

JUST LIKE BUNTER!

FRANK RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

BILLY BUNTER'S MYSTERIOUS BOOK!

"BUNTER!"
"Bunty!"
"Bunt!"

It was a powerful voice that called. Stentor, of old, had little on Bob Cherry, when Bob put on steam.

Billy Bunter did not heed.

Really, it might have been supposed that the fat Owl of the Remove was deaf.

Bunter was seated on the settee, on the Remove landing, within easy range of any voice calling from the staircase below. Bob's voice was quite audible on the landing—and indeed for a considerable distance in every other direction. But it failed to produce any effect on Billy Bunter.

If he heard, he followed the well-known example of the ancient gladiator, and heeded not!

Billy Bunter, with his plump person comfortably disposed on the settee, his little fat legs stretched out, was reading. There was a little paper-covered book in his fat hands, and he was immersed, engrossed, in it. His little round

eyes and his big round spectacles were glued on it. From which circumstance, it would have been easy to guess that it was not a school book. No school book had ever fixed Bunter's attention like that. Whatever it was, the fat Owl was too deep in it to heed calling voices.

"Bunter!" came Bob's roar again.

Still Billy Bunter turned a deaf ear: or, to be exact, two!

"Bunter!"

Bob Cherry was almost out-doing Stentor! Any fellow at the other end of the Remove passage could have heard him. Still the fat Owl remained oblivious.

"Bunter!"

Then came a sharp interrupting voice below:

"Cherry!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Bob, in much more subdued tones. He realized that his powerful voice must have been heard far and wide, whether Billy Bunter heard it or not. Evidently Mr. Quelch, his form-master, had heard it, and did not approve.

"Cherry! What do you mean by shouting on the stairs?"

"Oh! I—I wasn't exactly shouting, sir—"

"I heard you from my study."

"Oh! I—I—I was calling Bunter, sir! He's wanted for games practice, and Wharton asked me to call him—"

"If you desire to speak to Bunter, Cherry, go up and speak to him in a more seemly manner—"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"And take fifty lines for shouting on the staircase!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Mr. Quelch, frowning, rustled away. Bob Cherry, with deep feelings, tramped up the stairs, to call Bunter at closer range, and without quite so much steam.

Still Billy Bunter did not heed. It was quite uncommon for the fat Owl to be deep in a book of any kind. There must have been something of very unusual and extraordinary interest in that little paper-covered book, for the fat Owl did not look up, even when Bob's heavy tread sounded on the landing.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You fat ass, why didn't you answer me?" demanded Bob Cherry, wrathfully. "I've got fifty lines from Quelch now, you podgy piffler. Get a move on, do you hear?"

Not a blink came from Bunter.

Bob Cherry strode across the landing to the settee. The other fellows were already in the changing-room, and Bob wanted to join them there. Bunter—as was not uncommon when games-practice was the order of the day—had not turned up: and the captain of the Remove had sent Bob to look for him. Billy Bunter was about as useful at Soccer as at Sanskrit: but games-practice

was compulsory, and the fat Owl had to go through it for his own good. But Bunter, evidently, was not thinking of games-practice at the moment. He did not lift his eyes or his spectacles from his eager perusal of that little book, and Bob Cherry stared at the top of a fat bent head.

"You fat chump!" hooted Bob. "You're wanted!"

Billy Bunter did not look up. But he waved a fat hand at Bob, as if waving away a troublesome insect.

"Shut up!" he yapped.

"I tell you—"

"Go away!"

"Games-practice—"

"Leave a fellow alone!"

"You've got to come down and change—!"

Billy Bunter looked up at last. Really, a fellow couldn't go on reading, however absorbing his book, with a fellow hooting in his fat ears all the time. He blinked at Bob with an exasperated blink.

"Will you give a fellow a rest? he yapped. "I can't come—I'm busy—tell Wharton he's got to let me off this afternoon—"

"He's asked me to fetch you—"

"Go away!"

With that injunction, Billy Bunter dropped his eyes and his spectacles to the pages of the book again. Evidently that book was more interesting to Bunter than soccer on Little Side.

Bob gazed at him in astonishment. Never before had he seen William George Bunter so deeply interested in any book whatsoever.

"What on earth have you got there?" he asked. "Something frightfully thrilling?"

"Oh! Yes—no—do leave a chap alone! Tell Wharton I'm reading—I—mean—" Billy Bunter paused. Perhaps he realized that that might not satisfy a form-captain whose duty it was to round up slackers who cut games-practice.

"I—I mean, tell him I've got a pain—a bad pain—"

"Where?" asked Bob.

"I don't know—I—I mean, in the leg! I—I fell over in the study—fell over a box that Toddy left in the way, and—and hurt my leg! I—I couldn't run a yard—er—or even walk! I—I've got to rest my leg."

Bob Cherry grinned. Billy Bunter's excuses, when games-practice came round, were many and various. Bunter was never at a loss for an excuse to cut: though this was the first time, so far as Bob knew, that he had ever wanted to cut for the purpose of reading. Generally he just wanted to laze and frowst.

Still, it was possible—though perhaps only barely—that even Billy Bunter was stating the facts for once. Certainly, if a fellow had damaged his leg, and couldn't run a yard, he had to be let off games. If Billy Bunter's fat leg was really in the sad state that he described, Bob was prepared to report the same

to the captain of the Remove, and leave the fat Owl to rest that damaged limb. But was it? The fact that Bunter said it was, made it extremely probable that it wasn't.

"Look here, you fat foozler, if you're spoofing, as usual—!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Wharton's sent me after you—"

"I tell you I can't go!" howled Bunter, impatiently. "How can a fellow play soccer with a fearful pain in his arm—"

"His arm?" yelled Bob.

"I—I—I mean leg!" stammered Bunter. "I—I meant to say leg! I—I—I've got a fearful bruise on my elbow—I mean my knee—all black and blue—"

"You fat, foozling, frabjous fibber!" said Bob. "If you've got a bruise, show it up, and I'll tell Wharton—"

"Oh! It—it—it doesn't show!" gasped Bunter. "It's one of those internal bruises, you know—it doesn't show on—on the outside! But it's awfully painful—I can hardly move my arm—I mean my leg—"

"Couldn't you get off that settee?" asked Bob.

"Not if the house was on fire!" asserted Bunter.

"Not if I helped you?" further inquired Bob.

"Look here—"

"Suppose I grabbed you by the collar, like that—"

"Yow-ow! Leggo!"

"—and rolled you off, like that—"

Bump!

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he spread on the landing. "Wow! Beast! Wow! Keep off, you beast! I tell you I've got a pain—"

"Gammon!" said Bob. "But I'll tell you what—you're going to have one, if you don't get a move on. Quick's the word. Now—!" Bob drew back his foot.

Billy Bunter bounded to his feet. For a fellow who had a fearful pain, and couldn't move, he displayed remarkable activity. Probably it was the proximity of the largest foot in the Remove that worked that sudden cure. Bunter bounced up almost like a ball, leaving his book lying on the floor where he had sprawled.

"Beast!" he roared. "I tell you—"

"Push off!" said Bob. He made a motion with his foot.

"Keep off, you beast! I've dropped my book—"

"I'll pick that up for you."

Bob Cherry stooped to pick up the book. Billy Bunter made a sudden dive for it at the same moment.

Two heads met!

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

"Wow!" roared Bunter.

"You fat ass!" gasped Bob, rubbing his head.

"Beast!" Bunter, rubbing a fat head with one hand, grabbed up the book with the other. "You leave my book alone!" To Bob's astonishment, the fat Owl crammed the book hurriedly into an inside pocket. Apparently that mysterious book, whatever it was, was not to meet any eyes but Bunter's own. Bob stared at him.

"You footling fat frump!" he exclaimed. "What on earth have you got there, that you're keeping so secret?"

"Oh! Nothing! I—I mean—look here, I've told you I've got a pain—"

"And I've told you you're going to have another, if you don't get a move on! Here it comes!"

Billy Bunter dodged a lunging foot.

He gave Bob Cherry a glare, such a deadly glare that it might almost have cracked his spectacles. Then he rolled away to the stairs. Bob, grinning, followed him down. On the middle landing, Billy Bunter lagged—but a lunging foot set him going again, and he yelled and proceeded. A breathless and infuriated fat Owl arrived in the changing-room, with Bob Cherry grinning behind him. And for the next hour, Billy Bunter was too busy even to think of the mysterious book he was so anxious to peruse.

CHAPTER II

BATS?

HARRY WHARTON stared.

Frank Nugent jumped.

Both of them were astonished.

Indeed, they could hardly believe their eyes, as they looked in at the open doorway of No. 1 Study in the Remove.

The sight that met their eyes was not only unexpected. It was not only surprising. It was astonishing. It was amazing. Indeed, it was almost alarming.

After games practice that day, the Famous Five of the Remove had been chatting in the Rag. The Christmas holidays were close at hand, which was a topic of considerable interest to most Greyfriars fellows. Harry Wharton and Co. had been discussing that interesting topic with Lord Mauleverer and Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. Wharton and Nugent had now come up to their study. It was teatime, and Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were coming along: the Famous Five generally tea'd together in Wharton's study.

As No. 1 Study belonged to Wharton and Nugent, and nobody else had

any business there, they naturally expected to find it vacant when they arrived. But they found it already inhabited.

A well-known fat figure met their view.

It was not really surprising to see Billy Bunter in another fellow's study when the other fellow was absent. Billy Bunter was often found in spots where he had no business. If Bunter had asked himself to tea, or if he had been discovered in the act of rooting through the cupboard for provender, it would not have been surprising in the least, in view of the fat Owl's well-known manners and customs. But Billy Bunter was not sprawling in the armchair, and he was not rooting in the study cupboard. He was quite otherwise occupied and it was his occupation that made Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent gaze at him, in almost dumbfounded astonishment.

There was a looking-glass in the study. Billy Bunter was standing in front of that looking-glass, his eyes and spectacles fixed on the reflection of the fattest face and fattest head at Greyfriars School. There was an unusually intent and earnest expression on the fat face. The little round eyes were concentrated in their gaze through the big round spectacles. But that was not all. Bunter's fat hands were in the air. He was waving them to and fro, in the most extraordinary manner, sweeping the air with them, watching in the glass the motions of those fat hands, with an earnest concentration he had never bestowed on his lessons. So deeply earnest was Billy Bunter in that amazing occupation, that he had not heard or heeded footsteps in the passage, and remained unaware of the two astonished juniors looking in at him.

They gazed at him.

Why Billy Bunter was doing this, unless he had taken leave of his fat senses, was inexplicable.

But there he was—deaf and blind to the world, concentrated on those amazing antics in front of the looking-glass.

"What on earth—?" breathed Harry Wharton.

"Crackers!" murmured Nugent.

Even the murmur of voices did not attract Bunter's attention, so deeply was he concentrated. To and fro went the fat hands, to and fro, as if the fat Owl was indulging in some new and unheard-of form of physical jerks.

The two juniors stood almost spellbound at the doorway.

Still without blinking round at them, the fat Owl waved and waved on. Then a mutter came from him:

"That's right! I fancy that's all right! Better make sure, though."

To the further amazement of the watching juniors, Bunter ceased his antics, and drew a little book from his inside pocket. He blinked at a page in that book, with an earnest blink, and nodded, as if satisfied.

"I've got it right!"

He pushed the little book back into his pocket, and recommenced the antics before the glass. To and fro went the fat paws again.

There were footsteps in the passage behind Wharton and Nugent. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came up.

They looked surprised to find Wharton and Nugent at the doorway of their own study, staring in.

"What—?" began Bob.

"Look!" whispered Harry. He pointed.

The three juniors looked! Then they stared!

Five pairs of eyes were now fixed on the fat Owl. Unconscious of them, Bunter went on with his weird antics. The Famous Five gazed.

"Is he crackers?" muttered Johnny Bull, blankly.

"Looks like it," said Bob, in wonder.

"The crackerfulness seems to be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed and absurd Bunter must be off his ridiculous rocker."

