and his whip he did not know. His fat arms were flung wildly round the horse's neck and he held on for his life.

The horse, naturally startled and alarmed by that style of horsemanship, galloped off at a frantic speed, with fluttering reins and swinging stirrups. Billy Bunter's frantic yells floated back as he went.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"After him!"

And six juniors put on speed and galloped along the shining sands in hot pursuit of the hapless Owl of the Remove.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Wild Ride!

"OH crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter. He clung frantically to his steed's tossing neck. Wildly he blinked through his big spectacles.

Behind him six fellows were riding hard. But they were not gaining. The runaway steed was putting on tremendous pace.

Billy Bunter had intended to race the other fellows on the sands and beat them hollow. Now he was doing it. But he was not deriving the expected satisfaction from that performance.

He gasped and spluttered and howled and shrieked as he flew. He could not pull the frightened horse in—by the neck. He dared not let go the neck to make an attempt to recapture the reins. He held on like a limpet to a rock and howled—and the tighter he clung, and the louder he howled, the more frantic the horse became and the faster he flew.

WHO SAID THE AGE OF MIRACLES WAS PAST?

Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, has always bragged about titled relations who exist only in his fertile imagination. But at long last he gets a special invitation from a noble lord requesting his company and that of his friends at a Coronation party!

Gallop, gallop, gallop!

The hoofs thudded on the sand in a rapid tattoo. For a considerable distance the beach was quite clear—between the sea and the walls of the estate of Seahill Park. It was a private beach belonging to Mr. Vernon-Smith's estate, and the public did not use it—which, at the moment, was just as well for the public! Bunter, at full gallop, was distinctly dangerous.

But he was riding towards the seaside town of Seahill. At his present rate of progress it was not likely to take him long to arrive on a populated beach. And suddenly his popping eyes spotted a hat—a summer straw—right ahead.

Someone was on the sands just in front of the horse. A young man, seated on the sand with his legs stretched out lazily, was leaning back against a jutting boulder. He did not stir.

Certainly he must have heard the coming hoofbeats. But such a sound was not uncommon on the Sussex sands.

The young man in the straw hat was reading a letter.

His eyes remained fixed on that letter, and he did not glance round at the oncoming rider—not, evidently, guessing that the horse was running away with the rider and out of control.

Bunter charged on.

"Look out!" came a stentorian yell from far back along the beach. It was Bob Cherry's powerful voice that came down the wind.

Then the young man in the straw hat looked up.

He looked up just in time, as a frantic horse, with a still more frantic rider on its back, came rushing down on him.

A second ago his attitude had been one of lazy ease. It changed with remarkable rapidity at the sight of a tossing head and clattering hoofs almost upon him. He jumped—or, rather, bounded.

His straw hat went in one direction and the letter flew from his hand in another. He covered about ten feet in a single spring.

Bunter roared by.

"You young ass!" yelled the young man. "You mad young idiot! What—what do you think you're up to? What? Stop!"

Bunter did not stop. Though not a very obliging fellow, Bunter would have been glad to oblige at that moment. But he couldn't. He flew on.

The young man seemed annoyed—which, perhaps, was not surprising. He had had a rather narrow escape from Bunter. And his letter had blown away on the wind up the beach. He glared at a bunch of riders who came thudding along.

"Young asses!" he shouted. "What are you up to—what?"

Harry Wharton & Co. had no time to answer. They could understand the young man's annoyance, but they had no time to lose—they had to get after Bunter. They swept on regardless.

The young man stared after them as they vanished along the beach, picked up his straw hat, and replaced it on his head, and then started looking for his letter.

But he might as well have looked for a needle in a haystack.

The wind from the sea had carried that letter away and scattered it somewhere among the ridges and hollows of the wide sands. He very soon gave up that hopeless quest and walked away.

Forgetful of his existence, Billy Bunter swept on along the sands, and after him swept six anxious schoolboys going all out.

Seahill town was in sight now, and in the May sunshine there were a good many people on the beach. If Billy Bunter arrived among them at top speed on a runaway horse he looked like doing considerable execution.

"Oh, the ass!" panted Bob Cherry.

"The priceless, piffing idiot!" hissed Johnny Bull.

"Put it on!" growled the Bounder, and he gave his horse the whip.

Smithy drew ahead of the Famous Five. But he had no chance of running Bunter down. The Owl of the Remove careered wildly on, well ahead.

Then suddenly, to the intense relief of the pursuers, the runaway stopped. In a hollow of the beach was a wide, glistening pool left by the outgoing tide. On the edge of that pool the runaway steed came to a halt. He halted suddenly! It was so sudden that Billy Bunter was jerked from his grasp on his steed's neck before he knew what was happening. Bunter flew.

Splash!

"Yoooooch!" spluttered Bunter.

He sat in a foot of water, sending up a waterspout as he landed there. The horse stood panting and foaming.

Harry Wharton & Co. rode up, with a clatter and a jingle, and drew rein, the Bounder catching the reins of Bunter's steed.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Nugent.

"The thankfulness of the esteemed goodness is terrific!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The fat fool!" exclaimed the

Bounder. "Another hundred yards and he would have been knocking people right and left!"

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows—" "Happy landing, old man!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"I say, I'm wet!" yelled Bunter. "Wet!" repeated Bob. "Go hon! You don't mean to say that that water's wet, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Beast!" roared Bunter. "I'm soaked!"

He staggered to his feet. Water ran in streams down him. Up to his fat waist the Owl of the Remove was drenched. He splashed out of the pool and stood streaming.

"Come on, you men!" said Vernon-Smith, wheeling his horse and leading Bunter's by the reins.

"Hold on!" roared Bunter. "Gimme my horse!"

"You fat ass!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Do you want him to run away with you again?"

"Think I'm going to walk back, you silly idiot!" hooted Bunter. "Why, it's over a mile! Gimme my gee, Smithy, you beast! He won't run away—I suppose I can ride!"

"You suppose you can ride!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"I'm the best rider here, and chance it!" snapped Bunter. "Still, one of you fellows can lead him if you like! All of you get down and help me mount!"

The Famous Five looked at Bunter and looked at Herbert Vernon-Smith. The chums of the Remove could not help thinking that it was time Billy Bunter's equestrian performances came to an end. Evidently the Bounder thought so, for he started riding back along the beach, leading Bunter's mount.

"Smithy, you beast!" roared Bunter.

"Go and eat coke!" snapped the Bounder over his shoulder. And he rode on, with the riderless horse trotting at his side.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Better get back on Shanks' pony, old man!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "That's the only mount you're really safe on."

"Oh, don't be a cheeky ass!" snapped Bunter. "That cad Smithy's taken my gee. Which of you fellows is going to let me have his?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"The whichfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"One of you can walk back," explained Bunter. "I don't mind which."

"Anybody else mind which?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five wheeled their steeds and rode after Smithy.

Billy Bunter glared after them through his big spectacles with a devastating glare.

"I say, you fellows!" he roared. "Beasts! Rotters! I say, stop! I say—Beasts!"

The schoolboy riders jingled off along the beach, and disappeared in the distance. And Billy Bunter, with feelings too deep for words, started to walk.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Findings Keepings!

"**B**LOW it!" grunted Billy Bunter irritably.

He smacked at something that fluttered against his fat face.

Bunter had walked half the mile that

lay between him and the starting-point of that wild ride. Half a mile was a good walk for Bunter on a warm spring morning.

The sunshine was hot on the beach. Luckily it had the effect of drying Bunter's damp clothes. But it also had the effect of making him very warm and tired, peevish, and irritable. No doubt Bunter was safer on Shanks' pony than on any other steed, but his fat little legs had too much weight to carry for comfort. So the fat Owl of the Remove was taking a rest.

The Greyfriars fellows had disappeared along the beach, riding past Seahill Park towards the cliffs at the end of the bay in the other direction. The young man in the straw hat, whom Bunter had so nearly ridden over, had long since walked away.

Bunter had the sunny beach to himself. He sat down in the soft, warm sand, leaned back against a sandy hillock, and rested. The rolling sea was before him, dotted here and there with white sails. But the fat Owl did not waste a glance on blue waves or white sails. He closed his eyes behind his big spectacles. And then something fluttered on his fat face and he smacked angrily.

"Blow!" hissed Bunter. "Those beastly gnats! Blow!"

Gnats and other insects often betrayed a keen partiality for Bunter's face. Perhaps they were attracted by the rem-

PLEASE NOTE

that owing to the Coronation and Whitsun Holidays next week's issue of The MAGNET will be on sale Friday, May 14th.

nants of his latest meal often to be found there.

But this time it was not, as it happened, a gnat! Bunter's fat hand smacked on a sheet of paper!

He blinked at it and picked it up. It was a letter!

Evidently, somebody had dropped that letter on the beach, and it had been fluttering about in the wind ever since. The wind had blown it hither and thither, and finally landed it, playfully, on Bunter's fat face—and now it was clutched in his fat hand.

Bunter remembered the young man in the straw hat.

He had not noticed it specially at the time—he had been in rather a hurry—but he recalled now that that young man had been sitting reading a letter when he was suddenly startled by the fat Owl's charge.

Probably he had dropped the letter, and lost it. Serve him jolly well right, Bunter thought. That young man had called him names as he careered by—Bunter remembered that. Serve him jolly well right if he'd lost his letter, and be blowed to him!

The fat Owl proceeded to read the letter.

Inquisitiveness was Billy Bunter's besetting sin. He had the excuse, if he wanted one, that he had to look at the letter to ascertain to whom it belonged, if he was to return it to the owner. But, as a matter of fact, he did not want an excuse. He just read it, and that was that!

It was a brief letter. But it had a deep interest for Bunter. For it was written by a peer of the realm. There

was a crest on the notepaper. And there was an engraved address, of which Bunter had heard—the county seat of a well-known wealthy nobleman, not more than twenty miles or so from Seahill.

"Trant Elms, Sussex."

"Dear William,—I hope sincerely that you will join the party at Trant House for the Coronation celebrations. Bring any friends you like."

"Now that you are in Sussex, my boy, should be glad if you would run across to see me. Any day you like."

"Your old friend, TRANT."

If that letter had been lost by the young man in the straw hat, as seemed to be the case, evidently he was "William," and the Earl of Trant was an old friend of his.

Billy Bunter grunted.

It was Bunter's intention to honour the Coronation with his distinguished presence. Indeed, he would have booked a seat in the best quarter already, but for the fact that such seats had to be paid for.

Remove fellows at Greyfriars School had heard a great deal about Billy Bunter's titled relations. None of these eminent noblemen, however, had invited William George Bunter to join a Coronation party at his town house.

If this letter had only been addressed to William George Bunter, instead of the other William—

Bunter would have graced such a party. He knew that. With his good looks, his aristocratic bearing, and his distinguished appearance generally, he would have been the observed of all observers in a fashionable throng on the great balcony at Trant House, in town. Gladly would he have gazed down from that balcony, through his big spectacles, and cheered his Gracious Majesty King George the Sixth as he rolled by in state.

Instead of which, Lord Trant's invitation was handed out to that young bounder in the straw hat, who had called Bunter names.

Had it been practicable, Billy Bunter would have appropriated the invitation, as well as the letter containing it, and presented himself at Trant House on the great and glorious day.

That, unfortunately, was impracticable!

But something else was practicable. A sly gleam came into Billy Bunter's little round eyes, behind his big, round spectacles as he blinked, and blinked again, at Lord Trant's letter to "William."

Bunter's name was William!

True, he was generally called Billy. Nevertheless, his name was William—and a stately old gentleman like Lord Trant, if he wrote to him, would certainly address him as William, not as Billy!

Bunter grinned.

He chuckled.

"He, he, he!" echoed along the sunny beach.

For the third time Billy Bunter read through Lord Trant's letter to "William." There was not a word in it that might not have applied to Bunter, had it, by a happy chance, been addressed to him. If Bunter displayed that letter, with the statement that it was his, who was to know any better?

Nobody! That was, as Fisher T. Fish would have said, a cinch!

Bunter gurgled.

Harry Wharton & Co., like the rest of the Greyfriars Remove, had no belief whatever in Billy Bunter's noble connections. From Billy Bunter's talk on the subject, it might have been supposed that he had titled relations in bunches, like grapes. But nobody supposed so. In fact, the more Bunter talked on the subject the less he was believed.

But what would they say now—if he had a letter to show from the Earl of Trant, inviting him to a party for Coronation Day at his town house?

Seeing was believing!

Probably they had forgotten already

casual sort of way, to "my uncle Trant."

The Famous Five would grin, the Bounder would sneer—Smithy was a sneering beast. Then he would let them see the letter. Grinning and sneering would be washed out, with a vengeance, when they saw a letter from Lord Trant, addressed to "Dear William." Bunter chuckled at the prospect.

He folded that letter carefully into his notecase. There was plenty of room for it, as there were no notes in the case.

When he rolled on his way to Seahill Park there was a fat grin on Billy Bunter's fat face. His morning had

shining bay, the Greyfriars fellows were now jingling homeward along the sunny sands, merry and bright in the bright May morning. Probably they were not less merry, and not less bright, because William George Bunter was absent. They were able to endure the loss of his society with quite a lot of fortitude.

"Nothing about Bunter!" went on Herbert Vernon-Smith decidedly. "I've had enough of Bunter! Haven't you, fellows?"

"Well, a little of him goes a long way," admitted Bob Cherry. "But I—"

"I've stood him here for Easter,"



On the edge of the pool the runaway steed came to a sudden halt. It was so sudden, in fact, that Billy Bunter was jerked from his grasp on the animal's neck before he knew what was happening. The fat Removee flew through the air, heading direct for the pool! "Yaroooh!" he gasped.

the existence of that young man in the straw hat. Anyhow, they did not know that his name was William, or that he had lost a letter. It was an absolutely safe game.

It was a prospect of swank, and in swank Bunter's fat heart delighted. Next to eating and sleeping, swank came third on his list of the joys of life.

The fact that it wasn't his letter, that he wasn't the William addressed, and that Lord Trant had never even heard of him, mattered not a whit to Bunter!

Truth and he had long been strangers, and he saw no reason for striking up an acquaintance now.

That was going to be his letter. He was going to be "William." Lord Trant was going to be one of the Bunter family's noble connections. Cousin, was Bunter's first idea; but remembering that he had heard that Lord Trant was an elderly gentleman, he decided that his lordship had better be his uncle. "Uncle Trant" sounded rather good!

He could picture the surprise of the other fellows when he alluded, in a

been rather disastrous, but he was going to enjoy his afternoon.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Rough Luck!

"WHAT about Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

Vernon-Smith gave a snort.

"Blow Bunter!" he answered forcibly.

Whereat the Famous Five smiled.

They could quite understand any fellow who had been honoured with Billy Bunter's company for several weeks, being inclined to "blow" Bunter.

Sometimes they found William George Bunter rather too much for them, and they were all good-natured and good-tempered fellows. The Bounder was not specially good-natured, and could hardly be called good-tempered. So it was really surprising that he was able to stand Bunter at all.

Having enjoyed a ride round the

grunted the Bounder. "He happened to be of service to my father, and the pater asked me to give him a holiday here. Well, I've done it. But I'm not going to be haunted by him. We don't go back to Greyfriars for the new term till after Coronation Day; but I'm putting in a week in London, and I'd like you fellows to come, if you'd care to, and see the Coronation stunts from my father's house. Bunter can go and eat coke!"

"But—" said Harry.

"If you don't care for the idea, you can say so, I suppose," grunted Vernon-Smith. "I've asked nearly a dozen Greyfriars men already—and I shan't miss a few more or less in the crowd."

"Hem!" murmured the captain of the Remove.

Smithy was showing signs of getting his back up. Smithy was never slow to get his back up. Staying with Smithy was rather an exercise in tact for any fellow.

"We'd like it no end, old chap," said Frank Nugent soothingly. "And THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

if you'd mentioned it a week ago—" "It hadn't been settled a week ago," grunted the Bounder. "I had other affairs to think of a week ago. What's the difference?"

"Well, you see, there is a difference," explained Harry Wharton. "We'd settled, of course, that we were going up to town to see what was to be seen on Coronation Day, and that Bunter was going, too."

"You mean, Bunter settled that he was going, too?" snapped Smithy.

Harry Wharton laughed. "Well, perhaps that's how it was," he assented. "But there it is. We've got Bunter on our hands for the great and glorious day, and we can't very well let him down, Smithy."

"Rot!" grunted Smithy.

The juniors rode on in silence.

It was not, perhaps, with enthusiasm that the Famous Five had allowed Bunter to hook on to their noble selves for Coronation Day. Still, there it was—they had not said him nay—and, having permitted the fat Owl to bank on the arrangement, it was hardly possible for them to accept Smithy's invitation to the millionaire's house in Courtman Square, unless Bunter was included in the same.

Smithy really might have understood that. It was not the Greyfriars way to let a man down.

But Herbert Vernon-Smith, with all his good qualities, of which he had many, had not been nicknamed the "Bounder" for nothing at his school. He did not always play up to the Greyfriars standard.

"If you mean that you won't come —" he snapped at last.

"I mean that we can't come without Bunter," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We've agreed to let him join up for the Coronation stunts. We hadn't thought of anything specially tip-top; only getting a squint at the show; putting up for a couple of nights in a lodging in some giddy suburb. Our people's resources don't run to town mansions, old man. But—"

"You see, old bean," said Johnny Bull, "if you'd asked us before it was fixed with Bunter, it would have been all right. We'd have jumped at it with all our ten feet. It would have rested with you, whether you wanted Bunter, too. But, having fixed it with him—"

"You didn't; he fixed it with you," growled Smithy. "You're a set of soft asses, and you let yourselves be made use of."

The Famous Five made no answer to that. There was, perhaps, a spot of truth in it. But Harry Wharton & Co. did not look at things quite like Smithy. If it was "soft" for strong, sturdy, perfectly fit fellows, to let themselves be bothered by a fatuous ass who needed a helping hand, they were not ashamed of such "softness." Certainly there was no such softness in Smithy; he was as hard as nails all through.

"Think he wouldn't let you down, if something better turned up?" sneered the Bounder.

"Like a shot!" grinned Bob. "But we're not exactly taking Bunter for a model, Smithy."

Grunt from the Bounder. He was annoyed, and when Smithy was annoyed, he seldom took the trouble to conceal the fact.

"Well, I'm not having Bunter!" he said. "I've had enough of him here—more than enough! I'm going to get a rest from him, before I have to stand him again at Greyfriars. And

if you fellows had any sense, you'd do the same."

"Perhaps our esteemed sensefulness is not terrific, my absurd Smithy," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Well, leave it at that," growled Vernon-Smith. "I'm through with Bunter, when we leave here next week. You won't come—that's settled. I shan't ask you again—don't worry!"

"You see, old chap—" said Harry.

"Oh, yes, I see!" grunted the Bounder. "Quite! I shall jolly well see, at any rate, that you don't land that fat, frowsy frump on me, if you're fool enough to land him on yourselves!"

"You see—" murmured Bob.

"Oh, rats! Look here, I've asked you for Coronation week to my pater's house in London. Are you coming, or not? Yes, or no?"

"No," said Harry.

"That's that, then!"

And the Bounder, shaking out his reins, dashed ahead of the party, and rode on at a gallop over the sands.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged looks as they rode after him.

Bob Cherry grinned, and Johnny Bull shrugged his shoulders. It was rather discomfiting for guests, when a host got his back up, and showed it. But the chums of the Remove knew what to expect from Smithy, in the way of manners and customs. And, anyhow, his display of temper made no difference.

