



BUNTER ON THE WAR-PATH!



LOOKING FOR THE VENTRILOQUIST'S VOICE!

(A Screamingly Funny Scene in the Long, Complete School Story in this Number.) 8-3-19.

Bunter on the War-Path

A Magnificent, Long,
Complete Story of the Chums
of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

After Bunter!

"WHERE'S that fat villain?"

"Eh?"

"Where's that podgy burglar?"

Tom Merry grinned.

Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth Form, was asking those questions, in tones that were simply sulphurous.

Fatty, who belonged to the New House at St. Jim's, had just come into the School House, and he met the Terrible Three in the doorway.

"Where's the fat rascal?" continued the Falstaff of the New House. "Have you seen him?"

"Which fat rascal?" asked Monty Lowther. "We've got two in this House—Trimble and Bunter."

"As well as one who comes visiting," remarked Manners blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"I'm after Bunter—that fat rotter! I'm going to slaughter him! It's time he was slaughtered."

"High time," agreed Tom Merry. "Go ahead, and the School House will pass a vote of thanks. But what has Bunter been doing?"

"You'd hardly believe it," said Fatty Wynn, breathing hard. "There's a limit, you know, for everybody but Bunter. He's the very outside edge. What do you think of a fellow who bags another chap's aniseed-balls in the Form-room, where a chap can't make a row because there's a blessed Form-master present? Think of it!"

Fatty Wynn's voice almost failed him, in the excess of his wrath and indignation. It was evident that he regarded Bunter of the Fourth as having reached, and passed, the utmost limit of depravity.

"Awful!" said Tom Merry solemnly—as solemnly as he could. "People talk about the Kaiser. But what has the Kaiser done in comparison with that?"

"Echo answers what?" said Monty Lowther, with a nod.

Fatty Wynn gave another snort.

"Oh, don't be funny! I'm after Bunter—I'm going to boil him in oil. I'm going to spiculate him! I'm going—"

"But what were you doing with aniseed-balls in the Form-room?" asked Manners severely. "Isn't that against the rules?"

"Of course it is, fathead! That's how Bunter was able to bag them. Old Latham fairly had his blinkers on us, when Bunter slipped his fat paw under my desk and bagged the whole lot. I couldn't say anything, of course, or Latham would have been down on me for bringing tuck into the Form-room. Of course, the fat villain knew that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to cackle!" howled Fatty Wynn indignantly. "They weren't your aniseed-balls. You know how hungry I get in the morning—and I had a very light breakfast this morning, too—only a few sausages, besides the ordinary brekker, and a cake afterwards. I was depending on the aniseed-balls to see me through, and that fat brigand bagged them under my very nose."

The Terrible Three choraled.

They could imagine the feelings of Fatty Wynn at that awful moment, and they sympathised; but they were also able to see the humorous side of the affair, which was quite lost on Fatty.

"I told Figgins and Kerr, and they only chuckled," said Fatty Wynn. "They actually marched me off after lessons, and said I wasn't going for Bunter. I've only just got away from the silly asses. Now I'm after Bunter! I want to know where the fat villain is! I'm going—"

"I say, you fellows."

A fat junior—fatter than Fatty Wynn—rolled on the scene, blinking at the Shell fellows through a big pair of spectacles. He did not observe Fatty Wynn for the moment—but the New House junior observed him, and his eyes gleamed.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Wynn's just come over to see you, Bunter."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He gave Fatty Wynn one hurried blink, and made a spring for the stairs. The New House junior rushed after him.

"Put it on, Bunter!" yelled Lowther.

"Go it, Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter of the Fourth made remarkable speed up the staircase, considering the weight he had to carry.

He blinked back on the first landing, and saw a fat and furious face behind him, and dashed on again frantically.

"Stop!" panted Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter.

The fat junior came into the Fourth-Form passage with a wild burst of speed.

Blake and Co. were chatting outside their study, No. 6 in the Fourth. Blake and Herries and Digby spotted Bunter in time, and backed to the wall. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had his back to the new-comer; and, moreover, he was holding forth on the subject of the off-side rule, and he was deeply interested in his own remarks—perhaps the only fellow present who was.

His first intimation of the arrival of Bunter was a terrific crash on his back which sent him spinning forward, to land on his hands and knees.

"Yawwoop!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, ewombs! Wha-a-at's that?"

Bunter reeled back from the shock.

"Ow! Ah! Oh! Yawwoop! Help!"