Really, that seemed the only possible explanation to the astonished Co. Unless the fat Owl was wandering in his mind—such as it was!—they could not begin to guess what he was up to.

A fat chuckle came from the fat Owl, and a grin on the fat face was reflected in the looking-glass.

"He, he, he! I'm getting it all right! I fancy I shall make them sit up! He, he, he! All right for Christmas now! He, he, he!"

The Famous Five looked at one another. Apparently, in the fat Owl's mind, his antics before the glass were connected with break-up for Christmas!

"Poor old Bunter!" murmured Bob. "Quite crackers!"

"Mad as a hatter!" said Nugent.

"Madder!" said Johnny Bull.

"The madfulness is preposterous."

"Think we'd better call Quelch?" asked Harry Wharton, uneasily.

This time the murmur of voices did seem to reach the fat ears of the Owl of the Remove. He gave a sudden start, and blinked round, and the antics of his fat paws ceased immediately.

"Oh!" Bunter blinked at five faces staring in at the doorway. "Oh! I—I say, you fellows—I—I—I didn't hear you coming. I—I say—"

They came into the study.

The fat Owl blinked at them uneasily. Plainly, he was annoyed and perturbed by being caught at that strange and extraordinary game.

"What are you up to here, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, very quietly.

"Oh! Nothing," stammered Bunter.

"What are you doing in our study?" demanded Nugent.

"Well, Toddy and Dutton are in my study," explained Bunter. "I didn't want them to see—" He stopped, suddenly.

"To see what?"

"Oh! Nothing."

"You didn't want them to see nothing?" asked Johnny Bull, staring.

"Yes! No—I—I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?" asked Harry Wharton.

"N-n-nothing!"

"Look here, Bunter, are you ill?" asked Harry. He was feeling quite concerned about the fat Owl.

"Eh? Ill? No! Wharrer you mean?"

"Feeling queer?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Of course I ain't ill!" yapped Bunter. "What are you getting at?"

"Then what do you mean by wagging your paws about, and making monkey faces in the glass?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Oh! That!" said Bunter. "You silly ass, I was just practising—"

"Practising what?"

"Oh! Nothing!" said Bunter, hastily. "Nothing at all."

"Look here, you fat ass—"

"You needn't ask me questions," said Bunter. "I'm not going to tell you anything. Perhaps I may surprise you, later on. Perhaps I may not. That's telling. Perhaps you fellows are going to get the surprise of your lives, when I've had a bit more practice. He, he, he! How would you like me to make you chuck your books at Quelch's head in the form-room? What?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"Well, I can do it," said Bunter, darkly. "You'd better mind your p's and q's, I can tell you. You'd better be civil to a fellow that has tremendous power in his hands."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You watch out!" said Bunter. "You just wait a bit! You're captain of the Remove now, Harry Wharton."

"Eh? Yes! What about it?"

"Well, that mayn't last much longer," said Bunter. "I may decide to make you resign the captaincy—"

"Eh?"

"And get elected in your place," said Bunter, "I haven't decided yet. But I shall think it over."

"Oh, great pip!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"I can see the Remove voting Bunter in as skipper!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"They mayn't have any choice about it," said Bunter. "I can make the whole lot vote me in, if I like."

"And how?" gasped Bob.

"That's telling!" Billy Bunter chuckled. "Don't you fellows be surprised, though, if there's a new election before we break up for Christmas, I think I should make a pretty good captain for the form."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You watch out!" exclaimed Bunter. "A fellow with power in his hands like me can do jolly well anything he likes. Like to see me make Quelch cane himself in the form-room!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Well, you may see it before you're much older," said Bunter. "Fat lot I care for Quelch—I mean, when I've had a bit more practice. I shall simply bend Quelch to my will! He will be the slave of my orders."

"Oh, crickey!"

"There's going to be a bit of a change, I can tell you," said Bunter. "When I say jump, you'll jump, I can jolly well tell you that. But I've no time to waste on you chaps—if you're going to stick here, I'll clear. I've got to get on with it."

"With what?"

"Oh! Nothing!"

With that lucid reply, the fat Owl rolled out of No. 1 Study. He left Harry Wharton and Co. staring at one another, quite blankly. What Billy Bunter's mysterious boasts meant, if they meant anything at all, was a deep mystery to the Famous Five. There was only one conclusion to which they could possibly come.

"Bats in the belfry!" said Bob.

And really, there seemed no other way of accounting for it. Unless the explanation was that there were "bats" in Bunter "belfry", the chums of the Remove had to give it up.

CHAPTER III

ALARMING!

"MAULY, old chap—"

"Yaas."

"About the hols—!"

"Oh, dear!"

Lord Mauleverer was alone in the Rag, when Billy Bunter rolled in. He was fairly cornered.

It was the following day. During that day Billy Bunter had been an object of unusual interest in the Greyfriars Remove.

Generally, Bunter was the object of no interest whatever. His unimportance in his form was unlimited. But since the remarkable happenings in No. 1 Study the day before, many fellows gave Bunter curious attention. He had left the Famous Five with the impression that it was a case of "bats": and that theory was strengthened by subsequent occurrences.

Everybody knew that Bunter had a mysterious little book in his pocket,

which he would allow no one to see. Sometimes he was seen blinking into it, but he would shut it up, and cram it hurriedly back into his pocket, if a fellow came near. That alone was queer enough.

But that was not all. At odd moments, and in odd corners, the fat Owl had been seen wagging his fat hands in the air, just as Harry Wharton and Co. had seen him in No. 1 Study. Then he had acquired a way of staring a fellow full in the face, with a concentrated stare, and wagging fat hands at him. Fellows subjected to this treatment could hardly help coming to the same conclusion as Harry Wharton and Co., and naturally they displayed a marked disinclination to be anywhere near Bunter. Some fellows, indeed, thought that Quelch ought to be told, before it got worse. So far, it seemed harmless enough: still, in a case of "bats", you never could tell. Bunter, that day, was stared at by every fellow in the Remove, as if he had suddenly become a person of great consequence, but most fellows stared from a safe distance. Skinner pointed out that it might get worse quite suddenly, and the fat chump might get hold of a poker or something.

There had been a fall of snow, and after third school, most of the Remove fellows were out in the quad, snowballing. The famous Five and a crowd of other Remove fellows were giving Temple Dabney and Co. of the Fourth the time of their lives. But Lord Mauleverer had no urge to join in such strenuous skylarking, and he had sought a comfortable armchair by the fire in the Rag. He rather wished that he hadn't, when Billy Bunter rolled in. It was not only Bunter's new and alarming reputation. It was Bunter's remark about the "hols". On that subject Mauly had no desire to hear anything whatever from Bunter.

But he was for it now! He almost decided to rise from the armchair and join the snowballers in the quad, before Bunter could get going. But laziness supervened, and he sat it out.

Bunter stopped, just in front of him, and fixed his little round eyes and his big round spectacles on Lord Mauleverer. Mauly waved him away: but Bunter was not to be waved away. He had come there to talk to Mauly about the Christmas holidays: and he was going to talk to Mauly about the Christmas holidays.

"I hear that you've fixed up a party for the hols, Mauly," went on Bunter.

"Yaas," sighed his lordship.

"Wharton's crowd are coming to Mauleverer Towers, I hear."

"Yaas."

"Smithy and Redwing, too?"

"Yaas."

"Quite a party!" said Bunter.

"Yaas."

"Like me to come?"

"Yaas—I mean, no! Go away, old chap!" said Mauleverer, plaintively.

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"There's a bag of dough-nuts in my study, Bunter. Like to go up and sample them?"

Seldom, if ever, did Billy Bunter refuse such an offer. But even a bag of doughnuts, it seemed, did not tempt him now. He shook his head.

"They'll keep, old chap," he said. "Now about the hols—I say, old fellow, don't get up—I want to speak to you. I was thinking of the hols with my pal, D'Arcy of St. Jim's. But after all, a fellow likes to be with an old pal like you, Mauly. I'll come, old boy."

"Go away!" moaned Lord Mauleverer.

"But there's one thing," went on Bunter, unheeding. "You don't want all that crowd. I'd rather you left out Smithy."

"What?"

"He kicked me the other day," said Bunter. "Making out that I'd had a pineapple from his study. Am I the fellow to snoop a fellow's pineapple?"

"Yaas!"

"Oh, really, Mauly! I never knew anything about Smithy's pineapple. It was hardly fit to eat, anyhow—I couldn't have got it down at all, if I hadn't found some sugar in his cupboard. But you know Smithy—suspicious beast! Well, I don't want him at Mauleverer Towers for Christmas, see? A fellow has to draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at Smithy!" said Bunter firmly.

Lord Mauleverer gazed at him.

Unless Bunter was, as many fellows thought, "batty" it was difficult to understand this. Not only was he including himself in the Christmas party for Mauleverer Towers: but he was dictating what other fellows should be there!

Mauly glanced uneasily at the fender. He remembered Skinner's remark about the poker!

"Then there's Redwing," went on Bunter, thoughtfully. "He's not a bad chap, Mauly—but there's a limit. Not my class, you know."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" murmured Mauleverer.

"Better leave him out, as well as Smithy," said Bunter, decidedly. "Leave out the pair of them, Mauly."

"You fat ass—!"

"That will do!" said Bunter, sharply.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I said that will do! Now, about the others," went on Bunter. "I don't object to Wharton and his gang—I stand them at school, so I suppose I can stand them in the hols. But they'll have to behave themselves. I want none of their ragging and skylarking. That had better be understood right at the start."

Mauly gazed at him in silence. He wished some that other fellows would come into the Rag, with Bunter in this state. But no other fellows came into the Rag.

"Well, is it settled?" asked Bunter. "Mind, I mean every word I say!"

Mauleverer Towers will suit me for Christmas, and you can have Wharton's gang, so long as you leave out the Bounder and Redwing. Is it settled, Mauly?"

"Not quite!" gasped Lord Mauleverer, "Smithy and Redwing are coming with the rest, and if you show up within a mile, I'll boot you all over Hampshire."

Billy Bunter frowned darkly.

"That won't do!" he said.

"Fraid it will have to!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Now roll away like a good barrel."

Billy Bunter did not roll away. He remained firmly planted on his little fat legs directly in front of the schoolboy earl, his eyes and his spectacles fixed on Mauleverer's face. To Mauly's alarm, he raised his fat hands in the air, and began waving them about.

"Oh' gad!" breathed Lord Mauleverer. "Bunter, old chap—."

"Sit still!" rapped Bunter.

"Oh! Yaas! But—try to keep calm, old chap—don't get excited, for goodness sake—."

"Fix your eyes on mine!"

"Eh?"

"Do as I tell you," snapped Bunter. "Don't make me tell you twice."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

Mauly could only gaze at him helplessly. Bunter, evidently, regarded himself as one having authority, saying, "Do this!" and he doeth it! If that was not a plain and palpable proof of "bats", what was it?

The fat hands waved and waved.

"Shut your eyes!" said Bunter, suddenly.

"Oh, gad!"

Lord Mauleverer closed his eyes. He had heard that it was wiser to humour lunatics. But he opened them again very quickly. He was uneasy as to what Bunter might do next. The poker was uncomfortably near at hand.

"Good!" said Bunter. "Now lift your right hand above your head!"

"Look here!"

"Don't make me give my orders twice! Like me to make you stand on your head in the coal-locker!" snapped Bunter. "I could, if I liked."

"Oh, scissors!"

Still, as he supposed, humouring a lunatic, Mauleverer lifted his right hand above his head. Bunter nodded approval.

"That's all right," he said. "You're O.K. so long as you do exactly as you're told, Mauly. I shan't use my enormous power to do any harm, of course. But you have to jump to orders. Get that clear! Put your arm down again."

Mauleverer put it down again.

"Now raise your left arm."

Mauly raised his left arm.

Billy Bunter chuckled, evidently highly satisfied.

"O.K." he said. "You can put it down, Mauly! I was only testing you, you know, to make sure that you're the slave of my will."

"The—the—the which of your whatter?" stuttered Lord Mauleverer.

"The slave of my will! You're under my influence now, and will have to do anything I jolly well please, see?"

