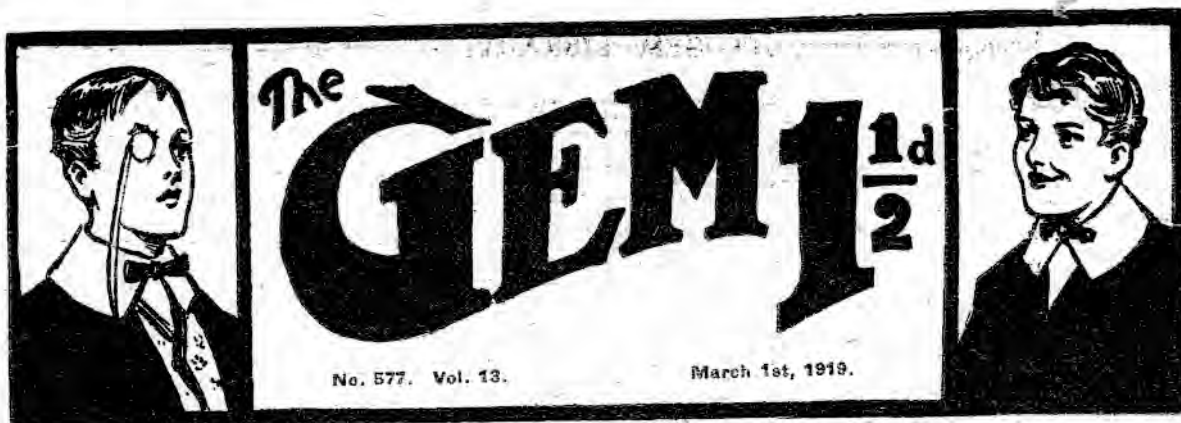
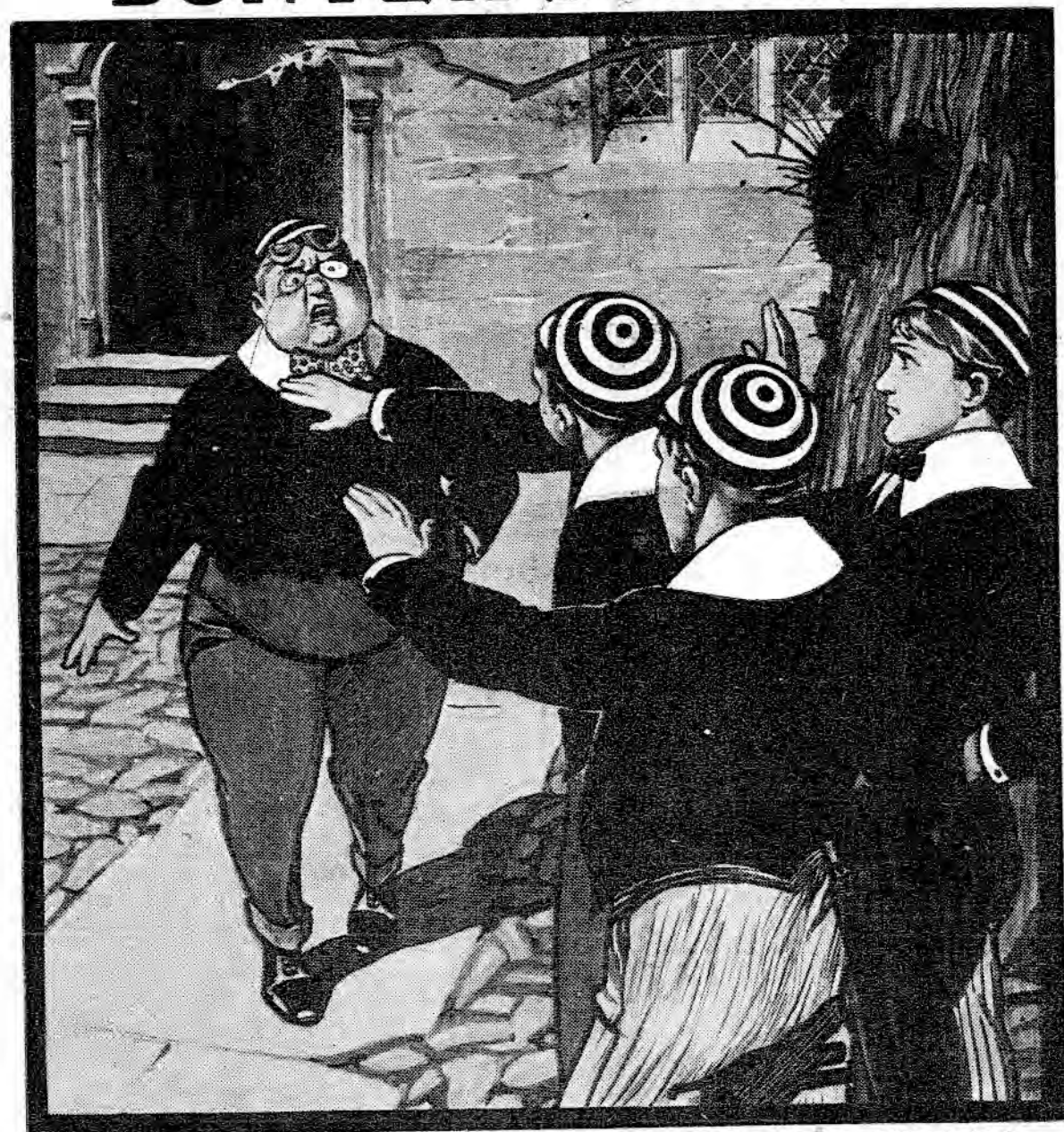




BUNTER'S FUND!



BUNTER IS NOT WANTED BY THE TERRIBLE THREE!

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A MAGNIFICENT NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.



Bunter's Fund.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I. Shooed Off!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Shoo!"
"Wha-a-at?"
"SHOO!"

Bunter of the Fourth blinked at the Terrible Three in surprise and wrath. The chums of the Shell were chatting in the quadrangle at St. Jim's when the fat junior rolled up. As if moved by the same spring, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther raised their hands, and waved Bunter off—"shooing" him off as if he were an obnoxious wildfowl.

"Look here!" roared Bunter.

"Shoo!"

"What do you mean, you silly asses?"
"Shoo!"

Bunter blinked at the three juniors through his big glasses with a really ferocious blink.

Tom Merry & Co. turned and walked away, smiling, leaving the fat junior rooted to the ground for a moment or two.

"You—you—you silly chumps!" gasped Bunter; and he started after the Shell fellows, not to be beaten.

Tom Merry & Co. quickened their pace, crossing the quad with long strides, and Billy Bunter had to break into a run in pursuit, his fat little legs going like clockwork.

"Owl!" gasped Bunter, breathlessly.
"Yow! Rotters! Stop!"

The Terrible Three walked faster.
"Oh, dear! I—I might as well have stayed at Greyfriars if I'm going to be treated like this!" mumbled Bunter.
"Beasts! I say, you rotters—Look here, old fellows—stop for me! I've got something important to say—very important!"

The juniors strode on, grinning, and Bunter panted in the rear, his fat face growing crimson with exertion, and his breath coming in gasps.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth was adorning the steps of the School House with his elegant person as the Shell fellows approached. He turned his eyeglass upon them in surprise.

"Bai Jove! Is this a wace?" he asked.
"Stop!" howled Bunter.

"Gussy, will you do us a favour?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly, deah boy. What is it?"
"Keep Bunter off while we hide somewhere!"

"I say, you fellows—"
"Run for it!" exclaimed Tom, as Bunter rolled up to the steps, panting.

The Terrible Three rushed into the House and disappeared from view. Billy Bunter, out of breath, leaned against the stone balustrade and gasped.
"Owl! Beasts! Owl!"

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"What are those silly chumps dodging me for like this?" spluttered Bunter.
"What does it mean?"

"Pewwaps they do not enjoy your society, deah boy!" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Ahem!"

"Perhaps they think you've got a postal-order you want cashed," suggested Jack Blake, looking out of the doorway; "and perhaps they think the merry postal-order won't come; and perhaps they're once bit and twice shy—what?"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Yaas, wathah! The fact is, Buntah, you are wathah a wowwy," remarked Arthur Augustus. "You are weally so vewy much like your cousin, Billy Buntah of Gweyfwish, you know."

Bunter grinned a little, in spite of his exasperation.

His remarkable resemblance in every respect to Billy Bunter of Greyfriars had been remarked on many times; yet no one guessed that he was in reality Billy Bunter of Greyfriars, and that he had changed places with his cousin, Wally Bunter of St. Jim's.

Bunter had expected that change to turn out an excellent thing for him; but the result was not quite so excellent as anticipated.

The juniors who had liked Wally Bunter found that Billy Bunter was far from lovable; and as they believed he was the same fellow, they supposed they had been mistaken in him.

Billy Bunter had quite a gift for exhausting anyone's patience in the shortest possible space of time.

"I say, you fellows," said the Owl of Greyfriars, blinking at D'Arcy and Blake, "as a matter of fact, you'll do! I was going to speak to those silly asses, but I'll take you into my confidence instead."

"You won't take me!" said Blake decidedly.

"Wathah not?"

"You see, we know you too well!" explained Blake. "You can't do it."

"Take you into my confidence, I said," howled Bunter. "It's a rather important matter—"

"Shoo!"

"What?"

Jack Blake waved his hands at Bunter in the same exasperating manner as the Terrible Three.

"Shoo!" he said.

"Yaas wathah! Shoo!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"You—you silly, thumping asses—"

"Shoo!"

Blake and D'Arcy walked out into the quadrangle, and Billy Bunter shook a fat fist after them in great wrath. It was really intensely exasperating to be "shooed" away like this—just as if he was a fearful bore, instead of the fascinating fellow he really was!

"Beasts!" he growled.

He rolled discontentedly into the House. He found Levison, Clive, and Cardew at the foot of the staircase, and rolled up to them with an aggravating grin.

To his great annoyance, the chums of

Study No. 9 waved their hands at him, and said, in a kind of chorus:

"SHOO!"

"You thumping chumps!" ejaculated Bunter. "Do you think I'm a cat?"

"Shoo!"

"You grinning ass, Clive—"

"Shoo!"

"It's a rather important matter I was going to confide to you—"

"Shoo!"

It was evidently impossible to confide the important matter to three juniors who persisted in "shooing" him off, and Bunter, with a snort, started up the stairs.

He realised that the humorous juniors of the School House were all entering into the little joke; for what reason he could not understand. Bunter's conversation was an honour for anybody, and ought to have been a delight. But the St. Jim's fellows did not seem to find it so.

He found Julian and Kerruish in the Fourth Form passage. He paused as he saw them; but before he could speak they were waving him off and "shooing." Bunter shook a fat fist at them and rolled on.

He was heading for Tom Merry's study, No. 10 in the Shell. He was determined to run the Terrible Three down to their lair, so to speak, and divulge that important matter, whether they liked it or not.

His heavy footsteps were audible well ahead of him, and the Terrible Three in the study grinned as they heard him.

"Here comes the barrel!" murmured Manners.

Monty Lowther closed one eye.

"Leave him to me!" he murmured.

Bunter rolled on towards the half-open door of the study, and as he came near he heard a stage whisper from within.

"Is it loaded, Tom?"

"Right up to the muzzle."

"Good! I'll let fly the moment he shows up. It will be supposed to be an accident, of course."

"Oh, of course!"

Billy Bunter stopped dead.

"Why, the—the—the awful beasts!" he gasped. "They've got a g-g-gun there! The awful villains!"

"He's stopped! Cut out after him before he can get away, Monty!"

"You bet!"

There was a rush of footsteps, and Monty Lowther burst from the study with something long and dark to his shoulder, and glared round in search of Bunter. There was a rapid patter of footsteps, and the slamming of a door in the distance.

Bunter was gone!

Monty Lowther grinned, and strolled back into the study, and threw down the golf-club.

"The dear boy didn't wait!" he remarked. "He must have supposed that driver was a gun. I wonder what put that idea into his head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three chortled as they set about getting tea. For once the persistent Owl had been successfully "shooed" off.

CHAPTER 2.

Bunter the Philanthropist.

"KEEP off!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Help!"

"What the—"

"Help! Fire! Murder!" shrieked Billy Bunter.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy stood rooted to the threshold of Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

They had come in to tea together, and they expected to find Study No. 6 unoccupied.

Finding Bunter there was not so very surprising in itself, but the actions of the fat junior were very surprising indeed.

He bolted round the table, yelling, evidently in a state of dire terror. They stared at him blankly.

"Bai Jove! What is the mattah with the young ass?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Have you gone pottay, Buntah?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "It's you, is it? I—I—I thought it was that murderous villain—"

"Eh?"

"That homicidal beast Lowther!" gasped Bunter. "He—he—he was after me with a gun!"

"A gun!" yelled the four.

"Yes, I—I heard them loading it in their study. I heard the ramrod shoved in," said Bunter, drawing on his imagination a little. "They had it loaded up to the muzzle."

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I barely escaped with my life!" gasped the Owl of Greyfriars. "Lowther rushed after me with the gun at his shoulder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" exclaimed the fat junior indignantly. "I—I've had a narrow escape of—"

"Of dying of funk, I should say!" chuckled Herries. "You silly duffer! Do you think there's any firearms in the junior studies, you fathead? There isn't, but there's a boot, and you're going to get it if you don't clear!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"You are an uttiah ass, Buntah!" said Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a wotten funk, Buntah!"

"I say, Gussy—"

"If you address me as Gussy, Buntah, I shall have no resource but to give you a fearful thrashin'. I wegard it as cheek!"

"There's a door to this study, Bunter!" remarked Blake.

"All right, old chap," said Bunter, who had recovered by this time. "I'll shut the door for you. I like to make myself useful when I come to tea."

"But you haven't come to tea, my son!" said Blake grimly.

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"You're too numerous, Bunter," explained Digby. "The charms of your society have palled. Travel along, old scout. Disappear!"

"Yaas, wathah! Vanish, deah boy!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the four juniors, debating in his fat mind whether he could take those remarks as playful jokes. But he couldn't take Herries' boot as a joke, and Herries was only too plainly getting ready to use his boot. He assumed a pathetic look.

"I—I say, you fellows, I thought you were going to be pally when I came to St. Jim's," he said reproachfully. "I really wish I'd stayed—I mean, gone to Greyfriars instead."

"I wish you had!" assented Blake.

"Couldn't you manage it now? I'll tell you what, Bunter, if you could change to Greyfriars we'll have a whip-round in

the Fourth and stand your railway fare."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of No. 6, more in sorrow than in anger. He looked like a fellow who was sorely misunderstood.

"Considering what pals we've been, D'Arcy—" he began.

"Wats!"

"I think I mentioned there's a door to this study," remarked Herries. "Can you see it, you owl?"