Before he could flee again Fatty Wynn was upon him.

"Yaroo!" roared Bunter, as the New House junior grasped him. "I say, you fellows—Help! Murder! Fire! I never touched the aniseed-balls, you know! Yaroooh! Leggo my neck! I never knew there were any—I haven't eaten them all! Yaroooh! Besides, there were only fifteen—Yoooop!"

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up dazedly. "What is it? Somethin' cwasht into me! Has the wool fallen in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "No, nothing's fallen in but Bunter."

"Yoop! Help! Draggimoff!"

"Oh dear! I have received a fearful shock! Look at the knees of my trousers!" wailed Arthur Augustus.

"Yaroo! Help!"

"Take that!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "And that—and that! You fat rotter! I'll teach you to bag my tuck! I'll—"

"I'll—"

"Yoop!"

Blake and Co., grinning, seized Fatty Wynn and dragged him off his victim. They had no doubt—none whatever—that Bunter deserved his punishment; but Bunter was School House and Wynn was New House, and so they laid hands on Fatty Wynn and yanked him away.

"Lemme gerrat him!" roared Wynn, struggling.

"Yow-ow-ow! I say, you fellows wallop him!" howled Bunter. "Yow-ow-ow! I'm hurt, you know! I'm injured! Yow-ow-ow! Wallop the beast!"

Blake and Herries and Dig held the struggling New House junior. Arthur Augustus had no attention to bestow on him. He was carefully dusting the knees of his trousers.

"Will you lemme get at the fat rotter?" breathed Fatty Wynn. "I tell you he bagged my aniseed-balls in the Form-room, under Latham's nose. Why, you saw him yourself!"

"Don't you know that this is the School House, and dogs and New House chaps are not admitted?" demanded Blake.

"Fathead! Leggo!"

"Bump the fat beast!" howled Bunter.

"Yah! You fat rotter!" yelled Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Arthur Augustus forgot his trousers for a moment, and choraled. It was very entertaining to Study No. 6 to hear Fatty Wynn and Bunter applying that adjective to one another.

"I never touched his aniseed-balls, you know," said Bunter, blinking at the chums of the Fourth. "Haven't tasted any for weeks, you know."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Digby.

"There's a big scent of aniseed coming from somewhere when you open your mouth, anyway."

"Yass, wathah!"

"Oh! I—I—that is, I—" Bunter stammered. "It—it isn't aniseed, you chaps, it's—it's onions!"

"Onions!" yelled Herries.

"Yes—no—I—I mean, it's—it's a—a tooth-powder I use. Smells a bit like aniseed."

"Bai Jovo!" said Arthur Augustus. "You fearful fabwicatah, Buntah! Weally, you fellows, I think you had better let Wynn thrash him. I weally considah that a feahful thwashin' would do him good."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"Good idea!" assented Jack Blake. "Hallo, where are you going, Bunter?" But Bunter was gone.

A door slammed along the passage, and a key clicked. The fat junior was safe from vengeance.

"Oh, you clumps!" snorted Fatty Wynn. "Lemme go! I'll—"

"Frog's-march!" said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"New House bounders musn't come kicking up shindies in this, the respectable House of St. Jim's!" said Blake severely. "Give him the frog's-march!"

"Yaas, waihai!"

"Yah! School House rotters!" roared Fatty Wynn, struggling, as he went back to the stairs in the frog's-march. "I say, I'll— Yaroooh! Oh, crickey!"

"Roll him down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn went rolling down, and on the lower landing the Terrible Three met him, and kindly rolled him farther. Fatty Wynn was hardly aware whether he was on his head or his heels by that time. Talbot of the Shell called up from the hall below.

"Cave!"

"Railton!" murmured Lowther. "Bunk!"

The School House juniors vanished. Fatty Wynn sat on the stairs and blinked at Mr. Railton. The School House master stared at him.

"What ever are you doing, Wynn? You have been making a great deal of noise."

"Oh!" gasped Fatty. "I—I—I rolled downstairs, sir."

"Have you hurt yourself?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"You should be more careful, Wynn."

The Housemaster gave rather a suspicious glance up the stairs; but there was no one to be seen. Fatty Wynn limped breathlessly out into the quadrangle. His chums, Figgins and Kerr, bore down on him there.

"Been in the wars?" grinned Figgins.

Fatty Wynn panted.

"Ow! I've been after Bunter! Wow! I've been frog's-marched—"

"Ha, ha!"