"Oh, gad!"

"Now about Christmas," went on Bunter. "I'm coming to Mauleverer Towers with you, Mauly. Leave out Smithy and Redwing. Wharton's gang can come, if they behave themselves. Got all that clear?"

Lord Mauleverer did not reply. He only gazed at Billy Bunter in mingled concern and alarm. That the fat Owl was wandering in his fat mind, he could scarcely doubt.

"You're having a car home on breaking-up day?" pursued Bunter.

"Yaas."

"I'll come in the car with you, Mauly."



"Now lift your left arm."

"Will you?" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

"Exactly! Thinking of packing Wharton's gang in the car?"

"Yaas!"

"Well, think again! I can't be crowded like that! They can follow by train, if I decide to let them come at all."

"If—if—if you decide!" gurgled Lord Mauleverer.

"Yes! I'll think it over and let you know later," said Bunter. "If they're civil, I'll let them come. But I bar Smithy, mind."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. He watched Bunter anxiously. So far, the fat Owl was, so far as Mauly could see, merely wandering in his mind. But with lunatics you never could tell! If he became violent—!

"Now we'll have a chat about what we're going to do over Christmas at your place, Mauly," went on Bunter. "I say, that fire's getting low. I'll give it a poke."

The fat Owl stooped over the fender, and picked up the poker.

That was enough for Lord Mauleverer!

It was more than enough!

Bunter, in his present state, was hardly safe, with a poker in his hand! As the fat Owl picked up the poker, Lord Mauleverer bounded out of the armchair, displaying an activity he had never displayed before since he had been at Greyfriars School. A kangaroo had simply nothing on Mauly, as he jumped. He was out of that armchair in the twinkling of an eye, and cutting for the door.

Bunter, poker in hand, stared after him through his big spectacles.

"I say, Mauly! What's up? I say, come back! Come back at once, do you hear? I order you to come back!"

Mauly was not likely to come back! He disappeared out of the Rag, and Billy Bunter, poker in hand, was left blinking after him, in a state of wrathful astonishment.

CHAPTER IV

POOR OLD BUNTER!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Nobody answered Bunter.

The bell had rung for class. Most Greyfriars fellows were heading for the form-rooms. Billy Bunter was among the latest to arrive at the door of the Remove room, where his form had gathered, for Mr. Quelch to let them in. Quelch has not yet appeared, when the fat Owl rolled up.

Nobody spoke: but every eye was fixed on Bunter: some sympathetically, some curiously, some rather apprehensively. Skinner and Snoop and Stott

backed away to a safer distance. Lord Mauleverer watched Bunter uneasily, really as if wondering whether the fat Owl might spring like a tiger. Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at him warily. Herbert Vernon-Smith pushed back his cuffs, as if he fancied that he might need the use of his fists. Squiff and Tom Brown, Peter Todd and Mark Linley, Redwing and Ogilvy, eyed the fat junior. Never had any fellow in the Greyfriars Remove received such universal and concentrated attention as did William George Bunter, when he joined the Remove at the door of their form-room that afternoon.

Bunter blinked at them. It seemed to dawn upon his fat mind that something was up. He had noticed that, at dinner that day, fellows had given him plenty of room at the Remove table. He could not have failed to observe, afterwards, in the quad, that whenever he came near a Remove man, that Remove man backed away. Bunter was puzzled and annoyed.

"I say, you fellows, what's up?" he asked, peevishly.

"Oh! Is—is anything up?" said Bob Cherry, vaguely.

"What are you all staring at me like a lot of boiled owls for?" demanded Bunter. "Is there a smut on my nose, or what?"

"Eh? Oh! No!"

"I say, you fellows, is Mauly here?" yapped Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer moved quietly behind the burly form of Bolsover major. He hoped that Bunter's eyes and spectacles would not fall on him. True, Bunter no longer had a poker in hand—not that any fellow would have been surprised at that, or anything else that Bunter might have done, in the present strange, startling, and alarming circumstances.

"Mauly!" repeated Harry Wharton. "Can't see him!" Which was perfectly true, as the captain of the Remove turned his back to Mauly before he answered.

"The silly ass!" said Bunter. "I've been looking for him! I say, you fellows, is there anything the matter with Mauly?"

"The—the matter with him?"

"Well, he's acting jolly queerly," said Bunter. "We were having a chat in the Rag about the hols, before dinner, and all of a sudden he jumped up and bunked. Fairly flew out of the room."

"Did—did—did he?"

"After dinner, he cut off in the quad when I was going to speak to him," said Bunter. "Just cut, as if he thought a fellow might bite! It's jolly queer, isn't it?"

"The queerfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"He'll be late for Quelch, if he doesn't come along soon," went on Bunter, happily unconscious that Lord Mauleverer was screened from view by the bulky form of Bolsover major, within a couple of yards of him. "What are you fellows grinning at?"

"Oh! Nothing!"

"Well, I've got to get it settled with Mauly, about the hols," said Bunter. "You won't be coming to Mauleverer Towers after all, Smithy."

The Bounder stared at him.

"How's that?" he asked.

"I've decided not," said Bunter. "Sorry, and all that, but a chap has to draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at you."

"You do?" gasped the Bounder.

"Yes—and Redwing, too," said Bunter. "I don't want either of you at Mauleverer Towers over Christmas. May as well say so plainly."

Tom Redwing gazed at him.

"You fellows can come," went on Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five. "I've decided on that."

"Thanks!" gasped Frank Nugent.

"The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"Mind, I shall expect you to behave yourselves," said Bunter, warningly. "No ragging. No skylarking! You'll have to remember that you're not in the Remove passage."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"Try to do me credit, while we're staying at one of the stately homes of England!" said Bunter. "If you don't, I shall have to tell you to clear."

"You'll have to tell us to clear!" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"Yes, and I shall make no bones about it. I wonder where that ass Mauly is?" said Bunter, blinking down the corridor. "Know where Mauly is, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! He will be late for class, at this rate," said Bunter. "I want to speak to him, too. I've a jolly good mind to smack his head for dodging me like this."

"Think he'd let you do it?" asked Squiff.

Billy Bunter gave the Australian junior a disdainful blink.

"Fat lot he could help it!" he said. "Mauly jumps when I say jump, I can tell you. I could make you all jump, if I liked. I've got the power."

"You—you—you've got the power?" articulated Harry Wharton.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter, complacently. "I tried it on Mauly, and it worked all right! You fellows would stare, if you knew the tremendous power I've got in my hands. Why, if I liked, I could make you collar Quelch, when he comes along, and bump him on the floor."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, suffering cats!"

"Bunter, old man—!"

"Poor old Bunter!"

"He ought to see a doctor—"

"Quelch ought to know—!"

"Don't get too near him!"

"Don't you fellows be afraid!" said Billy Bunter, reassuringly. "I've got the power in my hands, but—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes Quelch!"

There was sudden silence, as the Remove master appeared. Mr. Quelch came up the corridor, and unlocked the form-room door. He glanced rather sharply at his collected form, as he did so. Little escaped the gimlet-eyes of Henry Samuel Quelch, and he could see that there was something unusual going on in his form. He scanned the crowd of faces very keenly.

The Remove went in: and Billy Bunter became aware of Lord Mauleverer, now that his lordship was no longer screened by Bolsover major. He gave an irritated squeak.

"Why, there you are all the time, Mauly, you ass! Sticking out of sight behind another fellow! You jolly well knew I wanted to speak to you." The fat Owl grabbed Lord Mauleverer by the sleeve. "Look here—"

Mauleverer jerked his arm away, as suddenly as if the fat Owl's fat fingers were red hot.

"You keep off, Bunter," he gasped.

"What?"

Lord Mauleverer dodged hurriedly to his place.

"Look here, Mauly—!" hooted Bunter.

"BUNTER!" came a deep voice, from Quelch's desk.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" Billy Bunter spun round, and blinked at his form-master.

"Did you speak, sir?"

"Go to your place at once, Bunter, and be silent."

Bunter stood blinking at him. In Quelch's form-room, to hear was to obey. As a rule, Billy Bunter was about the last fellow in the Remove to hesitate, when Quelch barked out an order. But he seemed in no hurry to obey now. Some strange and inexplicable change seemed to have come over the Owl of the Remove. He stood blinking at Mr. Quelch, as if debating whether to go to his place or not, as bidden. The Remove fellows watched him, as if fascinated. Quelch, so far, knew nothing of what all the Remove knew: that it was a case of "bats" with Bunter. Was he about to learn?

The gimlet-eyes glinted at the fat Owl from the high desk.

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you hear me tell you to go to your place? I shall cane you if you do not take your place immediately, Bunter."

If Billy Bunter was thinking of disregarding Quelch, the glint in the gimlet-eyes was enough for him. He rolled to his place, Mr. Quelch's glance following him very severely.

"Cheeky old ass!" Bunter whispered to Peter Todd, as he sat down.

"Quiet!" breathed Peter. "If he hears you—."

Sniff, from Bunter.

"Fat lot I care!" he answered, contemptuously.

"You fat chump—."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"He's looking at you, ass! Do you want six on your bags?" hissed Peter.

"I'd like to see Quelch give me six on my bags!" said Bunter, derisively.

"Quelch won't ever give me six again, Toddy! Let him try it on, that's all! I'd make him give himself six with his own cane."

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Toddy. He moved along the form, as far as he could, away from Bunter. The fat owl blinked at him.

"You see, I've got the power!" he said. "Why, if I liked, I could make Quelch punch the Head in the eye!"

"Oh, dear!" moaned Peter.

"Let 'em wait!" said Bunter, darkly. "Let 'em all wait! I'm going to surprise some fellows, I can tell you! Things are going to be a bit different in the Remove, now I've got the power in my hands. You watch out, Peter."

"Bunter!" came a deep voice with an edge on it. "Bunter! You are chattering in class. Take fifty lines, Bunter. If you chatter again, I shall call you out before the form and cane you."

Billy Bunter did not chatter again. Whatever might be the mysterious "power" which the fat Owl fancied that he had in his fat hands, he decided not to exercise it just then! Which was probably very fortunate for the fat and fatuous Owl.

When the Remove were dismissed, there was quite a scurry among the juniors, once outside the form-room. Everybody seemed to want to get away from the proximity of Billy Bunter. Lord Mauleverer disappeared almost like a ghost at cock-crow. That Billy Bunter was "bats" could no longer be doubted: and the Remove fellows debated whether Quelch ought to be told, so that the unhappy Owl could receive proper attention before matters went from bad to worse. In the meanwhile, they dodged Bunter, and kept him at a safe distance. When Bunter rolled into the Rag, there were a dozen fellows there: but almost in a moment they were gone, and the Owl of the Remove had the room to himself. He blinked after them blankly as they went.

"I say, you fellows!" he squeaked.

There was no answer: but the fellows departed in such haste, that there was quite a jam in the doorway. Bunter was left blinking.

CHAPTER V

ORDERS FROM BUNTER!

"TODDY!"
"Oh!" ejaculated Peter Todd.

He was caught!

Peter was in No. 7 Study in the Remove, which he shared with Billy Bunter. Since the extraordinary manifestations by Bunter of late, Peter was not anxious to be in that study alone with his fat study-mate. In fact, he was very anxious not to be. So, being in the study after class, he was not in the least pleased when the fat Owl rolled into the doorway.

He backed round the table, and carelessly as it were, picked up a ruler. All the Remove knew of Mauly's narrow escape from the poker in the Rag. Peter felt safer with a ruler in his hand. Gladly he would have departed from the study. But the fat Owl was in the way, and he did not want to come too near Bunter. Ruler in hand, he eyed him warily across the table, wishing that he had thought of hiding the poker somewhere. However, if Bunter got hold of the poker, Peter was prepared to make a rush for the door, or to fence with the ruler, according to circumstances.

"I say, Roddy—"

"Yes, old chap!" said Peter, in soothing tones. He was ready to follow Lord Mauleverer's example and humour the lunatic! If Bunter told him that he could make Quelch cane himself with his own cane, or make him punch the Head in the eye, he was not going to contradict.