"Oh, really, Herries—"

George Herries made a stride towards the fat junior, and Bunter executed a strategic movement round the table.

"I say, you fellows, don't play the goat!" he urged. "You needn't think I've come here to tea. I should refuse to stay to tea if you asked me on your bended knees. I've got something rather important to say."

"We know all about the postal-order!" roared Blake.

"I wasn't going to say anything about a postal-order!" howled Bunter.

"My hat! Fan me, somebody!"

"I think you might do the decent thing, and back a fellow up when he's trying to help a chap who's down on his luck!" said Bunter.

"Wha-a-a?"

The chums of the Fourth stared at Bunter. He had succeeded in surprising them.

"You're trying to help a chap who's down on his luck?" exclaimed Digby.

"Certainly."

"Who's the chap?"

"A chap in our Form—a School House chap," said Bunter. "The poor fellow has had bad luck, and he's awfully hard up."

"Well, my hat!" said Blake in astonishment. "This is the first time I've heard of you worrying about any chap outside your own fat skin, Bunter!"

"Some fellows are kind-hearted and generous," said Bunter loftily. "That kind of thing mayn't be in favour in this study, but I happen to be a fellow of that kind."

"Bai Jove!"

"The chap I'm speaking of is awfully down on his luck," continued Bunter. "If I don't help him, nobody will; and he's too proud to ask anybody to lend a hand. Now, my idea is to raise a sort of fund to see him through."

"Who's the chap?" yelled Herries. "We know all the chaps in the Fourth. What's his name?"

"Yaas, wathah! If somebody in the Fourth is down on his luck, we are quite prepared to stand by him," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway divulge his name, Buntah!"

Billy Bunter blinked cautiously at the chums of the Fourth, and did not immediately reply.

"Gammon!" said Herries. "He's trying to raise the wind for himself, of course. He wants tin to blue in the tuckshop. Rats!"

"Oh, really, Herries—"

"Isn't that it?" demanded Herries.

"I regard that suggestion as an insult, Herries. I don't expect good manners in this study," said Bunter, with dignity. "But really, there ought to be a limit. I'm trying to befriend a chap who—"

"What chap?"

"You see, I can't tell you his name," explained Bunter. "He's awfully proud. He would feel insulted. But—"

"And you expect us to swallow a yarn like that?" howled Blake.

"Certainly. You can take my word, I suppose?"

"Your word! Oh, my hat!"

"I assure you that it is the case, and that's enough for honourable fellows.

Now, suppose you start the subscription in this study?" said Bunter briskly. "Gussy might put in a quid."

"Bai Jove!"

"You fellows, say, five shillings each. That's letting you off lightly. It will get the chap I'm speaking of out of an awful fix. The other fellows will follow your example. I may raise ten or twelve quids in all. Did you say you'd begin with a quid, Gussy?"

"Certainly not!"

"Ahem! What are you beginning with, Blake?"

"My boot if you don't buzz off, you fat fraud!" said Jack Blake, in great disgust.

"But I've explained what the money's wanted for, haven't I?—a chap in the Fourth awfully down on his luck. I should think you fellows would be willing to lend a hand. I'm backing him up, and I'm only a new fellow at St. Jim's," said Bunter reproachfully.

"Produce the chap, and we'll see!"

grinned Digby.

"That can't be done. He's proud, you see—"

"If he's too proud to come for the cash himself, he can keep his pride and we'll keep our money!" chuckled Blake.

"I look on that as mean, Blake."

"Look here, you fat rotter!" roared Blake. "Can't you see we know you're only spinning us a yarn? We don't swallow it—see? Herries, you've got the biggest feet. Kick him out!"

Billy Bunter circumnavigated the table again, with George Herries in pursuit.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shoo!"

"But I say, you know—"

"Shoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter backed out of the doorway as Herries reached him. The door slammed almost on his fat little nose.

It opened again a moment later, and a pair of big glasses glimmered into the study.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Whiz!"

"Yoooop!"

A cushion caught Billy Bunter under his fat chin. He departed, in a great hurry, with a loud yell; and Study No. 6 sat down to tea without any further importunities from the amateur philanthropist.

CHAPTER 3.

The Fund.

"PHEW!"

"What the merry dickens?"

"Bunter again!"

The Terrible Three of the Shelf strolled into the junior Common-room after prep, and found six or seven fellows gathered round a paper that was pinned on the wall.

They joined the circle in some curiosity. Some of the fellows were grinning.

The paper was evidently a notice, and the "fist" on it was recognisable as that of Bunter of the Fourth. It was rather a remarkable announcement. It ran:

"OFFICIAL NOTICE!"

A Friendly Fund will be opened for the Benefit of a Member of the Fourth Form who is Down on his Luck. All members of the Lower School are requested to contribute according to their ability. Large contributions thankfully received, also small ones and others.

Three prominent members of the Lower School are requested to offer their services on a committee to control

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

the fund, and see that all is above-board and fare and square.

Chairman of the Fund,
W. G. BUNTER.

"Well, my only hat!" said Tom Merry.

"Just a little bit too palpable, I think," remarked Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "I fancy it's some more of Bunter's little tricks for raising the wind. Who's the chap who's down on his luck, anyhow?"

"Echo answers, who?"

"Is it you, Gussy?" inquired Lowther, as Arthur Augustus came in with his chums.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the "notiss."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that question as asinine, Lowthah!" he said severely. "If I were hard up I should certainly not allow Buntah to waise a fund for me."

"Fancy Bunter starting as a giddy philanthropist!" remarked Manners. "But it's rather odd that he's asking for a committee. He will have to give the chap's name to the committee."

"Bai Jove! That is vewy twue. It weally looks as if the mattah may be genuine, atfah all."

"Bosh!" said Grundy of the Shell.

"Only a trick."

"Well, I must say it looks like one of Bunter's little games to me," said Tom Merry. "But if there's a School House chap in a scrape—"

"Might be young Brooke," said Mellish. "Brooke's hard up."

"Brooke's not friendly with Bunter."

"Might be Trimble," said Manners. "Trimble's always hard up, owing to the big cheques not arriving from Trimble Hall."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Here he is! Trimble, you fat boulder, is Bunter raising a fund for your behalf?"

Baggy Trimble started at the notice on the wall.

"No jolly fear!" he answered. "Besides, I'm not down on my luck. I had a tenner from Trimble Hall this afternoon."

"Let's see it," suggested Wilkins.

"I left it in my study," said Trimble carelessly.

"You left a ten-pound note in your study!" howled Wilkins.

"Why not? Tenners ain't so much to me as they are to you, Wilkins!" said Trimble loftily.

And Baggy Trimble rolled away with that remark.

"Hallo! Here's Bunter!"

Bunter of the Fourth came into the Common-room, and all eyes were turned upon him at once.

Bunter's various devices for raising the wind were pretty well known in the Lower School at St. Jim's by this time, and the general impression was that the "Friendly Fund" was one more of them. But Bunter at least was taking his fund seriously.

He had a large coffee-tin in his hand, which had once held two pounds of coffee. Now, apparently, it was to hold the fund—if any.

The lid was fastened down with wire, and in the middle of it a slit had been made for coins to pass through.

Unheeding the general stare, Bunter came in, and placed the coffee-tin on the table in a prominent position. Then he blinked round at the juniors.

"I say, you fellows, you've seen the notice?" he asked.

"We've seen it, you fraud!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

"What's that tin for?" demanded Tom Merry.

"That's for the fund," said Bunter calmly. "Gold, notes, or silver, it's all the same to me. I want to raise ten pounds, if possible, to get that poor chap out of a scrape."

"What poor chap?" asked Talbot.

Bunter jerked a fat thumb towards the notice.

"Chap mentioned there," he answered.

"Name?" said a dozen voices.

Bunter shook his head.

"I can't make the poor chap the talk of the school," he said. "I've undertaken to help him in this scrape out of kind-heartedness. But, as some chaps may be suspicious—"

"Ha, ha! That's very likely!" roared Grundy.

"As some chaps may be suspicious," pursued the fat junior calmly, "a committee of three will be selected to see fair play all round. The name of the chap will be given to the committee."

"Bai Jove! That sounds all wight."

"I should be very glad if D'Arcy would serve on the committee," said Bunter. "I think D'Arcy's word would be good enough for anybody present."

"I trust so!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Tom Merry, too, as the head of the Shell," said Bunter. "And I think there ought to be a New House chap—say Figgins. If they agree to serve on the committee, the name will be given to them, and they can tell the fellows generally whether the matter's genuine or not."

"My hat!" said Tom.

The juniors looked puzzled.

If the affair was spoof it was really a puzzle, for a committee composed of Tom Merry, George Figgins, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would certainly have made short work of any attempt at a swindle. A committee like that would assuredly have inspired confidence in all the Lower School.

"You mean that?" asked Manners.

"Certainly!"

"You'll give the chap's name to the committee, and they'll tell the fellows that they're satisfied—if they are?"

"Yes."

"Well, it beats me!" said Lowther.

"Blessed if I don't begin to think that Bunter's telling the truth for once!"

"It weally looks like it. It is vewy surpwisin'."

Billy Bunter pointed to the coffee-tin.

"There's the collecting-box," he said, with dignity. "You can see that it's fastened down. It won't be opened except in the presence of the committee, when appointed. It's standing there for contributions. All present are requested to contribute according to their ability."

And Bunter rolled away to an armchair and sat down, leaving the coffee-tin ready for business.

CHAPTER 4.

Something Like a Collection!

CLINK!

Clink!

Bunter was apparently deep in a book, but his little round eyes glistened behind his spectacles as he heard that clinking from the direction of the table.

He gave a hurried blink round.

Monty Lowther's hand was hovering over the coffee-tin, and a third clink sounded as he drew it away.

A fat grin of satisfaction came over Bunter's face. His fund was starting, at all events.

Clink, clink!

Manners was the next.

The committee of three had not yet been appointed, and so far there was only Bunter's word for the genuineness of the appeal; the name of the distressful member of the Fourth was still unknown. It looked as if the juniors had decided to accept Bunter's word.

Tom Merry strolled up to the table, and passed his hand over the tin. Clink, clink!

The expression on Bunter's fat face was growing almost beatific as he listened to that musical sound.

Jack Blake came up to the coffee-tin, paused, and glanced round at Bunter.

"I say, Bunter! Currency notes will be all right in the tin, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

There was a rustling of paper as Blake squeezed his contribution through the slit in the lid.

The example of the leaders of the School House juniors was generally followed.

Junior after junior strolled up to the table, and each visit to the coffee-tin was accompanied by a clinking of metal or a rustling of paper.

Bunter assumed a look of indifference, as far as he could; but he could not disguise the satisfaction in his fat face, or the greedy glimmer in his eyes. But he kept up a great appearance of reading his book sedately while the clinking and the rustling continued.

Even Baggy Trimble and Percy Mellish came up to the tin. They were Bunter's study-mates in the Fourth, and certainly had never before displayed any great confidence in W. G. B. Now they rolled up with the rest, the example of the Terrible Three apparently being contagious.

Levison, Clive, and Cardew, of the Fourth came along, and Cardew called out to the fat junior.

"Bunter, old nut, any objection to banknotes?"

"None at all, old fellow," said Bunter affectionately.

"It won't be overdoin' it?" asked Cardew.

"The more the merrier."

"All serene, then."

And there was a rustle.

Figgins of the New House looked in at the doorway. He had come over to speak to Tom Merry about football, and he seemed rather surprised to find the School House juniors gathered, with smiling faces, round a coffee-tin on the table.

"Hallo! What's the game?" asked Figgins. "Conjuring trick?"

"Ha, ha! No. Friendly fund for a fellow down on his luck," answered Tom Merry cheerily. "Bunter's raising it."

"Who's the fellow?"

"Bunter hasn't told us."

Figgins jumped.

"You're shelling out without knowing whom it's for?" he ejaculated.

"Well, Bunter says—"

"Yaas, wathah! Buntah says—"

"Well, you must be a set of duffers!" commented George Figgins with great candour. "I'd trust Bunter with a bad farthing, I think—not with more than that."

"Oh, really Figgins—"

"You must be a lot of chumps!" said Figgins, puzzled.

"Some fellows can trust a fellow, Figgins," said Bunter, with dignity. "Some fellows ain't suspicious, you know. The best thing you can do is to apologise, and put half-a-crown in the collecting-box!"

"Catch me!" said Figgins disdainfully.

"Better put something in," murmured Tom Merry, in Figgins' ear. "Any old thing will do, you know."

Figgins started and grinned. Then he came up to the table. "Oh, all right!" he said. "I'll do the same as you've done!"

"Clink, clink!" "That's right, Figgy," said Bunter encouragingly. "I'll bring the tin over to the New House to-morrow to make a collection. You can tell the fellows to have their bobs ready."

"I'll tell 'em to be ready," said Figgins.

"That's right!" Figgins chatted with the Terrible Three for some time about football, while the juniors visited the collecting-tin every few minutes, and the contributions continued to clink into it. Before leaving, the New House fellows made another visit to the tin, and there was another clink. Figgins, for reasons best known to himself, was grinning when he took his departure.

Bunter glanced at the clock. It was getting towards bed-time, and the fat junior rose from his armchair at last, perhaps thinking it would only be judicious to get the tin away before a prefect came in.

"Not closing the fund already, Bunter?" asked Blake.

"Oh, no!" said Bunter promptly. "The fund is still open. If you've got another half-crown—"

"Ahem! Not just at present."

"Wathah, not!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"The fund's still open, of course, and to-morrow the tin will be here again," said Bunter. "I'm going to lock it safe up in my desk for the night—"

"Without opening it?" said Blake.

"Oh, of course!"

"It's only to be opened in the presence of the mewwy committee, you know," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Certainly," assented Bunter.

"Perhaps it would be better for somebody else to take charge of the tin," suggested Monty Lowther gravely. "Of course, we all trust Bunter—"

"Of course!"

"But the founder of a fund ought to be like Mrs. Caesar, above suspicion."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Billy Bunter clutched the tin.

"I say, you fellows, I'm taking charge of the fund!" he said warmly. "If you think I shall open this tin—"

"Better lock it up in our study," said Lowther, shaking his head.

"If you think you are going to get a chance to bone anything out of this tin, Lowther—"

"What?" yelled Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean—"

"You fat villain!" roared Lowther. "I'll—"

"I—I mean, I don't want to give you the trouble of looking after it!" gasped the Owl of Greyfriars. "That's what I really meant to say. I'm going to lock it up safe in my desk till to-morrow."

And Bunter rolled towards the door with the tin under his fat arm. It felt quite heavy, and it clinked as he moved. "We'll see you lock it up," said Tom Merry.

"If you can't trust me, Merry—"

"My dear man, we trust you as far as we can see you, or nearly," answered the captain of the Shell. "Why shouldn't we see you lock it up?"