They would have been glad—very glad—to accept the invitation to the mansion in Courtman Square. It was ever so much better than what they had been able to plan for themselves for the great day. But, having allowed Billy Bunter to stick on, they could not make him come unstuck, unless of his own accord, and that was that. Anyhow, the matter was settled now. Vernon-Smith was not likely to mention the matter again; and certainly they did not want him to.

The Bounder kept ahead all the way home, and turned in at the gate in the sea-wall.

The Famous Five followed him in, and up the grassy path that led into the great avenue of Seahill Park.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's jolly old Bunter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

A fat figure was plunging up the avenue towards the house. Billy Bunter had come in on Shanks' pony.

The Bounder passed him at a gallop, taking no notice of his fat guest. But the Famous Five drew rein, dropping into a walk as they overtook Bunter.

He blinked round at them through his big spectacles. Rather to their surprise, he grinned. They had rather expected him to frown.

"Had a nice walk, old fat man?" asked Bob cheerily.

"Oh, fine!" said Bunter. "Rather nice not to see you fellows for an hour or two—what? He, he, he!"

"Mutual satisfaction, old fat bean!" grinned Bob.

"I say, you fellows, there's something I think I'd better mention," went on Bunter, with a very serious blink at the chums of the Remove. "I've sort of half-promised to see you through, on Coronation Day in London."

"Eh?"

"I think, perhaps, I'd better warn you not to depend on me," said Bunter. "I shall do my best for you, of course. I'm not the fellow to let fellows down, I hope. But circumstances may make it a bit difficult for me to stick to you. The fact is, I haven't decided yet."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Leave it open," said Bunter. "Mind, if I can possibly manage it, I shall stick to you chaps. If I can't, I can't—see? All I can say is, that I'll do the best I can for you. That's all you can expect, isn't it?"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

They had refused Smithy's very attractive invitation, on Bunter's account. It was too late now to change their minds on that subject. Smithy had pointed out that if something better turned up, Bunter would let them down. It looked as if something better had. Not, of course, that they cared a boiled bean. But it was rather rough luck to hear it just after they had turned down Smithy's offer.

"You blithering, blethering, burbling bloater!" said Bob Cherry, in measured tones.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It's our own fault," said Johnny Bull. "We've asked for this. We ought to have booted him to begin with, and left it at that."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"The bootfulness was the proper caper," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Oh, sit down, you fat ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

He reached over from the saddle, grasped Bunter's collar, and hooked him off his feet.

Bunter sat down.

Bump!

"Owl!" roared Bunter. "Beast!"

The Famous Five rode on, not in their usual sunny tempers, and left him sitting and roaring.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Titled Relation!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH had recovered his temper at lunch.

His father being in town, the Bounder was doing the honours at Seahill Park; and no doubt he realised that a host was expected not to scowl at his guests. If he was still annoyed, he showed no further outward sign of it; which was a relief to the Famous Five, who had begun to consider whether they had not better think of changing their quarters to Wharton Lodge.

The fact was that Smithy cared very little whether the Famous Five came up to town with him, or not, when the party broke up; but he was irritated by a refusal. He would have liked them to come; but he was not going to miss them fearfully. They could please themselves, and be blown to them—but as they had said "No," that "No" was definite. If they changed their minds, Smithy was not changing his.

Harry Wharton & Co.—knowing their Smithy—did not think of alluding to the matter again.

Had they been dealing with a fellow like Mauleverer, or Redwing, or Peter Todd, or Ogilvy, they could have said out plainly that, Bunter having kindly taken himself off their hands, they were now in a position to accept what they had earlier felt bound to refuse.

But Smithy was not like any of those fellows.

Such a remark would have been received by Smithy with a sarcastic smile, if not an open sneer.

So that matter was at an end definitely.

The only solace the Famous Five had, was that they were not going, after all,

to be bothered by Bunter on Coronation Day.

That, at all events, was so much to the good.

Smithy being, outwardly, at least, in a good temper again, there was a cheery chat over lunch, on all sorts of subjects—except the Coronation. That topic was barred.

Bunter, as usual, was too busily occupied with the foodstuffs to have time for talk. But he was grinning very brightly as he parked the provender.

Bunter was clearly bucked.

Nobody, however, was much interested in Bunter, and he grinned unheeded as he packed away provisions as if for a siege.

When he had eaten enough for three, and a little over, however, the keen edge was taken off Bunter's appetite, and he was prepared to slow down on the foodstuffs and bestow on the other fellows the delights of his conversation.

"I say, you fellows," began Bunter, after carefully filling his mouth, "I say, about the Coronation—"

"Try that pie, old man!" said Bob.

"After this pudding," said Bunter. "I was going to say—Gurrrrgh!" Bunter had filled up a little too liberally for easy conversation, and he choked a little. "Wurrrrgh! Hoo-hoo-gooo-hoo!"

"Turn that dog out, Larkin!" said Vernon-Smith, glancing round at the butler.

"There is no dog in the room, Master Herbert!" answered Larkin.

"What rot! I can hear one growling over a bone!" said Vernon-Smith. "Oh! Was it you, Bunter? My mistake!"

"Urrgh! Cheeky beast! Wurrrgh!" said Bunter.

"Why not take it on the mat?" suggested Smithy.

The Famous Five grinned, they could not help it. Otherwise, they affected not to notice this genial conversation between host and guest.

"Urrgh!" grunted Bunter. "If that's what you call manners, Smithy—gurrrh! Wurrrh! Goo! Ooo! Goo! I say, you fellows, about the Coronation, I don't want to disappoint you, of course—"

"Fathead!" said Bob.

"What I mean is, I may be able to stick to you, after all!" explained Bunter. "I'm going to do the best I can for you, see?"

"Idiot!" said Johnny Bull.

The Bunder glanced at Bunter, and then at his other guests. A mocking grin appeared on his face for a moment.

It was easy for the keen-witted Bunder to guess how the matter stood. His look showed that he was sardonically amused. It showed, also, that if Harry Wharton & Co. fancied they could take him up after turning him down, they were making a mistake.

But no such idea was in the minds of the Famous Five. They knew Smithy too well for that. Coronation festivities at the millionaire's mansion in Courtman Square were washed right out.

"I mean to say," continued Bunter, "that I may be able to wangle you into a rather splendid party I've been asked to. Rely on me to do my best!"

"You needn't trouble, fathead!" said Harry Wharton curtly.

"Go and eat coke!" said Johnny Bull.

"I suppose that's what you call grateful!" sneered Bunter. "Well, I mean it, all the same. After all, I never expect gratitude from you fellows. Do I ever get any? I ask you!"

"Push in that pudding, and shut up, old fat man!" suggested Bob Cherry.

Bunter pushed in pudding. At the same time he blinked at the Famous

Five across the table, in a thoughtful sort of way.

"After all," he said, "Trant says 'I can bring my friends!'"

"Eh?"

"My Cousin Trant," said Bunter carelessly. "I—I mean, my Uncle Trant, of course. Lord Trant, you know."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him.

a cousin or an uncle. Bunter seemed in some doubt on that point.

"He's asked me up for the Coronation," explained Bunter. "He says I can bring my friends, if I like. I was just wondering whether I could wangle you fellows in."

"You blithering bloater!" said Johnny Bull. "Shut it!"

GOD SAVE OUR KING and QUEEN!



The Editor and his staff unite with every reader of the MAGNET in wishing their Most Gracious Majesties a long, happy, and glorious reign.

They had heard of Lord Trant, who was a very wealthy landowner in Sussex; and they had passed his magnificent seat, Trant Elm, motoring with Smithy. Bunter had never mentioned before that that eminent nobleman was a relative of the Bunter clan. Now that he mentioned it, they did not, of course, believe it. A relation of Lord Trant's would certainly know whether his lordship was

"If you can't be decently civil, Bull, I shall leave you out of the party I take to Trant House!" said Bunter.

"I shall miss a lot—I don't think!" grunted Johnny.

"I had a letter, you see, from my cousin—I mean, my Uncle Trant," said the fat Owl. "I'll show it to you fellows after lunch, if you like. I think I've got

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,326.

it in my pocket. Might run across to Trant Elms one day to see the old bean before we go up to town. He's asked me to."

"You haven't mentioned him before," remarked the Bounder. "Haden't you made up your mind whether he was a cousin or an uncle?"

The Famous Five chuckled.

"He's my uncle," said Bunter calmly. "My father's elder brother, you know. Being the elder, he came into the title and estates."

"Larkin!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, Master Herbert."

"You've heard of Lord Trant?"

"Everyone in this part of Sussex has heard of his lordship, I think, Master Herbert," answered Larkin, in quite a reverent tone.

"What's his family name?"

"Stevenage, sir."

The Bounder chuckled.

"Fancy Mr. Bunter's elder brother being named Stevenage, you fellows," he remarked. "Bit unusual, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He had quite forgotten that trifling detail. Certainly it was more than a "bit" unusual for two brothers to have different surnames.

"I—I—I mean—" gasped Bunter.

"You mean that you're talking out of your silly neck as usual?" asked Smithy.

"No, you beast, I don't! I—I mean, he's a sort of half-brother—half-brother once removed, see?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The—the fact is, the relationship's a bit complicated," said Bunter. "But, never mind that. I always call him Uncle Trant. He's one of the titled relations I've told you fellows about. Well, my Uncle Trant has asked me up for the Coronation. He says I can bring some friends. Why not you fellows?"

"The why-notfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Well, look here, I'll tell you how I'm going to work it," said Bunter.

"If I can arrange for you fellows to come along with me to Trant House, in London, I'll do it. If not, I shall turn Trant down, and stick to you chaps, as previously arranged. That suit you?"

"I was afraid it was too good to be true!" sighed Bob Cherry. "Bunter will be sticking on to us, after all, you fellows."

"The stickfulness will be terrific."

"If you fellows don't believe me—" began Bunter warmly.

"Believe you!" gasped Bob.

"Like to see the letter?" sneered Bunter.

"If any!" remarked Nugent.

Vernon-Smith rose from the table. The Famous Five followed his example. They were not interested in a letter from Lord Trant—in which they did not think of believing for a moment. Their only impression was that the Ananias of the Remove was telling improbable "whoppers" even more recklessly than usual.

"I say, you fellows, hold on!" exclaimed Bunter, rummaging in his pockets. "I've got the letter here, somewhere. I say, I think I can manage it for you fellows to come. Not you, Smithy, I'm sorry to say—but there's a limit, you know—your manners, old chap, if you don't mind my mentioning it—"

"You silly owl!" snapped the Bounder, and he walked out into the hall.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, as the Famous Five followed Herbert Vernon-Smith. "I say, don't you want to see old Trant's letter?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

"Fathead!" said Harry, over his shoulder.

"Beast!"

Bunter was left lunching.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Surprise!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., as they strolled out on the green lawns of Seahill Park did not expect to see Bunter again till tea-time.

Lunch was a much longer process for Bunter than for any other fellow, when the foodstuffs were unlimited, as they were at Mr. Vernon-Smith's mansion on the Sussex shore. And after his exertions in parking the provender, it was Bunter's happy custom to take a nap in an armchair, to recover from the same. He was, as a rule, likely to get active again, when another meal was in the offing.

So it was a surprise to the chums of the Remove, to behold the fat Owl again quite soon.

Sitting in deck chairs on the sunny lawn, they were discussing the respective merits of tennis, badminton, or a run in a sailing-boat, as occupation for a bright May afternoon. Billy Bunter rolled out of the house and joined them—greeted with surprised glances by the Famous Five, and with a scowl from Vernon-Smith. Smithy took very little trouble, if any, to conceal the fact that he was fed up with that particular guest.

"Hallo hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You haven't finished your lunch, surely, Bunter?"

"Yes—it's not much I eat, as you know," remarked Bunter. "I say, you fellows—"

"But so far as I noticed, you'd only eaten enough for six!" said Bob, with a puzzled look. "What's the game—slimming?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, what about tennis?" grunted the Bounder.

"I say, you fellows, don't go. It's rather particular," said Bunter. "I've got to get this settled about my Coronation party."

"For goodness' sake, give us a rest, fathead!" said Johnny Bull.

"Let's see the letter from Lord Trant," said the Bounder sardonically.

"Oh, let's!" grinned Nugent.

"Do!" chortled Bob.

"I'm going to, old fellows!" declared Bunter. "Of course, I want you to understand that it's all fair and square. It needn't interest you, Smithy—I'm not asking you to Trant House. My cousin—I mean my uncle—bars City people. Sorry, and all that—but there's a limit!"

Some guests would have taken a hurried departure, when a host made it quite plain that he would be pleased thereby. That was not Billy Bunter's way. Bunter's way was to stick on, and make himself unpleasant.

There was no doubt that he succeeded in doing so.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, having asked his son to put up with Bunter for that vacation, Smithy was doing it. But he did not do it with a good grace—and Bunter was not slow to retaliate for what he considered Smithy's bad manners.

Vernon-Smith looked at him, so obviously considering whether to kick him or not, that Harry Wharton hastily interposed.

"Shut up, Bunter, you silly owl! Let's see that jolly old letter! We're frightfully interested in your titled relations and things."

"Here you are!" said Bunter cheerily.

He groped in his pocket.

The Famous Five watched him, with smiling faces—the Bounder with a sneering grin. None of them expected Bunter to produce the letter, of course. They expected him to keep up the humbug to the latest possible moment, and then to discover that he had left the letter somewhere, or lost it.

He drew a rather tattered note-case from his pocket, and opened it. There was a letter folded inside.

"That's it!" said Bunter, taking it out.

Bob Cherry winked at his friends. They chuckled. Even then, they were not convinced. Bunter had produced a letter—and they waited for him to unfold it, and discover that it was the wrong letter.

However, he unfolded it, and blinked at it through his big spectacles, and made no such announcement.

"Shall I read it out to you?" he asked.

"Oh, do!" said Bob, chortling. He thought he understood. Bunter was going to read out a fictitious letter, making it up as he went along! To fellows who knew Billy Bunter, and his unending fabrications, that seemed quite clear.

"Go it!" said Frank Nugent.

Bunter cleared his throat with a fat little cough, and proceeded to read:

"Dear William,—I hope sincerely that you will join the party at Trant House for the Coronation celebrations, and—"

"By gum!" murmured Bob. "He does it well! A fellow would almost believe that he was actually reading that from the letter!"

"Almost!" grinned Nugent. "Carry on, old fat man!"

"Bring any friends you like!" Bunter read on. He paused, and blinked at the Famous Five. "You see, you fellows, I can take you—what?"

"The seefulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Carry on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Now that you are in Sussex, my boy, I should be glad if you would run across and see me," pursued Bunter. "Any day you like! Your old friend,—Trant."

"Fine!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good!" said Johnny Bull heartily. "Blessed if I thought you'd do it so well, Bunter. Only a bit weak at the end. Hasn't his jolly old lordship signed himself cousin or uncle—or both? You don't seem quite clear which he is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, he signs himself my old friend," said Bunter, blinking at the letter. "The fact is, he's not—not very nearly related—sort of third cousin twice removed—or—or second uncle removed, or something—"

"Oh crikey!"

"I call him uncle, you know, but when he writes, he generally signs himself 'Your old friend,'" explained Bunter. "Now, what do you fellows think of that?"

"I think you did it well," answered Harry, laughing, "and if we didn't know you so well, old fat man, we might really believe that you'd read out what's in that letter."

"Eh? So I have!"

"I don't think!" grinned Bob.



Billy Bunter shot round the curve just as the little old gentleman backed to the side of the lane, the squinting ruffian standing in front of him, flourishing the knobby stick. Next moment his bike crashed into the footpad and knocked him spinning! "Yaroooooh!" roared the ruffian, as Bunter and his bike landed on top of him.

"You silly asses, mean to say that you doubt my word?" roared Bunter.

"Sort of!" admitted Bob.

"Something like that!" grinned Nugent.

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Bunter. "Look at the letter, then, and see for yourselves!"

To the amazement of the Famous Five, Bunter held out the letter. They stared at it, and at him.

"We're to look at it?" exclaimed Bob.

"Yes, you ass!"

"But then we shall see that you've been gammoning!"

"Look at it!" roared Bunter.

In sheer astonishment Harry Wharton took the letter, and the Famous Five all looked at it together. Vernon-Smith looked on with a sneer.

They almost fell down, as they saw that Bunter had read out the letter, word for word. Their eyes fairly goggled.

"Great pip!" said Bob Cherry faintly. "Has Bunter told the truth? Could he?"

"Impossible!" said Johnny Bull. "If he could, why hasn't he ever done it before?"

"But—but that letter's genuine!" said Harry, in bewilderment.

"Looks like it!" said Nugent.

"I hope," said Bunter, with dignity, "that you'll take my word now, you fellows. It's a bit ungentlemanly to doubt a fellow's word, I must say."

"Well, fan me!" said Bob blankly. "That letter's genuine, all right! Blessed if I shan't begin to believe there's such a place as Bunter Court, at this rate."

The Bounder broke in, with a laugh. "Are you fellows really letting the fat ass gammon you to that extent? He's written that letter himself, of course."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"He couldn't have, Smithy. He couldn't even spell the words. And he couldn't write in this fist. And where the dickens would he get Lord Trant's private notepaper from?"

"Rot!" said the Bounder curtly. "Let's see it!"

Wharton passed the letter to Smithy. The Bounder stared at it. But he could not stare the obvious genuineness out of it. He had expected to see some flimsy spoof—any spoof was good enough for Billy Bunter, when he was bent on swank. But this, clearly, was no spoof.

The address, "Trant Elms, Sussex" was engraved—and there was his lordship's crest on the paper. Bunter, obviously, could not have obtained that sheet of notepaper, to make up a fictitious letter for purposes of swank.

Neither could he have written in that scholarly hand. He could not, in fact, have spelt the words, without a good many mistakes.

That letter had been written by Lord Trant at his country house, Trant Elms. It was a genuine invitation to "William" to join the party for the Coronation at his lordship's town house. Seeing was believing, and even the sceptical Bounder had to admit that much.

He scanned the letter; he turned it over in his hands; he examined it with minute attention. But examination could demonstrate nothing but that it had indubitably been written by the Earl of Trant.

He threw it back to Bunter and rose.

The Famous Five were astonished, chiefly at the unexpected and amazing circumstance that Bunter had told the truth. But there was no annoyance mingled with their astonishment; they saw no cause for annoyance. If Billy Bunter really knew Lord Trant, and had been invited by that wealthy and

eminent nobleman for the Coronation, they were quite prepared to congratulate him on his good luck. Smithy, on the other hand, was intensely annoyed.

He did not like being put in the wrong. He did not like to find that there were any real grounds for Bunter's offensive swank. And genuine as the letter looked, the Bounder had a doubting nature, and he still doubted. He could hardly doubt that Lord Trant had written that letter, but he was convinced—chiefly because he chose to be convinced—that there was a catch in it somewhere.

Bunter gave him a lofty blink.

"Perhaps you believe me now, Smithy?" he remarked.

"Not a word!" answered the Bounder coolly. "I don't know where you can have sneaked that letter, but it's all gammon! If you knew Lord Trant, you'd know whether he was a cousin or an uncle or an old friend—"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Did you find the letter in somebody's pocket?" sneered Smithy.

"Why, you cheeky beast—"

"Smithy, old man," murmured Bob, "that letter's written to Bunter; there's his name on it."

"Lots of Williams in the world," said Smithy. "Too many, in fact!"

"Oh, rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Don't be an ass, Smithy!"