"You cackling duffers, I've been rolled downstairs—"

"Ha, ha! What did you expect?"

"Yow-ow-ow! And I haven't scalped Bunter!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Yow-ow-ow! But I'm going to make him cringe! I've got an idea, too! You wait till we get into class this afternoon!" said Fatty Wynn darkly.

And Fatty Wynn limped home to the New House, still gasping for breath.

CHAPTER 2.

A Surprise for the Shell!

"O H, dear! I wish I'd stayed at Greyfriars!" mumbled Billy Bunter dolorously.

The fat junior was ensconced just inside the Shell Form-room.

It was time to gather for afternoon classes, and Bunter's place was in the Fourth Form-room. But Fatty Wynn's

place also was there, and Bunter was extremely anxious not to meet Fatty Wynn. The aniseed-balls were really not worth the trouble they were causing him; but it was too late to think of that now.

In the circumstances Billy Bunter was feeling dismal.

It had seemed to him, at the time, such a ripping idea to change places with his cousin Wally, and come to St. Jim's in that plump youth's name and place; but somehow the scheme hadn't worked out as he expected.

Certainly, everybody believed that he was Wally. But he had worn out Wally's good reputation, and now he was judged on his merits.

And his merits really wanted looking for with a microscope.

The Owl of Greyfriars really felt that he might as well have stayed at his old school, where Wally Bunter was winning golden opinions in his place.

He had left a good many troubles at Greyfriars to fall upon Wally Bunter; but he was making a good many more for himself at St. Jim's, so it really came to the same thing, or nearly.

He blinked out of the doorway, hoping to see Fatty Wynn pass into the Form-room along the corridor, when the coast would be clear.

Some of the Fourth were going in, but Fatty Wynn was not among them.

Bunter drew back his head, and grunted.

"Beast!" he murmured. "Fat rotter, to kick up such a row over a few aniseed-balls. I told him I'd buy him a fresh lot when my postal-order comes, too! Can't take a fellow's word! Yah!"

"Hallo!"

Tom Merry came into the Shell-room with Manners and Lowther—the first to arrive for classes. They stared at Bunter.

"Got your remove into the Shell?" asked Monty Lowther. "I suppose I must expect that soon, from your general brilliance. I hear that you're a real credit to the Fourth, Bunt."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo! Where did that fat frog blow in from?" asked Kangaroo, coming into the Form-room. "You'd better mizzle, Bunter. Linton will be here in two ticks."

"I say, you fellows, have you seen Fatty Wynn?" asked Bunter pathetically. "The fat beast is looking for me, you know. I'm not going to fight him. He's not worth it."

"I shouldn't," said Monty Lowther seriously. "As you are strong, be merciful, you know."

"That's just it," agreed Bunter. "If I lost my temper, you know, I should damage him. I don't want to do that. I'm rather a terrific fighting-man when I'm roused. That's how it is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shurrup!" came Talbot's voice at the door. Here's Linton!

There was sudden silence as Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came rustling into the Form-room. Mr. Linton glanced at Bunter.

"Bunter, what are you doing here?" he exclaimed. "You belong to the Fourth Form!"

"I—I—I just came to—to say good-afternoon to you, sir," stammered Bunter.

"What?"

"I—I— It's nice weather, isn't it, sir?" mumbled the Owl of Greyfriars, wondering whether it was safe to venture into the corridor yet.

"Bunter!"

"I hope you're well this afternoon, sir?"

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

Mr. Linton simply blinked at Bunter.

He did not know that the fat junior was trying to gain time by that genial conversation. It looked to him like either impertinence or incipient insanity.

"Bunter, what do you mean?"

"Mum-mum-mean, sir?"

"Leave this Form-room at once!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Mr. Linton turned snappishly away. But Bunter didn't. A blink into the corridor revealed Fatty Wynn coming along with Figgins and Kerr and Redfern. And Bunter drew back his head again with a jerk. The Shell fellows were coming in, and they all stared at Bunter, wondering what a Fourth-Former was doing there.

The master of the Shell had gone to his desk, and he glanced round and knitted his brows at the sight of Bunter still inside the doorway.

"Boy!" he thundered. "Bunter!"

The fat junior spun round.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"What do you mean? Are you out of your senses? Go to your own Form-room at once, Bunter!"

"Ye-es, sir! Oh, certainly!" gasped Bunter.