"Quelch gave me fifty lines," said Bunter.

"I know!" agreed Peter.

"Well, I haven't time for them," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I've a jolly good mind not to hand them in at all."

"I—I think I—I would, Bunter, said Toddy. "Quelch is a bit particular about lines, you know."

"Who cares for Quelch?"

"Oh!"

"If you think I care a boiled bean for Quelch, Toddy—"

"Oh, no! Of course not!" said Peter, soothingly. "Not at all! Not in the least! You wouldn't! Oh, dear!"

"I—I—I should, old chap."

"But I've no time for them myself. I want you to do them, Toddy."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Get them done at once," said Bunter.

"I—I'm just going down to the Rag—"

"You're not! You're going to do those lines—fifty from Virgil," said

Bunter, calmly. "I expect you to do as I tell you, Toddy. Otherwise, I shall make you."

"Make me?" repeated Toddy.

He stared at Bunter. It was Toddy who was cock of the walk in No. 7 Study. Often and often had his foot landed on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars. It was quite a new thing for Billy Bunter to give orders, in that study. The idea of Bunter "making" Toddy do anything was quite fantastic. Apparently the "bats" in Bunter's "belfry" had put the idea into his fat head that he could give commands. In ordinary circumstances, Peter's foot would probably have been introduced into the conversation at that point. But the circumstances were not ordinary. Peter carefully kept round his own side of the table, with a firm grip on the ruler.

"I'll make you, fast enough," said Bunter, disdainfully. "I've got the power in my hands. I've told you so. I could make you eat that ruler, if I liked, thinking it was a stick of candy."

"Oh, crickey!" breathed Peter.

"Now, squat down and get my lines done," said Bunter, dictatorially. "When they're finished, bring them down to the Rag, and I'll take them to Quelch. Don't waste time, Toddy. Get a move on."

Peter eyed him. He was concerned, naturally, for Bunter, in this sad state. He was very anxious to get away from him, too. But he was not anxious to do fifty lines for Bunter. And he wasn't going to do fifty lines for Bunter.

"Look here, you potty porpoise—!" said Peter.

"That will do, Toddy! Get down to those lines."

"Rats!"

"Did you say 'rats' to me?" demanded Bunter. "By gum! Are you going to do those lines, Peter, or are you not going to do those lines?"

"Not!" answered Peter, very decidedly.

"All right! I'll make you."

Peter gripped the ruler harder. How Bunter was going to "make him" was a mystery: but he was prepared for all eventualities. He half-expected the fat junior to head for the fender, and the poker.

Bunter, however, was not thinking of pokers. He came a little further into the study, and stood looking at Peter across the table. He looked at him with a steady concentrated stare. Then, to Peter's amazement, he lifted his fat hands in the air, and began to wave them about.

Peter watched him as if fascinated. If this was the process of "making him" do the lines, it was incomprehensible to Toddy. Certainly it made him feel very uneasy, to watch a fellow staring at him like an owl, and waving fat hands in the air for no imaginable reason. But equally certainly, those antics were not going to make him do Bunter's lines.

For a full minute, Bunter waved and waved, still with his eyes and his spectacles fixed on Peter. Then he spoke.

"Put down that ruler!"

Peter hesitated. In the weird circumstances, he was unwilling to part with a weapon of defence. Yet he was anxious to humour Bunter in this alarming state.

But Bunter, it seemed, has no use for hesitation. He frowned.

"I told you to put that ruler down!" he rapped. "Put it down this minute, or I'll make you eat it."

"Oh, help!" murmured Toddy. He put down the ruler: within easy reach of his grasp if he needed it, as he feared that he might.

"That's better!" said Bunter. "You keep in mind to jump when I say jump, Toddy. It will be better for you. Now, sit in that chair."

Peter hesitated again; but he sat down. Humouring poor old Bunter seemed the best thing to do.

"Good!" said Bunter, with a nod. "I've got you feeding from my hand, Toddy. You are absolutely under the influence of my will. I could make you jump out of the window, if I liked."

"Could you?" gasped Peter. He rather doubted it.

"I'm not going to, old chap," said Bunter, reassuringly. "I'd never think of using my tremendous power like that! I'm only going to make you do my lines. Take your Virgil. Sharp!"

Peter Todd reached out for the volume of Virgil that lay on the study table. He gripped it as he had gripped the ruler.

"That's right!" said Bunter. "Now open it, and take your pen. Get fifty lines done before you go out of this study. Otherwise, I'll make you do five hundred."

"You'll make me do five hundred lines!" gurgled Toddy.

"Easy! Mind I don't do it!" said Bunter, darkly. "I could if I liked! I've got you under control, Peter! You're the slave of my will now. Just like Mauly was in the Rag to-day. You see, I tried it out on Mauly, and it worked all right, so that's that. Get on with those lines at once.

Peter Todd did not get on with the lines. He seemed to have found another use for Virgil. He lifted that great Roman poet over his head, and there was a sudden whiz, as Virgil shot through the air.

Bang!

"Yaroooooooooh!"

Billy Bunter uttered a roar, which might have excited the envy of the Bull of Basham, as Virgil crashed on the best-filled waistcoat in the county of Kent. He tottered, roaring.

Peter did not lose that opportunity. As Bunter tottered, and clutched at the table for support, Peter shot past him, and whipped out of the study. He banged the door after him and fled. A fat voice on its top note followed him as he went.

"Ow! wow! wow! Beast! Wooooooooooooogh!"

Billy Bunter rubbed the spot where the Roman poet had landed. He spluttered for breath.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Oh! ow! wow! Chucking a book at a fellow—wow! I—I—I couldn't have had him under the influence after all—he's not so easy as Mauly, I suppose. Beast! Or—or perhaps I want some more practice—I may have got some of the passes wrong! I'd better make sure!"

Billy Bunter's fat hand slid into his inside pocket, and disinterred therefrom the mysterious little book which he had guarded so jealously from all eyes in the Remove. He opened it at a page covered with diagrams, and blinked at those diagrams with a searching blink through his spectacles. Then, leaving the book lying on the table, he crossed to the little mirror over the fireplace: and had any eye fallen on him then, it would have banished the last possible doubt that Billy Bunter was "bats". For, standing in front of the glass, watching his reflection therein, he began waving his fat hands at that reflection: sawing the air with them in the most extraordinary manner. And he was still deep in that amazing occupation, when there was a tramp of feet in the Remove passage, the door was hurled open, and a crowd of Remove fellows appeared in the doorway.

CHAPTER VI

BUNTER'S LATEST

"HALLO, hallo! hallo!"
 "He's at it again—."

"Mad as a hatter!"

"Poor old Bunter!"

"Mind he doesn't get hold of the poker."

"Quite crackers—."

"The crackerfulness is terrific."

Billy Bunter ceased his antics before the glass, and turned round, staring at the crowd of Removites through his big spectacles. The famous Five were there, and Peter Todd, and Smithy, and Lord Mauleverer, and other fellows behind them. Half the Remove seemed to have gathered at No. 7 Study.

The fat Owl blinked at them in surprise.

"I say you fellows, wharrer you want!" he demanded.

"Keep quiet, old chap," said Bob Cherry, soothingly. "We're going to look after you."

"Keep calm, if you can," urged Nugent.

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "What's this game! Look here, don't you come here skylarking when a chap's busy."

"He's getting excited," said Johnny Bull. "Better collar him."

"You get out of my study!" hooted Bunter. "You're interrupting my practice, butting in. Get out of it, do you hear?"

"Practice?" repeated Harry Wharton. "What are you practising, then?"

"Oh! Nothing. I—I mean, that's telling! You jolly well get out, see? I'm not going to tell you anything. Just get out."

"That won't do," said the captain of the Remove decidedly. "You've got to be looked after, Bunter. This can't go on. You'd better come down and see Quelch—"

"Eh? I don't want to see Quelch."

"He can decide whether to send for a doctor—" explained Wharton.

"Who wants a doctor?" yelled Bunter.

"You do, old fellow," said Bob Cherry. "Now, come along quietly, and try to keep calm! You've simply got to see Quelch."

Billy Bunter blinked at them in exasperated astonishment. Apparently that crowd had come along to his study to take him down to see Quelch. Why they wanted him to see Quelch, was a mystery to Bunter.

"What do you want me to see Quelch for?" he hooted.

"You're ill, old chap—"

"I ain't ill—"

"Well, queer, then," said Bob. He was putting it gently.

"The queerfulness is terrific, my esteemed potty Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Come along at oncefully."

"Shan't!" yelled Bunter. "Look here, if this is a lark—"

"He doesn't know that there's anything the matter with him," said Johnny Bull, staring at the fat exasperated Owl.

"Lunatics don't!" said Skinner from the rear.

"Lunatics!" gasped Bunter. "Wharrer you mean? Who's a lunatic?"

"You are!" retorted Skinner.

"Why, you cheeky beast—"

"Look here, we'd better put it plain to the poor chap," said Squiff. "Bunter, old fellow, you've gone a bit batty, and Quelch will have you looked after. Now come along quietly."

"You—you—you—!" gasped Bunter. His little round eyes almost popped through his spectacles. "You—you—you—"

"Collar him if he gets hold of anything," said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Come on, Bunter," urged Bob. "You can't help going bats, poor old chap, but you've simply got to be looked after."

"Who's bats!" shrieked Bunter.

"Look here, let's have it clear, before we take him down to Quelch," said Harry Wharton. "Bunter, you ass, Toddy says you ordered him to do your lines."

"Why shouldn't I?" snapped Bunter.

"Well, that's bats, if anything is," said the captain of the Remove. "Did you say you'd make him do five hundred lines, if he wouldn't?"

"Yes, I did, and I jolly well would, too!" yapped Bunter.

"That settles it," said Harry. "He's got to see a doctor. Quelch is the man to handle this, and you've got to come down and see him. We've come here to take you down."

"You silly ass!" yelled Bunter. "I ain't potty, you silly chump! I've got enormous power in my hands, that's all. I could make Toddy do five hundred lines, if I liked. I could make you fellows start punching one another's noses, if I jolly well chose. I can tell you I'm going to be cock of the walk, and boss of the show, in the Remove, and captain of the form, too, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Harry Wharton. You're a back number, see? You wouldn't be so jolly cheeky, either, if you knew my tremendous power."

The juniors gazed at him. If they had wanted further evidence that it was a case of "bats", they could hardly have wanted more than this.

"That does it!" said Bob. "Are you coming, Bunter?"

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Take his arms, and walk him down," said Bob. "Goodness knows what might happen, if he runs on like this. Now, then—"

Billy Bunter backed away.

"I ain't going to Quelch!" he roared.

"It's for your own good, old fellow—"

"Beast!"

"Do come quietly, Bunter," urged Lord Mauleverer. "We only want to see you properly looked after while you're in this queer state—"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

The juniors gathered round Bunter. Exactly what was best to be done, in such extraordinary circumstances, they hardly knew. Such a case had never occurred before at Greyfriars. But it seemed obvious that, if a Remove fellow was "bats", his form-master was the man to take the matter in hand. And if Billy Bunter's amazing words and actions did not indicate "bats", what did they indicate?

"Keep off, you silly fatheads!" howled Bunter. "I ain't going to Quelch! You don't understand—!"

"Hike him along!"

"Come quietly, Bunter."

"It's only for your good—"

"Gently does it, but he's got to go."

"Come on, Bunter."

"Leggo!" roared Bunter, struggling frantically in many hands. "Leggo! Look here, I—I—I'll tell you, if you like! I wasn't going to tell you, but if you think I'm bats, I'll tell you about it."

"About what?" asked Bob.

"My hypnotism—"

"Your whatter?" stuttered Bob.

"Hypnotism! Now do you understand, you fathead? I'm learning it from that book." gasped Bunter. "I've learned enough already to hypnotize Mauly—it comes easier with weak-minded subjects, of course—."

"Oh, gad!"

"You fellows know I'm a jolly good ventriloquist. Well, I've found out that I can hypnotize, too! That's all!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

The juniors, in sheer amazement, released the fat Owl. Bob Cherry, staring blankly, picked up the little book from the table.