"Are you fellows coming to play tennis, or sitting here listening to that fat idiot's silly swank and humbug?" grunted Smithy.

He stalked away towards the tennis courts. The Famous Five exchanged a smile, and followed him. So far as they could see, it was impossible for Bunter to have bagged a letter belonging to some other fellow named William—as, indeed, it was, except for a peculiar chance, of which they knew nothing. But the matter was not worth arguing.

about; the Bounder was welcome to think what he liked. They followed him to the tennis courts, leaving Billy Bunter sitting under the beech, grinning.

Bunter had got by with it.

He grinned with satisfaction.

There was, of course, a fly in the ointment. After any amount of swank on the subject of Lord Trant and the magnificent Coronation party at his town mansion, Bunter couldn't go there. He would have to explain that.

But that was an easy one—to Bunter.

He was going to explain that Lord Trant objected to his friends. Being a loyal pal, he was going to stick to his friends and throw Lord Trant over.

That looked like a good one—to Bunter.

In the meantime, right up to Coronation Day, he was going to spread himself, and swank to his fat heart's content; and the more Smithy was annoyed thereby, the more Bunter was going to be pleased.

Prospects seemed good—to Billy Bunter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Artful Dodger!

"THE Rolls, Larkin!" said Vernon-Smith, after breakfast the following morning.

"Yes, Master Herbert!"

Larkin proceeded to convey the information to the garage that the Rolls-Royce would be required by Master Herbert and his friends that morning.

Harry Wharton & Co., in the hall after breakfast, glanced at Smithy and glanced at one another. There was a rather peculiar expression on the Bounder's face—unpleasantly sardonic. It was easy to see that he had something up his sleeve, though they had no idea what it was.

"You fellows would like a run in the car this morning?" asked Smithy.

"Yes, rather!" assented Smithy's guests.

"And you, Bunter?"

"Certainly, old chap," answered Bunter—"so long as we're not back late for lunch, I mean!"

"Right—ho!" said Vernon-Smith. "There's ripping country in this part of Sussex. We'll run a bit north over the downs—what?"

"Good!" agreed Harry Wharton.

A motoring run on a bright May morning was quite attractive to the Greyfriars fellows. But they could see that Herbert Vernon-Smith had something else on his mind, and, from his glance at Bunter, guessed that it had something to do with that fat and fatuous youth.

"Lots of things to see," went on Smithy. "Glorious Sussex downs, and old towns and villages—such as Trant."

"Trant?" repeated Harry.

"Yes. Trant's only twenty or twenty-five miles from here," said Smithy carelessly. "We passed Trant Elms once, you remember—fine old place! Bunter forgot to mention just then that he knew Lord Trant, or we might have dropped in to see him."

The Famous Five did not answer that. They knew that the Bounder did not believe in the Trant connection of the Bunter family, and that he would have taken a malicious pleasure in showing up Bunter's spoof, if it was spoof. It seemed that something of the sort was in his mind now.

"No, I never thought of mentioning it, Smithy," said Billy Bunter calmly. "I'm not the fellow to swank about such things. If I'd thought of it at the time,

I'd have taken you all in and introduced you to my cousin—that is, my uncle—I mean, my old friend, Lord Trant!"

The Famous Five grinned. Bunter seemed to be still a little confused about the relationship.

In point of fact, they did not believe in that relationship. That was just swank. But for the rest, they had to believe that Bunter was acquainted, at least, with his lordship. How else could he have received a letter from him?

"You see," Bunter further explained, "there's a lot of titled people in our family, and it doesn't seem so jolly wonderful to me, as I dare say it does to you, Smithy. I dare say you've never met a lord, except old Mauly at Greyfriars. We have 'em in dozens at Bunter Court for the huntin' and shootin'."

"Well, the fact is, I'd rather like to have a look at Lord Trant's place," said the Bounder. "Very historic old place—one of the sights of Sussex. Lord Trant asked you to run across and see him in that letter, Bunter."

"Oh, yes; now I'm in Sussex, you know!" grinned Bunter. "I don't think I shall trouble, though. I shall see enough of him in town at the Coronation."

"You can't neglect your titled friends like that, old fat man!" said the Bounder, shaking his head. "We'll take in Trant Elms on our run this morning."

"Eh?"

"His lordship's sure to give us permission to look over the place, as you're such a pal of his—"

"Wha-at?"

"Famous picture gallery there, you fellows," said Smithy, "stacked with Rembrandts and Velasquez and Corots and things. People travel hundreds of miles to see it. They show it on certain days. But any day will do for Bunter. Lord Trant said so in his letter, you know."

Harry Wharton laughed.

The Bounder believed—or was determined to believe—that that letter was somehow a spoof, so he had planned this motor run to his lordship's house to show up the spoof.

Certainly, if Bunter had somehow got hold of a letter that did not belong to him, and was spreading himself on the strength of it, he could not carry the spoof so far as to visit Lord Trant in his country mansion.

"Not a bad idea!" said Harry. "I'd like to see the place while we're in Sussex. What about it, Bunter?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The Bounder grinned.

The Famous Five looked very curiously at Bunter. There was no reason, so far as they could see, why he should not adopt the Bounder's suggestion. Lord Trant had asked William to run over while he was in Sussex. Why shouldn't he?

"Is it a go, Bunter?" asked Bob.

"Oh! No! Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"J-j-j-jolly good idea! But—"

"Is there a 'but' in it?" asked the Bounder blandly.

"Oh! No! Yes! I mean—h'm!"

"You fat chump!" said Harry Wharton. "What do you mean? Have you been pulling our leg, after all?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Well, what do you mean?" asked the captain of the Remove, rather sharply.

"Oh, nothing! The—the fact is, it's a jolly good idea!" declared Bunter, recovering himself. "I—I'm jolly glad Smithy suggested it. I'll be ready at eleven, Smithy."

"The car's coming round now."

"If you want to start now, Smithy,

you can start without me. I said eleven, and I mean eleven—see?"

The Bounder smiled—grimly. On any other occasion, booked for a motor-trip, the Bounder certainly would not have waited half an hour, or half a minute, for Billy Bunter. But if the fat Owl was banking on that, it was not a chicken that would fight.

"You fellows don't mind waiting till eleven?" asked Smithy.

"No—that's all right."

"We'll wait, then! Come and knock the balls about in the billiards-room—I won't ask you to put any quids on it," added the Bounder sarcastically.

"Right—ho, old bean!"

The juniors went into the billiards-room to kill time till Bunter was ready.

The Owl of the Remove blinked after them with a ferocious blink!

Billy Bunter had plenty of cheek. He was famous for it. But even Billy Bunter had not cheek enough to barge into the mansion of a nobleman who had never heard of him, and claim acquaintance.

Bunter had to wriggle out of this somehow.

For several minutes the fat junior stood thinking it out. Then he took his hat, and rolled out of the house.

Prompt at eleven o'clock, the Bounder threw down his cue and came out of the billiards-room, followed by the Famous Five. The Rolls was ready on the drive, the chauffeur standing by the car. Bunter, however, was not to be seen.

The Bounder called to the butler.

"Larkin! Where's Bunter?"

"I have not seen Master Bunter since he went out, Master Herbert."

"Oh, he went out, did he?" said Smithy. "Inquire where he is, will you, Larkin?"

"Very good, sir."

The juniors waited by the car. There was a sardonic sneer on the Bounder's face, and the chums of the Remove were feeling rather dubious. It was odd, at least, for Billy Bunter to have disappeared, at the time fixed for the start.

Larkin came back at last. But he came alone. There was no sign of William-George Bunter.

"Well," rapped Vernon-Smith, "where's Bunter, Larkin?"

"I find, sir, that he went out on a bicycle nearly half an hour ago," answered Larkin.

"On a bike?" repeated Smithy. "He has no bike here!"

"I understand, sir, that he went on yours," said Larkin. "He left word that he would be back by eleven, but that you were not to wait for him, sir."

Larkin went back into the house.

The Bounder gave the Famous Five a sarcastic look.

"Think he'll turn up?" he asked.

"Um!"

"Well, it's not much good waiting, as Bunter doesn't mean to come back till lunch," said Vernon-Smith. "Let's get out. I've said that the fat ass was spoofing—and I dare say you fellows have gumption enough to see it now for yourselves."

The Greyfriars fellows rolled away in the Rolls—not to visit Trant Elms!

However, they had quite a jolly morning, speeding over the glorious Sussex downs, in the bright sunshine of the merry month of May—and they did not miss Bunter to any great extent.

Only they wondered what he would have to say when they saw him again. Smithy had no doubt that he would have some thumping whopper to tell, to account for having missed the drive to Trant Elms. And Harry Wharton & Co. wondered whether Smithy was, after all, right.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Bumps:

"**B**LOW!" said Billy Bunter crossly.

He rolled off his bike—or rather, Smithy's bike—and stood holding the machine and blinking round him with an irritated blink.

Before him lay the choice of two roads—and which was the road back to Seahill Park, was, so far as Bunter was concerned, wrapped in mystery.

It had seemed to the fat Owl quite a bright idea to clear off on a bike, and leave the Greyfriars fellows to wait for him, or start without him, which ever they jolly well liked.

Certainly, Billy Bunter wasn't going to present himself at Trant Elms—not if Billy Bunter knew it!

It was like that beast, Smithy, to think of such a dodge as that, for showing up his spoof. But Bunter was not to be caught so easily.

He was going back for lunch. He had a yarn all ready—he had lost his way, and delayed his return entirely by accident.

Billy Bunter was going to make that statement—untruthfully! Now it looked as if he would be able, after all, to make it truthfully! For he had, in point of fact, lost his way, quite unintentionally!

Standing at the fork of the road, blinking to right and left, the fat Owl

wondered which road led to Seahill. Far in the distance, he could see the blue sea rolling in the sunshine. That was his direction. Still, that was no present help, for both the lanes in front of him led down towards the sea. One of them, he was sure, led to Seahill—the other somewhere else. Which was which?

Billy Bunter was very particular about getting back too late for a motor run to Trant Elms. But he was still more particular about not getting back late for lunch. That was important.

During his bike ride that morning, he had passed several enticing places where refreshments were to be had. But he had not stopped at any of them. At Mr. Vernon-Smith's magnificent seaside mansion, there was everything a fellow could want—except actual cash. And Bunter, not for the first time in his life, was short of cash. He was, certainly, expecting a postal order. But, as had so often happened before, the expected postal order had not arrived. So there was no refreshment for Bunter till he got back to lunch—and now he stood, blinking irritably, at the parting of the ways, not knowing which to take.

"Beasts!" grunted Bunter.

It was all the fault of that beast Smithy, that he was stranded like this. Nothing was ever Bunter's own fault!

There was not a sign-post to be seen. Not a building—not an inhabitant. There was a glorious view of rolling

downs, shady woods, and a distant shining sea—but Bunter had no use for a glorious view. He grunted with annoyance.

Then, to his great relief, he heard footsteps, and blinking round, saw a pedestrian coming the way he had come.

Bunter waited for him to come up. He was a little old gentleman, not very well dressed, and he looked rather tired, as if he had done quite enough walking over rugged downs that warm morning.

He stopped as he arrived at the corner where Bunter stood with the bike.

Bunter had intended to ask him the way. Before he could do so, however, the little old gentleman asked Bunter the way!

"Perhaps you can tell me which of these lanes leads to Stetton, my boy?" he said in a very pleasant voice. He put up an eyeglass as he addressed Bunter, and looked at him through it.

"Oh dear!" said Bunter. "I was just going to ask you which one led to Seahill."

"Dear me!" The little old gentleman smiled, quite a pleasant smile. "Then we are both in the same state of ignorance."

He looked at him through his eyeglass.

Bunter grunted dismally.

One of those beastly lanes led down

(Continued on next page.)

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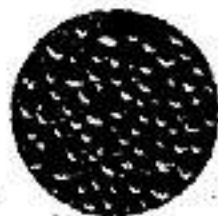
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to Seahill; the other, apparently, to a place called Setton. But which was which?

The eyeglass turned on Bunter again. "Perhaps you have seen someone I am looking for," remarked the little old gentleman. His voice, which was very cultivated, and his manner, which was very courteous, rather contrasted with his somewhat shabby clothes. Somebody who had come down in the world, Bunter supposed.

"Eh? Who?" asked Bunter without much interest.

He was thinking of his own difficulties, not those of a shabby old gentleman. Billy Bunter had no use for poor people, though ever so nice in their manners.

"A young man, probably in plus fours," said the little old gentleman. "I missed him at Setton, but learning that he had gone for a walk, I thought I might fall in with him; but, unfortunately, I appear to have lost my way. Possibly you may have seen him on the roads."

Bunter shook his head.

If he had passed any young man in plus fours, he had not noticed him.

"Dear me!" said the old gentleman again.

There was a pause, while they looked round—the old gentleman through his eyeglass, Bunter through his spectacles.

"Well, well, one must take a chance!" said the little old gentleman at last, and, with a nod to Bunter, he re-started.

One of the two lanes had a downward slope. That was the one the old gentleman chose—perhaps with the idea that, as he did not know which was the right one, he might as well take the easiest.

He disappeared from Bunter's sight down the winding lane in a few minutes.

Bunter grunted.

He did not feel disposed to take chances, if he could help it, when an error might lead to being late for lunch. But what was a fellow to do?

Greatly to his relief, he heard footsteps behind. Again he blinked round hopefully.

A man was coming on at a trot. He was not a nice-looking man like the old gentleman with the eyeglass. He was a big, brawny, muscular man, with a squint in one eye, and a front tooth missing. He was in need of a shave, and still more seriously in need of a wash. He had a knobby stick under one arm.

Bunter did not like his looks at all.

He looked, in fact, a most unpleasant kind of a tramp—not at all the sort of man a fellow liked to meet in a lonely place. Indeed, he looked capable of relieving a fellow of his bike and of his loose cash, in a spot sufficiently lonely. Bunter was glad that it was Smithy's bike, and not his own, as that stubbly ruffian came hurrying towards him. There was no help at hand, if the man with the squint chose to take possession, and he looked like it.

Bunter, who had been going to ask for information, only hoped now that the stubbly man would pass without stopping.

But the man stopped. He looked, or, rather, squinted, at Bunter. But, to the fat junior's relief, he showed no hostility.

"Seen a bloke pass 'ere?" he asked hastily.

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"Old gent with a heyeglass?" asked the squinting man. "I got a message for 'im! You seen 'im?"

"Yes, he went down that way!" said Bunter, pointing.

Without stopping to render thanks, the squinting man followed the way the little old gentleman had gone at a run, and disappeared in his turn down the winding lane.

Bunter leaned on the bike and grunted.

He was glad to see that stubbly man disappear. He did not like his looks at

all, and still less did he like his knobby stick.

He blinked back along the road—but no one else was in sight. What was a fellow to do? Lunch-time was drawing near. Bunter's watch had stopped, as it often did—but he did not need a watch to tell him that. Inward premonitions warned him that it was near lunch-time.

It was useless to stand there, he realised that. He had, like the little old gentleman, to take a chance. And, like the old gentleman, he decided on the easiest way, as there was nothing else to choose between the two. Downhill was easy going, at any rate, and it was as likely to be the right way as not. If that squinting beast was still hanging about, he would pass him quickly enough, free-wheeling down a slope.

Having decided, Billy Bunter re-mounted Smithy's bike and started.

Bunter was no great cyclist but on a slope he could put on quite a good speed.

He went fast—and beyond the bend of the lane he found that the descent was steeper, and he went faster.

In fact he whizzed.

That lane wound almost like a corkscrew, between high grassy banks, crowned with hedges and trees.

Suddenly, from the lane ahead, came a sharp, calling voice:

"Help!"

Bunter blinked.

He knew the little old gentleman's voice again.

"Help!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

In a flash he understood! That man with the squint had not been following the old gentleman with a message, as he had stated. He had been following him to a lonely spot, with an intention which was revealed by the fact that the old gentleman was calling for help!

Bunter fumbled with his brake.

But before he could get the brake on he shot round another curve.

He had a split second's glimpse of a startling scene—the little old gentleman backed up to the bank at the side of the lane, the squinting ruffian standing in front of him, in the middle of the lane, flourishing the knobby stick!

Only for a fraction of a second did Bunter view that scene—then he crashed.

His bike crashed right into the stubbly man, before the footpad knew that it was coming, and knocked him spinning.

With a fearful yell, the man went over headlong, and over him sprawled Smithy's bike, and over Smithy's bike sprawled Billy Bunter. And from Bunter, as he bumped, came a roar that woke the echoes of the Sussex downs far and wide:

"Yaroooooh!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Brave Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER sat up and blinked wildly.

He was sitting on the bike.

The bike was on the footpad.

The footpad was groaning horribly.

A crash on hard chalk, with a bike crashing on top of him, and Bunter's weight added to the bike, seemed to have damaged the man with the squint.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter.

"Dear me!" ejaculated the little old gentleman.

A moment ago he had stood at the mercy of the footpad, and the knobby stick had been uplifted to crack his ancient nut.

Bunter's sudden and unexpected arrival had wrought a startling change.

The knobby stick had flown through

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Billy Bunter rolled back his trouser-leg and revealed a fat knee. On that fat knee was a large dark bruise. Vernon-Smith stood dumbfounded at sight of it. "Satisfied now?" asked the fat Removite, with lofty sarcasm.

the air. The footpad lay crumpled, evidently hors de combat.

The danger was over.

"Dear me!" repeated the little old gentleman.

"Ooooooh!" repeated Bunter.

"Woohoo!" repeated Bunter. "My dear, good, brave lad!" exclaimed the old gentleman. He ran towards Bunter to give him a helping hand. "Are you hurt? I hope not—I trust not! Let me help you! Gallant lad!"

"Eh?" gasped Bunter.

He was glad of a helping hand to rise. He was winded—and a bike was not a comfortable seat sideways.

He staggered up, spluttering.

"Such presence of mind!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "My dear boy, I trust you are not hurt! No?"

"Wow!" gasped Bunter.

He set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at the old gentleman.

Why the old gentleman was paying him these compliments Bunter did not at first realise.

He had run into the tramp and knocked him over, for the simple reason that the tramp was in the way of the bike, and he could not stop the whizzing bike in time.

This old ass seemed to fancy that he had done it on purpose.

Bunter had had a heavy bump, and collected about a dozen bruises. Such, most decidedly, had not been his intention.

But the old gentleman's mistake was natural.

He had left Bunter up at the corner, undecided which way to take. Then he had been attacked by the tramp. Then Bunter had come whizzing down on the bike and knocked the tramp spinning. Really, it looked as if a fellow, with plenty of nerve, had rushed recklessly to the rescue.

That was the old gentleman's impression.

He beamed on Bunter.

Bunter rubbed damaged spots, and gasped for breath.

The footpad, howling with anguish, tried to struggle out from under the bike. He was hurt, there was no doubt about that.

Leaving Bunter, the old gentleman ran to the fallen cudgel and picked it up.

Cudgel in hand, he turned back to the tramp.

The bike was heaved over with a clank, and the squinting man staggered to his feet, gurgling. He limped badly. Barely was he on his feet when the old gentleman reached him and hit him on the head with his own cudgel.

Bang!

The footpad roared.

Bang! went the cudgel again. Bang!

Yelling wildly, the footpad took to his heels. He limped as he ran. All the mischief had been taken out of him by that terrific crash—he could hardly have put up a scrap with Bunter! He was bumped and bruised all over, a mere lump of aches and pains. But the old gentleman, perhaps not realising that he was so far gone, followed him up, still banging with the cudgel; and the wretched tramp dodged and howled and yelled as he got bang after bang, till at last he scrambled desperately up the bank, tore through a hedge, and vanished over the rugged downs.