He made a movement to the doorway, and stopped again. Even Mr. Linton in the Form-room was not so dangerous as Fatty Wynn in the passage. Fatty Wynn robbed of his tuck was like unto a lioness robbed of her cubs. Billy Bunter's feet seemed really rooted to the floor inside the Shell Form-room.

Naturally, Mr. Linton did not understand. He picked up a cane from his desk and started towards Bunter. It was not usual for a Form-master to cane a fellow in another Form. But that unwritten law was about to be broken.

"The blessed ass!" murmured Manners. "Linton will scalp him if he doesn't go! I'd rather chance it with Fatty Wynn myself."

"It's a case of Scylla and Charybdis," grinned Monty Lowther. "Linton is Scylla, and Fatty Wynn's Charybdis."

There was a chuckle, and Mr. Linton's attention was transferred for a moment to his class.

"Silence!" he thundered.

"Rats!"

Mr. Linton jumped almost clear of the floor as he heard that reply.

Who had spoken was not to be ascertained. The voice seemed to come from the back of the class.

The Shell fellows, almost dazed themselves, turned in their seats, craning their necks to look for the speaker.

There was a silence that could be felt in the Form-room.

Never in the history of St. Jim's had a Form-master been thus answered in his own Form-room, and it took away the breath of both master and pupils.

Mr. Linton found his voice at last.

He advanced towards the palpitating class, quite forgetful of Billy Bunter.

"What?" he stuttered. "Who—who spoke? I order that boy to stand out at once—immediately!"

There was no reply.

"Who spoke?" thundered Mr. Linton.

Silence.

"Was it you, Gore?"

George Gore jumped.

"I? Certainly not, sir!"

"It sounded like your voice!"

"It wasn't, sir. My hat! I—I never spoke! Did I speak, Skimpy?" exclaimed Gore, in great alarm.

Skimpole, who was seated beside Gore, shook his head.

"I assure you, sir, that Gore did not utter that extremely disrespectful remark," said Skimpy, in his solemn way.

"I demand to know the name of the boy who answered me!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "If he does not come forward I shall punish the whole class. The boy must be known to several others at least."

There was dead silence. "Very well," said Mr. Linton, compressing his lips. "The whole class will be detained for one hour after lessons."

He turned back to look for Bunter. But the Owl of Greyfriars was gone. The last of the Fourth had gone into their Form-room, and Bunter had ventured out into the corridor at last.

That afternoon was not a happy one for the Shell. Mr. Linton's temper was acidulated, his tongue bitter, and the weight of his wrath fell heavily upon the unfortunate Shell. And the suffering juniors, while feeling inclined to "scrag" their Form-master, were feeling still more keen to "scrag" the disrespectful youth who had answered "Rats!" and caused all the trouble. But who that disrespectful youth was remained a mystery.

CHAPTER 3.

A Terrible Temptation!

BILLY BUNTER rolled into the Fourth Form-room several minutes late. The Fourth were all in their places, and Mr. Lathom was at his desk, and he gave Bunter a reproving blink.

"Bunter, you are late!" said the master of the Fourth severely.

"Sorry, sir!" said Bunter meekly. "Mr. Linton was speaking to me, sir. I—I didn't like to interrupt him."

"Oh, in that case I excuse you, Bunter," said Mr. Lathom ungraciously. "You may go to your place."

Bunter's place, as it happened, was next to Fatty Wynn of the New House. He intended to find some other place, but he found that the juniors had not left him any other. Next to Fatty there was plenty of room; but the Fourth-Formers had spread themselves out to take up all other available space. Grinning looks were turned upon the fat junior as he stood blinking round him. It was evident that the whole Form had entered into that little joke.

"Why do you not sit down, Bunter?" called out Mr. Lathom.

"I—I'm just going to, sir," stammered Bunter.

"Well, do so at once."

"I—I say, D'Arcy, make room for a chap," whispered Bunter.

"Your place is vacant, dear boy," answered Arthur Augustus, with a smile.

"I'd rather sit beside you."

"I would wataah not, Buntab, thank you all the same."

"Bunter!"

"Yee-es, sir?"

"Sit down at once!"

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir! I say, Mulvaney—"

"Go and eat coke, intirely," answered Mulvaney minor cheerily.

"I say, Blake—"

"Rats!"

"Ditchy, old chap—"

"If you old chap me, I'll biff you," answered Dig.

"Move up a bit, Roylance, old fellow—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I say, Julian, be a pal—"

"No fear!"