He stared at it. Then he held it up, and the other fellows stared at it. Billy Bunter gasped for breath. He had not been willing to let out the secret. But it was out now! All eyes fixed on that book from which the fat Owl derived his new and astonishing power—if any! On the title-page they read:

ACQUIRE POWER!

Easy Lessons in Hypnotism, with diagrams
showing the hypnotic passes.

Price One Shilling.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Hypnotism! Bunter's going to hypnotize the lot of us, and be cock of the walk! Oh, crickey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It dawned on the juniors now.

Bunter was not "bats". Those extraordinary antics before the looking-glass did not mean that he had taken leave of his senses, such as they were. They only meant that he was practising the hypnotic passes! When he stared a fellow in the face, it did not mean that his fat mind was wandering: it only meant that he was putting on the hypnotic influence! As the juniors realised it, there was a roar of merriment in No. 7 Study, that woke every echo in the Remove passage from end to end.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at—."

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

"Look here, you cackling beasts—."

"We needn't take him down to Quelch!" said Bob Cherry, almost weeping.

"Ha, ha, ha! He isn't bats—he's a giddy hypnotist—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle—!" yelled Bunter, indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll cackle the other side of your mouths, when I get going!" said Bunter, wrathfully. "Wait till I get the 'fluence on, that's all. I'll jolly well make you punch your own head, Bob Cherry."

"Oh, do!" gasped Bob. "Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my only aunt Jemima!" moaned Peter Todd. "Did that blithering owl think he had me hypnotized, when he told me to do his lines! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You just wait!" said Bunter, scornfully. "I'll have you eating from my hand, Toddy, just as I had Mauly in the Rag. Didn't I, Mauly?"

Lord Mauleverer gazed at him.

"Did you?" he gasped.

"Well, didn't I?" yelled Bunter, angrily. "Weren't you the slave of my will? Didn't you jump when I said jump?"

"Oh, gad! I thought I'd better humour you, old fat man, as you were nuts," explained Mauly. "Of course I thought you were nuts."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Mauly, I had you hypnotized, and we fixed it up about the Christmas holidays, and—"

Lord Mauleverer chuckled.

"Not at all, old fat man! You heave in sight at Christmas, and I'll boot you all over Hampshire, as I've told you before."

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"M-m-mean to say you weren't under the influence at all?" howled Bunter, blinking at Mauly in angry dismay.

"Ha, ha! Not a lot, old fat bean! I thought you were crackers, that's all."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you cackling asses, you get out, and let a fellow get on with his practice. I may need a little more practice—"

"Just a little!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Almost weeping with merriment, the Remove fellows crowded out of No. 7 Study. There was no need to take Bunter to Quelch: no need for him to see a doctor. He was not, after all, "bats", though all the evidence had pointed that way. He was only an amateur hypnotist! Apparently he had taken it for granted, in the Rag, that Mauleverer had fallen under the magic 'fluence: but even Bunter realised now that he had taken a little too much for granted. The tremendous power he desired to wield was not yet in his fat hands!

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter, as the juniors crowded out.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came back from the passage. Billy Bunter, his manners and customs, had often added to the gaiety of existence in the Greyfriars Remove. But never had he excited so much merriment before. Bunter the Hypnotist had fairly brought down the house!

The fat junior gave an angry snort, and slammed the study door on the almost hysterical crowd of Removites. Then he picked up that previous book, which gave instructions on how to acquire tremendous power, at the price of One Shilling—a very reasonable price, it had to be admitted, if the instructions were of any use, which was perhaps doubtful!

Bunter, at all events, had no doubts! With an industrious keenness he had never displayed in the form-room, he blinked at those diagrams, and practised the passes before the looking-glass, till his fat arms were aching. Exertion, as a rule, had no appeal for the Owl of the Remove: but it was worth it, for when once he had acquired that tremendous power, he would be safely booked for Mauleverer Towers for the Christmas holidays, to return to Greyfriars next term as captain of the Remove, cock of the walk, and monarch of all he surveyed. It was a glorious prospect—if it came to pass! That was, perhaps, a large size in "ifs".

CHAPTER VII

SMACK!

"ME all over!" murmured Billy Bunter.
 Bob Cherry glanced round, with a grin.

It was two or three days later. During those two or three days, Billy Bunter had not sought to exercise the magic powers of a hypnotist. It had been borne in upon his fat mind that he needed some more practice—perhaps quite a lot more practice!—before he acquired such power as to become cock of the walk in the Greyfriars Remove. But, in this matter, Bunter was a sticker: and he stuck. He was going to master that abstruse science: he was going to wield that tremendous power.

For if it came about—or rather, in Bunter's opinion, when it came about—the prospect was really dazzling. Bunter was a butter-in at other fellows' spreads, and as often as not a boot had been his reward. But a fellow exercising hypnotic powers would be able to butt in where and when he liked, and fellows under the "influence" would not be able to say him nay. He was accustomed to helping himself to tuck from other fellows' studies, and the consequences had sometimes been quite painful. But those painful consequences would no longer accrue, when Bunter could put the 'fluence on! Sometimes, for his sins, Bunter was whopped by a prefect: but that was going to be a thing of the past, when he could put the 'fluence on Wingate, or Gwynne, or Loder, or any other Sixth-Form man he chose. In the form-room, Bunter often had the sharpest edge of

Mr. Quelch's tongue. Once he acquired hypnotic powers, however, what could Quelch do? Once a hypnotist, Bunter could order him, if he liked, to stick his majestic head into the waste-paper basket!

Really, it was a most attractive vista!

The one thing needful was to acquire those hypnotic powers!

So far, they had not materialised. But Bunter had no doubt that they were coming. At the present moment, he was seated in an armchair in the Rag, after class, with that precious book "Acquire Power" on his fat knees, studying it. Seldom or never before had William George Bunter been seen in a studious state. But he was studious now—fairly swotting over it!

Bob, tramping into the Rag, heard his muttered remark, and glanced at him and grinned. All the Remove had howled with laughter over Billy Bunter's "latest". They had been quite relieved to find that the fat Owl was not, as everyone had supposed, "bats", but was only mugging up hypnotism. But nobody seemed to believe that he would ever acquire power, and be in a position to give orders in the Remove! Bunter had that idea—but he had it entirely to himself!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "How's the jolly old 'fluence going, Bunter?"

The fat Owl blinked up through his big spectacles. Bob stood grinning down at the fat figure in the armchair. Bunter gave him a disdainful blink.

"You just wait a bit!" he yapped. "It's coming all right! The chap who wrote this book knows all about it. Listen to this bit": Bunter proceeded to read out, "To acquire hypnotic power, requires a strong personality, an unbending will, and a general mental strength and superiority."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "If it requires all that, Bunter, where do you come in?"

"That's me all over!" explained Bunter.

"Oh, suffering cats!"

"Strong personality, general mental strength and superiority!" said Bunter. "Isn't that just me?"

"Help!"

"Me all over!" said Bunter. "If you think I ain't mentally superior to other chaps in the Remove, Bob Cherry—"

"Ye gods and little fishes!"

"You couldn't do it, of course," said Bunter. "No good you trying, Cherry, even if I let you have my book, which I jolly well ain't going to do. You see, you haven't the necessary mental superiority. I have. That's the difference."

Bob Cherry gurgled.

"The fact is, I'm just cut out for a hypnotist, according to this book," went on the fat Owl, "strong personality, superior mentality, concentration of intellect—I've got all the qualifications, you see. All I need is practice. Then I can jolly well tell you I'm going to surprise you."

Bunter sat up, and fixed his eyes and spectacles on Bob's grinning face.

"Look here, Cherry, if you don't believe it—"

"If!" chuckled Bob.

"Well, just stand there and be a subject!" said Bunter. "If I can't put the 'fluence on, you're all right! I fancy I can now—I've been all through the passes again and again, and I'm sure I've got them right."

"Try it on if you like!" grinned Bob. "If I go under the 'fluence, old fat man, I'll eat my hat, and my football boots after it."

"Stand quite still, and fix your eyes on mine!" said Bunter.

"O.K."

Bob Cherry stood quite still, and fixed his eyes on Bunter. The fat Owl stared or rather glared, straight into his eyes. This, apparently, was the hypnotic gaze. It was backed up by a series of hypnotic passes, Bunter's fat hands clawing and sawing the air. The fat paws waved to and fro.

"Feel it coming on?" asked Bunter.

"No!" chuckled Bob.

"Sort of dreaming feeling."

"Nothing of the kind, so far."

"Oh, you're a rotten subject," said Bunter. "Still, it ought to work all right with you, Cherry. The book says that weak-minded persons are the easiest subjects."

"What?"

"That's why I started on Mauly, you know, and that's why I want to try it on you," explained Bunter. "You being a bit weak-minded—"

"You blithering fat ass—"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Now look here, you relax, and give a chap a chance," said Bunter. "Just relax, and the 'fluence will come on all right."

Bob Cherry had looked, for a moment, as if disposed to hook the fat Owl out of the armchair, and bump him on the floor! However, he refrained from giving Bunter that for which he had asked: and stood still, unless the hypnotic stare, and the wagging of the fat paws.

"Now close your eyes!" said said Bunter.

Bob's eyes glimmered. Then he closed them.

The fat Owl's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. This looked like coming success! He carried on industriously with the magic passes.

"Now open them!"

Bob opened his eyes.

"Now stand on one leg!"

Bob stood on one leg.

Billy Bunter breathed triumph and satisfaction. It did not occur to his fat brain for one moment that the playful Bob was pulling his fat leg. He had no doubt now that the influence was working!

There was a tramp of feet, and the other members of the Co. came into the Rag. They stared blankly at Bob Cherry standing like a stork on one leg. Bob's face was quite grave now, though his eyes were glimmering.

"What on earth's that game?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Don't you fellows butt in!" yapped Bunter. "Bob's under the 'fluence!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at him, if you don't believe it!" sneered Bunter. "I've ordered him to stand on one leg! Is he standing on one leg or not?"

There was no doubt about it, at all events. Bob Cherry, undoubtedly, was standing on one leg! On that point there was not a shadow of doubt: no possible probable shadow of doubt: no possible doubt whatever. And if that was not a proof of Billy Bunter's hypnotic powers, Billy Bunter would have liked to know what it was. His eyes gleamed with triumph through his spectacles.

"Now, Cherry!" he rapped. "You're under the 'fluence, and you're the slave of my will! Got that?"

"I've got it!" admitted Bob.

"You've got to obey my orders. Whatever I tell you to do, you've got to do. What are you grinning at, Wharton?"

"You, old fat frump," answered Harry, laughing.

"I don't want any cheek," snorted Bunter. "Like me to make you hop on one leg round the quad, and then into the Head's study? I could if I liked! I'll jolly soon stop your grinning! Bob Cherry, go over and smack Wharton's head."

"Eh!"

"Hard!" commanded Bunter.

Bob Cherry glanced at his friends. They all grinned. Nobody but Bunter expected him to go over and smack the head of the captain of the Remove. But Bob, with a very serious face, seemed to be considering the matter.

"Get on with it!" snapped Bunter.

"Let's have this clear!" said Bob. "You've got the 'fluence on me, and you order me to smack a fellow's head. Mean it?"

"I've said so! Get on with it at once."

"You're quite sure you want me to smack a fellow's head?"

"Yes!" hooted Bunter.

"All right, then!" said Bob. "If you've put the 'fluence on, and you order me to smack a fellow's head, I'll smack a fellow's head. Here goes!"

Smack!

"Yaroooooooh!" roared Billy Bunter, as the smack landed. It did not land on Harry Wharton's head. It landed on Bunter's own fat head. And it landed hard.

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

"Ow! wow! wow!" yelled Bunter. "You silly ass, I didn't mean my head—"

"I did!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Have another?" asked Bob.

"Wow! Keep off, you beast!" yelled Bunter. "You beast, you weren't under the 'fluence at all—only pulling my leg—wow!"