"You—you see—" stammered Bunter.

"Yes, we're going to see!" assented Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bunter blinked at the juniors as a whole party of them accompanied him from the Common-room. Considering that the contents of the tin were for a distressful person unknown, and not for

Bunter, there really seemed no reason why the fat junior should want to carry the tin off by himself. But it was pretty clear that he did, all the same.

But what Bunter wanted, and what Bunter was going to get, were quite different things. The School House juniors showed no intention of leaving him alone with the precious tin.

Bunter's fat fact was rather peculiar in expression as he ascended the staircase in numerous company.

He arrived at Study No. 2 in the Fourth, and Bunter rolled in, followed by his study-mates, Trimble and Mellish, the Terrible Three, and the chums of Study No. 6, and then Roylance, and Grundy, and Gorse, and Wilkins, and Gunn, and Levison, and Clive, and Cardew, and Tompkins, and Mulvaney, minor, till there was scarcely standing-room in the study. And outside, in the passage, Talbot, and Skimpole, and

"But—but the study's a bit crowded, and—and—"

"Give Bunter plenty of room!" said Tom Merry. "This is your desk, I think, Bunter?"

"Ye-es!"

"Well, lock up the vast wealth. Kildare will be along soon to rush us off to the dorm."

"The—the fact is, I—I've got some lines to do—"

"Then lock up the tin sharp, and do them."

Bunter breathed hard. He had a strong suspicion that when the tin was locked up the key would be demanded for safe keeping. And for some reason of his own—not hard to guess—he didn't want the collecting-tin thus placed out of his reach.

"I—I think I'll go over to the New House first, and get some more contri-



ALL DONATIONS—

Kangaroo, and Glyn, and Dase, and Kerruish, and Julian, and several more fellows crowded. It was quite a representative gathering of the Lower School, all smiling, and all keenly interested in Bunter and the coffee-tin.

Bunter blinked at the crowd, and the crowd smiled at Bunter, and there was a pause.

CHAPTER 4.

Under Lock and Key!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"I—I say—"

"Room for Bunter," said Tom Merry. "Don't crowd Bunter! He wants to lock up the collecting-box."

"And we want to see him do it!"

grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Go ahead, Buntah!"

"I—I'm much obliged to you fellows,"

stammered Bunter. "It—it's kind of you to—"

to see me home like this—"

"We mean to be kind, old nut," said

Cardew.

butions in the tin!" he stammered at last.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Too late!" he answered. "The House is closed—it's a quarter-past nine."

"As he jolly well knows!" growled George Alfred Grundy.

"Oh, really, Grundy—"

"Bai Jove! It weally begins to look, Buntah, as if you wish to get out of our sight with that collectin'-tin!"

"I hope you don't suppose I would spend anything out of that tin, D'Arcy?" said the Owl of Greyfriars, with a great deal of dignity.

"I am suah you will nevaah do anything of the sort, deah boy, even if it isn't locked up," answered Arthur Augustus.

"We trust you to that extent,"

assented Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"Let's see the tin locked up, all the

same," said Blake. "Nothing like

making assurance doubly sure."

"Lock it up, Bunter."

Bunter breathed hard, and went to his desk, tin in hand. There was evidently nothing else to be done. To insist upon retaining the collecting-tin in his own hands was to give himself away—if he had not done it already.

He opened the lid of his desk, placed the tin inside, and closed the lid down, under a crowd of eyes.

"Now lock it!" said Manners.

Bunter felt in his pockets.

"I—I seem to have lost the key—"

"Then it had better be looked up in another study," said Tom Merry decidedly.

"I—I've found the key!"

"Good! Go ahead!"

Bunter turned the key in the lock of the desk with a grunt. Although the juniors declared that they could trust him not to spend anything that was in the tin, they were really acting as if they distrusted him a little—which was very painful to William George Bunter.

"Now, you're satisfied that it's safe, I hope?" he said, slipping the key into his pocket.

"Certainly!" said Tom. "Give me the key."

"What-at?"

"Getting deaf? Give me the key!" said the captain of the Shell.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Hand it over!"

"Who's in charge of this fund, I'd like to know?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "You're taking too jolly much on yourself, Tom Merry! I shall keep charge of the key, for safety!"

"Safety's the question," agreed Tom. "Hand it over! Hand it to anybody you like—but hand it over!"

"I refuse!" said Bunter loftily. "I decline to be treated with distrust! I shall be obliged if you fellows will leave my study!"

"What do you want to keep the key for?" grinned Blake. "Suppose you walked in your sleep, and came down from the dorm—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I refuse to trust anybody with the key!" said Bunter firmly. "I don't really think you would burgle my desk, Tom Merry—"

"Eh?"

"But I think it would be wrong to place temptation in your way. So I shall keep the key."

"My hat!"

"Pway allow me to make a suggestion," said Arthur Augustus. "Let's ask Kildare to mind the key till to-morrow."

"Hear, hear!"

"Perhaps Bunter doesn't want to place temptation in Kildare's way?" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, you fellows, you know—"

"Take him by the neck," said Tom. "We'll give Kildare the key. Hold him upside-down and shake him till it drops out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bunter jumped back.

"I—I say, you fellows, I don't mind Kildare having the key. The—fact is, I was going to suggest it!" he howled. "Then hand it over," said Tom.

Unwillingly, as if it were an obstinate tooth he was extracting, Bunter drew the key from his pocket. Tom Merry took possession of it.

"You can see me hand this to Kildare," he said. "No deception, gentlemen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Tom Merry, and blinked at his desk. The treasure-tin was out of his reach now—unless he broke open the desk. As it was his own

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

desk, he was entitled to do that, of course, if he liked. It was evidently necessary, however, to do it in strict secrecy.

"I say, you fellows, now you've got the key you can clear off," he said un- easily.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"Dorm in five minutes," he remarked. "Let's stay here and chat with Bunter till Kildare yells for us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I've got some lines to do!"

gasped the unhappy Owl.

"Then I'll tell you what," said Tom. "After Bunter's stood up for a chap—name unknown—who's in distress, and raised a fund for him, we ought to help Bunter. Let's all lend a hand with his lines till bed-time."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Many hands make light work," continued Tom. "How do you like the idea, Bunter? Don't trouble to thank us—let's begin."

Bunter did not look as if he was going to thank anybody. He looked more inclined to bite Tom Merry than to thank him.

"Look here—" he began.

"Not much time to lose," said Tom.

"Let's get on with those lines."

"On—on second thoughts, I sha'n't do them till to-morrow!" stammered Bunter. "I—I wish you'd leave me alone for a bit. I've got something to think out."

"A problem?" asked Lowther.

"Ye-es, exactly!"

"Such as how to open a desk without a key?"

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

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

Reilly of the Fourth came along the passage.

"Dorm!" he called out. "Sure, Kildare's after ye!"

"Hallo! Bed-time!" said Tom regretfully. "We sha'n't be able to help you with your lines now, Bunter—or in thinking out your problem. Come on, old fellow!"

"I—I'm coming!"

"Well, come, then!"

"You needn't wait for me!"

"My dear chap, after the splendid way you've shown up, helping unknown chaps in distress, I'd wait for you any length of time!" answered the captain of the Shell affably. "As long as you like!"

"Now, then!" It was the voice of Kildare of the Sixth in the passage. "Off to the dorm, you young sweeps! What are you up to?"

The grinning juniors crowded away, Tom Merry with his arm linked in Bunter's. The fat junior murmured something under his breath. There was no help for it, and he had to leave the study, and the treasure-tin reposed in the locked desk—so near, and yet so far.

CHAPTER 5.

In the Dead of Night!

"BEASTS!"

"Eh? What did you say, Bunter?"

"N-u-nothing! Lemme alone, and get along to your dorm, Merry!" grunted the Owl of Greyfriars sulkily.

"Right ho! Hadn't you better see me hand Kildare the key first?"

Another grunt from Bunter. He did not seem interested in the key, now that it had passed irrevocably out of his possession.

But Tom Merry was a fellow of his word. He stopped Kildare in the dormitory corridor.

"Kildare—" he began.

"Get a move on!" answered the prefect.

"Would you mind keeping this key for us till to-morrow?" asked Tom. "We've got something locked up in a desk, and we want the key kept safe, if you wouldn't mind."

"Oh, all right!" said Kildare, with a smile. And he took the key and slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket. "Now, get along!"

The Shell and Fourth separated, and went to their respective quarters.

Bunter cast a longing blink down the stairs, but it was impossible to get away just then, and he went into the Fourth Form dormitory with the rest of the School House Fourth.

His fat face was clouded.

"Anythin' w'ong, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus kindly as the fat junior kicked off his boots.

"No!" snapped Bunter.

"You were lookin' wathah wowwied!"

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"The tin's safe, Bunter, old bean!" remarked Cardew. "Kildare will keep the key all right!"

Grunt!

"Perhaps that's what's worrying him!" suggested Levison. And there was a laugh.

Kildare was looking after the Shell, and Darrel came to see lights out for the Fourth. The juniors bolted into bed as the prefect looked in, and Darrel called out to the Owl of Greyfriars.

"Bunter! You're only half undressed! What the thump do you mean?"

"Eh? I—I—"

"Some game on in this dormitory—what?" asked Darrel sharply. "Mind, if there's any turning out after lights out there'll be trouble. Finish undressing at once, Bunter, and sharp!"

The Owl obeyed, with a black brow.

Darrel turned the lights out, and retired; and there was a chuckle in the dormitory after the door had closed.

"Why weren't you going to undress, Bunter?" chirruped Trimble.

No reply.

"Thinking of getting up again, and sneaking down to the study?" chuckled Mellish.

"Oh, really, Mellish—"

"Oh, Bunter wouldn't do that!" said Blake. "Besides, the desk's locked, and Kildare's got the key. The tin's all right!"

"Of course it is!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "You don't think I'd bust open my own desk, do you? Of course, it might happen. Some fellow might do such a thing for—for a lark! I wouldn't!"

"Of course, if we found in the morning it had been busted open, we should conclude that some fellow had done it for a lark!" remarked Jack Blake gravely.

"Of course!" said Bunter.

"Being such innocent, unsuspicious youths, we should be bound to think so!" remarked Cardew. "Who'd suspect Bunter of sneaking down in the middle of the night to burgle his own desk?"

"Who, indeed?" chuckled Roylance.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Billy Bunter did not speak again. He was not, for once, anxious to get to sleep; but he was very anxious for the other fellows to get to sleep.

The buzz of voices died away in the dormitory at last, and the last good-nights were exchanged. Silence settled down on the big room, and never had silence seemed so blessed to the fat ears of Billy Bunter.

He waited with suppressed impatience for the minutes to pass. But as ten chimed out from the clock-tower he sat up in bed.

"You fellows asleep?" he breathed.

Silence.
"You fellows asleep?" repeated Bunter in a slightly louder tone.

"Hallo! Who's jawing?"
It was Jack Blake's voice.
Bunter's eyes glittered in the darkness. Blake was evidently still awake.

"That you, Bunter?"
"No!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm asleep! I mean, I just woke up! I—I've got a toothache!"

"Poor old chap!" said Blake sympathetically. "How lucky I'm awake! I'll get you something for it—"

"It's all right—it's gone now!" gasped Bunter.

"Sure it's gone?"

"Yes."
"I shouldn't mind sitting up with you a bit, if you liked."

Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose.

"You beast! I mean, I—I don't want you to! I only want you to go to sleep, you—"

"Eh?"
"I—I mean, I don't want to disturb you—"

"Oh, all right! Good-night, Bunt!"
"Good-night!" said Bunter, between his teeth.

The fat junior began to snore. But his snore did not last very long. It was about a quarter of an hour later that he sat up once more.

"You asleep, Blake?"

"Hallo!"
"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Bunter, dismayed at finding Jack Blake still out of the arms of Morpheus.

"What's that?" yawned Blake.

"N-n-nothing!"

"Still got the toothache?"

"Nunno!"

"What is it this time, old chap?" asked Blake quite affectionately. "Would you like me to sit up with you?"

"No!" howled Bunter.

"Bai Jove! There seems to be a fearful lot of talkin' goin' on!" came a sleepy voice from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bed. "Anythin' happenin'?"

"Poor old Bunter can't sleep!" explained Jack Blake. "I'm thinking of sitting up and talking to the poor fellow!"

"Bai Jove! That is weally a vewy kind kind thought, Blake! I will sit up, too! What shall we talk about, Buntah?"

There was a subdued chuckle from some of the other beds.

It dawned upon Billy Bunter that a good many of the Fourth were still awake. W. G. Bunter was not very acute, but he began to guess that the Fourth-Formers were remaining awake on purpose.

"Oh, you beasts!" murmured Bunter. "Did you speak, Bunt?"

Snore!

"Hallo, he's gone to sleep, after all!" said Herries. "Are you asleep, Bunter?"

Snore!

"Bai Jove! I think we can settle down now, deah boys!"

Another chuckle, and then silence. Billy Bunter lay in bed in a Hunnish frame of mind. He was exceedingly sleepy himself, and he knew that he had to wait a long time now. It would never do to make a move while the Fourth were wakeful, and any more alarm might make them really suspicious—if they weren't so already!

Bunter resolved to wait. He had his own reasons for wanting to open the treasure-tin in strict privacy, and that could not be done on the morrow.

In spite of himself, his eyes closed; but the treasure-tin was on his mind, and he dreamed of it—of clinking gold and silver and rustling notes—and he awoke with it still in his thoughts.

A clock was striking in the distance.

The fat junior rubbed his sleepy eyes and counted the strokes.

Eleven!

It was pretty certain that the Fourth Form were asleep by that time. But Billy Bunter did not risk speaking again. He crept cautiously out of bed, grabbed up his clothes in the dark, and began to dress quietly.

Then he crept away in his socks towards the door.

His heart was thumping hard, and he listened anxiously as he crept on; but there was no sound in the dormitory save that of steady breathing.

His fat hand was on the door at last, and he drew it open.

Outside, the corridor lay black and silent.

The fat junior crept out, and drew the door softly shut behind him. It was "all clear" at last!

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CHAPTER 6.

Treasure-Trove!

BILLY BUNTER crept down the stairs, feeling his way in the darkness. Here and there a glimmering window gave a glimpse of starlight, but fortunately the fat junior knew the way well enough to find it in the dark. He bumped several times on banisters and corners, and yelped suppressed yelps, but he arrived in the Fourth Form passage at last.

Softly he opened the door of Study No. 2. From somewhere below the big staircase there was a glimmer of subdued lights, but in the junior quarters all was dark. Bunter knew his study when he came to it, and he crept in, closed the door, and scratched a match.

He blinked at the window, to ascertain that it was covered, and then lighted a candle-end.