Breathing hard, the old gentleman returned to Bunter.

Bunter picked up the bike, making the sad discovery that the front wheel was badly buckled and the pedals twisted, to name only a few of the damages. That bike needed a lot of professional attention before it could be ridden again. With feelings almost too deep for words, the fat Owl leaned it against the wayside bank. He had to walk now!

But there was, so to speak, balm in Gilead!

Lower down, in the distance, Bunter spotted a high roof, evidently that of a large building in a town by the sea. He knew that roof. It was the roof of Seahill railway station.

From the corner where he had stopped it had been hidden from view by trees. From the spot where he now stood it was visible.

Bunter gasped with relief. He knew where he was now. By leaving the lane and cutting across the fields he could reach the Seahill road in ten minutes—and Seahill Park five minutes later, and—lunch at last!

He was about to start when the little old gentleman came trotting back.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed.

"Eh, what?" asked Bunter, blinking round impatiently.

"One moment—one moment——"

"I'm in rather a hurry."

"Yes, yes, but I must speak!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "My dear boy, I must thank you. I should have been robbed—I should have been injured. How can I thank you, my brave lad, for coming to my help?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "That—that's all right!"

The old gentleman's gratitude was all very well. Bunter did not object to that. But he was thinking of lunch. Now that he knew his way, he was anxious to get going.

"Such presence of mind!" said the old gentleman, beaming. "Nothing but what you did would have been of any use against that hulking ruffian. Both of us would have been at his mercy had you not thought of running into him with your bicycle, and knocking him over. But the risk you ran, my lad—you did not stop to think of that!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "No."

(Continued on page 16.)

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BILLY BUNTER'S CORONATION PARTY!



(Continued from page 15.)

Bunter was not the fellow to disclaim credit, due or not. He did not think much of this rather shabby old gentleman, who seemed to him rather a fool. Still, if the old gentleman wanted to be grateful, Bunter was the fellow to give him his head. Nevertheless, lunch came first.

"I've got some friends waiting for me—" added Bunter, as he started over the bank, to get into the adjoining field for a short cut to the road.

"I will not detain you, my dear lad, if you are in a hurry. But I must know your name—the name of my gallant rescuer."

"Oh! Bunter—Billy Bunter! Good-bye!"

"Once more, my dear boy, I thank you! And—"

Bunter disappeared through the hedge.

He did the adjoining field, and the next, at a trot. He came out into the Seahill road, and trotted on to the gates of Mr. Vernon-Smith's mansion. He trotted up the avenue to the house—and never had the avenue seemed so long.

But his luck was in; he rolled, dusty and breathless, in as the gong sounded for lunch!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Tells the Truth!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Bunter rolled in.

The Greyfriars fellows were back from their drive. They had learned from Larkin that Bunter had not come in yet. Now here he was.

"So you've come back!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, yes!" gasped Bunter.

"I fancied he would be back for lunch," remarked the Bounder. "You've missed seeing your old friend Lord Trant, Bunter."

"Look here, you fat ass, why didn't you turn up?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Have you been spoofing us, after all?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Well, why didn't you come back at eleven?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I—I couldn't! I lost my way—"

"Gammon!" said the Bounder coolly.

"I—I mean, I—I had a spill on my bike!" gasped Bunter. "That's what I really meant to say."

"Not much difference!" remarked Smithy.

"The fact is, I—I lost my way, and then—then I had a spill," gasped Bunter. "Both—see? I've got a lot of bumps! If you don't believe me, Smithy—"

"I don't!" said the Bounder.

"Well, you jolly well will when you see your bike!" said Bunter. "Never seen a jigger so thoroughly crocked!"

"Eh?"

The Famous Five grinned. If

Smithy's jigger was crocked, it was a proof that Bunter had had, as he stated, a spill. But the news that his handsome jigger was crocked seemed to have a rather exciting effect on the Bounder.

"You fat rotter! Where's my jigger?" he demanded.

"I had to leave it up on the hill; it was too crocked to ride!"

"Why, you fat scoundrel—"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"If you've smashed up my jigger—" roared the Bounder.

"A minute ago you didn't believe that I'd had a spill!" sneered Bunter. "If I haven't, the jigger's all right. Wait till you see it, though."

"Well, if Bunter really had a spill—" said Harry Wharton.

"Awful crash," said Bunter. "I ran into a tramp, on a steep place. Luckily, he was too hurt to cut up rusty. I say, you fellows, let's get in to lunch. I'm fearfully hungry!"

The Greyfriars fellows went in to lunch, Vernon-Smith with a black look on his face. He had told the Famous Five that Bunter would come back with some thumping lie. That was still his belief. But it looked to him now as if Bunter had crocked his bike to give colour to the thumping lie. Which was extremely irritating to the Bounder.

That the bike had really been crocked was hardly to be doubted, as Bunter cheerfully described where he had left it, so that a man could be sent to wheel it in.

Harry Wharton & Co. were rather curious to see it.

It had arrived by the time they finished lunch, and they went out to look at it—leaving Bunter still lunching.

One glance was enough! If ever a bike looked thoroughly crocked, that bike did! Obviously, it had had a smash—and a bad smash!

The Bounder glared hard and deep as he glared at that dilapidated jigger.

"The fat rotter!" he said savagely.

"He's crocked that bike—but he never had a spill. That's gammon! I told you fellows he wouldn't come back in time to drive to Trant Elms—and he didn't! He had to spin some yarn, and this is it!"

"It looks a bit like it," said Harry Wharton slowly. "But—"

"But what, fathead?" yapped the Bounder.

"Well, the bike's had a spill, that's a cert! If Bunter was on it when it crashed, that may have kept him out and—"

"Rubbish!"

"My esteemed Smithy—" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The Bounder laughed scornfully.

"It seems to me that you want to be taken in by that fat idiot's swank," he sneered. "How he got hold of a letter from Lord Trant I don't know, but he knows nothing of the man, and the man knows nothing of him. He dodged going over to Trant Elms, as I said he would. He came back with a lie, as I told you, and you're silly asses enough to believe him."

Harry Wharton & Co. were silent. Certainly, they were not disposed to place any faith in any statement made by William George Bunter without proof; they knew him only too well.

Still, even Bunter was entitled to the benefit of the doubt. He had said that he had had a spill on that bike. The bike, at least, looked like it.

"But, my dear chap," said Bob at

last, "you don't think Bunter crocked the bike without being on it—just bashed it into a tree, or something—"

"I do!" snapped the Bounder. "Just to give colour to it! Just the rotten trick he would play—with another fellow's jigger. Not with his own, I dare say!"

"Um!" said Bob.

"Well, let's see," sneered the Bounder. "We'll have another motor run this afternoon, and see if Bunter will join up. If he misses us again when we're starting, what will you say then?"

"Well, that would be rather palpable, I suppose," admitted Harry Wharton.

"We'll put it to him, then."

They went back into the hall, and Bunter, having finished lunch at last, joined them there, depositing his ample limbs in a deep armchair.

"What about a motor trip this afternoon, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry. "You missed it this morning, you know—"

"Owing to that crash on the jigger," assented Bunter, "otherwise, I should have been back in time, of course. I was rather keen to run across and see Lord Trant at his place. As you know, he asked me to, in his letter the other day."

"Well, let's go this afternoon—what?"

"Nothing I should like better, old chap!" said Bunter affably.

"Oh, good!"

"Only—" said Bunter regretfully.

"I thought there would be an 'only' or a 'but,'" grinned the Bounder sarcastically. "Only what, you spoofing fat oyster?"

"Only," said Bunter calmly, "I feel so jolly bruised, you know, by that crash on the jigger—"

"You never had a crash on that jigger," said Vernon-Smith. "You crocked it to make these silly asses believe you had."

"Oh, really, Smithy! When a fellow's black with bruises—" said Billy Bunter warmly.

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I've got a fearful bruise on my knee!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "Think it's funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That does it!" yelled Vernon-Smith. "Even you silly chumps will spot the spoof now, I fancy!"

"How do you mean?" asked Nugent. The Bounder chortled.

"Bunter says he's got bruises. If he was on the bike when it got smashed like that he certainly has! Well, let's see the bruises!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob.

The Famous Five looked at Bunter. Vernon-Smith laughed mockingly.

He had not the faintest belief that Bunter had had a spill. He did not believe for a moment that he had any bruises to show. He fancied that he had the fat spoofer now, delivered into his hands, as it were.

"I say, you fellows, I hope you don't doubt my word!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I'd come over to Trant Elms with you with pleasure if my knee wasn't so painful."

"Big-bruise on it—what?" said the Bounder banteringly.

"Yes, you beast!"

"Well, let's see it!" chuckled Smithy. "Seeing is believing, you know!"

"Well, I don't want to move now I've made myself comfortable on these cushions," said Bunter.

"I fancied not!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Look here, Bunter, you fat ass," said Harry Wharton, "if you've been spoofing us, as I begin to think you have, you want jolly well kicking. I—"

"If you doubt my word," said Bunter, with tremendous dignity, "I'll take the trouble to prove it, and then I hope you'll be jolly well ashamed of yourselves."

The fat Owl stood up. He rolled back his trouser-leg and revealed a fat knee.

Vernon-Smith jumped almost clear of the polished oak floor in his surprise. Then he stood dumbfounded.

On that fat knee was a large dark bruise. Evidently Billy Bunter had had a knock there—and a hard knock. It could hardly be doubted now that he had been on the bike when it crashed.

"Satisfied?" asked Bunter, with lofty sarcasm. "Think I smashed my knee on a tree as well as your mouldy old jigger, Smithy?"

Smithy did not reply. Obviously Bunter hadn't done that. His story of a bike spill was borne out—by evidence! That evidence satisfied the Famous Five, if not Smithy.

Bunter, with a cheery grin on his fat face, settled himself in cushions for a nap! The other fellows went out—the Famous Five smiling and the Bounder scowling.

"He had a spill," admitted Smithy at last, "but that wasn't what kept him away. He went out to dodge, and he stayed out to dodge—and I'll jolly well show the fat spoofer up to-morrow."

"Oh, bother Bunter!" said Bob. "What about a spot of tennis?"

And they went down to the tennis courts and forgot Bunter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

What the Butler Said!

"**W**ORTHING?"

"Yes!"

"I'll come!"

"Don't if you'd rather not!"

"I want to!" yapped Bunter.

"Well, be ready at three, or you'll get left!" said Vernon-Smith, and he lounged away.

It was several days later.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had declared that he would show up the fat spoofer on the morrow. But the fat spoofer had been one too many for Smithy.

On the morrow Bunter's knee seemed too painful for exertion. On the following day he had—or said he had—a headache and did not care for motoring. Next day he was very tired after bathing.

Then the Bounder appeared to give it up.

Whether Billy Bunter was or was not making excuses for steering clear of Lord Trant's residence the Famous Five could hardly make up their minds. But Vernon-Smith had not the slightest doubt about it. How Bunter had got hold of that letter he could not guess, but he was assured that the fat Owl knew nothing whatever of Lord Trant and that Lord Trant knew nothing whatever of Bunter—and that Billy Bunter was no more invited to the Coronation party than the man in the moon was.

Still, it was clear that so long as Smithy proposed motoring over to Trant Elms, Bunter would not be at a loss for an excuse. Short of bundling him headlong into the car, and driving him off willy-nilly, there seemed no way of getting him within twenty miles of his lordship's country house.

So the Bounder dropped the subject—much to Bunter's relief and rather to the relief of the Famous Five, who were getting rather fed-up with it.

A run round to sunny Worthing, however, was welcome to all, and that was what the Bounder proposed on this particular afternoon.

Bunter was quite willing to join up for a run to Worthing, which was along the Sussex coast, a good forty miles from Trant Elms. In fact, he would have been very much annoyed had he been left out of the party.

Had the Bounder been keen on his coming Bunter might have scented a rat. But Smithy was ungracious about it—his look and tone hinting that he would have preferred to leave the fat Owl behind. Bunter had no suspicions—except that that beast Smithy would leave him out if he had half a chance.

So, prompt at three, Billy Bunter was ready to pack into the big car with the Greyfriars party.

Smithy gave him a sour look.

"Sure you want to come, Bunter?" he asked.

"I'm coming!" grunted Bunter.

"Oh, all right!"

They packed in, and the Rolls rolled away down the avenue. Swiftly it rolled by green lanes and dusty white roads.

"Not keeping to the coast, Smithy?" asked Bob, when three or four miles had passed under the wheels and the blue sea disappeared.

"Bit of a run round," answered the Bounder. "Lots of time to get into Worthing for tea."

"I say, we don't want to be late for tea!" remarked Billy Bunter. "That's important!"

"Bags of time!" answered Smithy carelessly.

The Famous Five liked a run round in a smoothly running Rolls Royce, and Billy Bunter had no objection so long as they arrived somewhere in good time for tea.

But after a time it dawned on Harry Wharton & Co. that the car was taking more than a "bit" of a run round. Worthing lay to the east along the coast. The car was eating up the miles to the north-west. Twenty miles to the north-west was rather an extensive "run round" to a destination almost due east.

However, it was jolly, and nobody minded. But when the car passed through a village which Harry Wharton recognised as Oakways it suddenly occurred to him that this was the road to Trant.

He gave the Bounder a sharp look.

"Where are we heading for, Smithy?" he asked.

"Worthing!" answered the Bounder blandly.

"Worthing's right behind us."

"We're having a run round, aren't we?"

Wharton was silent, and his friends looked a little uncomfortable. Billy Bunter, if he blinked out at the road at all, did not recognise it. The car rushed on, till the little Sussex town of Trant appeared ahead.

Then it slowed down at a great gateway back from the road, where massive bronze gates stood wide open.

The Famous Five knew Trant Elms, having passed it in a car with Smithy before. This time they were not passing it. They were going in!

The chauffeur—who had evidently received his instructions from the Bounder before starting, turned in at the tall gateway, and drove on up a wide drive lined with ancient elms.

Billy Bunter gave a startled blink round.

"I say, you fellows, what's this place?" he exclaimed.

The Bounder chuckled.

"Don't you know it?" he asked.

"It ain't Worthing!" said Bunter, blinking from the car. "Looks to me like a private place!"

The Famous Five looked at one another uncomfortably.

Smithy's little trick was palpable to them now. Bunter had refused, for reasons good or bad, to visit Trant Elms. Now he was visiting Lord Trant's residence in happy ignorance of the fact. No doubt they were going to arrive, ultimately, at Worthing—after a very long run round, taking in Lord Trant's residence on the way.

"Look here, Smithy—" said Harry Wharton uneasily.

"Well?" grinned the Bounder. He was greatly amused. The fact that Billy Bunter did not yet know where he was did not seem to indicate that Lord Trant was an old friend of the Bunter clan.

"What the thump have we come here for?" exclaimed Harry.

"Historic old place—one of the sights of Sussex, as I've told you!" grinned Smithy. "Well worth seeing—with a pal to pass us in."

The chums of the Remove sat silent.

On the evidence of the letter Bunter had produced they believed him, though the Bounder did not. If Bunter had told the truth—if Lord Trant was an old friend who had asked him to run across any day he liked while he was in Sussex—there was no harm in the Bounder's trick.

On the other hand, if the Bounder's doubts were well founded, what then? The thought of barging in on a stranger, who would naturally think them a bunch of pushing bounders, made the Famous Five feel hot all over.

It had no effect on the Bounder. He cared for nothing but showing up Bunter's spoof. Bunter—if Smithy were right—would look a fool; and the fact that the rest of them would look fools, too, mattered nothing to Smithy.

"Look here, Smithy, this won't do!" said Bob Cherry at last. "Let's get out of this!"

"Why?" grinned the Bounder. "Don't you believe that fat spoofer now?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"The butfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh uneasily.

"Cut it out, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "If—if what you think is right what the dickens will they think of us?"

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter. He blinked at a vast, many-windowed facade of a magnificent mansion that appeared at a curve of the drive. "I—I say, what's this place?"

Bunter was getting suspicious at last.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "He doesn't know his old friend's place. Have another squint, Bunter. Uncle Trant may be knocking about."

"Wha-a-t?" gasped Bunter.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles. He realised now how the Bounder had pulled his leg, and where he was.

Utter dismay sat on Bunter's fat countenance.

"I—I—I say, you fellows! Is—is—is this Trant Elms?" he gasped.

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

"I—I say— Oh, you beast, Smithy!" howled Bunter. "You said we were motoring to Worthing."

"So we are. Don't you want to

drop in on your old friend on the way," chortled Vernon-Smith.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Lord Trant may ask us to tea, being so pally with Bunter," chuckled Smithy. "Then we'll cut out Worth-ing—what? We don't meet lords so often as Bunter does, you know."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, make him turn round! I—I'm not going there! I—I—"

"And why not?" grinned the Bouncer.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter. "Go back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Smithy.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at Bunter, and looked at one another. The dismay in his fat face was hardly to be mistaken.

"You blithering fat ass!" said Harry, compressing his lips. "Have you been telling lies, after all, and made that ass Smithy bring us all here to look a set of fools?"

"Oh, no! But—"

"But what, then?"

"I—I—I think my cousin—I mean my uncle—that is, my old friend Trant, is—is away from—from home now!" gasped Bunter. "Another time—see? I say, tell that beastly chauffeur to turn round!"

"Look here, Smithy, chuck it!" rapped Bob angrily.

"Too late," grinned the Bouncer.

The car came to a halt in front of a magnificent portico. A vast building, with innumerable windows reflecting the May sunshine, faced the dismayed juniors as they looked from the car. A vast door opened.

On the threshold appeared a magnificent creature—apparently a butler, but a super-butler. He swam, rather than walked, down vast steps to the halted car.

Harry Wharton & Co. sat crimson and dumb. They had no doubt now, or very little, that the Bouncer was right, and that it was all "spoof."

Such a position was enough to make a fellow's flesh creep. Even the Bouncer ceased to laugh.

As for Bunter, he blinked at the massive, magnificent super-butler, with his little round eyes almost bulging through his big, round spectacles.

Slow and stately, the super-butler swam towards them. In a few moments more the spoof was going to be shown up. Bunter's humbug completely given away, and the party ordered off the premises, as a set of pushing bouncers who had butted in where they had no business. But—

The magnificent creature reached the car. He bowed his stately head to the occupants. He opened the door of the car. He spoke, and the words he uttered surprised the Famous Five, astonished the Bouncer, and made William George Bunter wonder whether he was dreaming. For this was what the butler said:

"His lordship bids you welcome to his house, Master Bunter. His lordship saw you from the window, and has instructed me to say that he is very glad indeed to see you again. His lordship is at present confined to his room with a somewhat severe attack of rheumatism, and regrets that he will not be able to do the honours of his mansion personally, but he desires you, and your friends, to make yourselves at home in every way. I am completely at your orders, Master Bunter."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Amazing!

BILLY BUNTER gasped.

He could only gasp.

He gasped like a fish out of water.

The Bouncer sat dumb—dumb-founded. Harry Wharton & Co. brightened up with infinite relief.

"They had feared the worst, and the best had happened. From Bunter's looks it had seemed impossible to doubt that the Bouncer was right—that he had spoofed them once more, and that he knew no more of Lord Trant than of the Emperor of Japan, or the Great Cham of Tartary. But it—"

Evidently it was all right.