"What a brain!" said Bob, admiringly. "He's guessed it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

Bob Cherry joined his friends, and they went out of the Rag laughing. The Remove hypnotist sat in the armchair and rubbed his head. And he made up his mind that the next "subject" upon whom he tested his magic powers was not going to be Bob Cherry!

CHAPTER VIII

AT LAST!

SAMMY BUNTER, of the Second Form, put a fat face and a fat head into No. 7 Study, and blinked round him through the spectacles that were so like his major's. Billy Bunter, seated in Toddy's armchair, gave him a blink in return.

"Trot in, Sammy!" he said.

"You said you had some toffee," said Sammy.

"So I have!"

Bunter minor rolled in.

Bunter minor was not a frequent visitor in Bunter major's study. He had no great yearning for his major's company. But if Billy had toffees, of course, the case was altered. If brotherly affection was not strongly developed in Sammy, at least his love of toffee was deep and lasting.

"Where are they?" asked Sammy. His friends in the Second Form, Gatty and Myers, were expecting him in the quad, and Sammy wanted to get down to business without delay.

Bunter waved a fat hand to the table.

"There they are!" he said. "But never mind the toffees for a minute, Sammy. There's something else first."

"Oh!" said Sammy. "I say, Gatty's waiting for me—"

"Never mind Gatty."

"And Myers too—"

"Never mind Myers."

"Well, what is it, anyway?" asked Sammy. He displayed visible signs of impatience. Still, there was a paper bag of toffees on the study table, so

obviously he had to give Billy a hearing. It was rather surprising that Billy Bunter had not devoured the toffees himself, forgetful of the fact that he had a minor at Greyfriars. The fat Owl, it seemed, was for once thinking of other things than eatables.

"Stand in front of me," said Bunter.

"All right! But what—?"

"I daresay you've heard that I'm taking up hypnotism."

Sammy chuckled.

"I've heard," he admitted. "All the fellows in your form thought you'd gone bats, I heard. Have you?"

"Don't you be cheeky to your elder brother, Sammy. Just listen to me—"

"Well, I'll have one of the toffees to go on with—"

"Leave those toffees alone!" snapped Bunter. "You can have the bag, after we're through. Not till then."

"Oh!" said Sammy. The bag looked as if it contained a dozen or so toffees. Sammy wondered in whose study Billy had found it. But he did not say so. If Sammy was to have the whole bag, he was willing to let Billy run on. "Well, look here, Billy, what's it all about?"

"I want a subject—"

"Eh?"

"I've got to practise the hypnotic passes," explained Bunter. "It seems to want a lot more practice than I thought. I thought I had it two or three days ago, but it turned out that I hadn't, after all—"

"He, he, he!"

"There's nothing to cackle at, Sammy. I've been swotting over that book, and I fancy I've got it all right at last. I'm going to put the 'fluence on you, Sammy."

"Oh!" said Sammy. He understood now why he had been tempted to No. 7 Study with a tale of toffee. He was to be the "subject" upon which Billy Bunter was going to test his hypnotic powers. "Go ahead! I've no objection."

Sammy had no objection at all. Certainly, he would have objected very strongly, had he supposed that Billy could put the 'fluence on. But as he did not suppose so, it was all right for Sammy.

"There's not a lot of time left before we break up for Christmas," went on Billy Bunter. "I haven't fixed up the hols yet. I thought I had fixed it up all right with Mauly, but it didn't work somehow. I've got to make sure before I try it on again. I'm going to make sure by putting the 'fluence on you, see? If it works all right, you can have the toffees—"

"Eh? Only if it works all right?" asked Sammy, in dismay.

"Of course."

Sammy eyed him through his spectacles. Billy, after all, had not forgotten that he too had a taste for toffee! Only if this hypnotic experiment was a

success, was he going to part with those toffees. Otherwise, the fat Sammy had clambered up all those stairs for nothing!

Bunter minor considered whether to tell his major what he thought of him, and clear. But second thoughts prevailed. Billy Bunter, really, was asking to have his fat leg pulled. Sammy decided to pull it.

"Well, get on with it," said Sammy. "Gatty and Myers are waiting for me—"

"Bother Gatty and Myers!" said Bunter, irritably. "Now, stand quite still, and fix your eyes on mine. I think you're a good subject, Sammy. The book says that any person of inferior intellect is a good subject—"

"Eh?"

"Now, you're a chap with a very inferior intellect, you know—"

"Am I?" yapped Sammy. Possibly it was true: but true or not, Sammy did not seem to like the description.

"Just that!" said Bunter, with a nod. "You see, we can't all be brainy, Sammy. I've got the brains of the family: that's how it is."

Sammy opened his mouth—and closed it again, remembering the toffees.

"Now relax!" said Bunter. "If you try to resist the influence, that makes it harder, see? Just relax. Mind, there's nothing to be afraid of. I shan't make you jump out of the window, or anything like that: you can be sure of that, Sammy."

"I'm sure of that!" assented Sammy. He was, in fact, absolutely sure: he hadn't a doubt on the subject!

"I shall simply put the hypnotic 'fluence on, and make you the slave of my will," explained Bunter. "You just lose your own consciousness, and obey my slightest command. No harm at all! I could make you climb up the chimney if I liked. But I won't."

"I'm sure you won't!" agreed Sammy. "I say, what are you wagging your hands about like that for, Billy?"

Bunter frowned.

"I'm not wagging my hands about, you young ass! These are the hypnotic passes. That's how the 'fluence is put on, added to the power of the eye. Now, mind you relax. Don't resist the 'fluence. Mind, if it doesn't come off, you don't get the toffees. What are you grinning at, Sammy?"

"Oh! Nothing! Carry on!" said Sammy.

Billy Bunter carried on.

For a couple of minutes, he waved fat paws in the air before Sammy's face, at the same time concentrating upon him the hypnotic eye.

"Feel dreamy?" he asked, suddenly.

"Do they feel dreamy under hypnotism?" asked Sammy.

"Of course they do, fathead! If you feel dreamy, close your eyes."

Sammy closed his eyes.

"It's coming on!" said Bunter. "Now sit on that chair, Sammy, and go to

sleep."

Sammy Bunter sat on the chair, and gave a slight snore. Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. It was coming at last! He ceased to make the hypnotic passes. Evidently, they had done their work, and were no longer needed. There was Sammy, asleep and snoring, under his eyes!

"Now, Sammy, you're the slave of my will!" said Bunter. "Are you the slave of my will, Sammy?"

"Yes!" murmured Sammy.

"Now, Sammy, you're not Sammy Bunter at all, but Dr. Locke, headmaster of Greyfriars. Who are you, Sammy?"

"I'm Dr. Locke, headmaster of Greyfriars," answered Sammy, dreamily.

Billy Bunter grinned joyously! This was success!

"Open your eyes and stand up, Sammy."

Sammy opened his eyes and stood up.

"Now pick up that pen off the table."

Sammy picked up the pen off the table.

"Now, that pen's a stick of toffee!" said Bunter. "What is it you're holding in your hand, Sammy?"

"A stick of toffee!" said Sammy.

"Now chew it."

There was a momentary pause. The fat fag had not quite expected that, and he had no fancy for chewing a pen-handle. However, it was a case of in for a penny, in for a pound. Unless that experiment was a success, there were no toffees for Sammy, and he had clambered up to the Remove studies for nothing! After that momentary pause, Sammy chewed the end of the pen-handle.

Billy Bunter watched him in sheer delight!

It had come at last! Practice had made perfect! His hypnotic powers had developed! There, standing before him, was Sammy of the Second, chewing the end of a pen handle in the belief that it was toffee!

"You can put it down, Sammy!" said the delighted Owl.

Sammy was glad to put it down!

"Now, twice four are twenty-six!" said Bunter. "How many are twice four, Sammy?"

"Twenty-six!" said Sammy.

"He, he, he! You're under the 'fluence all right!" chuckled Bunter. "I could make you give answers like that to Twigg in the form-room, if I liked. But I won't! I wouldn't use my enormous power like that, Sammy. But just wait till I get Mauly under the 'fluence like this! I shall be all right for Christmas! He, he, he! I shall be captain of the Remove next term! Fancy Wharton's face! He, he, he!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Sammy. But it was not fancying Wharton's face that made Sammy chuckle!

"Now, Sammy, take that waste-paper basket from under the table."

"What for?"

"Don't ask questions!" said Bunter, frowning. "You have to jump when I say jump! Take that waste-basket out from under the table at once."

Sammy dragged out the waste-paper basket.

"Now, that's your Sunday hat!" said Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped Sammy.

"Now, what is it, Sammy?"

"It's my Sunday hat!" said Sammy, obediently.

"Put it on your head!"

Again there was a momentary pause. But again Bunter's "subject" realized that in for a penny was in for a pound. He jammed the waste-paper basket upside down on his head. Billy Bunter watched him with glee.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter. "Wait till I get Quelch under the 'fluence! I'll make him do the same in the form-room."

"He, he, he!" gurgled Sammy. He could not help it.

"Now walk out of the study in your Sunday hat!" commanded Bunter.



"Stop," commanded Bunter.

There was a longer pause this time! Bunter's "subject" had no intention whatever of showing up in public with a waste-paper basket on his head—not even for that bag of toffees. Finally he walked as far as the door.

"Stop!" commanded Bunter.

Sammy stopped.

"That will do," said Bunter. "I won't make you go out with that waste-paper basket on your head, Sammy. I'll jolly well make Quelch do it, some time! I'll show him! Now, I'm going to wake you out of the hypnotic trance, Sammy."

Sammy was glad to hear it. He had had enough of the performance, and was eager to begin on the toffees.

"Stand quite still, while I make the reverse passes!" commanded Bunter.

"It won't take a minute, and then you'll be conscious again."

The fat hands sawed the air once more.

"Wake up!" commanded Bunter. "Now, you're out of the trance, Sammy."

Sammy gave quite a dramatic start.

"I—I say, what's this on my head?" he exclaimed.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"It's the waste-paper basket, Sammy! I made you believe it was your Sunday hat, while you were under the 'fluence."

"Did you?" gasped Sammy.

"I jolly well did! You'd have walked out into the quad, thinking you had your Sunday hat on, if I'd chosen. You can shove it back under the table. You can take the toffees, Sammy. It's been a splendid success."

Sammy lost no time in raking the toffees, and disappearing with them. Billy Bunter grinned complacently, as his minor vanished. He leaned back in the armchair, and his happy grin extended so far and so wide, that it almost looked like meeting round the back of his fat head.

That experiment had been a splendid success. There was no doubt about that—in Billy Bunter's mind, at least. A fellow who could put on the 'fluence to the extent of making another fellow believe that a waste-paper basket was his Sunday hat, was evidently as master of the mysterious powers of hypnotism. Power—tremendous power—now resided in Billy Bunter's fat hands. There was no mistake this time! He was booked for Mauleverer Towers for Christmas, with Mauly the slave of his will—he was going to be captain of the Remove, with practically everybody else the slaves of his will: he was even going to make Quelch put a waste-paper basket on his head in place of the accustomed mortar-board, just to show him, and to show the other fellows what he could jolly well do if he jolly well liked! All this the gleeful Owl could see, in his mind's eye: though perhaps he was destined never to see it with any other eye! It was just as well, for the fat Owl's happy satisfaction, that he could not see, and hear, Bunter minor in those very moments. Sammy Bunter was whacking out toffees with Gatty and Myers, all three fags yelling with

laughter: Gatty and Myers really seeming to enjoy Sammy's description of Bunter the Hypnotist even more than they enjoyed the toffees!

CHAPTER IX

BUNTER MEANS BUSINESS!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, there was nothing in Billy Bunter's remark, to cause the Famous Five to burst into a laugh. But they couldn't help it. Often and often as Billy Bunter had provided comic relief in the life of the Greyfriars Remove, he had never been quite so entertaining as now. Bunter as a footballer, Bunter as a cricketer, Bunter at Latin, or maths, or even spelling and arithmetic, was entertaining. But as a hypnotist he was the limit in that line. And Harry Wharton and Co. had just heard Sammy Bunter relating to a group of grinning fags how he had pulled Bunter's fat leg in the study. Billy Bunter, clearly, had not the remotest idea that Sammy had been pulling his leg. Not for a moment did he doubt that Sammy had been under the mystic 'fluence. And that was the final proof that Bunter needed, that he had at last mastered the thing. Not a doubt lingered in his fat mind.