Then he grinned.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "Just as if

a chap couldn't be trusted! I'll show 'em!"

He blinked at the desk for several minutes. It was locked, and the key was in Kildre's waistcoat-pocket, so there was no opening it by the usual method. The only way to get at the collecting-tin was by forcing the lid up, and that meant cracking the lock. Bunter had a natural disinclination to damaging his own property, and he regretted that he had not allowed the tin to be locked in somebody else's desk. That would not have mattered so much. But there was no help for it now, and he made up his mind to it.

He tried the poker first. He bent the poker and squeezed his fat thumb, and yelped; but the desk remained at it was before. Then he hunted through the study for a chisel, and found one belonging to Mellish.

He squeezed the chisel under the lid with some difficulty, and began to pric it up.

Creak! Crack!

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter.

In the stillness the cracking of the desk sounded alarmingly loud. He ceased his efforts, and remained listening for several minutes with thumping heart. He was feeling a good deal like a burglar, as a matter of fact, and he felt the nervousness natural to a person taking up that honourable profession for the first time.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter. "Fancy giving a chap all this trouble to get at his own fund! Awful beasts! I really wish I'd stayed at Greyfriars, only they're just as beastly there, if not more so. I dare say Wally's having no end of a good time, while I'm put to all this trouble. Beasts!"

He shoved in the chisel again at last, and there was another loud crack.

But Bunter was in deadly earnest now, and, heedless of the cracking of the desk, he persisted in his labours.

There was a louder crack, but it was not caused by the bursting of the lock. It was the lid of the desk that split across.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

His efforts were detracting considerably from the value of the desk.

"Beasts! Rotters! Somebody ought to pay me for this! But I know jolly well they won't—sure of it! Beasts!"

Crack!

Half the lid flew up at last, and that was enough for the amateur cracksmen.

He thrust a fat hand into the desk and dragged out the clinking tin of contributions.

Heedless of the damaged desk now, Bunter proceeded to jerk off the wire that fastened down the lid of the coffee-tin.

The incessant clinking that accompanied the movements of the tin was music to the fat ears of the Owl of Greyfriars.

How much was there in it?

He hardly dared to guess; his imagination was running riot. The tin was heavy—very heavy. Even if all the contributions had been coppers the collection was worth a great deal. But, of course, it wasn't all coppers. He had heard fellows speaking of half-crowns, shillings, florins. And hadn't he been asked whether currency notes and banknotes would do? Why, the smallest denomination of banknotes was five pounds! And if there was only one fiver—

Bunter was dazzled at the bare idea.

A fiver and some currency notes, as well as a regular heap of silver, large and small! It was dazzling! The generosity of the St. Jim's juniors equalled their simplicity in placing such sums in the hands of Bunter on his bare word! And on the morrow there was a

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

fresh harvest to be gathered—the New House was untouched so far, with the exception of Figgins!

In his mind's eye Bunter could see himself fairly rolling in banknotes, currency notes, silver, and copper!

His fat hands trembled on the tin.

The lid was wired down very securely, and he jerked and jabbed at the wire with feverish impatience in the glimmer of the candle-light.

The lid came off at last.

With a gasp of relief the fat junior up-ended the coffee-tin on the table and poured out the contents.

And then—

Three trouser-buttons rolled out first, much to Bunter's surprise. They were followed by a regular cascade!

But alas for Bunter's rosy visions of wealth!

It was not a cascade of gold and silver, or even copper, not a flood of banknotes and currency notes!

Not at all!

Trouser-buttons and shirt-buttons and waistcoat-buttons, all kinds of buttons; broken studs, small pebbles, pen-nibs that had seen service; such was the treasure that poured out of the tin under Bunter's astounded eyes!

There were coins, certainly—two! One was a defaced halfpenny, and the other a seriously damaged farthing! Neither was likely to be accepted at face value by anyone but a blind beggar. And they were the only specimens of the coinage of the realm.

Bunter blinked at the heap on the table. He blinked into the tin. Then he gasped.

"Oh! Beasts! Oh! Ow! Ah! Rotters!"

The fat junior seemed almost petrified.

That was his treasure!

That was the great collection that had been made for the Friendly Fund for the distressful unknown. The musical clinking he had heard in the Common-room had been caused by buttons and pebbles dropping through the slit in the tin. And the rustling banknotes? Fragments of crumpled old envelopes mingled with the assortment of rubbish—not fivers, not currency notes, only wastepaper!

The fat junior could scarcely believe his eyes or his spectacles. What had that scene in his study meant? Why hadn't the beasts let him open the tin when there was only this rubbish in it?

The explanation dawned on him at last.

His podgy leg had been pulled all the time. The juniors had known perfectly well that he would creep down from the dormitory in the night and burgle his own desk—evidently.

He had stayed awake, and Blake had stayed awake to keep him on tenter-hooks. He had crept down from bed at a late hour, he had smashed his own desk, and now—

Now he was rewarded with a unique collection of buttons!

He realised at last that he had been the victim of a joke planned among all the juniors. Even Trimble and Mellish had been in the game; Tom Merry & Co., and all the rest, had been in it, to pull his egregious leg as a punishment for his "spool."

And the burgled desk remained as a proof that he had intended to bag the loot all the time. And there wasn't any loot to bag!

Bunter's feelings were too deep for words.

He remained staring at the weird collection for a good five minutes, the candle-light flickering on his fat, dismayed face.

There was a crash at last as he pitched the tin and the collection into the grate.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

That was the end of his dreams of wealth.

He blew out the candle and crept from the study. His eyes were gleaming behind his spectacles as he crept back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

He rolled into the dormitory, and closed the door after him with less caution than before. There wasn't much need for caution now.

"Hallo!" There was a yawn from Blake's bed. "What's the row?"

The closing of the door had awakened Jack Blake. He sat up in bed, peering into the darkness.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

"That you, Bunt?"

"Beast!"

"Have you got up in the middle of the night to call me names?"

"Beast!"

"Been downstairs?" chuckled Blake. "Been looking after the giddy treasure?"

"Beast!"

"Is it still safe?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled into bed in a furious temper, and it was some time before he went to sleep. Blake chuckled sleepily, and turned his head on his pillow, and slumbered peacefully. And as Bunter at last sank into the arms of Morpheus, the last murmured word on his lips was:

"Beasts!"

CHAPTER 7.

Called To Account!

TOM MERRY & CO. were down bright and early in the morning. And as soon as they were down the Terrible Three made their way to Study No. 2 in the Fourth. And at the sight of the broken desk there was a roar of laughter in No. 2.

"Bunter's been at it!" grinned Lowther. "Poor old Bunter! And there's the contributions in the grate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder what the dear boy felt like when he found that collection?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was quite a crowd in Study No. 2 before breakfast. All the juniors were interested in the burgled desk. And howls of laughter rang along the passage, and reached Billy Bunter's ears when he rolled down, last of the Lower School, as usual.

The Owl of Greyfriars did not approach the study. There was nothing to interest him there. At the breakfast-table that morning Bunter's fat face wore a frown of wrath and indignation, while the other fellows were smiling sweetly.

After breakfast the fat junior rolled out into the quad, still frowning. And he was followed by a dozen fellows, who surrounded him under the elms. Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder.

"Do you know what's happened, Bunter?" he demanded.

"Oh, rats!" snapped Bunter.

"We've been to your study."

"Br-r-r!"

"And your desk's been burgled," said Tom Merry. "It's seriously damaged. The lid's split into pieces."

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The desk is vevy seriously injahed, Buntah. Did you know?"

"I suppose you're going to the House-master about it?" said Lowther.

Bunter started.

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"You see, the collection's gone," said Tom Merry. "I don't know how much it was, but the tin was heavy, and it

must have been a large sum. It can't be allowed to disappear like this. The burglar must be found."

"Wha-a-a?"

"As chairman of the fund you are responsible for the money," said Tom. "The best thing is to report the loss to Mr. Railton at once."

"Eh?"

"Suppose there was about twenty pounds—"

"There wasn't!" howled Bunter.

"How do you know?" asked Tom.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Do you mean to say that it was you burgled your own desk, and that you were after the collection?" demanded the captain of the Shell.

"Nunno!" gasped Bunter. "Certainly not! I—I slept like a top all night. I certainly never went down."

"You didn't mean to bag the collection?"

"Of—of course not."

"Well, somebody's done it," said Tom. "And, as there may have been thirty or forty pounds, the police will have to be called in."

"The—the pip-pip-police?"

"Certainly. The burglar can't be allowed to get off with all that swag."

"Wathah not."

Bunter blinked speechlessly at the juniors.

"You're responsible, you know," said Tom, shaking a forefinger at him. "The money was in your desk."

"There wasn't any money!" shrieked Bunter.

"I mean the collection."

"There wasn't any collection, only buttons and things."

Tom Merry shook his head, and there was a grave shaking of heads all round Bunter. Apparently the School House juniors were not prepared to accept that statement.

"That chicken won't fight, Bunter," said Jack Blake. "What did you look up the tin so carefully for if there were only buttons in it?"

"I—I thought—"

"It's pretty plain," said Tom gravely. "Somebody went down in the night and bagged the money, and chucked all those buttons about to cover up his tracks. Camouflage, you know. Now, Bunter's welcome to the buttons—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But the money's got to be found. The question is, who bagged it? Are you sure you never went down in the night, Bunter?"

"Ye-es, certainly!" gasped Bunter.

"Then it was somebody else, and he's got to be found. The money must be recovered."

"You know there wasn't any money!" shrieked Bunter.

"Eh? How should I know?"

"You didn't put any in, you beast!"

"How do you know?"

"I—I—I—"

"Yes, if you didn't open the tin, how do you know there wasn't any money in it?" giggled Baggy Trimble.

"I—I—I—"

"Better all go to the Housemaster and report this," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "d-d-don't you tell Railton anything! He might think there really was some money, and that it had been taken."

"Well, wasn't there?" demanded Tom. "Only the fellow who burgled the desk and opened the tin can know for certain. Come on, you chaps, and we'll catch Railton before classes."

"Hold on!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't mind admitting that I—I opened the—the tin!"

"Why, you said you didn't!"
 "D-d-did I!"
 "Yaas, wathah, Buntah!"
 "I—I—I—I meant that I did. That's what I really meant to say all along!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, when you said you didn't you meant that you did? Very lucid," said Tom Merry. "So you burgled the desk?"

"I—I suppose I can bust my own desk if I like?"

"And you opened the tin?"

"Ye-es."

"And took out the money?"

"There wasn't any money!" yelled Bunter. "Only that rubbish—buttons and things. You know jolly well there was only rubbish, as you put it into the tin, you beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a laughing matter," said Tom Merry. "Bunter seems to have bagged the fund, which was for the benefit of an unknown person in distress. He spins us a yarn about buttons and things, but we're not bound to believe it. We must see that Bunter accounts for the money."

"Yes, rather!"

"How much was there, Bunter?"

"There wasn't any!" shrieked Bunter. "You know there wasn't."

"What we know isn't evidence. Better take him to Railton," said Tom. "He can explain to Railton. It looks very black to me."

"Vewy black indeed!"

"It's a serious delinquency under the Expense to the Realm Act," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Bunter is liable, I think, to about a hundred years' imprisonment. We are bound to hand him over to justice."

"Come on, Bunter!"

"I—I say, you fellows," howled Bunter in great alarm, "there wasn't any money! I—I'm ready to swear—"

"Bai Jove! You had better not begin swearin' heah, Buntah!"

"Bunter! You shocking reprobate!"

"I—I don't mean swear, you dummy—I mean swear—"

"Come along, and don't swear, unless you want to be bumped."

"I swear there wasn't any money in the tin!" howled Bunter desperately. "You know there wasn't, you beasts! How could there be money in it, when you only put in old buttons and waste-paper, you rotters?"

"That's your story!" said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "I'm afraid it won't wash, Bunter!"

"Wathah not, Buntah! A fellow who waives a fund is bound to account for the money. If you had opened the tin in the presence of witnesses it would have been all wight. Why didn't you?"

"I—I—I—"

"That shows he meant to bag the dibs," said Monty Lowther. "Well, he meant to, and he did it! Clear as day-light!"

"I—I didn't mean to!" wailed Bunter.

"I—I only got at the tin to—see that it was all safe. I—I thought perhaps Kildare might—might be tempted to—to bag it, you know, as he had the key. So—I—I went down to see if it was safe! That's all!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I—I say, you fellows, that's true, you know! You know what a truthful chap I am!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That statement was too much for Tom Merry & Co. They roared. Billy Bunter blinked at them furiously.

"You beasts, I believe you know I'd go down and—open the tin, and that's why you made me lock it up, just to pull my leg—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Rotters!"

The chapel bells were ringing, and Bunter was left in peace at last. He rolled away in great wrath and indignation.

"Bai Jove! I fancy Buntah will be fed up with waisin' funds for bluein' in the tuckshop!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally think we have heard the last of that remarkable stunt."

But in that prediction the swell of St. Jim's did not display his usual judgment. The last of Bunter's "stunt" had by no means been heard.

CHAPTER 8.

Success in Sight.

TOM MERRY & CO. were playing football that afternoon, and they had not much attention to bestow upon Bunter of the Fourth. The fat junior gave them many reproachful

Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh? What the thump do you mean by two to one?" he asked peevishly.

"Goals!" explained Lowther.

"Who's talking about goals?"

"Haven't you come to inquire the result of the match?" asked Lowther affably.

Snort!

"Tommy took the first goal," continued Lowther cheerily. "It was rather good. Gussy sent him a pass—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Kerr nearly got the ball, but Tommy was too quick for him. He fairly slammed it in—"

"I say—"

"They had Fatty Wynn in goal, but he was beaten all the way—missed the ball by inches," said Lowther. "He's a good man, but we were too much for him. That was the first goal, Bunter."

"Look here—"

"Figgins took the next for the New House. It was pretty smart of Figgy,



WHAT HAS TRIMBLE HEARD?

blinks, which they did not heed—in fact, did not notice. After dinner the Owl of Greyfriars tackled the Terrible Three, but they escaped him, and Bunter followed them down to the football-ground in a disconsolate mood. He remained there to watch the beginning of a House match, but House matches did not interest him, and he rolled away again. While the footer was going on, however, he found a little harmless and necessary entertainment in looking into study capboards, and was lucky enough to find a cake in Study No. 6, and a bag of jam-tarts in Tom Merry's study. The cake and the jam-tarts consoled him a little for the failure of the Friendly Fund, but that fund was still in his mind.

The chums of the Shell did not see Bunter again till tea-time. They were at tea after the football match when the fat junior presented himself in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

"Two to one!" said Monty Lowther, as soon as the Owl came in.

for he had Manners and Digby almost on his neck—"

"I haven't come here to talk football!" howled Bunter.