Lord Trant had seen Bunter arriving in the car, from the window of the room where he was nursing his rheumatism. He had instructed his butler to welcome him to Trant Elms. Obviously, he knew Bunter by sight, and by name, since he had recognised him in the car, and given his name to the butler. Even the Bouncer had nothing to say now. He looked almost stunned.

Right up to that moment Vernon-Smith had been absolutely convinced that it was all spoof—that he was going to show that spoof up in the most unmistakable manner, with a reckless disregard for the feelings of the other fellows involved. He was going to prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt. And what he had succeeded in proving was that Lord Trant indubitably knew Billy Bunter, and desired to make much of him at his mansion of Trant Elms.

For a long moment silence followed what the butler said.

Bunter broke it.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

The super-butler bowed his stately head again.

"If you will please to alight Master Bunter—"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

"You and the other young gentlemen—"

There was a general stirring in the crowded car.

Billy Bunter heaved up his weight.

He could not understand. The whole thing was utterly beyond his fat comprehension. So far as he knew, he had never even seen Lord Trant. He had never even heard of him, till he came to stay at Smithy's place, where he had heard his lordship spoken of as a very great man in Sussex. Except for that, he had known nothing at all of him, till he picked up the letter lost on the beach by the young man in the straw hat.

So this was simply bewildering to Bunter.

How did Lord Trant know him by sight? How did he know his name? And, even if he did, why was he glad to see him there? Why did he make him welcome to his magnificent mansion?

It was utterly inexplicable!

But there it was. Either he was dreaming it, or it was happening. He was not dreaming it, therefore, it was happening. He, William George Bunter, was a welcome and honoured guest at Trant Elms. How and why were deep mysteries; but there it was. And, really nothing could have been more fortunate.

Bunter stepped from the car.

His friends followed him.

Calm, stately, the super-butler swam back to the great portico, ushering the Greyfriars fellows in.

Vernon-Smith touched Wharton's arm, and the captain of the Remove glanced round at him, smiling.

"Understand this?" breathed the Bouncer.

"What is there to understand?" Harry Wharton laughed. "I'm afraid you've been a bit suspicious, old man. Clear enough now, isn't it?"

"The clearfulness is terrific, my esteemed and unbelieving Smithy," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bunter must know old Trant," muttered the amazed Bouncer.

"Looks like it," said Bob Cherry. "The giddy nobleman would hardly send his grand vizier to greet him specially, if he didn't."

"Well, it beats me," granted Vernon-Smith. "I—I—I suppose seeing is believing, but—but— Well, it's got me beat."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man!" grinned Bob.

"I say, topping place my friend Trant's got—what?" said Bunter breezily.

Bunter could not begin to understand why it was happening, and how it was happening. He plumped on the fact that it actually was happening.

He, William George Bunter, was the goods. That magnificent super-butler, whom Bob Cherry justly compared to a grand vizier, was at his orders. How and why really hardly mattered, so long as it was so. And it was so. Bunter was not quite sure that he was not going to wake up presently; but while it lasted, he was prepared to enjoy it.

"Oh, topping!" said Bob.

"You could put all Wharton Lodge into this hall, Wharton."

"Very nearly, I think," said Harry, with a smile.

"And Seahill Park along with it, Smithy," added Bunter, grinning.

The Bouncer scowled. He could not take Bunter's fatuous absurdities so good-humouredly as Wharton did.

About a dozen footmen were ranged in the vast hall, at a respectful distance. It was quite a stately welcome to one of the stately homes of England.

Harry Wharton & Co. rather wished that they had dressed in their best for this great occasion. However, they were clean and tidy, though Bunter was neither. Bunter was a little grubby and a little sticky, as usual. Anyone scanning his fat face might have supposed that he had had eggs for lunch. He had had them at brekker. There was, indeed, a hint of the jam pudding at last night's supper. Such trifles did not bother Bunter. Sticky or not, Bunter was "it."

The fat Owl swelled with importance. He grinned with glee.

The massive dome of the super-butler bowed before him.

"Will it please you to take tea, sir?" Bunter beamed.

It would.

It was a little early for tea—but a meal could hardly be too early for William George Bunter.

"What-ho!" said Bunter affably. "Trot it out!"

The super-butler gave over so slight a start. This was not, perhaps, the form of address to which he was accustomed, but he recovered immediately.

"Very good, sir. Perhaps you would prefer tea to be served on the terrace?"

"Any old thing!" agreed Bunter.

"In the meantime, sir, if you would care to view the picture gallery—"

People came hundreds of miles to



Marchbanks arrived at the arched doorway from the picture-gallery just as Bunter arrived at it from the hall. Then—Crash! "Ooooooooo!" roared the super butler. He rolled, completely up-ended by that terrific charge. And over him rolled Bunter!

view the picture gallery at Trant Elms on special days when the public were admitted to the same. Billy Bunter, however, would not have travelled a hundred inches for that purpose.

"Oh, blow that!" said Bunter carelessly.

Again the super-butler gave an imperceptible start; again he rallied his forces and recovered.

"Very good, sir. Perhaps the armoury—"

Bunter shook his head.

"Push along with tea!" he said. "I say, you fellows, you can trot round and look at the pictures if you like; I'll take a rest here till tea's ready."

"Well, we'd rather like to," said Harry, with a smile.

"Go it, then!" said Bunter.

He deposited his fat person in a deep leathern armchair by a sunny window looking on the terrace. The super-butler guided the rest of the party on a tour of the mansion, while other members of a staff that seemed innumerable prepared tea on the terrace.

Billy Bunter leaned back in the deep chair, stuck his fat thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and stretched out his fat little legs—in what a novelist might have called an attitude of un-studied grace.

He wondered what the dickens it all meant.

Had Lord Trant, spotting him from his window, mistaken him for somebody else—a lord, perhaps? For Bunter knew that he had rather the appearance of a nobleman. Bunter didn't mind if it was that, so long as the mistake continued till after tea.

But he realised that it was not that, for the butler had addressed him by name.

Lord Trant knew that he was Bunter—Billy Bunter. How the dickens did he know that? And, knowing it, why

the dickens did he welcome Bunter to his mansion? It was an utter puzzle.

But there it was, and the fat Owl was ready to make the most of it. After this those beasts wouldn't be able to make out that he didn't know Lord Trant.

He chuckled at that thought.

"He, he, he!"

There was a step in the spacious hall. Bunter blinked round carelessly; then he jumped as a voice that he had heard once before exclaimed in tones that indicated surprise and not pleasure:

"You! You grubby little blighter, what the dooce are you doing here?"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

That Young Man Again!

"EH?" Billy Bunter sat up and took notice.

A young man was standing in front of him, staring at him, his stare expressing absolutely nothing in the way of welcome or hospitality.

"Oh!" ejaculated, Bunter as he blinked at that young man through his big spectacles.

He knew that young man; he had seen him on the Seahill beach four or five days ago and, very nearly ridden over him on a runaway horse. The young man was bareheaded now, but he was the young man in the straw hat of that occasion.

"Oh!" repeated Bunter blankly.

In the notecase in his pocket—otherwise empty—there was a letter that belonged to this young man. Bunter was surprised, annoyed, and dismayed to see him here. But really he need not have been surprised, for this was the "William" whom Lord Trant had

asked to run across while he was in Sussex. He had apparently done so.

"Where the dooce did you spring from?" demanded the young man. "And what are you doing here? What?"

Billy Bunter recovered himself at once. Whoever this young man was—a friend of Lord Trant's evidently—he was only a visitor in that magnificent establishment, like Bunter himself. He couldn't possibly know that Bunter had his letter in his pocket. He could look as supercilious as he liked, but he wasn't boss of the show—and Bunter was prepared to tell him so.

"Find out!" retorted Bunter.

"Wha-at?" ejaculated the young man.

"Deaf?" asked Bunter coolly.

The young man gazed at him.

Bunter gave him a defiant blink in return. Lord Trant had welcomed him to that mansion—for whatever mysterious reason he had done so, he had undoubtedly done so. Bunter had no use for young men with cheeky, supercilious looks. He was more than ready to tell that young man where he got off.

"Who are you?" demanded the young man.

"Who are you, if you come to that?" retorted Bunter.

"Never mind that! Who are you?"

"Never mind that either! Who are you?" said Bunter breezily.

The young man breathed hard. It was plain that he had an annoyed recollection of the fat schoolboy who had nearly ridden over him on Seahill sands and caused him to lose a letter. On that occasion, very probably, he would have smacked Bunter's head had Bunter stopped and given him a chance. He looked powerfully tempted to take the present opportunity of smacking it.

Instead of that, however, he touched THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526,

a bell. A footman appeared from nowhere.

"I rang for Marchbanks!" rapped the young man.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Marchbanks is showing some young gentlemen over the picture gallery at the moment, sir."

"Oh! Well, who is this, James?"

The young man pointed a supercilious forefinger at the fat figure in the armchair.

Billy Bunter crimsoned with indignation. The cheeky beast was pointing him out as if he had been a zoological specimen.

James looked at Bunter.

"I think I heard Mr. Marchbanks address that young gentleman as Master Bunter, sir," he answered.

"Bunter?" repeated the young man. "Is that a name?"

"I—I think so, sir."

Bunter gurgled with wrath.

"James!" he hooted.

"Oh! Yes, sir?" said the footman.

Bunter pointed a fat and rather grubby forefinger at the supercilious young man.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"That, sir?" stammered James.

"That is Captain Lancaster, sir."

"Lancaster!" repeated Bunter. "Is that a name?"

James coughed.

"Tell Marchbanks I wish to see him as soon as possible, James," said the young man.

"Very good, sir," James disappeared.

The young man—whose name Bunter knew to be William and whose surname he had now discovered to be Lancaster—turned to Bunter again; he looked at him with knitted brows. Obviously he did not like Bunter, and was surprised to find him where he was.

"Now, just explain yourself!" he snapped. "I saw you one day last week, you young ass—some sort of a seaside tripper at Seahill. Explain what you are doing here in Lord Trant's house."

Really, from the young man's unpleasant manner it might have been supposed that he suspected Bunter of designs on the umbrellas. But if he was annoyed, so was Bunter.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter.

"What—what did you say?"

"Getting deaf again?" asked Bunter. "I said shan't! S-H-A-N'-T—that spells shan't! See? Go and eat coke!"

And Billy Bunter turned up a fat little nose—an easy task, as Nature had started it well on the way—to express his utter contempt for that supercilious young man.

"By gad—" began the young man, breathing very hard.

"Oh, shut up!" said Bunter.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Shut up!"

At that point the young man appeared to lose his temper—which was not, perhaps, wholly surprising. He made a rapid stride towards Billy Bunter, grasped him by his collar, and hooked him out of the armchair.

"Wow!" roared Bunter as he swung.

"Ow! Beast! Leggo!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Yurrrggh!" spluttered Bunter.

Shake, shake!

"Urrggh! Leggo!" howled Bunter.

"If you make my specs drop off—yooogh—you'll have to pay for them—yooogh!"

Shake, shake!

"Gurrrggh!"

"Now," said the young man, releasing the gasping fat junior. "Now—Oh!"

Thump!

Bunter was wrathful. He had been taken by the collar and shaken, in the hall to which Lord Trant had bidden him a hospitable welcome. It was enough to make any fellow wrathful. Bunter hit out—rather unexpectedly. The young man did not appear to have expected that. He got it unexpectedly.

The thump landed on his waistcoat, and, taking him by surprise, sent him staggering backwards. As he staggered, his feet slipped on the polished floor, and he sat down, suddenly and hard.

Bump!

"Ho, he, ho!" gasped Bunter breathlessly.

"Ooooh!" gasped the surprised young man.

He started to rise. The expression on his face indicated only too plainly what Bunter had to expect when he got up. Bunter did not wait.

He revolved on his axis, and scudded. He headed for an arched doorway by which the Greyfriars fellows had followed the butler. He flew! This was not the sort of thing a fellow might have expected when visiting a nobleman's mansion—but there it was, and Bunter preferred to have help at hand when the young man got to close quarters.

It was rather unfortunate that Marchbanks, the super-butler, had received James' message, and was coming back to the hall at the moment.

He arrived at the arched doorway from the picture-gallery, just as Bunter arrived at it from the hall.

Marchbanks arrived at it with the slow stately motion of a Spanish galleon. Bunter arrived at it with the rapid motion of a bullet. Neither saw the other before they met.

Crash!

"Ooooooooo!" came from Marchbanks.

He rolled, completely up-ended by that terrific charge. Over him rolled Bunter! It was quite a mix-up.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"What the dickens—"
"Bunter—"
"Great pip!"

Harry Wharton & Co. came scudding up to the scene of the collision. It was quite a startling scene.

The massive, magnificent butler was extended on his massive back. Billy Bunter had charged him on the very widest part of his massive figure, and completely winded him. Breathless, gurgling feebly, lay Marchbanks winded to the wide, lost to the world.

Bunter scrambled wildly up.

"Ow! Oh! I say, you fellows—yaroooh!"

"You blithering idiot!" gasped the Bounder. "What the thump—"

"Keep him off!" yelled Bunter.

The gasping fat Owl circumnavigated the wreck of Lord Trant's butler, and dodged behind the Famous Five. He was only in time. Captain Lancaster came striding in from the hall.

He stopped, however, at the sight of the massive wreck before him.

"Marchbanks!" he exclaimed. "What the—"

"Ooooooooo!" moaned Marchbanks faintly.

"What the dooce—"

"Mooooooooh!"

"What has happened—"

"Gooooooooh!"

Marchbanks, for the moment, was incapable of speech. He moaned and mumbled and moaned.

The young man stared at him, and then transferred his stare to Harry Wharton & Co.

"I say, you fellows, keep that beast off!" gasped Bunter. "I say, knock him over! You hit him in the eye, Bob!"

"You blithering ass—" gasped Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"What on earth—" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Keep him off!" yelled Bunter, as the captain, coming round Marchbanks, headed for him.

The Famous Five closed round Bunter. They were utterly amazed at these hectic happenings; but they were ready to stand by the fat Owl if he needed protection—as evidently he did.

Three or four footmen appeared and raised Marchbanks to his feet. He hung on them, moaning.

Captain Lancaster came to a halt, the Famous Five facing him like a Macedonian phalanx, Bunter safe behind.

"Chuck it!" suggested Bob Cherry, with a cheery grin. "What the dickens are you ragging Bunter for?"

"Let me get hold of that young rascal—"

"Yaroooh! Keep him off!"

"But what's the row?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Look here, stand back—you're not going to touch Bunter."

"It's the chap Bunter nearly squashed under his horse last week!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "Still feeling shirty about that?"

"Cheeky cad—shaking a fellow!" gasped Bunter. "I knocked him down! I'll jolly well knock him down again, too, if—if you fellows will hold him while—"

"Will you stand out of my way?" demanded the angry young man.

"No, we jolly well won't!" answered Johnny Bull. "Keep your temper, and and don't be a silly ass!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

The young man, breathing hard, turned to Marchbanks.

Slowly the super-butler was recovering his power of speech.

"Marchbanks," rapped Captain Lancaster, "who are these boys?"

"Ooooh! They are—groogh—friends of Master Bub-bub-Bunter's, sir!" gasped Marchbanks.

"Bunter! Who is Bunter? What is that grubby young bounder doing here at all?"

"Yah!" came from the fat Owl behind his phalanx. "Mind your own bizney! Yah! Shut up! Cad! Swab!"

"Dry up, you fat ass!" hissed Bob.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "Think I'm going to stand his dashed cheek? Yah! Cheeky snob! Yah!"

"Who is he, Marchbanks?"

"I—groogh—I really do not know sir!" gurgled Marchbanks. "But his lordship instructed me to—grooogh—"

"What?"

"His lordship saw him from his window, sir, and sent for me, to give me instructions to—yooogh—oggggh—urrggh!" Marchbanks struggled for breath. "To—to—urrggh!—to make the young gentleman welcome here, and—and to—ooooh!"

"Impossible!" snapped Captain Lancaster. "Lord Trant cannot be acquainted with the grubby young rascal! Absurd!"

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged curious glances. The Bounder chuckled. Was there, after all, some mistake in the matter?

"I can only say, sir—urrrgh—I can only say—ooooh!"

"Where is his lordship now, Marchbanks?"

"His lordship is keeping to his—gurggh—his—"

"What?"
"His room, sir, having a very bad attack!" gasped Marchbanks. "But he gave me definite instructions to—gurggh!"

"There is some mistake in this! I will see his lordship at once!" snapped the captain. And he strode away with a knitted brow.

"Beast!" yapped Bunter.
"Oh, my hat!" murmured Frank Nugent. "Is there some jolly old mistake—has the fat ass landed us—"

"Looks like it!" grinned the Bunder.
"Order of the boot for the lot of us, when that sportsman comes back."

"Oh, rot!" said Harry uneasily.
"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Look here, Bunter—"

"I say, you fellows, it—it's all right!" gasped Bunter. "I say, let's go and have tea! We'd better have tea at once, in case—"

"In case what?"

"Oh, nothing! But let's have tea, and you can look at those rotten pictures afterwards, if you want to. Look here, I'm going to have tea, see?" yapped Bunter. "Marchbanks, have tea served at once!"

"Urrgh! Very good, sir!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had rather lost their interest in the picture-gallery, famous and historic as it was. The looks and actions of that young man made them feel extremely dubious as to their footing in Lord Trant's mansion. He had evidently gone up to see his lordship; and they could not help wondering what was going to happen when he came back.

So did Bunter! That was why he was so anxious for tea! If anything disastrous was going to happen, it was obviously best to bag tea, if possible, before it happened! That, at least, would be so much to the good, even if the order of the boot came afterwards!

Marchbanks, still in a rather gurgling state, but struggling hard to maintain his massive dignity, ushered them out on the terrace.

Whether there was some mysterious mistake in the matter or not, Marchbanks had his instructions, and he was carrying them out.

Tea was served on the terrace. Billy Bunter was glad to see that it was an ample tea, with an abundance of the sticky things in which his fat heart delighted. He started at once. If trouble was coming, it was only sense to park as much as possible before the trouble came.

The other fellows, however, did not share Bunter's views. They were feeling worried and uneasy. A gorgeous tea, on a noble terrace in front of a magnificent mansion, with a footman to wait on every fellow there, and a superb butler to preside with almost episcopal dignity, was rather a catch. But the Greyfriars fellows were not, in the circumstances, in a mood to enjoy it. They waited for the returning step of that young man.

"I say, you fellows, tuck in!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, with his mouth full. "I say, what are you wasting time for? If we're going to be interrupted, you know—"

"So you think we're goin' to be interrupted?" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, no! Still, it's no good wasting time! Make the most of it while it lasts!" said Bunter.

"While it lasts?" repeated Harry.

"I—I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean, you fat fraud?"

(Continued on next page.)

The STately HOMES of GREYFRIARS

M. HENRI CHARPENTIER (MOSSOO)

By
The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

M. Henri Charpentier, known as Mossos,
Is bearded, but full of good nature;
He has a circumference ample for two,
But lacks a few inches in stature.
He teaches us French, or, at any rate, tries,
With gentle persistence unflagging,
And sees, with apparently stunning surprise,
That we'd rather spend our time ragging!

(2)

He can't understand why we're never
enthralled
By French—c'est un lingo magnifique!
Our passion to learn it could hardly be called.
As Inky would put it, terrific!
Can shooting ink pellets at Bunter compare
With joy such as grammar or reading?
And putting a bottle of gum in his chair—
It seems such a senseless proceeding!