He blinked in surprise at the Famous Five, as they laughed. Bunter himself could see nothing to evoke merriment.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" he said. "If you fellows fancy that I can't hypnotize—"

"The fancifulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Sort of!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'll jolly well show you!" said Bunter, loftily. And I can tell you fellows that you'd better be civil, too, if you want Christmas at Mauly's place. That depends entirely on me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"All I've got to do is to put the 'fluence on Mauly," explained Bunter. "I don't mind letting you fellows know, now that you've found out that I'm a hypnotist—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The power in my hands is simply tremendous." said Bunter, impressively. "I've tried it out, now, and made absolutely sure. What do you fellows think of my hypnotizing a chap and making him put a waste-paper basket on his head, thinking that it was his Sunday hat?"

"You fat ass—!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"That young scamp Sammy was pulling your silly leg," said Johnny Bull. Sniff, from Bunter.

"Not so jolly easy to pull my leg," he said, contemptuously. "I'm pretty wide, I think."

"You are!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"The widefulness of the esteemed Bunter is preposterous!" concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The broadfulness is as terrific as the longfulness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't mean that sort of wide, you silly ass!" yapped Bunter. "I mean wide! I had Sammy right under the 'fluence. That shows! Well, now that I'm absolutely sure that I can do it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you stop cackling!" howled Bunter. "I tell you it's all right now. A powerful personality, strength of will, and superior intellect—that's what does it. That's where I come in strong, you know."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"I could put the whole lot of you under the 'fluence, this very minute, and make you chuck snowballs at one another, if I liked. I could make you crawl on your hands and knees, if I jolly well choose."

"Run for your lives!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We break up to-morrow," went on Bunter. "Well, I'm going in the car with Mauly—"

"Does Mauly know?" grinned Nugent.

"I'm going to tell him!" said Bunter, calmly. "I don't want to be crowded in the car. I think you fellows had better go by train."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at in that, that I can see. I shall fix things exactly as I please," said Bunter. "I've got the power. But I've been thinking about Smithy and Redwing. Mauly seems to want them: and after all, it's his party. I've decided to let them come."

"That's generous of you!" said Bob.

"Well, I always was a generous chap," said Bunter. "Kindest friend and noblest foe, and all that, you know. They can come, if they behave themselves. So can you fellows. But mind, no skylarking. I don't want it, and I won't have it. You'd better get that clear, at the start."

"You fat frump—!" began Johnny Bull.

"That will do, Bull! Don't answer me back—I don't like it! And—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the bell!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "If you've finished your funny turn, Bunter, we'll get along to the form-room."

"Oh, do!" said Bunter, derisively. "Jump when Quelch says jump! Fat lot I care for Quelch! I'm not going into form."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Why should I, if I don't jolly well choose?" asked Bunter, independently. "Think I'm like you chaps, saying. "Yes, sir; and "No, sir" and "Please, sir"? I'll jolly soon tell Quelch where he gets off, if he asks for it. You wait!"

The Famous Five gazed at him. Evidently, Billy Bunter's confidence in his powers as a hypnotist was now unbounded. It was the last class of the term: and Billy Bunter was going to cut it! He was going to pass by Henry Samuel Quelch, master of the Remove, like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"You fat chump—!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"That will do, Wharton."

"You howling ass—!" said Johnny Bull.

"Pack it up!" snapped Bunter.

"Look here, Bunter, don't play the goat," said Harry Wharton, really concerned for the fat and fatuous Owl. "Come into form with us—it's only an hour, anyway—for goodness sake, don't get Quelch's rag out on the last day."

"Fat lot I care for Quelch!"

"It will be whops!" said Nugent.

Bunter laughed, sarcastically.

"I'd like to see Quelch whop me!" he said. "No more whops for me, I can tell you. I may stroll in later. If Quelch doesn't like it—"

"No 'if' about that!" said Bob.

"Then he can lump it!" said Bunter. "I've had lines from Quelch! I've had whops from him! I've had lots of jaw from him! That's all over now, I can tell you. If Quelch cheeks me—"

"If he whatters?" gasped Bob.

"If he cheeks me," said Bunter, calmly. "I shall simply put the 'fluence on him, and make him feed from my hand! I may make him put the waste-paper basket on his head, and walk out into the quad with it on, too, thinking it's his Sunday hat, like I did with Sammy. I may make him cane himself with his own cane! It all depends on how I choose to use my tremendous power. I can tell you that once the 'fluence is on, Quelch will have to hop when I say hop."

"Oh, help!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"You fellows coming in?" shouted Vernon-Smith, from a distance. "The bell's stopping."

"Come on, you fellows," said Bob. "Come on, Bunter."

"Rats!"

"For goodness sake, come in, Bunter," urged Harry Wharton. The bell was stopping, as the Bouncer had said, but Wharton was really concerned for the fattest and most obtuse member of the form. "If you're late—"

"I shall be jolly late!"

"Quelch—."

"Blow Quelch! Who cares for Quelch?"

"If you won't come—."

"I jolly well won't! If Quelch wants to know where I am, tell him I'm in the Rag, and he can come and fetch me if he likes, and I'll make him crawl back on his hands and knees. Tell him that, from me."

"Yes, I can see us telling him that!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Come on, you men—we don't want whops from Quelch, if Bunter does."

And the Famous Five rushed off to join the crowd at the Remove form-room, leaving Billy Bunter alone in his glory, so to speak.

Bunter sniffed contemptuously. They could rush off, and jump to orders, if they liked. Not Bunter! A fellow with irresistible power in his hands was not likely to jump to orders. Now that he had proved—to his own satisfaction at least—that that power was irresistible—Billy Bunter was going to be a law unto himself: monarch of all he surveyed. He was going to be cock of the walk, and he was jolly well going to let the fellows know it, too!

Billy Bunter did not head for the form-room like the rest of the Remove. He headed for the Rag, where he ensconced himself in the most comfortable armchair before the fire. Later on, when he jolly well liked!—he would stroll into the form-room: and if Quelch did not like it, so much the worse for Quelch. Bunter was standing no nonsense from Quelch—now that he was monarch of all he surveyed!

One member of the Remove was missing when Quelch let in his form for the last lesson of the term. Probably other fellows, as well as Bunter, would have liked to stay out. But no other fellow thought of venturing to do so. Quelch noted Bunter's absence with a grim brow, and was seen to lay his cane ready on his desk. Nobody envied Bunter when he did come in!

But he was in no hurry to come in. The lesson was almost at its end, and dismissal at hand, when the door opened, and the fattest figure in the Greyfriars Remove, strolled in—strolled in with an air of perfect ease, with fat hands in its pockets, evidently not in the least perturbed by a basilisk-like glare from Mr. Quelch. All eyes fixed on Billy Bunter.

CHAPTER X

TRYING IT ON QUELCH!

"**B**UNTER!"
 Quelch's voice was very deep.

Few fellows in the Remove would have passed that deep voice unheeded. Even the reckless Bounder would have been wary, at that deep note in Quelch's

voice. Least of all would Billy Bunter, in ordinary circumstances, have disregarded it.

But the circumstances were not ordinary now.

Billy Bunter was—or at least he believed that he was—able to make Quelch feed from his hand. That made a tremendous difference.

To the amazement of the Remove, and still more to the amazement of the Remove-master, Bunter gave Quelch only a careless glance.

"Did you speak?" he asked. He did not even add "Sir". His manner could not have been more casual.

"Asking for it!" murmured Skinner.

"Is he potty after all?" muttered Vernon-Smith. "We thought he was, you know, and blessed if this doesn't look like it."

Every fellow in the form gazed at Bunter. Mr. Quelch gazed at him, with gimlet-eyes that almost bored into his fat face.

"Bunter! You are late."

"I believe so," assented Bunter.

"What? What did you say?" stuttered Mr. Quelch. He seemed hardly able to believe his majestic ears.

"I said I believe so," answered Bunter, carelessly.

"Oh, the ass!" breathed Harry Wharton. "Quelch will take his skin off!"

"The skinfulness will be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The blithering bloater!" muttered Bob. "Is he really idiot enough to fancy that he can hypnotize Quelch?"

"Isn't he idiot enough for anything?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Frank Nugent. "He's got it coming."

Quelch was staring hard at Bunter. He seemed at a loss for words. Never, since Quelch had been a school-master, had any fellow in his form answered him in this style. He was almost too astonished to be angry. But not quite!

"Bunter!" His voice deepened.

"Hallo!" said Bunter. He was lounging to his place, but he stopped and looked round at Quelch.

"What? What did you say? Did you say 'hallo'!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Just that!" said Bunter.

"Are you in your right senses, boy?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes," drawled Bunter. "Are you?"

Mr. Quelch quite jumped. The Remove fellows did not even whisper to one another now. They sat in awed silence. When a Remove man talked to Quelch like that, it was certain that something was going to happen: something in the nature of an earthquake, or at least a thunderstorm.

"Bunter!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "This impertinence—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Don't jaw," said Bunter. "I've heard enough from you."

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!" breathed Bob Cherry.

"Poor old Bunter!" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "He's got it coming."

"Bunter! Come here!" roared Mr. Quelch. He picked up the cane from his desk, with an almost convulsive grab. The expression on his speaking countenance was absolutely terrifying—to all eyes but Bunter's.

Bunter was not terrified! Why should he be, when he had irresistible power in his fat hands, and could make Quelch crawl on his hands and knees, if he wanted to? Had not the experiment on Sammy proved that his hypnotic powers were unlimited and irresistible? Billy Bunter was quite cool. His glance at his exasperated form-master was careless and disdainful. And he did not take a step towards him.

"Do you hear me, Bunter?" thundered Quelch.

"I'm not deaf," answered Bunter.

"What? What?"

"No need to yell!" said Bunter.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch. Like the Remove fellows a few days before, he began to wonder whether the fattest member of his form was quite in his right mind. "Bunter, I order you to come here."

"Fire away!" said Bunter.

"Come here at once, and bend over that chair!"

"I'll watch it."

"Bless my soul!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Do I hear aright? Bunter, what do you mean by this?"

"Just what I say," answered Bunter. "No whops for me! No fear."

"I shall cane you most severely, Bunter."

"You jolly well won't!"

"Goodness gracious! The boy cannot be in his senses!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"If any!" murmured Skinner.

"Bunter—!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, pack it up, Quelch," said Bunter. "You make me tired. Look here, put that cane down, or I'll jolly well make you cane yourself with it. Mind, I mean that."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch faintly. He could hardly doubt further that something was amiss with Bunter's fat intellect. No fellow in his senses could dream of talking to his form-master like that. Naturally, Quelch's anger faded, as that belief was forced into his mind. He realised that if Bunter was not responsible for his actions, it was medical care he needed, not a whopping from his form-master.

And if Quelch had doubted that the unfortunate Owl was "bats" Bunter's next action would have convinced him. Bunter, standing facing his form-master, fixed his eyes and spectacles on him, and began sawing the air with fat

hands. It was time, Bunter thought, to put the 'fluence on. Only the hypnotic 'fluence could save him, but the fat Owl relied upon it without a shadow of doubt. Quelch was going to be the slave of his will, just like Sammy!

In dead silence, the whole Remove watched Bunter, as if fascinated. They knew what those antics meant—that Bunter fancied that he could hypnotize. They understood that the fat and fatuous Owl was seeking to put the 'fluence on Quelch! But Quelch, quite unaware that Bunter was a hypnotist, was unaware that that sawing of the air represented mystic hypnotic passes. The only meaning it conveyed to his mind was that Bunter was as mad as a hatter!

"Bless my soul!" breathed Mr. Quelch. "This is—is—is appalling! The wretched boy must see a doctor at once. Bunter, calm yourself."

"Don't talk!" said Bunter.