"You've come here to hear me talk it? Right-ho! Figgins put the ball in, and Herries let him do it. I'm going to speak to Study No. 6 about that. I think even Study No. 6 will admit that Herries ought not to have done it."

"I say, Tom Merry—"

"But he did," continued Lowther. "He let the ball through, and the New House scored one. But then—"

"Will you give a fellow a chance to speak?" shrieked Bunter. "I've come here to tell you—"

"Aren't you interested in the House match?"

"No, I'm not, you ass!"

"Oh, you will be when you've heard all about it!" said Lowther. "I'm going to tell you about the second goal for the School House—"

"I won't listen! I—"

"Gussy had the ball—"

"Look here—"

"He played it over the line, and, of course, that was just like Gussy: to let it go into touch instead of sending it in. I told him so afterwards, and he was quite ratty. He said it was the game to play it into touch just then. Didn't he, you chaps?"

"He did!" grinned Tom Merry and Manners.

"Will you listen to me?" raved Bunter.

"But he ought to have sent it in to Tommy," said Lowther, shaking his head. "What they don't know about footer in Study No. 6 would fill volumes and volumes. New House got it from the chuck-in, you see, and they came on like giants refreshed with Government ale—"

"I say—"

"And fairly rushed our goal," continued Lowther, smiling blandly at the excited Owl. "There was me on my back—there was Manners star-gazing as usual—"

"Look here!" interrupted Manners warmly.

"There was Blake wandering around like a lost sheep, and Gussy hunting for his eyeglass. Luckily, Herries played up in goal, and sent the leather out, and Kangaroo cleared to midfield—"

"You silly chump!" raved Bunter. "I tell you—"

"Then we were fairly on it," said Lowther—"right on the ball you know, and buzzing it up the field like one o'clock. Where were the New House forwards? Nowhere! Where were their halves? Same place. Where were their backs—"

Slam!

Bunter departed from the study, closing the door after him with a terrific crash.

"Hallo! Bunter don't seem to want to know about that last goal!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell went on with their tea. In a few minutes the door opened again, and Bunter looked in.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Where were their backs?" continued Monty Lowther, as if there had been no interruption. "Nowhere—simply nowhere. We came through them like—"

"Lowther, you silly idiot—"

"A knife through cheese. Figgins was on his back, contemplating the mysteries of the firmament—"

I—I—

"Kerr was too soon, and Redfern was too late. Right up to the New House goal—"

"You—you—"

"And Tommy slammed in the ball!" said Lowther.

"Well, and it was goal," said Bunter. "Glad you've come to the end. Now, I say, you fellows—"

"But it wasn't goal yet," said Lowther cheerfully. "Fatty Wynn buzzed his napper on the ball, and it came out again—right out—"

"I say—"

"And Thompson cleared nearly to midfield. But that gave Kangaroo a chance. He was on the ball like lightning—"

Slam!

"Dear me!" said Lowther, as the door closed after Bunter once more. "Bunter will never hear how we got that goal at this rate. I wonder if he's coming in again?"

But the fat junior did not come in again. He had realised that so long as he was in Study No. 10 Lowther would continue to give him football news. And THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

so he rolled away in search of other victims, and the Terrible Three had their tea in peace.

The fat junior rolled away to Study No. 6 in the Fourth. He found Blake & Co. there, and they smiled as the fat face showed in the doorway.

"Just finished!" said Blake. "Not a crumb! Not a merry morsel! Too late, my fat pippin! Sold again!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Pewwaps, Buntah knows what became of our cake?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Cake!" said Bunter vaguely.

"There is a cake missin' from our cupboard, Buntah."

"Some of the New House have been raiding you, I expect," said Bunter calmly. "I don't know anything about it. Measly small cake it was, too! I say, you fellows, I've come here to speak to you about the fund."

"You've found the missing money?" asked Blake.

"There wasn't any money!" roared Bunter. "You know there wasn't! Now, look here, you fellows, I'm not going to start that tin again. It only leads fellows to play rotten, practical jokes. But the fund's important. I've decided to appoint the committee at once. When the committee gets to work I think the fellows will have the decency to put in something better than trouser-buttons."

"You fat ass!" said Jack Blake in measured tones. "Are you keeping up that yarn? Do you think anybody believes you you were raising the wind for a chap in distress? There isn't such a chap! You've invented him to spoof us out of our dubs! Got that?"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, with a serious shake of the head. "It goes against the grain to suspect any fellow of such wotton twicks; but weally, Buntah, it is quite palpable. You are a feahful spoofah, and the chap you wefer to does not exist at all. It is all spoof from beginnin' to end!"

Bunter blinked at the chums of the Fourth with an expression more of sorrow than of anger.

"I'm sorry to see that you can't trust me," he said. "I don't know what I've done to deserve this. You know me to be an honourable chap—always candid and above-board, and strictly truthful and—"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"But as there seems a lot of suspicion about I'm appointing a committee, and the matter will be taken entirely out of my hands. I should think that would satisfy you. A collecting-box will be placed in my study, and fellows can put in what they like. All particulars will be given to the committee, and their word will be good enough for all the chaps, I hope. Will you act on the committee, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the fat junior in perplexity.

"Weally, Buntah, you are awah that I do not cweedit your statement," he said. "I am sowway to say it, but I do not take your word. I do not believe in the existence of the chap you wefer to."

"Suppose I give you his name?"

"Then I should weserve the wight to ask him personally whethah your statement is cowwect."

"That's agreed, of course!"

"Oh, that's agreed, is it?" exclaimed Blake in surprise.

"Certainly!"

"Look here, you ass, we don't believe there's any chap in the Fourth on his uppers, as you say, and we don't believe you'd try to help him if there was!" growled Herries.

"Bai Jove! If Buntah gives us the name and particulars we can prove that for ourselves!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I think even Buntah ought to have a chance. If there is a chap in this House in feahful bad luck I am willin' to back up, for one!"

"So are we all!" growled Blake. "But there isn't!"

"Pway give us the chap's name, Buntah, and we will see."

"The name can only be given to the committee. The chap is in awfully low water, but he's very proud," said Bunter. "He doesn't want his troubles to be the talk of the school. He's frightfully hard up, and he's got some debts to pay, and the committee are welcome to make all inquiries. I can't say more than that."

Study No. 6 stared at Bunter. He had succeeded in impressing them at last. For the first time they began to think there might be something in Bunter's claim that he was trying to raise funds for a St. Jim's fellow in distress. Certainly, if the name was given to the committee, and they questioned the fellow concerned personally, there did not seem much room for "spoof."

"My hat!" said Blake. "Is it barely possible that the fat boulder is telling the truth, after all?"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"It would be wevery we remarkable, deah boys, but it is barely poss. Buntah, I am willin' to act on the committee on condish that I am at liberty to make every investigation into your statement, and prove that mattahs are as you desceibe, befoah anythin' is contributed to the fund."

"Well, that's all right," assented Blake.

"Done!" said Bunter at once.

"Bai Jove! If Buntah agwees to that it must be all wight, and we have been wathah too distwustful," said Arthur Augustus. "I will speak to Tom Mewwy and Figgins at once, and the committee can get to work."

The swell of St. Jim's was convinced at last. Billy Bunter followed him from the study with a fat grin of satisfaction on his face. He felt that success was at hand, and the next collection would be something getter than wastepaper and trouser-buttons!

CHAPTER 9.

What's in a Name?

"PWAY be sewious, deah boys!"

The committee had met.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had called on Tom Merry, and then on Figgins of the New House, and both those cheery youths had yielded to the persuasions of the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus had pointed out to them that, if Bunter acted up to the conditions agreed upon, the matter must be fair and square; and Tom Merry and Figgys, after some thought, agreed to that. Not that they expected Bunter to fulfil the conditions. They were prepared for some fresh "wriggle" on the part of the Owl.

However, the committee of three met in the Hobby Club-room in the School House, prepared to give Bunter a hearing. Tom Merry and Figgins were in a humorous mood, certainly; and it was in vain that D'Arcy begged them to be serious. They couldn't quite take the Owl seriously.

"You see, deah boys," continued Arthur Augustus, "if Buntah is weally in earnest, there is some chap we know who is in a difficult posish, and Buntah appears to be tryin' to help him out. That is wathah decent of Buntah, if it is the case."

"If!" chuckled Figgins.

"Buntah is goin' to give us all the particulars—"

"My dear chap, he's going to try to spoof us!" said Tom. "Still, we'll give him a chance. Hallo! Here he is!"

Bunter came in, and closed the door after him. A number of curious juniors were in the passage outside. But it was agreed that the committee should meet in strict private. If Tom Merry, Figgins, and D'Arcy backed up Bunter's claim, that was good enough for the St. Jim's juniors. It was certain that in that case contributions would flow in for a deserving case of distress. So the juniors remained outside the Hobby Club-room; very curious to hear the finding of the committee of three.

Bunter blinked at the three juniors sitting at the big table, and Arthur Augustus kept up an expression of proper gravity; while Tom and Figgins smiled.

"I say, you fellows—" began Bunter.

Tom Merry held up his finger.

"Let's have this plain, Bunter," he said. "You say there's a chap in the School House who's awfully hard up?"

"Yes,"
 "And he's too proud to ask for help, and so on, and doesn't want all the fellows to know?"

"That's it."
 "But he's agreeable to a fund being raised to help him out?"

"Yes, he's willing."
 "He owes money, I think you said?"

"Yes."
 "Not gamblin' debts, or anythin' of that kind?" asked Arthur Augustus rather hastily.

"Certainly not!"
 "Then how did he get into debt?" asked Figgins.

"It was really through being generous to other fellows, and not thinking about his own interests."

"Well," said Tom, "if it's a genuine case, there's plenty of fellows ready to lend a hand. Prove it to us, and the Lower School will take our word, without the poor chap's name being generally known and bandied about. But I may as well warn you that we shall want it quite clear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we're waiting."
 "Hold on a minute, though!" said Bunter cautiously. "If I tell you the name, it's understood that you don't give it away. You won't mention it to a single soul?"

"Of course not. That's understood."

"That's a promise?" asked Bunter.

"Honour bright!" said the committee, with one voice.

"But we must see the chap," added Figgins.

"You'll see him, of course. And when the chap has satisfied you that he's stony broke, and owes money, you'll tell the fellows, without mentioning the chap's name to them?"

"That's the programme," assented Tom. "You're jolly long-winded, Bunter. Let's get to the point."

"Well, a fellow can't be too careful," said Bunter sagely. "I don't want any misunderstandings afterwards. You'll tell the fellows that the chap is stony, and owes money, and is in need of help—if I satisfy you on all these points?"

"Certainly."

"Right-ho, then!"
 "Bai Jove, you don't seem in a hawwy, Bunter! What's the chap's name?"

Bunter drew a deep breath.
 "I dare say it will surprise you," he said.

"Is it old Bwooke?" asked D'Arcy.

"Oh, no!"

"Mulvaney minah, or Tompkins?"

"No."

"Then I weally cannot guess!"

"Don't tell us who it isn't; tell us who it is!" said Figgins practically. "What's the name, Bunter? Speak up!"

And Bunter spoke up.

"Bunter!" he said

"Wha-a-at?"

"W. G. Bunter!" said the fat junior, blinking at the astonished committee.

"That's the name!"

"Eh? That's your name!"

"Yes—I'm the chap."

"You're the chap?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Yes."

Tom Merry and Figgins looked blankly at the Owl. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked perplexed.

"I do not quite undahstand you, Buntah. You are the chap who is waisin' the fund for a fellow who is hard up?"

"That's right," said Bunter, with a nod. "And the fellow who is hard up is W. G. Bunter—that's me!"

"Gweat Scott! Do you mean that you are waisin' the fund for yourself because you are hard up and owe money?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, comprehending at last.

"You've got it!"

"Why, you spoofin', deceivin' wottah—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"
 "You—you—you blessed fat worm!" exclaimed Figgins. "Pulling our leg all the time. I knew there wasn't such a fellow as you mentioned—"

"But there is!" howled Bunter. "I'm the fellow."

"You said it was a chap in the Fourth who was in a scrape for money—"

"Well, I'm the Fourth, ain't I?" demanded Bunter.

"I—I suppose you are," admitted Figgins. "But—but—but you led us to suppose it was another chap you were befriending."

"Yaas, wathah, you spoofah!"

"Not at all!" said Bunter airily. "I said a chap in the Fourth. Well, I'm a chap in the Fourth. I said he was hard up. Well, I'm hard up—stony, in fact! I said he owed money. Well, I owe money, right and left. Why, I owe you fellows yourselves money. I said I thought he deserved to be helped. Well, I jolly well think I deserve to be helped. Isn't that clear?"

The committee blinked at him.

"Clear!" stuttered Tom Merry. "Oh, yes, it's clear enough—clear spoof."

"Not at all. I said I'd give you the fellow's name in private. Well, I've given it—my own name," said Bunter, with refreshing coolness. "I've fulfilled all the conditions, haven't I?"

"Bai Jove!"

"If you thought I was speaking of some other chap, that's your look-out! I only said a chap, and I'm a chap, I suppose," said Bunter. "Now I want you fellows to back me up in raising the fund—"

"B-b-back you up?"

"Certainly, according to agreement," said Bunter firmly.

"We haven't agreed—"

"You jolly well have," said Bunter warmly. "I hope you fellows are not going back on your word. You ought to be strictly honourable, like me!"

"Like you! My word!"

"You'll tell the fellows you know the chap's name, and it's true that he's hard up, and owes money, and wants help!" said Bunter firmly. "You won't mention his name, as you promised. I hold you to your word."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I'll call the fellows in now," said Bunter. "You chaps do as you've

promised—that's all I ask. I picked out you three because I could rely on your keeping a promise."

"You spoofing worm!" howled Figgins. "Why, you've tricked us into this—spoofed us into backing you up to get money out of the fellows!"

"You've promised."

"But—but you—"

"I hope you're going to keep your promise, Figgins," said Bunter with dignity. "I despise a fellow who breaks his word. But I'm sure I can rely on you."

Figgins gasped.

The Owl of the Fourth rolled away to the door and opened it. There was an expectant crowd outside, curious to hear the committee's verdict.

"I say, you fellows, come in," said Bunter. "It's all right. I've told the committee, and they're satisfied."

The juniors crowded into the room. They found the committee sitting at the table with extraordinary expressions on their faces. How to deal with Bunter as he deserved, without breaking the promise he had so cunningly extracted from them, was a problem the committee had not been able to solve.

Certainly they could not break their word, even to a fellow like Bunter; but the only alternative seemed to be to help the fat junior in extracting cash from the other fellows on the supposition that it was for a schoolfellow in distress—when in reality Bunter himself was in distress, and his distress was the result of reckless expenditure in the tuckshop! Bunter had certainly led them to suppose that he was taking up the sad case of some other fellow, but they could not say that he had exactly said so. They could not say that the distressful youth did not exist—when Bunter announced himself as the distressful youth.