(4)

Arrived in his study, he sinks with a sigh
In his chair, and forgets for the present
The school and its scholars, and lets his mind
fly
To a place which for him is more pleasant.
The Land of the Lilies—the fair land of
France,
So near, yet so far—lacking money!
The plains and the mountains, the hills of
romance,
The Cote d'Azur, bright and sunny.

(6)

The good-humoured peasants wear bonnets
and clogs,
Great shoes on which everyone hobbles,
And there you see quaint little carts with two
dogs
To trundle them over the cobbles.
The jovial curé—we call him a priest—
Looks after the town he has fathered,
And gathers them all to a thanksgiving feast
As soon as the harvest is gathered!

(8)

But poor Uncle Henri has no easy task
In raking the dollars together;
If he could persistently give what they ask
He'd certainly be in high feather.
Alas, for his salary really is small,
He scrapes and he hoards every penny.
He'd think it impossible if, when they call,
He had to say: "I haven't any!"

(3)

He crawls from the Form-room a positive
wreck,
And sometimes we feel rather sorry
That he is too kind to hold raggers in check;
We don't want to add to his worry.
But boys will be boys, as we'd like to explain,
It's up to the master to stop it,
And if, like old Quelchy, he'd give 'em the
cane,
He'd very soon find they would drop it.

(5)

But one place especially long he has known,
An old rambling house in a valley,
Which stands by the cool River Saone
(pronounced Sohn),
Full many miles eastward from Calais.
And there all the meadows are fertile and
green,
The vineyards are fruitful and tender.
And far in the distance the mountains are
seen,
The blue and white Alps in their splendour.

(7)

It's there Mossos's "family" lives in content,
His brother and sister and nieces,
And nephews as well, and, in fact, the extent
Of his family often increases.
They know that their good Uncle Henri will
give
The money they need for existence;
How else, they inquire, could the family live,
Without Uncle Henri's assistance?

(9)

All honour to Henri Charpentier, then,
For fighting his battle so gamely;
Himself the best-hearted and kindest of men,
He'll never take circumstance tamely!
And when he is old, and at length he has
grown
Too tired for his work in our galley,
Let's wish him long life in his house by the
Saone,
That old rambling house in the valley!

Next Week: CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE, of the Upper Ten.

"I—I mean, these cakes are absolutely spilling! Try them!"

"Hailo, hallo, hallo! Here comes that journey!" murmured Bob Cherry, as the young man emerged into view, and came along the terrace towards the tea-party.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, collar him!"

"You fat ass!"

"Barge him over!"

"Idiot!"

"Look here, you beasts——"

"Shut up, fathead!"

Billy Bunter snorted and shut up, and devoted himself to another cake. It was one more to the good, if it was going to be the last!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Serene!

"MY dear fellow——"
"Eh?"

Bunter was booked for surprises that surprising day—one after another.

As Captain Lancaster came up to the tea-party, Bunter, with a sticky cake in one hand, grabbed a milk-jug with the other to use as a missile.

If that cheeky, supercilious beast of an Army man grabbed him, he was going to get the milk-jug, milk and all, right in his chivvy!

But the other fellows, to their great relief, saw that the captain's look, as he approached, had altered very considerably. His brows were no longer knitted; his eyes no longer glinted. His interview with Lord Trant had clearly had a very ameliorating effect on his temper.

Bunter did not observe it. The short-sighted Owl blinked uneasily and belligerently at the young man, gripping the milk-jug, ready for war.

So the young man's cordial greeting surprised him—in fact, astounded him. The captain had called him various names, but never yet a dear fellow. Now he addressed him as a dear fellow in the most cordial of tones.

Bunter could only blink.

It seemed to him that some sort of magic must be at work that weird afternoon. First of all, Lord Trant had fancied that he knew Bunter and welcomed him to the mansion. Now this obnoxious young man had changed, for no discoverable reason, from hostility to cordial kindness. It was no good trying to understand it. Billy Bunter just gave it up.

"I am more sorry than I can say!" went on Captain Lancaster. "Give me your hand, my boy!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He was willing to give the captain his hand—grubby and sticky as it was—if the captain had any use for it. But he had a lingering suspicion that this was too good to be true, and that the young man might be going to collar him and shake him again.

So he held the milk-jug in his left, ready for action, as he extended his right.

But it was all serene. Captain Lancaster, apparently not noticing the grubby stickiness of the fat paw, gave it a hearty grip.

Bunter set down the milk-jug and took up a cake instead. Evidently there was going to be no need for a missile.

But what it all meant Bunter could not begin to guess. If the other fellows were surprised, Bunter was doubly so. Still, it was very satisfactory.

"If I'd known, Master Bunter, I should have acted very differently."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

went on the captain. "But, you see, I had not heard your name, and only knew you as the young ass—ahem!—as the lad who nearly ran over me on a horse one day last week. You understand that, of course?"

"Oh, quite!" gasped Bunter, without beginning to understand. "That—that's quite clear, of course."

"I beg your pardon most sincerely!" went on the captain. "Had I known you were the lad of whom Lord Trant thinks so highly, I should have been delighted to see you here and renew your acquaintance."

"Oh, yes! Jig-jig-just so!" stammered Bunter.

"Lord Trant had mentioned the incident to me, you see, but did not mention your name," explained the captain. "So I had no idea, of course, that you were the same person. I couldn't have, could I, really?"

"Nunno!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I—I don't see how you c-c-could!"

He wondered dizzily what the captain meant, if he meant anything at all.

"I cannot be too glad that Lord Trant met you the day he came over to see me and missed me!" went on the captain. "It was remarkably fortunate."

"Ye-es; w-w-wasn't it?" gasped Bunter.

Never, so far as he was aware, having seen Lord Trant in his life, Bunter wondered whether his lordship was potty, or whether the captain was, or whether they both were.

"Well, I am sure you will overlook our little dispute," said the captain, smiling genially. "You had the best of it, really, Master Bunter; you handed over quite a hefty one. All forgotten and forgiven—what?"

"Oh, yes! Quite!" gasped Bunter.

"That's right! I'm sure a plucky lad like you would never remember a grudge," said the captain.

Harry Wharton & Co. listened to all this in amazed silence, the Bounder dumbfounded.

The captain turned to them, smiling.

"I must ask all of you to excuse me," he said. "Pray forget all about it. Lord Trant is delighted to see any friends of Master Bunter's here; and, speaking for myself, it is a real pleasure!"

"You're very good!" gasped Harry.

"Not at all! If there is anything I can do, pray command me in any way!"

With that the young man, who had been so unpleasant, and was now so extremely pleasant, bowed to the tea-party and withdrew.

"Well!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. It was all he could say.

"Well!" murmured Wharton.

"Are we dreaming all this?" asked the Bounder helplessly.

"Blessed if I don't half think so!" said Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter blinked after the retiring figure of the captain till he was out of sight. Then he blinked at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows——"

"What does it all mean, Bunter?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Bunter would have been glad to know the answer to that one himself. He was not likely to say so, however. He gave the Bounder a lofty blink.

"Oh, really, Smithy, perhaps you believe me now," he said—"what?"

Herbert Vernon-Smith made no reply to that. Really, there seemed no room left for doubt; yet a doubt lingered in the Bounder's mind.

"I say, tuck in!" said Bunter. "You fellows ain't eating anything! Try these topping cakes! I've tried them,"—Bunter had had seven—"and I'm jolly well going to have some!"

The Greyfriars fellows tucked in. All doubts were relieved now; they were, evidently, welcome guests at Trant Elms, and that was that!

They made a very good tea, especially Bunter. Contrary to his usual custom, Billy Bunter had to leave a lot of provender undevoured. But he did his best—so thoroughly that he was breathing very stertorously when at last he rose, and he seemed to have a little difficulty in rising.

After tea the visitors were taken to view the picture-gallery, the armoury, and other wonderful sights of his lordship's house; and then Captain Lancaster turned up, and very politely conducted them over the rose garden and the pinery and the vinery, and other wonderful spots in the unlimited grounds.

It was a very cheery and satisfied party at last that packed in the car to depart. The captain saw them off. He expressed his lordship's regret at having been unable—owing to a rheumatic attack—to entertain them personally, and shook hands very warmly with Billy Bunter.

Bunter grinned serenely as they rolled down the drive.

He had enjoyed his visit tremendously; but he was not sorry to be getting safe out of Trant Elms before it transpired that there was some extraordinary mistake in the matter.

"Much obliged, Smithy!" he remarked, as the car turned out of the gateway and headed for home.

"Eh?" grunted the Bounder.

"Why?"
Smithy was not so pleased as the rest of the party. Having planned to make Billy Bunter look a fool, the result had made Smithy feel rather a fool himself!

Bunter grinned.

"I mean, for running me over here this afternoon!" he explained. "You see, I'm not the sort of chap to barge in anywhere——"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Not that sort at all!" said Bunter. "Of course, I—I knew that Lord Trant would be glad to see me. Still, a fellow doesn't like to seem to push in, you know. I mean, a fellow like me—not a fellow like you, of course."

"You fat idiot!"

"But I'm glad we came, after all," said Bunter breezily. "Much obliged, old chap—he, he, he! Quite a good idea of yours—he, he, he! I say, you fellows, how do you like visiting my titled friends?"

"Fine!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Topping!" chuckled Nugent.

"The topfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"If we don't wake up presently!" remarked Johnny Bull.

But they did not wake up. It was real—amazing, but real. It was a puzzle to the Famous Five, and a greater puzzle to the Bounder—greatest puzzle of all to Billy Bunter!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Party!

"THE Coronation?"

"Why not?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Um!" said Harry Wharton thoughtfully.

It was a few days later—and the last day of the Famous Five's stay at Seabill Park. That day, Vernon-Smith was going up to London to rejoin his father at Courtman Square and gather a numerous party of Greyfriars fellows, whom he was entertaining there for the Coronation.



A gorgeous tea, with a footman to wait on every fellow, was rather a catch. But the Greyfriars juniors were not, in the circumstances, in a mood to enjoy it. "I say, you fellows, tuck in!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, with his mouth full. "Make the most of it while it lasts!"

In that party, the Famous Five were not included.

Not, perhaps, that they were particularly keen to be included. Still, had the Bounder asked them again, after Billy Bunter had announced that he was booked for Trant House, no doubt they would have accepted.

But the Bounder had not spoken a word on the subject, and obviously did not mean to do so. He had asked them once, and they had declined, on Bunter's account. That was that. Smithy was very friendly and polite to the Famous Five, if not to Bunter; but he was not, as he would have regarded it, a fellow to be played fast and loose with. That matter was at an end.

Harry Wharton & Co. had not the slightest desire to re-open it. They were rather more particular in such matters than Billy Bunter.

Nevertheless, they had to make their arrangements for Coronation Day. As the new term at Greyfriars, happily, was not beginning till after the great date, they were free to add their loyal voices to the cheers of the multitude, and they were not missing it.

They had packed their suitcases that morning, and were ready when the Bounder was ready to start. Smithy was going up by car, and he was going to drop them at Seahill Station to take their train for Surrey.

Harry Wharton's friends were to stay with him at Wharton Lodge till they went up to London for the Coronation. Billy Bunter was—presumably—going home, when he left.

Waiting for the Bounder, in the hall, Harry Wharton & Co. were talking of the great topic—which they avoided discussing when Smithy was at hand.

"Why not?" repeated Bob. "I know Bunter is a gammoning ass—but really, it's hardly fair to him to think that he's spoofing now! He showed us the letter—"

"Ye-es!"

"I know Smithy makes out that he picked it up somewhere—"

"Well, the fact is, he might have!" said Harry. "If he did, he would think nothing of spinning a thumping yarn out of it."

"I know! But since then, we've been with him to Lord Trant's house in Sussex!" said Bob. "Seeing is believing, isn't it?"

"Well, yes!"

"Dash it all, even Bunter ought to have justice," said Bob rather warmly. "He was made specially welcome at Trant Elms. We know that, as we were with him. That bears out the invitation to Trant House in town."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, I suppose it does!" he agreed. "Smithy seems to be still nourishing doubts on the subject—"

"Smithy's a suspicious ass!" grunted Bob.

"I—I suppose it's all right!" admitted the captain of the Remove. "There's no getting over that visit to Trant Elms. It's proof."

"Well, then, if old Trant has asked Bunter, and told him to bring any friends he likes, why not?" said Bob. "We turned down Smithy on that fat chump's account, and if Bunter can take us to Trant House, why not?"

"The why-notfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I don't see why not," said Johnny Bull.

"Nor I!" assented Nugent. "Bunter's asked us to join up. I don't see turning him down for nothing."

Harry Wharton paused. He did not like to be doubting or suspicious, in the Bounder's way. But in spite of himself, a doubt lingered somehow at the back of his mind.

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter came downstairs and joined the Famous Five in the hall. He

blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"Where are you fellows going on, from here?" he asked.

"We're all going with Wharton," answered Bob.

"Stick together, what?" asked Bunter. "That's a good idea! Let's all stick together as we're going to be together for the Coronation."

"Are we?" murmured Wharton.

"My dear chap, isn't that settled?" asked Bunter. "You've seen Lord Trant's letter. You've seen how he made me welcome at his magnificent mansion. I'll show you his letter again, if you like—"

"That's all right," said Harry. "But—"

"He says plainly, bring any friends!" said Bunter. "Those are his words! Well, I am asking you fellows! Trant House is right on the route, in the very best position—you'll see everything. You're coming?"

Again Harry Wharton paused, and his friends looked at him. They left it to their leader to decide, but their own opinion was clear enough. What reason could there possibly be for declining, now that the thing had been proved to be not Bunter's usual gas, but absolutely genuine? None at all! Harry Wharton, realising that, made up his mind.

"It's a go, Bunter!" he said.

"Good!" said Bunter briskly. "That's settled, then! If there should be—er—any hitch—"

"What?"

"I mean to say, there can't possibly be any hitch! How could there be?" amended Bunter hastily. "That's all right! Rely on me!"

Wharton, with a revival of doubt, gazed at him.

"Fact is, I'll phone now to Trant. THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 1,526.

Elms, if you like, and fix up the whole thing!" said Bunter.

"Oh, all right!"

"Go it!" said Bob. "Nothing like getting it settled!"

"Oh, I forgot! Lord Trant's gone up to town!" said Bunter. "That's all right, though—I'll phone from Wharton Lodge, later. Or write—it might be better to write."

Harry Wharton looked at him, long and hard. The stay at Seahill Park having come to an end, Bunter had to land himself somewhere. Home, sweet home, never had any powerful call for William George Bunter. He had selected Wharton Lodge. Wharton could not help feeling a momentary doubt that the thing was, after all, spoof, and a trick to get the fat Owl safely landed for the rest of the holidays. Well he knew what Billy Bunter was capable of in that line.

"Look here, Bunter, for goodness' sake try to tell the truth for once," he said. "If you're pulling our leg—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"We'll be jolly glad to come, of course; but otherwise, I've got to get my uncle to make arrangements for our lodgings in town!" said Harry. "It can't be left till the last minute, with London swarming from end to end, and every room for miles round taken. You can see that. If you're gammoning, own up before you land us in the soup."

"I'll write to Lord Trant this minute, if you like," said Bunter, with dignity. "We'll post the letter as we go."

"Well, do it, then."

"I—I say, though, we don't want to lose the train—"

"Lots of time for the train!" said Bob. "Look here, Bunter, we want to know. Get that letter written."

"Oh, all right! I'll drop Trant a line, then," said Bunter carelessly. And he rolled away into an adjoining room where there were pens and ink.

Five minutes later, he came back with a sealed letter in his hand, addressed to Lord Trant at Trant House, London, S.W.1.

"We'll drop this in, as we go!" he remarked. "Remind me when we're in the car."

"Right-ho, old fat man!" said Harry, feeling a little compunction for that twinge of doubt.

The Bounder came down. The suitcases were already on the car. The juniors packed in, and rolled away down the avenue. Vernon-Smith glanced at the letter in Bunter's fat hand, as the car glided along the road to Seaham. He smiled sarcastically as he noted the address.

"Tell the chauffeur to stop at the post office, Smithy," said Harry.

"Oh, don't bother," said Bunter. "I can post this at Wimford when we get out of the train."

The Bounder chuckled.

"No trouble at all," he said. "We pass the post office, and there's lots of time for the train. Not a bit of trouble to post it."

Billy Bunter gave him an inimical blink.

The car stopped at Seahill post office. The Bounder jerked the letter from Bunter's fat hand and passed it out to the chauffeur.

"Post this, will you," he said.

"Look here, Smithy, you cheeky beast—" roared Bunter.

"Don't you want it posted?" grinned Smithy.

"I was going to post it myself—"

"In your pocket?"

"Beast!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

"Still time to call it back, if you don't want it to go!" grinned Smithy, as the chauffeur crossed the pavement to the post office.

The Famous Five looked at Bunter. But if they shared, for a moment, the Bounder's scepticism, it was only for a moment.

Bunter did not call the chauffeur back. The letter was dropped in the post office box, the chauffeur returned to his seat, and the car rolled on to the station.

"That's that!" said Bob Cherry.

"The thatfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

At the station, the Famous Five and Bunter got out, and the baggage was taken off. Good-byes were said; and, at the last moment, the Bounder's better nature came to the fore.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "Look here, you fellows, I can't make out how it is, but that fat spoofer is pulling your leg! No good asking me to explain it, because I can't—but that's that! Look here, change your minds, and come up to Courtman Square with me."

"Can't turn Bunter down, old chap!" said Harry, with a smile. "Thanks all the same!"

"Fathead!"

"See you at the Coronation, Smithy!" said Bob.

And the car rolled away with Smithy, and the other fellows went into the railway station. In the train for Surrey, five fellows were cheerful and bright—but the sixth member of the party had a very thoughtful expression. That one was William George Bunter.

Bunter was wondering what Lord Trant, or his secretary, whichever opened that letter, would think, on finding a blank sheet of paper inside!

Really, Bunter would have preferred not to post it! But the Bounder had settled that. Still, so far as Bunter could see, it could do no harm. His lordship, or his lordship's secretary, would no doubt be surprised at receiving a blank sheet of paper by post. But it was never likely to reach the knowledge of the Famous Five, who were never likely to see Lord Trant.

So it was all right. Bunter was safely landed for the rest of the holidays—which was the really important consideration. If it caused trouble to other parties, that really could not be helped. Fortunately, it was only Bunter that mattered.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Play Up, Bunter!

CORONATION week opened with a blaze of bright May sunshine.

That week, the chums of the Remove had intended to spend in town—in quarters, certainly, much less magnificent than Lord Trant's town house. But on Monday, they were still at Wharton Lodge.

No answer had been received, so far, to the letter Billy Bunter had posted on his way.

Considering what that letter contained, it was not surprising. But the Famous Five, unaware what it had contained, naturally expected his lordship to answer.

His lordship didn't!

When, on Monday, there was still no letter, Billy Bunter did not seem unduly perturbed. He was not exactly disappointed by the non-arrival of an answer that he did not expect to arrive.

But the other fellows began to feel a little worried.

That day, they had been going to instal themselves in a suburban lodging, and mingle with the endless crowds in London. Certainly, they preferred Trant House—if available! But—

"No letter this morning, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, after breakfast.

"Eh? Oh, no! Old Trant's pretty busy, you know," said Bunter airily. "He's going to take part in the ceremony at Westminster Abbey, you know, on Coronation Day, as a peer of the realm. Must have plenty to think about."