"Calm yourself, Bunter. Strive to calm yourself! Every care shall be taken of you—"

"Quiet!" said Bunter, in a voice of authority. "I've told you to be quiet, Quelch! Don't make me have to tell you again."

"Oh, holy smoke!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Quelch stood silent, gazing at Bunter. Quelch was usually equal to any situation, in his form-room. But these circumstances were so unusual, so very extraordinary, that he hardly knew what to do. Bunter had to be secured, and taken to a doctor—that was clear, at least. Except for that strange and unaccountable waving of his fat hands, he seemed calm. But there might be some outbreak, if he was not secured.

Bunter advanced towards him, his eyes and spectacles still fixed on Quelch, his fat hands weaving and winding. The Remove watched him, speechless. Quelch watched him, ready to grab him by the collar as soon as he came within reach. A sudden grab, before he could escape, seemed to Mr. Quelch the best way of handling this extraordinary situation.

But the fat Owl stopped, at a distance of six feet, his fat hands still sawing and winding and weaving. Quelch stood very still: and that, as it was exactly what Bunter expected the 'fluence to produce, convinced him, if he had needed convincing, that he had Quelch where he wanted him! The 'fluence was on—at least Billy Bunter had no doubt that it was.

"Now, Quelch!" said Bunter. His voice was commanding. "Drop that cane!"

Mr. Quelch hesitated for a moment. But he decided that it was wisest to humour the fat Owl, and keep him calm. He laid the cane on his desk.

Billy Bunter grinned.

He cast a vaunting blink at the staring Removites. Quelch had obeyed his order! Obviously the 'fluence was on! This was a lesson to the Remove! It showed them the tremendous power that resided in Bunter's fat hands. They would have to believe it now—and jolly well mind their p's and q's.

"Now then, Quelch," went on Bunter. He was going to exhibit his power to the full. "Take that waste-paper basket from under your desk."

"What?"

"Put it on your head!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"It's your Sunday hat!" said Bunter.

"Bless my soul!"

"Put it on your head, and walk out into the quad!" commanded Bunter. He winked at the petrified Removites. He had no doubt that they would yell, at the sight of Quelch walking out of the form-room the waste-paper basket on his head, thinking that it was his Sunday hat! So far, they did not even smile! They sat regarding Bunter in stony silence, almost in horror.

"Don't waste time, Quelch!" snapped Bunter, as the Remove master stood gazing at him. "I've told you what to do! You're the slave of my will now! Jump when I say jump! Do you hear?"

And Quelch did jump—at Bunter— His grasp closed on Bunter's collar, and the fat Owl was secured. There was a startled yell from Bunter. He had not expected that. He had expected Quelch to obey his orders, just like Sammy, under the same mystic 'fluence! And here was Quelch gripping him by the back of the neck in a grip of iron, instead.

"Ow!" helled Bunter. "Leggo! Wow! Oh, crickey! Oh, lor'! Will you leggo?"

"Calm yourself, Bunter—."

"Yaroooh!"

"I must secure you. I must keep you secured. But be calm! You shall see a doctor immediately, and perhaps something may be done—. Calm yourself!"

Billy Bunter wriggled frantically. But that iron grip on his collar did not relax. Quelch had secured him, and he was keeping him secured. And, in that awful moment, it dawned on Bunter's fat brain that Quelch was not under the 'fluence at all: that the mystic passes, and the concentrated glare of the hypnotic eye, had produced no effect whatever, and that his form-master merely supposed that he had taken leave of his senses! And as that realisation rushed into Bunter's fat brain, he fairly collapsed with terror, and sagged in Quelch's grasp like a sack of coke.

CHAPTER XI

TWICE SIX!

"**N**ow, Bunter—."
 "Oh, lor'," moaned Bunter.
 "Calm yourself—."

"Oh, crickey!"

"Every care will be taken of you, Bunter. This—this illness may prove to be merely temporary. You shall see a doctor at once—."

"I—I—I don't want to see a doctor!" wailed Bunter. "I say—oh, crickey! I—I—I say, ain't you under the 'fluence after all?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the Remove. They had sat petrified, indeed horrified, up to that point. But this was too much for them. They yelled.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The juniors really could not help it. The climax of Billy Bunter's hypnotic experiment in the form-room might, as Bob Cherry remarked, have made a cat laugh.

"Silence! This unfortunate boy's unhappy state is not a matter for merriment," exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "I am surprised—shocked! This unfortunate boy has taken leave of his senses—."

"I ain't!" yelled Bunter.

"Calm yourself, Bunter! You shall have medical attention as quickly as it can be obtained. If you are to be removed to an asylum—."

"Yarooooh!"

"—every care will be taken of you—and everyone will hope for your ultimate recovery—."

"I ain't mad!" shrieked Bunter.

"Hush, my poor boy! Be calm—."

"I tell you I ain't—."

"Every care—."

"I was only hypnotizing!" howled Bunter, desperately. "Don't you send for a doctor. I don't want a doctor! I—I—I was only hypnotizing, and I—I—I thought you were under the 'fluence—oh, crickey!"

"Wha-a-a-t?" stuttered Mr. Quelch.

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

"Hypnotizing!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove were yelling. Mr. Quelch glanced at his form, almost convulsed with merriment; and then he looked at Bunter. Then he glanced at the yelling juniors again, and then once more he fixed his gimlet-eyes on Bunter. Slowly, but surely, he began to realise how matters stood. Certainly, he could never had dreamed that Bunter fancied that he was hypnotizing. Really it was not easy to guess that one! But it dawned on him now—slowly, but surely!

"Did—did—did you say hypnotizing!" he stuttered. "Did—did—did I understand you to say hypnotizing, Bunter?"

"Oh, dear—!"

"Answer me!"

"Oh, lor'! Yes, sir!" moaned Bunter. "I—I—I learned it from a—a—a book sir, and—and—and I—I don't believe there's anything in it, now, but I—I—I thought—oh, crickey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" Quelch fairly bawled. "Silence! Bunter, if you are not out of your senses as I supposed—"

"Oh! No, sir!" moaned Bunter. "I—I was only—only—oh, lor'!"

Quelch eyed him doubtfully. Slowly he assimilated it. Probably it was a relief to him to realise that it was not a case of "bats", and that no doctor was required. But as he realised it, his face grew grimmer and grimmer, and the expression on it made the fat Owl cringe.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, at last. "Am I to understand, Bunter, that you have merely been playing disrespectful tricks in this form-room, deliberately leading me to fear that you were out of your senses?"

"I—I—I—"

"You have ventured—you have dared—to play such absurd tricks on me—on your form-master—!"

Bunter could have groaned. Only too clearly, Quelch was not under the 'fluence! Remembering how he had talked to Quelch, in the happy belief that he could make him feed from his hand, the fat Owl quaked with terror. Quelch's face was growing more and more expressive.

He released Bunter's collar. He knew now that Bunter did not need securing while a doctor was sent for. What Bunter needed was nearer at hand. It was lying on Quelch's desk, in fact! Quelch picked it up!

"Bunter!" He swished the cane. "You have missed a lesson—you have been guilty of unheard-of impertinence—and to crown all, you admit that you have been so foolish, so absurd, so insensate, so disrespectful, as to—to—to—to attempt to hypnotize your form-master—!"

"I—I—I—"

"The severest punishment is called for, in such a case," said Mr. Quelch. "You will be caned with the utmost severity, Bunter."

"Oh, crickey!"

"Bend over that chair!"

"I—I—I—"

"Bend over!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Bunter gave him an unhappy blink. But he was no longer thinking of trying to get Quelch under the 'fluence! In fact Bunter had ceased to believe in hypnotism, and had no doubt that that young rascal, Sammy, had been pulling his leg in the study, after all. It was the complete collapse of Bunter's house of cards—Quelch was never going to feed from his hand, and Christmas at Mauleverer Towers was as far off as ever! In the lowest possible spirits, the Owl of the Remove bent over the chair and the cane swished.

Nobody in the form-room was laughing now. The Remove fellows had taken it as a huge joke, when they had discovered that Bunter was not "bats" but only a hypnotist. Quelch, evidently, was not taking it as a joke. The comic side of the affair was utterly and wholly lost on Quelch. Grinning faces in the Remove became grave and sympathetic, as they watched what followed. "Six" was the immemorial limit of a whopping. But Quelch did not stop at the immemorial limit. He was running no risk of spoiling Bunter by sparing the rod! This time it was double-six! And every one was a swipe!

Bunter roared. He yelled. He bellowed! Unheeding roars, yells, and bellows, Quelch went on with the good work! Twelve terrific swipes landed, one after another: and then, at long last, Quelch paused. Bunter had had a dozen—and Quelch was tempted to make it a baker's dozen! But he paused, and laid the cane on his desk.

"Now, Bunter—"

"Yaroooooooh!"



Bunter roared. He yelled. He bellowed.

"I trust that that will be a lesson to you!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Silence!"

"Wow! wow!"

Quelch glanced at the form.

"Dismiss!" he rapped.

Several fellows gathered round Bunter, as he tottered from the form-room. He had asked for it—begged and prayed for it, in fact—but he had had it hot and strong, and they could sympathise. They helped him away to his study. There, the fat Owl sank into the armchair—where he reposed for about the millionth part of a second before he bounded up. Even an armchair did not tempt Bunter now. He leaned on the table, and groaned.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER ALL!

"POOR old Bunter!" sighed Bob Cherry.

Groan!

"Feeling it bad?" asked Nugent.

"Groan!"

"You asked for it, you know!" remarked Johnny Bull: apparently in the role of Job's comforter.

Groan!

"You'll feel better presently, old fat man," said Harry Wharton.

Groan!

"The betterfulness will be terrific, laterfully on, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Groan!

The Famous Five looked at Bunter, looked at one another, and departed. There was, evidently, nothing they could do for Bunter. He had no reply to make but in the form of a hair-raising groan.

Left alone, Bunter leaned on the table, and continued to groan. Only groaning could express his feelings, which were deep, after that record whopping from Quelch in the form-room.

His eyes, and spectacles, fell on a little paper-backed book that lay on the table. It was entitled "Acquire Power!" He blinked at it, snatched it up, tore

it into several fragments, and hurled the fragments into the fire-place. Bunter, it seemed, was done with hypnotism! Even his fat and obtuse mind had been able, at long last, to assimilate the fact that there was nothing in it: and that his dream of acquiring tremendous power was nothing but a delusion and a snare!

Leaning on the table again, he resumed groaning.

Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing looked in at the door. Redwing's look was sympathetic: the Bounder's rather sardonic.

"Sorry you had it so tough, Bunter," said Redwing.

Groan!

"Thinking of putting the 'fluence on the Head next, Bunter?" asked Smithy.

Groan!

They went their way. Bunter groaned on. Lord Mauleverer was the next visitor. His lordship gazed at the groaning Owl leaning on the table.

"Bunter, old man—."

Groan!

"Still feeling it, old chap?"

Groan!

"Anythin' a fellow could do?"

Groan!

"I've got a cake in my study—."

Groan!

"Like to sample it?"

Groan! Even cake seemed to have lost its appeal. Quelch, undoubtedly, had laid it on. It was the first time in history that William George Bunter had not sat up and taken notice at the mention of cake!

Lord Mauleverer regarded him thoughtfully. He opened his lips to speak, and closed them again. Then he opened them once more—and spoke.

"Bunter, old man—."

Groan!

"We're breakin' up for the hols to-morrow—."

Groan!

"Like to come along for Christmas?"

Billy Bunter was about to groan again. But he checked it. For the first time since Quelch's cane had whacked, he did not answer a remark with a groan! He blinked round at Lord Mauleverer.

"Mean it, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"I'll come!" said Bunter.

Then he resumed groaning.

It had been a really record whopping. It had completely cured Billy Bunter of any desire to practise the mystic science of hypnotism. He was still feeling twinges, even in Lord Mauleverer's car the next day. But he was in the car! It was rather crowded—but he was in it, bound for Mauleverer Towers. There was still a spot of balm in Gilead! The 'fluence had failed him—but he was, after all, booked for Mauleverer Towers and a Merry Christmas.

THE END