The committee felt cornered, and what to do was a mystery to them. And meanwhile a dozen fellows were asking for information.

CHAPTER 10.

Trimble Trumps the Trick!

"WELL?"

"Go it, Tommy!"

"Is it all right?"

The committee blinked, without answering.

"I say, you fellows, it's all right," said Bunter confidently. "I've satisfied the committee."

"I don't see why they're sitting like a lot of moulting fowls!" remarked Blake. "Why can't they speak?" He tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder. "Wake up, my son!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"Wake up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, is it all right? Has Bunter been telling the truth for once?" asked Blake. "Has he given you the chap's name?"

"Yaas," gasped Arthur Augustus. "He—ho has certainly given us a name."

"Is it a chap in the Fourth?"

"Oh, yaas!"

"Has he satisfied you that the chap's really hard up?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And that he owes money?"

"Yaas, certainly."

"Well, that seems clear enough," said Blake. "You two fellows say the same as Gussy?"

"Oh, yes!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Ye-es!" murmured Figgins.

"You seem rather worried about it," said Blake. "Is it a serious matter, after all?"

"Yes—not. Oh, dear!" gasped Tom.

"Well, if Bunter's satisfied you three

chaps that it's all right, we needn't have any doubt about it that I know of," said Blake. "All contributions will be made to the committee, and by them handed to the chap in question, of course?"

"I was going to suggest that!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Oh, you awful wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! What are you calling Bunter names for?" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise.

"Oh, deah! I—I say—"

"Well, what do you say?"

"N-nothing" stammered Arthur Augustus.

There was nothing he could say, without infringing upon the promise solemnly made to the Owl of the Fourth. There was no help for it; the committee were bound to silence.

"Well, I don't see any need to jaw Bunter, Gussy," said Kangaroo. "It seems to me he's acting decently for once. He's taken a lot of trouble in the matter, and the money doesn't go into his hands—the committee are going to collect it."

"We really seem to have done Bunter a bit of an injustice," remarked Talbot of the Shell. "It's his own fault, perhaps; but in this case he seems to be doing a really decent thing."

"Who said the age of miracles was past?" murmured Cardew of the Fourth.

"Well, as the matter's settled to the satisfaction of the committee, we may as well shell out," said Sidney Clive. "I'm ready, for one. If there's a School House chap in a real fix, it won't hurt us to help him out a bit. Anybody got a hat?"

"Oh, deah!" murmured Arthur Augustus helplessly.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We—we know the chap's name and all that, but—but we don't advise you to hand out any tin."

"Why not, if the chap's really in bad want of money?" asked Blake. "It would be only friendly."

"Ye-es; but—"

"You mean it's his own fault—he's been careless, or extravagant, or something? Still, dash it all, if there's a School House fellow on the rocks, we can help him off, I suppose? It won't come to much each. I'm starting it with a bob," said Blake.

"He, he, he!"

There was a general jump as that weird cackling came from under the big table at which the committee sat.

"He, he, he!"

The committee pushed back their chairs. They had had no suspicion that there was anyone hidden under the big table. Neither had Billy Bunter had any suspicion of that awkward fact; and his eyes almost bulged through his spectacles as he heard the fat chuckle from below.

"Hallo! What an earth's that?" exclaimed Blake.

"Bai Jove! There's somebody undah the table—"

"Trimble!" yelled Herries, as a podgy face grinned out from under the big table. "You fat rotter, you've been listening!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter.

"He, he, he!" giggled Baggy Trimble. "I heard it all! He, he, he!"

"You—you heard—" stammered Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! He, he, he—Yaroooh!" roared Baggy, as Jack Blake rushed upon him and seized him by the collar, and dragged him out with a bump.

"Yoop! Leggo! Yaroooh!"

"Turn him out!" yelled Bunter, in

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

alarm. "Don't let him talk! Turn him out! I say, you fellows—"

"Trimble, you cad!" exclaimed Blake.

"You hid yourself there to spy, and to hear what Bunter told the committee!"

"Yow-ow! Yes! Owl! Leggo!"

"Then you heard the name?" shouted Figgins.

"Yoop! Yes! Leggo, Blake!"

Draggimoff!" howled Trimble. "I

heard the name right enough! He, he!

Yaroooh! I'll tell all you fellows—"

"You won't!" exclaimed Blake angrily.

"Do you think we're a lot of inquisitive worms like you, you podgy bouncer?"

The name's known to the committee, and if you breathe a word of what you've spied out you'll get scalped!"

"But I—I say you don't understand!" gasped Trimble. "Leggo!"

"Kick him out!" howled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, get on with the contribution! Turn that rotter out! Besides,

he won't tell the truth. You know what an awful fibber he is! If he mentions my name, don't take any notice of him."

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

"It's his own name!" shrieked Trimble. "It's all spoof! He's the

chap who's hard up, Bunter—he's the fellow! It was his own name he gave

the committee, after making them promise not to tell anybody. The fund's

for himself!"

"What?"

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It really looks as if the secret is out now, deah-boys!"

It did.

Like a flash Bunter's amazing spoof dawned upon the juniors as Trimble

yelled out his discovery.

Jack Blake released the triumphant Baggy, and turned towards Bunter. The Owl of the Fourth backed away.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he stammered.

"So that's it!" said Blake, in measured tones. "That's why the committee are looking like a set of silly owls. You've been spoofing all the time, and there isn't any fellow in distress at all!"

"Yes, there is!" gasped Bunter. "I've given the committee the name—"

"His own name!" yelled Trimble.

"Your own name, you spoofing worm?" roared Blake.

"The—the fact is, I—I—I— Certainly not!" gasped Bunter, as the juniors closed round him wrathfully.

"Nothing of the kind! The—the name can't be mentioned, of course—it's a dead secret."

"His own name!" shrieked Trimble.

"He made them promise not to tell, and then said his own name! Spoofing all the time! He, he! He's the fellow

who's hard up! He, he! The fund's for himself! He, he, he!"

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter. "I shouldn't take any notice of that chap Trimble—he's untruthful. Look here, I'm ready to take the contributions. What are you giving, Blake?"

"I'm giving you a jolly good hiding!" answered Blake.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Give the howlid spoofah a faithful thwashin'!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, waving his

eyeglass excitedly. "He fairly had us corned, you know. It is vevy lucky that that wottah Twimble was undah the table. He is a spyin' beast, but it is

vevy lucky, all the same! Give him a faithful thwashin', deah boys!"

"Yaroooh! Fire! Murder! Thieves! Help!" shrieked Bunter.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yoop! Help! Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump!

"Oh, crikey! I—I say, you fellows, it was only a joke, you know!" howled Bunter. "Of—of course, I wouldn't

have kept any of the tin. I—I wouldn't have touched it, you know. Yaroooh! I'm too honourable! Help!"

Bump!

"Now kick him out!" shouted Blake.

"All together, and kick your hardest!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter escaped from the Hobby Club-room at last, dusty and dishevelled, breathless and perspiring, and fled for his life. He flew to Study No. 2, turned the key in the lock, and sank into a chair gasping. Once more his little schemes

had gone awry, and this time it was undoubtedly the finish of the "fund." By whatever means the Owl of Greyfriars succeeded in raising the wind in future, it certainly would not be by that means.

That evening there were sounds of strife in Study No. 2. Billy Bunter was not a fighting-man as a rule, but this time his wrath overflowed, and Baggy Trimble had the benefit of it. A crowd gathered round the doorway to see the scrap; but fortunately the two fat juniors were too afraid of one another to do much damage. When the Terrible Three were at supper in their study, the door opened and a sorrowful fat face looked in.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Get out!" roared Tom Merry.

"Oh, really, Merry! I say, I—I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and—and—there won't be any fund now, you know. I—I say, if you could lend me ten bob till my postal-order comes—"

"My dear chap," said Lowther heartily, "come right in! I never finished telling you about the footer match. After Fatty Wynn fisted out the ball—"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Tom Merry got his head to it, and in it went again. Then—"

"You silly ass! I—"

"Right in it went, and Wynn fisted it, and then—Hallo! You're not going, Bunter?"

But Bunter was gone!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"BUNTER ON THE WAR-PATH!"—by Martin Clifford.)

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted by—

James Savage, 17, Monks Close Road, Carlisle—with reader well up in photography, 17-20.

Miss Ada Cummings, 19, Invermay Road, Launceston, Tasmania, Australia—with girl readers anywhere.

J. H. Evans, 85, Dudley Road, Lye, Stourbridge, Worcestershire—with readers overseas.

Miss Alice Locke, 169, Queen's Road, Sutton, Surrey—with girl readers anywhere.

Harry E. Nance, 15, Button Lane, Moorhead, Sheffield—aged 16—wants to hear from a reader of 16, interested in drawing, etc., in Sheffield.

Secretary of new club, 324, Grosvenor Road, Hanwell, W.7, wants readers to serve on committee.

W. R. Dunn, 189, Marton Road, Middlesbrough, Yorks, wants members for club; stamped envelope: magazine, 4d.

C. Lockenby, 3, Horsfield Street, Middlesbrough, Yorks, wants readers for magazine—4d.

Stanley W. Diaper, 123, Fortune Green Road, West Hampstead, London, N.W.6, wants to hear from his chum, John Godfrey Robinson, last heard of at Hilda House, 10, The Steyne, Acton, London, W.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 37.—Stanley Gibson.

STANLEY is his baptismal name, though in the Third they always call him Curly. His hair earned him that nickname, as may easily be guessed. No one would think of christening a kid Curly.

Gibson is one of the little band of six who follow Wally D'Arcy. It is not only those six who recognise Wally as leader and war-chief, of course; but those six—Levison minor, Manners minor, Frayne, Hobbs, Jameson, and Gibson—are his chums.

Wally himself, Frank Levison, and Reggie Manners have already been dealt with in this series. Joe Frayne will come before long; there is quite a lot to tell about him. Hobbs and Jameson may be included before we have finished, though in their cases there is less to be told.

I should say that, on the whole, Curly Gibson is the weakest of the seven. I do not mean so much physically weak, though most of them are sturdier than he is, but weak in character. He is one of those youngsters who might easily go wrong if he got friendly with the wrong sort of fellow—Piggott, for instance. Curly has gone wrong before now, though not irretrievably. But he is not alone in that. Reggie Manners has outdone him in some ways, if not in all.

Curly got into trouble over a stamp once. It might have turned out very badly for him, though he had not the slightest felonious intention. He merely acted foolishly. It was in the days when the Merry Hobby Club was in full swing. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was among the St. Jim's stamp collectors then, and Arthur Augustus wanted a green Ceylon, 1863. He was on the track of one. Baker of the Sixth had a specimen. Curly also had one, and wanted to sell it to Gussy. But Curly's was the sea-green variety, whereas Baker's was emerald-green. It was emerald-green Gussy wanted, the market value of that being somewhere round thirty shillings, while the other was not worth more than a fifth as much—a matter of their comparative rarity, of course.

Gibson had given eight shillings for the stamp he had, and he was naturally anxious to compare it with the other. D'Arcy did a deal with Baker, and the rare stamp took its place in his album, which was deposited with other treasures in the Hobby Club room.

As he wanted to see the two stamps side by side, Curly should have asked D'Arcy to let him compare them. But there his weakness came in. He is rather a sensitive little chap; and he had already shown his stamp to the swell of the Fourth, who had been quite sure that it was not the valuable issue. Gibson was not satisfied about that; but he did not feel like telling D'Arcy so. He tried, instead, to get a peep at the stamp on the sly.

Nothing badly wrong in that, except that doing things on the sly seldom pays. But Curly messed things up rather badly. Tom Merry and Manners, taking a stroll in the quad, saw a light in the Hobby Club room, where no light should have been, and investigated. They found Curly there. Curly did not explain properly his presence in the room; he was nervous about it.

Next morning Manners found him down early, with a paper which his Form-master had banned—with quite insufficient reason. The Shell fellow got a snapshot of him. Then he asked him questions, and Curly again showed nervousness. Mr. Quince came along, and confiscated the number of "Pluck"—with the stamp inside it! Curly had concealed it there from the eyes of Manners.

Then it was discovered that the stamp had disappeared from the album. Curly naturally fell under suspicion. He was subjected to examination, and confessed that he had taken the rare Ceylon. He had only taken it to compare it with his own specimen. But now he had lost it. He did not know where it had gone. Manners' questioning had confused him, and he had slipped it into the paper without quite realising what he was doing.

Nobody wanted to think Curly a thief; but if the affair had come to the ears of those in authority there was a very grave danger of his being taken for one, and punished—perhaps by expulsion. Curly had wild notions of

running away; but Tom Merry made him promise not to do that.

Manners cleared it up after all. The snapshot he had taken showed the stamp lying beside the copy of "Pluck," and Manners' theory was that it had been taken up with the paper and was probably still in it.

Five of the Shell and Fourth waited in deputation upon Mr. Quince, and the paper was produced by that gentleman. Manners was proved to be right, and Curly was cleared!

The one other affair in which Curly took a prominent part was that connected with the activities of Mr. Jex, of "Jex's World-Wide Emporium." It may be doubted whether the Emporium had any existence outside the imagination of Mr. Jex; but that gentleman himself was very real—and at the same time very false. Mr. Jex, to put the matter plainly, was a complete rogue—"A Regular Rascal," to quote the title of the story which told of his precious activities.



Mr. Jex did business in rotten goods on the instalment system. It was not Curly Gibson alone who fell into his trap. Fellows older than the Third-Former, and, in their own estimation, much wiser and wiser, were also taken in.

Kerr, always cautious, shook his red head, and resisted all the blandishments of Mr. Jex. Figgins bought a fountain-pen, Manners some films, Monty Lowther a camera, D'Arcy a bike, Tom Merry a football, Fatty Wynn a punching-ball, Herries a fishing-rod, Blake a pair of footer-boots, and George Gore a cigarette-case.

Mr. Jex pointed out how very easy his terms were. They might regard Jonas Jex, he said, somewhat in the light of a fairy prince out of the "Arabian Nights," who would supply them with all they wanted just for the asking. It was really more for advertisement than anything else that he did it.

They may not all have believed that; but Curly Gibson, very young and trusting, fully believed that he had bought at least five pounds' worth of stamps, with an album thrown in, for two pounds ten shillings, pay-

able at the easy rate of ninepence per week. Kerr had pointed out that the price of D'Arcy's bike—twelve guineas—would take something like five years to pay off. Fifty shillings, at ninepence a week, would take well over a year; but, of course, Curly did not mind that—that was the business of Mr. Jonas Jex.