"Yes, but—"

"My dear chap," said Bunter, "you've seen his letter—the one he wrote to—to me in—in Sussex! Plain enough, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but—" Wharton paused.

That letter, certainly, was good enough, if the chums of the Remove had been dealing with any other fellow but Bunter. But it was Bunter with whom they were dealing, and they wanted it a little plainer.

"If there's any hitch," added Bunter cautiously. He coughed, "I—I mean, it's all right, of course. Still, I understand that your uncle engaged rooms at Hampstead or somewhere—before we came back from Sussex. I—I shouldn't cancel that, old chap, in—in case—"

"In case you have been spoofing us, do you mean?" asked Harry Wharton, very quietly.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Well, what else do you mean?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"I—I—I mean—" Bunter paused. The position was difficult, even for an experienced Ananias like William George Bunter. "I—I mean, there—there might be a—a—a hitch! I mean to say, Lord Trant's house will be pretty crowded out, you know—"

The Famous Five exchanged glances. Bunter was hedging! Indeed, now that it was only a couple of days to the Coronation, the fat Owl had to begin to think of a line of retreat.

The visit to Trant Elms, in Sussex, had, amazingly and unexpectedly, gone off all right—Bunter could not imagine how! But he could not hope for such luck a second time! To present himself at Trant House, in London, and hope that fortune would favour him in that inexplicable way again, was really hoping too much!

Billy Bunter had not the remotest idea or intention of going anywhere near Trant House!

But he wanted to see the Coronation! He was going to pack in with the Famous Five, in their Hampstead lodging, for that purpose—go up by Tube, and join the crowd in the streets on the route. That, after all his swank and humbug, was what it came to!

But he realised that he was on delicate ground. If these beasts got on to it that he had pulled their leg, they were more likely to boot him, as a reward, than to see him through the Coronation.

"I suppose," said Bob Cherry, after a long silence, "that we might have expected this. Smithy knew, after all."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Johnny Bull gave an emphatic grunt.

"If Bunter has been spoofing us all this time," he said. "I'm going to whop him! I'm going to whop him till he can't crawl!"

"Same here!" said Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific."

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter.

"We've turned down Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "Luckily, we haven't"

cancelled the rooms at Hampstead. We might have. That fat rascal didn't care a straw. As he's under my roof here, I can't very well boot him. But you fellows might give him a few for me, as well as for yourselves."

Billy Bunter jumped away in alarm. Obviously, this was not a time for "hedging."

"I—I say, you fellows, it—it's all right!" he gasped. "You're staying at Trant House the night before the day. Rely on me! It—it's all right I—I hope you don't doubt my word. I—I expect I shall get that answer from—from old Trant in the morning. If not—"

"If not," said Johnny Bull, "you're going to be booted, and booted hard!" "Beast!"

It was left till the morrow morning. It was Bunter's last chance.

The Owl of the Remove did not enjoy himself that day. Bunter was very little given to thinking—but he had to think now!

Having swanked to his fat heart's content, his idea had been to put up some excuse or other, from his unlimited supply of fibs. Then, having wound up the holidays at Wharton Lodge, he was going to land himself on the Famous Five for the Coronation. And all would be, so to speak, calm and bright.

Instead of which, these beasts were getting suspicious, like that other beast Smithy; and instead of seeing him through the Coronation, they were going to boot him!

Bunter felt that it was hard!

But what was going to be done was quite a mystery to him. Not for the first time his endless provarications had landed him in a scrape from which there seemed to be no escape.

The next morning there was, of course, no letter.

The juniors could hardly doubt now. They could have kicked themselves—and they were going to kick Bunter—hard!

Bunter breakfasted in bed that morning. When the juniors went up to see him, they found his door locked on the inside.

The fat Owl did not emerge till nearly lunch-time. He hoped to cut down quickly, and get into the presence of the elders. Instead of which, he found five juniors waiting for him in the corridor with grim faces. They gathered round him.

"I—I say, you fellows!" groaned Bunter. "Has—has—hasn't that letter come for me?"

"No!"

"It—it's some delay in the post, old chap! They're always delaying letters in the Post Office. Look how they delay my postal orders, sometimes—"

"First kick to me," said Johnny Bull.

"I—I say—keep off!" gasped Bunter.

"I—I say, I—I'll go down and—phone! I—I mean it! I—I'll ring up Lord Trant—"

"We've had enough of your gammon, you fat porpoise! Boot him!"

"I—I say. I—I mean it!" howled Bunter. "Just let's go down to the phone, old chaps—"

Harry Wharton paused.

"Give him a chance!" he said. "Come on—don't let him bolt!"

Bunter gasped with relief. Once he got safely downstairs— But his relief was short-lived. He was not going downstairs!

"This way," said Harry, "there's an extension phone in my room—bring him in."

"Oh crikey!" gasped the helpless Owl.

They marched him into Wharton's "den." The door was closed, and Bunter was planted at the telephone.

He blinked at it in dismay.

"I—I say, you fellows—I—I've forgotten the number!" groaned Bunter.

"I'll look it out for you!" said Bob.

"Beast!"

"And I'll ring up for you, too!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Bob Cherry looked out the number and rang up Trant House in London. There was some delay in getting through. Telephone wires were rather crowded in Coronation week. Bunter began to hope again. Again his hope was short-lived. There was a call at last.

Harry Wharton answered it.

"Is that Trant House?" he asked.

"Yes—Lord Trant's secretary speaking," came the reply.

"Here you are! Play up, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter took the receiver in a trembling fat hand. He blinked round dismally at the Famous Five.

"I—I—I say, you fellows—" he mumbled.

"Go it, you fat fraud!"

"But I—I say—"

Johnny Bull drew back his boot.

Just in time, Billy Bunter yapped into the transmitter. He was desperate now.

"Billy Bunter speaking! Please call Lord Trant!"

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Astounding!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood round the telephone as Bunter squeaked into the mouthpiece.

They stood close enough to hear what was said in reply. There was going to be no spoof this time. It was Bunter's last, last chance—and they were going to know exactly how the matter stood; after which Billy Bunter was going to get the booting he so richly deserved.

Bunter yapped into the telephone in the lowest of spirits. Perhaps he nourished a faint hope that Fortune would stand his friend, as it had done that day at Trant Elms. If so, the hope was very faint. He was merely putting off the booting for a few minutes.

Quite clearly, to all ears, came the reply of his lordship's secretary, speaking from Trant House in the distant metropolis.

"Please state your business! Lord Trant is too busy to come to the telephone."

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I'll wait till he's less busy—" stammered Bunter.

Two or three boots were lifted.

"I—I—I mean, I—I'll get on to him somehow, you beasts!" gasped the wretched fat Owl.

"You'd better!" said Johnny Bull grimly.

"The betterfulness will be terrific."

Billy Bunter almost groaned into the telephone.

"I say! Tell him it's Bunter—he—he knows the name! It's rather important—about the—the Coronation! If you mention the name of Bunter, it will be all right, Bunter!"

"Please hold on!"

"Oh lor'!"

There was a pause. The secretary, it seemed, had gone to mention the name of Bunter to Lord Trant.

Perspiration trickled down Bunter's fat brow, as he waited. Then a voice came through.

"Bunter! Is that Bunter speaking?"

It sounded like an old gentleman's voice—a rather reedy, but very pleasant voice. There was something vaguely familiar to Billy Bunter's fat ears in its tones, though he could not remember where he had heard it before.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged blank looks over Bunter's fat head. Was this Lord Trant speaking? Had his lordship come to the telephone at the magic name of Bunter?

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"My dear boy!"

Bunter jumped. So did the Famous Five. They crowded close so as not to lose a syllable.

"My dear lad!" went on the elderly voice. "How pleased I am to hear from you again."

"Oh!" stuttered Bunter. "Are you?"

"Yes, indeed! I regret that I omitted to inquire your address the day you called on me at Trant Elms, when I was unfortunately unable to entertain you personally."

"Oh!" gurgled Bunter.

He had wondered, at Trant Elms, whether he was dreaming. Now he wondered whether he was dreaming again.

"I have desired very much to get in touch with you, my boy," went on the voice. "I was delighted when my secretary brought me your name. Have you made any arrangements for the Coronation?"

"The kik-kik-Coronation!" stuttered Bunter.

"If not, would you care to come here—"

"Oh!"

"And bring your friends—"

"Oh!"

"You will see everything from the balcony here. I shall be occupied, as I have to be present at the Abbey; but Captain Lancaster will be very pleased to look after you—"

"Oh!"

"Captain Lancaster has a very high opinion of you, Bunter. He is the son of my oldest friend, and so he naturally feels as I do with regard to you."

"Oh!"

"If you will come, my dear boy, I will give instructions at once for rooms to be prepared for you and your friends—"

"Oh!"

"And I will ask Captain Lancaster to fetch you in the car—"

"Oh!"

"Please come, my boy! Need I say that I shall be delighted?"

Bunter could not even say "Oh!" again! He could only gasp. His fat head was almost turning round with astonishment and delight.

"You will come?" asked Lord Trant.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes, rather!"

"Very good—very good indeed! I am glad to hear you say so, Bunter! Now good-bye—good-bye, my dear boy! Captain Lancaster will call for you and your friends—"

"Hold on!" gasped Bunter. The rather absent-minded peer had again omitted to inquire his address. "I say, sir—"

"Yes, my dear boy?"

"I'm at Wharton Lodge, in Surrey you—"

"Oh! Yes! Quite! Good-bye!"

Lord Trant rang off.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood dumb. They had heard every word of it. They were astounded—though certainly not so utterly astounded as Billy Bunter!

Bunter, for a moment or two, stood gasping. But he was quick to recover. It was all right. How it was all right he could not begin to guess. But it was. This was Trant Elms over again. How and why were deep mysteries; but it was all right, and that was all that mattered.

He turned to the Famous Five. He gave them a lofty blink.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

"Perhaps," said Billy Bunter, in a tone of ineffable dignity, "perhaps you fellows believe me now?"

They did!

They had to!

There were no bootings for Bunter. Bunter rolled down to lunch like a fellow walking on air. Bunter was the goods. Bunter was going to take a Coronation party to a magnificent West End mansion! Even Bunter himself believed it now! Bunter had been specially asked by a noble lord to come, and bring his friends with him. It almost made his head spin to try to think out what was the meaning of it. But whatever was the meaning of it, there it was. Only, it was so amazing that at moments it seemed to Billy Bunter too good to be true!

But if a doubt lingered it was banished that afternoon when a car rolled up to Wharton Lodge, driven by a young man so well remembered.

Billy Bunter and the Famous Five packed into the car, and Captain Lancaster drove off to London.

Bunter sat grinning with fat satisfaction.

And the Famous Five, sharing his satisfaction, could only wonder, as they had wondered that day at Trant Elms, whether they were dreaming this, and would wake up presently.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Up for the Coronation!

LONDON was swarming.

Never, in all their young lives, had the chums of the Remove seen such enormous crowds.

Once in the metropolis, the pace was slow. But the juniors did not mind that. They were glad to have plenty of time to look about them. Partly on account of the traffic, partly to give the schoolboys a view of what was to be seen, the captain drove by a round-about way and they saw a great deal of the route that was to be followed on the morrow by the royal procession. The wonderful decorations seemed to have turned London into a sort of fairy city.

Crowds, and crowds, and crowds, at every turn; and everybody in good humour, and looking merry and bright. Going at almost a snail's pace up Regent Street, the juniors were suddenly hailed by a familiar voice from amid the throng on the pavement. A bunch of fellows in Greyfriars caps waved to them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "Old Smithy!"

The Bounder grinned at them and pushed towards the car. Half a dozen Remove fellows were with him—Redwing and Peter Todd, and Russell and Ogilvy, and Tom Brown and Squiff. They all waved to the party in the big car.

"Where are you fellows going?" asked the Bounder, with surprise and curiosity in his face.

Billy Bunter gave him a blink.

"This is my Coronation party, Smithy," he answered loftily. "We're going to Trant House."

"Hear, hear!" said the Bounder grinning. "And now, where are you going?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Honest Injun, old man!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Lord Trant has asked Bunter to come and bring his friends—and here we are!"

"Oh, my hat!" said the Bounder.

He disappeared into the crowd again, evidently in a state of great astonishment. He was hardly more astonished than the Coronation party themselves, as a matter of fact.

Progress was slower and slower. But it was all so exciting and delightful to the juniors that it could not be too slow for them.

Billy Bunter, however, began to look serious. He had doubted a little whether they would arrive at Trant House in time for dinner. Now he began to doubt whether they would arrive in time for supper.

However, they arrived at last, through streets gorgeous with banners and streamers.

Trant House, London, S.W. 1, proved to be as imposing, in its way, as Trant Elms, Sussex. A good many other guests were there; the mansion, large as it was, seemed to be fairly well populated for the great occasion. But room had been found for Billy Bunter's Coronation party. Captain Lancaster handed them over to the Groom of the Chambers, who was so dignified a gentleman that Bunter, for a moment, supposed that he was Lord Trant.

But they learned that Lord Trant was absent, at the Palace, and was not likely to return until a late hour.

This was rather disappointing to the Famous Five, who were keen to see his lordship and elucidate, if they could, the baffling mystery of Billy Bunter's Coronation party.

It was, on the other hand, a relief to Bunter.

Bunter was haunted by a lingering dread that there was some mistake in the matter—as how, indeed, could there fail to be? If such was the case, it might all come out when he met his lordship face to face!

Lord Trant, clearly, fancied that he knew Bunter. Bunter was absolutely certain that he didn't know Lord Trant.

So, really, no fellow could have made head or tail of it. It was all happening very happily, but in the strange circumstances, it seemed only too likely that something might crop up of a less happy nature.

Much as Billy Bunter loved a lord, he felt a qualm at meeting this particular peer. So he was glad that Lord Trant was kept at the Palace that evening. Indeed, he nourished a hope that he might not meet his lordship personally till after the Coronation. Then, if anything was amiss, it would be all right.

Between his keen desire for a meal and his uneasiness at meeting Lord Trant, Bunter's feelings had been quite mixed as the car approached its destination. Now, however, he was relieved, and he concentrated wholly on food.

Having cleaned off the dust of the journey—even Bunter having put in an extra wash—the juniors went down to supper under the wing of the genial captain.

The house was crowded, with people going and coming all the time; and supper was going on, on the informal lines of a country house breakfast.

Captain Lancaster, who was doing the honours in his lordship's absence, had plenty on his hands, but he found

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time to look after the Greyfriars fellows—especially Bunter.

Bunter, it was clear, was a fellow he delighted to honour!

It could hardly be because Bunter had nearly run over him, on a horse, on Seahill sands but what other reason he had was unknown to the Famous Five.

Anyhow, there it was; and Bunter beamed, and blinked about him through his big spectacles, with great satisfaction. Supper, he discovered, was all that his fat heart could desire. He demolished it on a great scale.

He was still going strong when Harry Wharton & Co. went out for a happy ramble in the crowded, brightly lit streets. When they came in, a couple of hours later, Bunter had gone to bed.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed his example.

"Make this out, anybody?" asked Bob Cherry, when they parted for the night.

Four heads were shaken.

"The make-outfulness is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bunter's worked the oracle!" grinned Bob. "It must be all right, as we're here—what?"

"Must be!" agreed Harry Wharton, laughing. "But—"

"But how?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Goodness knows! Seems a bit like the Arabian Nights!" said Harry. "But we're in tremendous luck, at any rate!"

"What-ho!"

And the Famous Five went to bed, to dream of brilliant lights, and thronging streets, and prancing horses, and the blare of music, and all the glories of the historic event they were to see on the morrow.

They were up early in the morning—the morning of the great day. Bunter was not. They looked into his room for him, and were greeted by a snore.

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

Snore!

"Better wake him," said Harry. "Even Bunter will want to turn out early for once, on Coronation Day, I should think."

"Bunter! Bunt! Bunt!" roared Bob into a fat ear; and the Owl of the Remove opened his eyes, and blinked, and murmured:

"Beast!"

"Turn out, old fat man!" said Bob cheerily. "Coronation Day, old bean! We don't get a Coronation Day every holiday! Make the most of it!"

Bunter sat up.

"Oh!" he said. "Has Lord Trant gone yet?"

"Blessed if I know. Haven't seen him."

"I mean, he will have to go pretty early," said Bunter. "Call me again after he's gone, will you?"

"Don't you want to see him?" asked Bob, puzzled.

"Eh? Oh, yes! No end! But—but I think I'd better have a bit of a rest, till—till he's gone! I mean—"

"What the thump do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Billy Bunter laid his fat head on the pillow again.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him, and looked at one another. Plainly Bunter did not want to meet his lordship—his noble host on this great and historic occasion. Why, was another mystery to be added to an already long list?

"Look here, Bunter—" said Harry.

Snore!

They left him to it, and went down. Billy Bunter breakfasted in bed that morning. He did not turn out till he was quite, quite sure that the coast was clear. Not till lunch, in fact, did the Famous Five see him again. After that it was time to take their places on the great balcony in front of Trant House to watch for the Royal procession on its way from Westminster Abbey back to Buckingham Palace, and to cheer the newly crowned King and Queen.

Billy Bunter joined them with a cheery grin, and a smear of pie on his fat face.

"All serene now, you fellows!" he remarked breezily.

"The serenefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky smile.

"I say, you fellows"—Bunter lowered his voice a little—"seen the old bean?"

"The what? Oh, his lordship!" said Harry. "No; we haven't seen him, Bunter. I expect he's had plenty on hand this morning."

"Oh, good!" said Bunter.

"Why?" asked Harry. "We shall see him later, of course. What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing! Of—of course, you'll see him later. That won't matter, though. It will be all right then."

"Isn't it all right now?"

"Oh, yes; right as rain!" said

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BE SURE AND READ IT!

Bunter hastily. "Of—of course! Still, it's just as well, considering—"

"Considering what?"

"Oh, nothing! Anyhow, whatever happens, we shall have seen the show, shan't we?"

"What can happen—"

"Nothing, old chap—nothing at all! I say, you fellows, it's all right—right as rain! Don't you worry!"

They looked at Bunter. It was rather late in the day for doubts to rise again. But doubts were rising.

"It can't be spoofo," said Bob Cherry slowly. "We're here. How could we be here if it was spoofo? We're here!"

"The herefulness is terrific!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!" Bunter gave the Famous Five an indignant blink. "I hope you fellows ain't getting suspicious like Smithy. If you fancy that I don't know Lord Trant at all, and that it's all a mistake, you're absolutely mistaken. Right off the mark," said Bunter reassuringly.

Five fellows jumped, as if moved by the same spring. "Wha-a-t?" stuttered Wharton. "You heard him on the phone, didn't you?" said Bunter warmly. "I showed you his letter, didn't I? What more do you want? That letter—"

"You pernicious porpoise!" breathed Bob. "Did you pinch that letter somewhere, as Smithy said you jolly well did?"

"Smithy's a suspicious beast!" said Bunter. "How could I pinch that letter? Wasn't it addressed to me? So far as I know, that chap Lancaster's name ain't William at all."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Lancaster's letter—"

"No!" hooted Bunter. "Nothing of the kind! He wasn't reading it on the beach that day when I nearly galloped over him—"

"Oh crikey!"

"And he never dropped it. If he had, I shouldn't have picked it up. I don't believe his name is William. Very likely George, or—or Thomas."

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter, petrified. There was a buzzing crowd round them. Trant House was full of people. But they did not heed. They just gazed at William George Bunter.

He gave them a cheery wink.

"It's all right, you fellows," he said—"right as rain! We're here, ain't we? What more do you want? The food's splendid!"