If Mr. Jex came out of the "Arabian Nights" at all, he was one of the Forty Thieves, and very far from being a fairy prince. Every thing he sold was a dud. Blake's boots were made chiefly of brown paper. Tom Merry's football refused to be pumped hard, and gave up the ghost after it had been used for a few minutes. The gilt came off the gold nib of Figgys' fountain-pen. There was something radically wrong with Fatty's punching-ball. The weight of a hat was too much for Herries' fishing-rod; but, of course, Herries should not have been fishing for hats. And, anyway, it was just as well he found out before he tried to land a really big fish with it. As for the camera and the films, which was the worse it was quite impossible to decide.

And all these things had been discovered before the chums of the Shell and Fourth found out about Curly's stamp album.

He wanted to sell some of the stamps to D'Arcy, and he was ready to explain everything—including the extremely liberal terms of Mr. Jex—to anyone who cared to listen. The album contained a Cape of Good Hope stamp that represented fifteen shillings by itself. There was also a set of Jahalbad stamps worth a couple of pounds anywhere; and a lot of the others were worth a shilling or eightpence apiece.

Curly believed it all. He explained to the Terrible Three, with rather a superior smile, that it was the advertisement Mr. Jex got that paid him. Tom said that if the advertisement brought Jex customers like Curly, who paid fifty shillings for what was worth twice the money, Jex must be going to live on his losses. And by this time Tom Merry & Co. were sure that it was not exactly on his losses that Mr. Jonas Jex lived.

The superior judgment of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pronounced all the supposedly valuable stamps in Curly's albums to be rank forgeries; only the common varieties—the sort one gets on cheap sheets, such as the beginner buys—were genuine.

Gussy is not an infallible critic—of stamps or of anything—but there is no room for doubt that he was right this time. Curly was badly cut up. His heart was in the stamp hobby; and now he saw himself tied down to paying half his pocket-money for the next year or more for a collection of rubbish.

Tom Merry & Co. took back the rubbish they had bought, and refused to pay any further instalments on it, though Tom let the rascally Jex have a P.O. for ten shillings as a kind of compromise. But little Gibson did not know enough to get out of his bad bargain in this way.

Nobody had read the agreements signed. They were printed in small type; they did not seem to matter; and Mr. Jex had not pressed anyone to read them. But now Curly found that by the agreement he had made himself liable to pay the full amount at once. Any default in instalment payments brought this about; and Curly, with Mr. Jex's consent, had paid only eightpence, instead of ninepence, on the last Saturday's settlement.

Jex frightened the small boy almost out of his senses. All sorts of things might happen to him if he did not pay up immediately. He might have to go to a reformatory; he would have a writ served upon him.

But he did worse than threaten. He tempted. Some of his schemes had turned out badly, and he wanted to get away with what cash he could collect. So, seeing that Curly was rather a weak youngster, he suggested to him that there were ways of getting money in a place like St. Jim's, where a good many fellows had plenty. He even pointed out from whom the cash might be borrowed.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 577.

without the lender's knowing anything about it—Gussy was the victim indicated.

Curly did not palter for a moment with that idea. But he went away from the interview in great distress, believing that if he did not pay ten shillings on the following Saturday nothing short of ruin was in store for him.

He could not pay when Saturday came; and he was in the deadliest of funks. He fancied that Jex was lying in wait for him, which was likely enough; and that behind Jex were all the vague and unknown powers of the law, which was absurd, for the swindler dared not attempt to use the law to further his ends. Knox ordered Curly off to Rycombe to get some stamps. The youngster dared not go. He tried to get the stamps from Tom Merry. Tom saw that he was in trouble, and questioned him closely.

Then it all came out. With sobs and tears

Curly told his tale of woe. The Terrible Three heard, and made up their minds what to do. Gore was also in the toils; a cigarette-case is not the kind of thing that a fellow wants talked about to the Head. They helped Gore out; and Gore joined with them in vengeance upon Mr. Jonas Jex. The aid of Blake & Co. and of Figgins & Co. was also invoked. And Mr. Jex was given a warm time. Treacle and feathers came into it. The Head also came into it. But Dr. Holmes had learned something about Mr. Jex's activities, and apparently he considered treacle and feathers quite the right prescription in such a case, for the juniors were never brought to book for what they had done to the rascal.

Since then I can recall no story in which Curly Gibson's part was at all a leading one. But he has shared in all the japes and all the trials of Wally & Co. Upon him has descended the wrath of Mr. Selby. He has

helped in rags against the Fourth and Shell. He has endured the bullying of such fellows as Knox and Cutts. He has shared in the friendship of cousin Ethel, whom all the seven regard as someone quite outside the ordinary run of girls, and far superior. The general attitude of male thirteen towards girls of any age is a long way off being one of worship, or even of admiration; but Wally & Co. are quite sure that cousin Ethel is more than "all right."

Curly is a good little fellow, and in Wally's circle is likely enough to develop some of the strength that he needs. He is no dufer at games, and can run well. Among his gifts perhaps the chief is a real singing voice. He rather fancies himself as a poet, but his efforts thus far in that direction have not gone much farther than rhymes of the old comic valentine type; and these are hardly poetry.



NOT GUILTY! By Robert Arthur Digby.

EVERYBODY knows that we fellows in the Fourth have precious little to do with the Third Form kids; but two of us have minors among the fags—the one-and-only Gussy and Levison—and we do get to hear things through them. That's how it was I heard about the squabble over Manners minor. Part of the thrilling story—as the newspapers say—came through Wally D'Arcy; but most of it through Frank Levison, who has a greater respect for his major's opinion than Wally has. And I don't wonder!

I happened to be standing at the door of the School House, talking to Gussy and Herrie, when Wally and his crowd hove in sight.

"You chaps wait here a moment," Manners minor said. "I just want to pop into the Form-room and bag my knife. Old Selby put it in his desk when he took it away from me yesterday, and I don't believe the old Hun looked up."

"Weally, Weggie—" began Arthur Augustus.

But Reggie took no notice. Somehow or other the kids don't take much notice of what Gussy says.

"Right-ho, old bean!" answered Wally. And Reggie hurried off.

"Hurry up, or you'll meet old Selby coming in!" Frank Levison warned him.

Manners minor was going into the Form-room when he ran against young Harvey.

"Hallo! What are you up to, kid?" he asked, severely.

"Nothing!" replied Harvey, with a guilty dash.

"Well, don't do it again, that's all!" said Reggie. "I believe you've been at old Selby's desk."

Harvey did not answer that. He bolted.

"I wonder what the young boulder's been doing?" muttered Reggie to himself.

But he was not long in doubt. As he raised the lid a big frog jumped up almost into his face.

He gave a smothered yell, caught it, and put it back again.

He did not take his knife. Reggie is a young ass, but he has his moments of discretion.

But, just as he reached the door, footsteps sounded outside, and as he thrust it open he fell slap into old Selby's arms.

"Good gracious, Manners minor, what are you about?" snapped the Form-master.

"I'm sorry, sir! I—I—" stammered Reggie.

"You will do me a hundred lines by this evening!" the pleasant old bird rapped out.

"And do try to behave a little less like a young hoodigan!"

Mr. Selby's face was even more sour than usual as he passed on to his desk. And that's saying something. Selby would really be the outside edge if we didn't know Ratty!

"What's up with the old Hun?" asked Wally, in a whisper, as the Third went to their places.

Nobody knew but Reggie; and he did not answer.

Mr. Selby opened his desk, and gave a regular shriek.

He had sighted froggy!

"There is a boy in this Form who has been guilty of a most outrageous action!" thundered the tyrant.

As he spoke he held up between his thumb and forefinger the frog. His face was all puckered up, and his nose was elevated. No one could see why he should make all that fuss. Frogs don't smell, and why should anyone mind them?

"The boy who put this loathsome reptile into my desk evidently imagines himself a humorist," went on the Form-master. "It is, however, in the least the kind of joke that I can appreciate. The possessor of this depraved and obscene sense of humour will stand out at once!"

He moved, with all the dignity he could muster up, to the window, raised the sash, and flung poor froggy into the quad.

A gasp went round the Form. But the possessor of the depraved sense of humour sat tight.

"Manners minor, as you lack the elementary moral decency to own up to this impudent action, I must call upon you to come here!"

Wally groaned. Reggie had been threatening for the last day or two to get his own back on Selby, who had dropped on to him continually of late. And Reggie had been to the desk just before classes. Wally could see no loophole for him.

Very unwillingly Manners minor arose, and slowly he made his way to the rostrum. He could see that the case looked black against him. He cast round in his mind for some method of clearing himself without involving Harvey. But it was not easy.

"You were leaving the room as I entered, Manners. What had you been doing here?" rasped out Selby.

"I came in for something I had left," muttered Reggie.

"What had you left, Manners?"

"You took a knife away from me yesterday," replied Reggie sulkily.

"And you dared to come into this room for the deliberate purpose of rifling my desk?"

"I—I—it's my knife, sir!" protested Reggie.

"I don't call getting it back rifling your desk!"

"But the knife is still here!"

Mr. Selby paused. But Reggie had nothing to say. He wished now that he had taken the knife.

"Did you or did you not put that loathsome reptile in my desk?" hissed the master.

"Speak up, boy! No prevarication will avail you!"

"No, sir, I didn't!" mumbled Reggie, flushing furiously.

"Do you know who was responsible for that impudent action?"

Selby is a rare chap for cross examination. He would have made quite a hefty Grand Inquisitor.

Reggie was silent. He did not actually know; but he felt that there was no real doubt about it.

The tyrant saw that either he was guilty or else he was shielding someone. His next question was right off the rails. But Selby does that kind of thing.

"Was D'Arcy minor the culprit?" he asked.

"No, sir, D'Arcy minor wasn't—at least, I don't think so. But how should I know?" said Reggie, with a burst of defiance.

"I will not brook your impudence, Manners! Will you tell me the truth, or must I punish the whole Form? Hold out your hand!"

Reggie breathed a sigh of relief. The kid can take a caning all right, and he fancied that was going to settle the matter.

Swish, swish!

"Go back to your place, Manners, and take five hundred lines, instead of the hundred I have already given you for your rough and impolite behaviours!"

Manners minor returned to his place with an angry and sullen countenance.

Harvey was the culprit, he knew; but it was plain that Harvey had not the pluck to acknowledge his offence, and clear the rest.

And, of course, Reggie could not give Harvey away.

None of the Form had heard just what had passed between Reggie and Selby. The master had spoken in an angry, hissing whisper, and Reggie had mumbled, as is his way when he is sulky.

But Wally had caught his own name. He jumped to the unjustified conclusion that Reggie, to shield himself, had accused him.

Wally would never have dreamed such a thing as that if it had been any other member of his little band. But Reggie had done some queer things in his time, and it was not easy to forget.

"I will give the Form one more chance!" rapped out Mr. Selby. "Who put that frog into my desk?"

There was absolute silence. Many glances were directed to Reggie. But no one looked at Harvey. His guilty face would have given him away if anyone had seen it.

"Very well!" snapped Mr. Selby, with a leer of triumph. "It will be my painful duty to detain the whole Form for an hour after classes for this and the next two days! We will now proceed with the morning's work!"

Painful duty—oh, you bet! He likes it! It was a trying morning for the Third. Lines were distributed with even more than ordinary generosity, and canings punctuated the imposts. Hardly anyone escaped one or the other; and it was with frayed nerves and tempers almost at boiling-point that the Third Form poured out into the quad when the long morning was at last over.

II.

"HERE, you—young Manners!" howled Wally.

"What do you want?" asked Reggie sullenly.

"You told old Selby that I put that beastly frog in his desk, you young liar! And you're going to get it in the neck for being a liar and a funk!"

"Oh, cheese that!" said Frank Levison warmly. "You know well enough that Reggie would never be such a rotter, Wally!"

"I heard him give the old Hun my name, anyway!" howled Wally. "And I jolly well want to know the reason why he had the cheek to drag me into his filthy tricks!"

"I didn't, then!" retorted Reggie. "Selby asked me whether you did it, and I told him."

"No. Come to that, I might have said that very likely you did!" he added maliciously. "You wouldn't be above such a trick!"

"That's not fair, Reggie," said Frank. "You know Wally didn't, and whether he would or not is no odds at all."

"Why didn't you own up, you young sweep?" demanded Jameson.

"Three hours' detention because young Manners hasn't the pluck to own up!" said Piggott spitefully.

"I didn't do it. If you like to believe I'm lying, you're welcome to, D'Arcy minor!" said Reggie.

"None of your cheek!" snapped Wally. Reggie looked as if he meant to go for him, but Frank clutched his arm.

"Wally knows that if you say you didn't, you didn't, Reggie," he said soothingly.

Frank Levison is always among the peacemakers. But peacemaking in the Third is not all violets.

"I don't care whether he believes me or not!" fumed Reggie. "A fine chum he is—I don't think! If I were you, D'Arcy, I'd go and tell old Selby what I said about him yesterday. I should get six on each hand then!"

It really was a bit rough on Reggie, you know. He had acted as well as he knew how in difficult circumstances.

"That's what makes it look as if you put the frog there," said Wally. "I believe you did, and I call it cadship to get us all kept in like this."

"That's not fair, Wally," said Frank. "I don't care what anyone says—I'm dead sure Reggie wouldn't lie about it."

"Thank you for nothing!" sneered Reggie. "Nobody asked for your opinion, and I can tell you I don't care a scrap for it!"

"He ought to have owned up," persisted Wally. "Selby practically caught him red-handed. He can't get out of that."

"Somebody else might have been to the old Hun's desk before Reggie," suggested Curly Gibson.

"Oh, that's too far-fetched a notion for the mighty mind of the skipper of the Third!" said Reggie bitterly.

"Well, if you know who did it, why don't you say so?" jeered Wally, a trifle shaken in his conviction.

Manners was silent. He felt that he could not give Harvey away.

"Come on, young Manners, and get it out!" said Hobbs. "We want to get even with the fellow who did it for the three hours' detention he's landed us all with; and if you value your blessed skin you'd better give us his name!"

"You're a rotten cad, D'Arcy minor!" said Reggie fiercely. "I've said I didn't do it. That's good enough, I should think. If you want to know who did, just you find out!"

And Reggie stalked away without another word.

Levison minor started after him. But Reggie took no notice of Frank. So Frank came back to the rest. He wanted to put things right if it could be done. But between Reggie in the suiks and Wally in a rage royal he was in no very pleasant position.

III.

"THOUGHT you were going to give us up and check in your lot with that young sneak, Levison!" said Wally sarcastically.

"If the young bounder wants to sulk why can't you let him?" said Hobbs.

"Oh, don't be rotten, Wally!" urged Joe Frayne. "Isn't like you to be so unfair. I fancy as 'ow Reggie does know, but won't give the chap away."

"Shut up, Joe! You're as soft as young Levison," retorted the irate Wally. "If the young ass knows, why can't he tell us? We shouldn't split to Selby; he knows that well enough. There's a screw loose somewhere."

"You're all wrong, Wally," said Frank quietly. "Reggie isn't a liar, and he's said he didn't do it."

"If you're on the sulky young cad's side, just you say so straight out, young Levison!" snapped Wally. "I can get along all serene without both of you. And Manners won't have too many chums. Everyone feels pretty sick about this detention bizny."

Frank walked miserably away. He had done his best to reconcile his chums, and he had failed. All he had managed was to quarrel with Wally, who meant ever so much more to him than Reggie. I dare say Frank was wondering whether the peacemakers really are blessed!

He made his way to the gates, thoroughly miserable, passed out, and walked moodily along Ryecombe Lane, pondering over the tragic turn of events.

In spite of all he could do, a wide rift was yawning between two of his best chums; and it looked as though he might be left on the wrong side of it, though somehow he could not feel sure that it was the wrong side, either.

He was sure that Reggie was shielding someone. But who was it?

"Levison! I say, just a minute!" called a voice behind him.

Frank turned in surprise, to see Dick Harvey.

"Take it easy, kid," said Frank, as Harvey came up, panting. "What's the hurry?"

"Levison! I—I want to tell you something," Harvey said hesitatingly.

Frank waited to hear more. But Harvey evidently found it difficult to say what was in his mind.

"Well, let's have it!" said Frank at length. "I'm willing enough to help, if I can; but I can't if I don't know what the trouble is."

Harvey looked at him for a moment with a white, troubled face.

"I put that beastly frog into old Selby's desk," he blurted out at last. "Manners came in just as I was cutting out. I—I didn't say anything to him, but I was sure he wouldn't give me away."

"But why the dickens didn't you own up, instead of getting the whole blessed Form detained?" demanded Frank.

"I—I daren't, Levison! He was in such a wax, you know. But I wished afterwards that I had. I heard what you said to Wally, and I don't want to make a row among you chaps."

Frank thought hard about what was the best thing to be done.

"Will you come back with me now and tell Wally?" he said. "I'll tell the other chaps, if you like."

"Oh, I say, Levison, thanks very much!" replied Harvey, in great relief. "I shall own up to old Selby. It's the only decent thing to do, and he can't kill me, anyway. That will be heaps better than having it on my mind, and feeling such a beastly worm for funkng."

They found Wally with Joe Frayne and Curly Gibson in the Form-room.

Wally stood at a window, gazing dimly

out across the quad. The other two were writing lines, or pretending to write them. But it was plain that they were only there to keep Wally company; and it was also plain that Wally felt no special gratitude for their thoughtfulness.

Wally looked up as the two entered, but he took no notice of Harvey, and only acknowledged Frank's advent by a scowl.

"Go on, kid!" Frank whispered. "Get it over!"

And he turned his back to give Harvey, a chance.

"I say, D'Arcy—" began Harvey.

"Well?" snapped Wally.

"I—that is, Manners—"

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"Manners didn't put the frog in Selby's desk," quavered Harvey.

"Thanks for the information, but I'm not in the least interested in Manners minor!" answered Wally.

And Gussy himself, on the stiffs, as he often is, could not have spoken more freezingly.

"But—but you don't understand—I did it!" said Harvey desperately. "And Reggie wouldn't let on because he was too decent to give me away!"

And Harvey turned, with a lump in his throat that would not let him say more.

"What—?" said Wally in astonishment. He might have said more, but he saw that Harvey was on the verge of tears. And, for all his arbitrary ways, young Wally has lots of sympathy with a chap in trouble.

"It's all right, kid," he said reassuringly. "We'll put it straight with young Manners. He can't help being an ass, you know. But what about Selby?"

"I'm going to him now," Harvey said, with a new light of resolution in his face.

"I'd go with you if it was a scrap of good," said Wally. "But it wouldn't be. The old Hun would only lay it on thicker, you know."

Selby laid it on quite thickly enough for Harvey as it was. But he always does. You might strain Selby down to the dregs and not find any quality of mercy in him, as Shakespeare, or someone, didn't say.

Harvey had scarcely left the room when Wally went across to Frank Levison.

"Franky!" he said.

It was not much, but it was enough.

Levison minor turned, with a glad light in his eyes.

"Is it all serene, old chap?" he said.

"Rather!" said Wally, taking him by the arm. "Let's go and find Reggie. He's a young ass, but it was pretty decent of him. And it was more than decent of you, Franky. I might have known you were right!"

Which was quite a lot for Wally to say!

THE END.

PROUT, ANARCHIST.

By Peter Todd.

I DO not usually go rabbit-shooting at night, and hence I cannot explain how it was that the fifteenth night of March found me engaged in this agreeable pastime. Suffice it, I had just started out, when I discerned a Welsh rabbit sitting on an adjacent knoll. I raised my gun, and fired. (May I state here that my gun is a 15.6 Lampighter—best gun on the market, capable of peeling a rotten apple at a distance of thirty miles?)

Now, I cannot explain how it was that I missed the animal, unless the rabbit had watched the dust-shot coming and had jumped out of the way. For though it was impossible that I could have aimed incorrectly, this creature, instead of dying on the spot, simply walked off with its tail in the air. I was never more astonished in my life.

Now I come to an event which is even more remarkable. As I was walking along, watching the strange antics of this creature, I suddenly found that I was damp. The truth of the matter being that I had walked straight into the river—one of the trifles so great a mind as mine often ignores.

To my alarm and dismay I found that I could not climb out. The current was so strong as to sweep me clean off my feet, and to hurry me along in the direction of the weir. Every moment the roar of the water grew louder, and I could not help saying to myself, in the terms of the Stock Exchange,

that there would be a "Fall in Prout" directly.

With Spartan courage I set my teeth and screamed for help. (This is a more difficult operation than you would suppose; but, remember, I was never an ordinary man.) It was useless. The rescue I craved for did not materialise.

Fortunately, just as I thought I might think about thinking about my last will and testament, I managed to lay hold of a branch of a tree, and thought about thinking about gaining the shore instead.

This operation successfully achieved, I looked about me. I noticed what, at first sight, I took to be the moon, and I listened for the usual air raid. No sound disturbed the calm beauty of the night. I looked at the moon again. It seemed very low down. Ah! That explained it. What I had taken for the moon was really the round mouth of a cave with the glow of a fire issuing from it. And, let me tell you, lesser men than I have made greater mistakes!

Here I might find warmth and solace, and my gratitude found expression in the noble words, "Dear, dear, they'll be had up as sure as Fate for showing all that light! Well, I shan't contribute towards the fire."

I reached the entrance to the cave—I had left my Gatling gun behind on some portion of the river-bed—and entered. I found myself faced by a villainous and ruffianly-looking crew! With superb courage, and with unmoved countenance, I turned to run away. Need I tell you it was merely a ruse? They were after me, and caught me up in three strides.

"W-w-well, w-h-hat d-d-d-o y-y-you w-w-want w-w-with m-m-me?" I articulated, with grandeur and force.

Their answer came, and it expressed my worst fears. "Hut! Of course, when they said that I knew they must be villains of the deepest dye."

I put up a really heroic fight. I kicked out as hard as I could, and caught one of the villains a fearful kick on the shins. I cannot but hope it hurt him.

In a few minutes I was standing before a sort of dais, raised at one end of the cave. A great stalactite hung down in front of it, and I knocked my head against this with considerable violence. This did not, I may say, disturb my composure in the least.

A most awful ruffian was seated at this dais. He looked worse than the villain at Drury Lane—he did, really!

But I faced him with undaunted courage. I demanded recompense for the outrage, with dauntless courage and thundering tones.

"Pl-p-please, sir, will y-you take me h-h-home, if y-y-you w-w-would be so k-k-kind?"

He stared at me with a gloomy brow. I told him my name was Prout, I told him where I came from, I told him my past history, I told him I wanted to go home to mother, I told him how I came to be there, I even told him I wouldn't give his hand away. He looked at me gloomily. When I promised I would be silent, he roared sternly:

"You shall be silent, my friend! Yes. You shall have no tongue to speak against us with!"

At these words I uttered a cry of wrath. I am half-afraid he took this as a sign of deficient courage on my part. (Imposs.!!—Ed.)

"Let the torturer come forth!"

His command thundered in my ears.

"Now," said he, turning to me, "will you have your eyes, your ears, your appendix, your nose, your mouth, your teeth, your backbone, and your great toe removed, or will you join my band?"

The ruffian's brutal threats did not terrify me in the least. You see, I had already decided to join his band, so that I might the better confound his fiendish plots.

"Well," he persisted, "what has the prisoner to say to my honourable proposal?"

I answered him, dissembling my intentions: "Please, kind sir—your majesty, I mean—I shall be delighted to do the most desperate, dreadful deed which you can demand of me!"

(I forgot to tell you that it was only the chill of the water that had made my previous accents a trifle shaky.)

"You consent?" said he. "You consent? Bring forth the hot irons, so that I may brand you with the double-square, which I and mine wear in default of a registration card, which we can't print on account of a serious shortage of paper. Bring forth the hot ir-r-r-ons!"

I confronted him sternly.

"I am a British subject. I am. You just leave me alone, or you mind your eye!"

In moments of excitement my speech often takes this heroic tone.

"Ha!" said he, confused and confounded. "Ha! Shall I, then, sheer off your big toe in the mincing-machine? Shall we then hold your head in a bucket of water till you are black in the face? Will you compel us to hang you by the neck for three-quarters of an hour? Answer me, sir!"

I answered him smoothly, and his wrath again abated. In consideration of my youth and innocence, he consented to forgo the branding, which, I pointed out, would only serve to make me conspicuous, and hamper me in my bold, desperate, dreadful duties.

The ceremony of introducing the new member then took place. I am not a Freemason, so I must confess that I have never undergone a similar inauguration. I must confess, though, that the part of the ceremony which demanded that I should be raised two feet from the ground, and deposited in a sitting position, came as a very considerable shock.

Then came another shock.

A handit, with a particularly vicious expression, murmured softly:

"The bumpfulness of the esteemed Prout is terrific!"

Came a voice from a remote corner. There seemed to be something familiar about it:

"Shut up, you burbling jackanapes! You'll give the whole show away!"

"That's done it!" said another voice. "I vote we bump that black idiot, too!"

"Silly asses!"

"Burbling jackanapes!"

"The gasfulness of the esteem—"

"Look here, you blundering fools!" said the president. "You'd better stop this if you don't want prisoner at the bar—or I

mean, brother and fellow-comrade— Look here, you chaps, stop jabbering, and tell me what to do with him!"

"Make him eat coke!"

"Make him wash up!"

"Throw him in the river!"

"Give him some dynamite, and make him swallow it!"

"Make him stand a free feed all round!"

I really thought I did recognise this voice.

A sudden idea seized me. They were quarrelling among themselves. Why not escape? (Yes; I had decided to forfeit the glory of tracking them down.) No sooner thought of than acted upon. I made a wild dash for the entrance. It was blocked by a burly form in blue. Never shall I forget my grateful surprise as I recognised our village policeman.

Full well I knew that noble form, that protruding—well, I'll call it chest, though it's rather low down—that magnificent air of our neighbouring representative of the law! I knew those stentorian tones, nobly expressing a justifiable indignation:

"Ere what's all this about?"

The Anarchists were taken aback. I conclude they were Anarchists. What else could they have been? Well, they were taken aback. A chorus of protest and alarm took place.

"Gosh! It's old Tozer!"

"Tozer! How's your last great-aunt as ever was?"

"Tozer! What did you do with that board of yours?"

I started. The tones came from the blank wall. My astonishment was as nothing to Tozer's. He faced round as though he had been shot.

"Who said that?"

"I—I—I am the ghost of your mother-in-law. I have watched you! Here you are arresting others for breaking laws which you have yourself infringed! I—I—I have watched you. What did you do with all that grub, you food-hog, you Hun?"

"Ere, you shut up playing the fool, whoever you are! I know you! I'm doing my duty. I am. These 'ere guys are showing too much light. I'm going to arrest them!"

"Come!" said the voice. "Come down here!"

Then a light dawned on me—on me, Mr. Prout of Greyfriars School. I knew those awful tones from experience. I rushed forwards to one of the villains—a fat villain.

I seized him. His beard came away in my hand!

"Bunter!" I gasped.

That did it.

I—I—well, I woke up.

I consider it necessary for the morals of my pupils that I should attach some moral to this story. So this is all my advice to you:

"Don't go shooting rabbits by night with a Lamplighter, however good; don't miss; don't fall into the river; meet all circumstances with unflinching bravery, as I did; And, above all, don't eat too much Welsh rabbit!"

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"BUNTER ON THE WAR-PATH!"

By Martin Clifford.

Thus far Billy Bunter has made very little use of his ventriloquist talent at St. Jim's. The bagging of the fags' kippers by sending them out of their Form-room to meet Mr. Selby—who was not there, and did not want them—at the gym was a small thing for a ventriloquist like Bunter.

But now, made desperate by the situation in which he finds himself—regarded at St. Jim's in the same light as he has always been at Greyfriars—he tries it on, and mystifies everyone.

Every story of Bunter at St. Jim's has been a rare good one; but I am not at all sure that this is not the best of the lot.

That, however, is for you to say. What an editor thinks matters; but what readers think matters a great deal more in the long run. For if there were no readers there could be no editors—see? We might even be reduced to working for our livings. No one seems to think we do that as things are, though from some considerable personal experience I can

say that there really is something in the way of work attached to the running of a paper.

THE NEW SERIAL IN THE "MAGNET."

I ought really to have told you about this last week. But I dare say most of you have heard, and it is not too late for those who did not hear, for the synopsis in the current week's number will give you a fair start.

Remember Goggs—Johnny Goggs—Goggs of Frankingham and of Highcliffe—Goggs the ventriloquist, and expert in ju-jitsu, and football, and cricket, and runner, and jumper—Goggs, with his skinny limbs that have muscles like steel and whipcord—Goggs, with his simple face that has a first-rate brain behind it—Goggs, who is always polite and proper in his speech, but is as full of japes as anyone can be?

Of course you remember him! I have had hundreds of letters asking me for another story about him. He first appeared in "The Fourth Form at Frankingham," which ran in the "Magnet" for three or four months a couple of years or so ago. A little later he was the chief figure in a short serial—"Johnny

Goggs at St. Jim's"—which appeared in the GEM. Then he cropped up in "The Twins from Tasmania," playing a big part in the later stages of that story.

Now, together with his chums, Blount, Trickett, and Waters, he turns up at Kyrcombe, and you will find him playing his japes there, in more than half friendly opposition to Gordon Gay & Co., but before long up against other fellows who are not at all of Gay's type.

"GOGGS, GRAMMARIAN."

is the title of the yarn, and none of you can afford to miss it.

ORDER "THE MAGNET" NOW.

Your Editor