"What," said Bob Cherry helplessly, "can it all mean? That fat scoundrel's been spoofing us, after all. But if it's spoofo, we couldn't be here. And we're here, unless we're dreaming."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You fat, frowsy frump—" began Harry Wharton.

"Oh, here you are!" The genial captain came up. "Time to take your places, my boys. This way!"

The mystery of it was too bewildering for the juniors to try to think it out. They gave it up. Anyhow, as Bunter said, they were there, and the Royal procession was on its way.

The captain guided them to their places on the high balcony, and left them there. They dismissed Billy Bunter and the mystery from their minds, and gave all their attention to the great event of the day.

From a distance a roll of cheering, growing louder and louder, heralded the approach of the State carriage, and the chums of the Remove forgot Bunter, and remembered only that they were loyal subjects of his Majesty King George the Sixth, and prepared to testify the same at the top of their voices.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

"HURRAH!" roared Bob Cherry. Tens of thousands of voices mingled in rolling cheers; but among those tens of thousands, probably not one was more powerful than that of Robert Cherry, of the Greyfriars Remove.

Yeomen of the Guard marched majestically by. Fanfares of music shrilled through the deep boom of innumerable cheering voices. Louder and louder grew the roar as the great gilt State coach rolled by and all eyes were turned on the King.

Billy Bunter was a little short of breath after his exertions at lunch; but he added his loyal squeak. He squeaked, and waved, and squeaked again.

With graceful bows in acknowledgment of the greetings of his loyal subjects, King George the Sixth passed slowly on, the huge coach moving at a walking pace, drawn by its eight powerful horses.

"I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter excitedly—"I say—"

"Hurrah!"

"I say, did you see the King bow to me?" gasped Bunter.

"Oh crikey!"

"I say, he jolly well did!"

"You and I, and all of us, old fat man," chuckled Bob Cherry.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Cheer, boys—cheer!" roared Bob.

"The cheerfulness is truly terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

Horse and foot, waving plumes and tramping hoofs, passed on. In great excitement and enthusiasm the Greyfriars fellows waved and cheered, and cheered and waved. It was a great occasion, and they did it justice to the full extent of their lung power, which was considerable.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, when the procession at last was past, and vast, cheering crowds closed in behind it, and they looked down on heads as innumerable as the waves of the sea—"well, that was worth seeing, you fellows!"

"The worthfulness was—"

"Terrific," chortled Bob—"not to say preposterous! Hurrah! Long live the King! Long live the Queen! Long live the princes and princesses, and—and everybody! Hurrah!"

"We're going to hear the King broadcast presently," remarked Harry Wharton, as they went in from the balcony, and mingled with the throng in Trant House. "Lord Trant will be back before then."

"Oh crikey!"

"What's the matter, Bunter?"

"Oh, nothing! I mean, I—I'm hungry. Let's see if we can scrounge some tea."

Captain Lancaster rejoined them, while they were scrounging some tea. He gave them a cheery smile.

"Lord Trant has returned," he said. "He is a little tired. But you will see him soon. He will be down shortly. He is very anxious to see you, Bunter."

"Oh lor!"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, r-r-ripping!" gasped Bunter. "S-s-so sorry I haven't seen him yet. I—I—I'm fearfully eager."

"I've fixed up a show for to-night," said the captain. "It's going to be a tremendous night in London, of course. A theatre, and a supper, and a run round the town—what?"

"Fine!" said Bob.

"Ripping!"

"The ripfulness is truly terrific!"

The genial captain nodded, and left them again.

Billy Bunter blinked after him uneasily, and then blinked at the other fellows through his big spectacles.

"I—I say, you fellows," he gasped, "I—I suppose it's all right—"

"You suppose, you fat fraud!"

"I—I mean, it must be! You heard him on the phone. He—he must have known what he was talking about, whether I did or not."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I—I say, pip-pip-point him out when he turns up!" gasped Bunter. "You see, as I d-d-don't know him by sight—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows, think—think we'd better clear?" gasped Bunter.

"I—I'm not fearfully keen on seeing Lord Trant, you know—"

"We're not going, you fat spoofer, and you're not, till we've seen Lord Trant. If there's a mistake, it's got to be explained!" said Harry Wharton.

"Beast!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that the jolly old peer?" asked Bob Cherry, with a nod towards a little old gentleman with an eyeglass, who had entered with the captain.

Billy Bunter turned his spectacles on the little old gentleman, and gave a jump. The old gentleman had stopped to speak to a group of guests, and Bunter had a good view of him! He knew that little old gentleman!

"That ain't Lord Trant," said Bunter. "I've seen that old fossil before. I wonder what the dickens he is doing here? Poor relation, perhaps! He's better dressed than when I saw him in Sussex—"

"You've seen him before?" asked Harry Wharton. "Who is he?"

"Blessed if I know! He was there that day when I crooked Smithy's bike, running into a tramp!" answered Bunter. "I was coming down the hill, you know, and couldn't stop, and banged right into

missed him at Stretton. I have not forgotten your courage—your gallantry—the way you rushed to my rescue—"

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled. After what Bunter had just said, they really could not help doubting that rush to the rescue—a little!

"You left me in such a hurry, my dear lad, that I had no time to make myself known to you," continued the little old gentleman. "So I was very, very glad that day I saw you arrive at Trant Elms, from my window—"

"Eh?"

"I knew, then, of course, that you must know who it was that you had rescued. Otherwise, of course, you could not have paid me that visit at Trant Elms—"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the little old gentleman, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

He understood at last.

That little old gentleman on the Sussex downs, whom he had—inadvertently—rescued from the tramp, was Lord Trant!

Bunter had not had the remotest suspicion of it—till now!

Now it explained everything!

"Oh!" he gasped again.

"You will stay here for Coronation week!" beamed his lordship. "You and your friends! Yes? Delightful! Please introduce your friends! So glad to make your acquaintance, my dear boys! Any friend of Bunter's—delighted—delighted!"

He shook hands with Bunter again, beamed on Bunter's friends, and passed on, to beam on other guests.

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter.

"So that's it!" said Bob Cherry. "Who'd have thought—"

"Pluck will tell!" said Bunter.

"What?"

"Pluck!" said Bunter firmly. "This is what comes of being brave as a lion—I may say, heroic! I ran fearful risks, rescuing that old geezer—I mean my friend, Lord Trant—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Fancy him turning out to be that old geezer, you know—I—I mean, I knew he was the same man all the time. He knew me at once, of course, when he saw me from his window at Trant Elms, and fancied I knew—I mean, I did know, of course! Look here, what are you fellows cackling about?" hooted Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, here we are, up for the Coronation!" said Bunter. "We're going to have a beano to-night, and a jolly week! Ain't that all right?"

"The rightfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

Which was cheerfully endorsed by all the members of Billy Bunter's Coronation Party. THE END.

(Enjoy a laugh? Good! Then be sure to read: "COKER THE CONQUEROR!" next week's grand yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., which will appear in the MAGNET, on sale FRIDAY next!)

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the tramp. The old donkey thought I had done it on purpose. I—I mean to say, I—I did it on purpose—to—to rescue him, you know! You know my pluck—my long suit, as you know. He'd stopped that old bean to rob him. Then I banged right into him and knocked him over, and—"

"I believe that's Lord Trant!" said Harry.

"Oh, don't be an ass! He was quite shabby when I saw him in Sussex!" said Bunter.

The little old gentleman left the group, glanced round, spotted the Greyfriars fellows, and came quickly towards them.

He beamed on Billy Bunter!

"Bunter, my dear boy," he exclaimed, "I am delighted to see you here! You must excuse me for not having seen you before—I have been very much occupied owing to the Coronation. But now"—he beamed on the juniors, and beamed on Bunter—"I have not forgotten our meeting in Sussex, my dear boy, when I came over to see Captain Lancaster, and

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SAD END TO CORONATION CHEER CLASS! By DICK RUSSELL

Coker had a great idea. He started a class in cheering for the Coronation. "I like to hear a good, hearty British cheer," he said. "Not the tinpot little apology for a cheer that you get from the Greyfriars crowd round Big Side. The fact is, the kids here don't give their lungs sufficient exercise. They want training for the Coronation. They want to learn to cheer. And I'm going to teach 'em!"

There was quite a rush to join Coker's cheer class. Possibly the fact that free refreshments were to be supplied by Coker had something to do with it!

On the far side of the playing fields Coker conducted several very successful trials in cheering.

But he was a hard taskmaster. Try as they would, Coker's class couldn't cheer loudly enough to satisfy him.

Some of the volunteers almost gave it up in disgust. Refreshments in the tuck-shop after each class, however, kept them pegging away at it.

Coker felt pleased with the progress they were making.

At last, he felt pleased till it came to the last practice.

Then something went wrong.

The cheering, which had been growing louder at each practice, suddenly started reversing, and became feebler and feebler at each cheer!

Coker bullied and raved at his trained exponents of the hearty British cheer. It was all to no avail!

Coker had often called his recruits donkeys. And now, every one of them had become a little "horse"!

They'll hardly be able to muster up a whisper between them when the procession passes—and this after a week's hard training in cheering!

It's a disappointing world—as Coker's always learning!

A "STUDY" IN RED, WHITE, and BLUE!

Maully's Remarkable Gesture

"Somethin' ought to be done about the Coronation, begad!" remarked Lord Mauleverer to his study-mates, Delarey and Sir Jimmy Vivian, in a brief interval between snoozes, the other day. "What about brightenin' up the study a bit?"

Delarey said he didn't see much sense in that. He thought a better idea would be to brighten up the outside of the window, where people could see it, with a Neon sign. But it was doubtful whether the Head would allow Neon signs outside chaps' windows.

Sir Jimmy Vivian said candidly that he thought it was all rot to dress up a study for the Coronation.

Maully didn't hear what either said, because he'd fallen asleep again.

But when he woke up for a second time he remembered his idea, sent for Tubb of the Third, and asked him if he'd brighten up the study and give it a touch of red, white, and blue as a gesture for the Coronation.

Tubb, with a gleam in his eye, said it was a pleasure for the Third to fag for the Remove, and he'd bring a few pals along to help, if Maully didn't mind. Then he trotted off.

When he returned, he brought with him a whole crowd of grinning Third Formers. Delarey and Vivian were out. Maully was asleep.

About an hour later Delarey and Vivian had the shock of their naturals. Walking into the study, they found it painted red, white, and

blue all over! The Third had not even spared Maully himself. He had a blob of white on one cheek, a blob of blue on the other, and a big blob of red on his nose. And he was still fast asleep!

Tubb and his pals certainly succeeded in brightening up Maully's study for him!

But they didn't feel quite so bright themselves by the time the incensed crowd of Removites which Delarey and Vivian led to the Third Form Room had mopped up the floor with them!

It took them a mere five minutes to do their colouring in a Remove study. But it will be years before they forget what the Remove did to them afterwards!



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WE STAND UP FOR THE KING!

Coronation Zeal in Form-room

Larry Lascelles took us in English History during Quelch's absence the other day.

So we tried out our little Coronation jape.

Smithy had thought it out previously. But Quelch's such a funny beggar that we felt a bit chary of doing it while he was running the show.

Larry's more human and has a better-developed sense of humour. And as a patriot he wouldn't be able to object. So we tried it on him.

The idea was for us all to jump up and salute every time he mentioned "the King." Smithy said it wouldn't matter which king in history was meant. We'd jump up and salute, anyway.

When Larry asked us what we thought we were doing, the idea was to reply that, as patriots, we could allow no opportunity to pass of displaying our loyalty to the Throne.

Rather a bright wheeze of Smithy's! We were all keen to see how it panned out.

We got our cue in the first few seconds of the lesson. Larry began:

"I understand that in the last lesson you dealt with Wolsey's relations with the King—"

He got no further! We all jumped up, with a deafening clatter of desks and forms, and saluted.

Larry jumped. "All gone mad!" he asked.

"Not at all, sir," said Smithy, with his usual coolness. "You mentioned the King. Any decent chap stands up for the King, sir, especially at a time like this."

Larry gave the Bounder a somewhat peculiar look. "Your loyal sentiments do you credit, Vernon-Smith. But I happened to be talking about Henry the Eighth, not George the Sixth."

"Quite, sir!" said

Smithy cheerfully. "But whatever king you talk about, you can't help thinking of the Throne generally, and this Coronation particularly. Can you, sir?"

"I see," nodded Larry. "Well, you can all sit down again now, anyhow. To get on with the lesson. The King—"

We all jumped up again and did our stuff! Some of us felt a bit funky about it. But Larry seemed to be taking it without the flicker of an eyelid this time. We concluded that, as Smithy had forecast, he wouldn't be able to object.

He certainly didn't object till the end of the lesson, and we all felt the jape had panned out very well. We stood up about forty times during the morning, and it was a pleasant change from sitting down without a break.

But when the lesson ended we had a shock!

Larry, all smiles, waved us gently back into our places, as we got up to go.

"Don't hurry, boys," he said. "As you are so patriotic, I've decided to give you a chance to exercise your patriotic fervour. You will stay here till dinner-time, doing your little saluting turn. I'll send in a prefect to call out 'The King!' at half-minute intervals."

"Oh crikey!"

"As it's a half-holiday," went on Larry sweetly.

"I'll gratify your patriotic aspirations by giving you the chance to do saluting all the afternoon—in this Form-room—under a relay of prefects. Don't thank me, boys—it's a pleasure!"

We didn't thank him! We didn't thank Smithy, either, afterwards! In fact, Smithy got such a ragging that he says he's never going to think out any more brainy japes for us.

That's a relief, anyway.

WOULD-BE CONTRIBUTORS

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NOT UNIQUE!

Hobson of the Shell, who is an amateur astronomer, thinks he's something special because he's potty about planets.

But it's nothing, really. We know at least a dozen Greyfriars film-fans who are crazy about stars!

PATRIOTIC LAWYER

Peter Todd, the lawyer of the Remove, is awfully patriotic.

They say that whenever a client who's consulting him waves a Union Jack, Toddy waives his fee!

with a roguish twinkle in his eyes. "Mind if I feel in your pocket, Fearless?"

"You won't find it there, sir, even if you do!" laughed Frank Fearless.

But Fearless was wrong. When the Head dived a hand into his pocket and withdrew it again, he brought to light the very fountain-pen which had caused to disappear.

"Well, my hat!" eggshelled Fearless, wondering. "I never knew you were such a clever conjurer, sir."

"Me! Why, I'm a regular elite-of-hand specialist!" declared the Head, whose face wore a strange look of triumph, as he put away the fountain-pen. "I'll show you a few more tricks."

He proceeded to give them quite a programme of conjuring and elite-of-hand tricks. The heroes of the Fourth enjoyed it no end. They had never imagined previously that their headmaster was such an entertaining Johnny as this!

Time passed rapidly and, almost before they knew where they were, they were chonking through the outskirts of London.

They left the shower to take his car to a garage and walked on to the Hotel Posh, where they were to watch the Coronation procession from a first-floor window.

At the entrance they all felt for their tickets.

And it was then that Frank Fearless made a garish discovery. "My ticket—I've lost it!" he gasped.

"Impossible! You had it when we got in the car," said Jack Jolly. "I saw it sticking out of your weskit pocket."

"It's not there now, anyway!" eggshelled Fearless. "I suppose none of you chaps picked it up anywhere?"

Jolly and Merry and Bright shook their heads.

"You'd have had it back at once, if we had, old chap," said Bright.

"What about Doctor Birchmall?"

The Fourth Formers looked round. They were just in time to see the Head hurrying to the grand staircase of the Hotel Posh, holding a ticket in his hand.

Jack Jolly whistled, a sudden suspicion came into his head.

"Few! I wonder—"

"You wonder what?" asked Frank Fearless.

"I wonder if the Head helped himself to it!" said Jolly, eggshelled. "Remember, now he dived into your pocket and brought out the fountain-pen, Fearless?"

"Oh crumbs!"

Fearless and Merry and Bright looked absolutely dazed. In a flash, they saw how it would have been for an accomplished conjurer like the Head to take Frank's ticket and "put it away

while he was projecting the fountain-pen from the junior's pocket.

"It's a hundred to one in do-nutts that he's got it!" cried Frank Fearless. "After him, you fellows!"

Jack Jolly & Co. broke into a run and followed Fearless up the stairs, two at a time.

A lass! They were too late! As they reached the top of the stairs, Doctor Birchmall went through a doorway, grinning all over his dial; and when the Fourth Formers tried to follow him, they found two burly commissioners barring the way.

"Tickets, please!" they cried. Jolly and Merry and Bright showed their tickets.

"Can't you let our pal in, too?" asked Jack Jolly. "He's lost his ticket."

"Haw, haw, haw! Tell us another!" laughed one of the burly doorkeepers. "If you'd like to know, there are only three seats left. The old jent with the beard took the only other one."

"Never mind, Fearless," said Jack Jolly. "We'll all stick together and watch the show from the pavement."

But Fearless simply wouldn't hear of that.

"You chaps go and take your seats," he said. "I'll stand on the pavement just below your window—and if I get a chance to climb up to you, I'll take it!"

"All serene, then old chap," said Jack Jolly. "We'll look out for you."

Fearless went off on his own, and Jack Jolly & Co. gave up their tickets and went to their seats at the hotel window. They found Doctor Birchmall calmly occupying Frank's seat in the front row.

"Ah! Here you are, then, boys!" he grinned, as they arrived.

"Where's Fearless?"

"You know where Fearless is, sir!" said Jack Jolly scornfully.

"He's outside on the pavement—while you're sitting here in luxury in the seat you pinched from him!"

The Head frowned.

"Really, Jolly, I'm surprised at you being so suspicious."

Jack Jolly opened his mouth to argue it out with the Head. But he finished up by cheering instead, for at that moment, the clashing of symbols and the blare of music from up the street announced that the procession was coming.

All thoughts about tickets vanished, as the Coronation procession came in site. Headmaster and juniors alike leaned out of the window and yelled themselves hoarse with cheering.

Then, suddenly, there was a change of note in Doctor Birchmall's voice. His yells of enthusiasm gave place to yells of pane!

Jack Jolly & Co. looked round. An amazing sight met their eyes!

Frank Fearless had climbed up from the street on to a ledge just below the window.

Finding the Head's beard dangling just beside him, he had decided to make it his safety strap. So he had grabbed it firmly with his right hand while he waved his cap with his left!

Jack Jolly & Co. grinned. Their grins changed to a larf and their larf to a roar!

The Head's roaring was of a very different character. He bellowed and bawled in sheer aggrony. With Frank Fearless hanging on to his beard, he found it impossible to stay in his chair. His head was pulled forwards and he fell on his neeze, his ostrich-like



neck stretched out over the window-sill!

"Yarooooo! Ow-ow-ow! Help! Murder! Perlice!" he howled.

Not till the procession had passed did Frank Fearless release his hold. Then at last he vaulted through the window and joined his chums in the Hotel Posh.

By that time, Doctor Birchmall was in a state of sheer frenzy.

"You yung idjut! You yung maniac!" he shrieked. "How dare you hang on to my beard!"

But Fearless was not the fellow to be cowed.

"It just served you right, sir!" he flashed. "You nabbed my seat and I nabbed your whiskers. So now honners are even!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Jack Jolly & Co.

But none of them bore the Head any ill-will, and, as soon as he had simmered down a little, they invited him to a big feed in the restoring of the Hotel Posh.

And when the time came to return to St. Sam's, everybody—the Head included—declared that Coronation Day had been a grate success!