"Cardew! I say, Cardew—"

"Rats!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, peering in great astonishment

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at Bunter. "What does this mean, Bunter? Are you aware, sir, that you are delaying the lesson? Do you desire me to administer chastisement, Bunter?"

The unhappy Owl made a dive for his seat.

He plumped down beside Fatty Wynn, palpitating. The Falstaff of the New House gave him a ferocious look.

"You fat villain," he whispered, "I'm coming out with you after lessons! I'll get hold of your neck—see? You wait a bit!"

"I—I say, Wynn, old chap—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"You—you see, dear old fellow—"

murmured Bunter.

"None of your soft sawder," answered Fatty Wynn. "And don't you dare to lay your fat paws on my jam-tart, that's all!"

"Silence in class!" rapped out Mr. Lathom.

The lesson proceeded; but Billy Bunter was not bestowing much attention upon Mr. Lathom. Fatty Wynn's warning words had caused him to blink under the desk; and there, within easy reach of his fat fingers, lay a juicy jam-tart, simply luscious to Bunter's greedy eyes.

Fatty Wynn had apparently provided against a possible "sinking" in his plump inside before tea-time. The jam-tart was large, it was flaky, it was thick with jam, and it looked very tempting. Billy Bunter felt an almost irresistible impulse to slide his fat hand along the ledge under the desk and capture it.

But he resisted the temptation.

He tried to turn attention elsewhere; he even listened to Mr. Lathom for some minutes.

Vengeance was still hovering over him for the "soffing" of the aniseed-balls that morning. If the jam-tart followed the aniseed-balls there really was no telling what Fatty Wynn might do.

But as the afternoon wore on Bunter debated that matter in his mind, thus losing the advantage of the valuable instruction he might have derived from Mr. Lathom by paying a little attention to the Form-master.

Form-masters and form-work weighed little in Bunter's estimation in comparison with a fat, juicy jam-tart.

He was getting hungry; in fact, he had got. He generally was hungry; and the sight of tuck made him feel as if he had been three weeks in an open boat at sea.

He was no longer sorry that he had been forced to sit beside Fatty Wynn. He had felonious designs upon that jam-tart, and now he was only waiting for a favourable opportunity. He had argued the pros and cons of the case, and settled the point. If Fatty Wynn was going to "pitch into him" for bagging the aniseed-balls there was no help for it, and he might as well bag the jam-tart also, on the principle of being in for a penny in for a pound. As there was certain trouble in any case, why not bag the jam-tart and make it worth while?

That was unanswerable logic to Bunter's fat mind. And, utterly regardless of the valuable information Mr. Lathom was just then imparting with regard to the coal-fields of Great Britain, Billy Bunter watched for an opportunity.

Curious to relate, Fatty Wynn seemed to have forgotten the tart. He was listening to Mr. Lathom with rapt attention, as if he was specially desirous of knowing all about the coal-fields of Great Britain above and beyond any other subject in the universe. His head was turned from Bunter, and he seemed to have forgotten the tart, and Bunter, too, in his intense interest in the subject of coal-fields.

Bunter's fat hand slid under the desk,

it slid along, and he trembled. If Fatty Wynn had looked round he would have withdrawn that fleching paw hastily. But Fatty did not look round. He was listening to Mr. Lathom as if pearls of wisdom were falling from his lips.

The Owl's fat fingers touched the tart at last, and he drew it along slowly and cautiously in front of him. It was safe under his desk at last, and still Fatty Wynn seemed unaware.

Bunter's heart was beating fast now. The jam-tart was his, but eating it was another matter. He could not sit in full view of Mr. Lathom, and bolt a jam-tart under his eyes. But great minds rise to all emergencies, and Bunter's rose. What was easier than dropping a pen, stooping under the desk to pick it up, and shoving the jam-tart into his mouth under cover of the desk?

Nothing was easier. It would not take more than a few seconds to bolt the tart, and he would rise like a giant refreshed with wine.

Clatter!

A pen and a pencil rolled on the floor by Bunter's feet. He moved off the form, and slipped down to grope for them. Even then Fatty Wynn did not look at him, but a fat grin might have been seen stealing over his visage.

Bunter, stooping under his desk, was not bothering about the pen and the pencil. His fat grasp was on the tart, and in an instant it was jammed into his eager mouth.

His teeth crunched into it ecstatically, and the next moment there was a fiendish yell, that woke every echo in the Form-room.

"Yaroooh! Groogh! Yaroooh! Guggggggggg!"

CHAPTER 4.

Hot Stuff!

GUG-GUG-GUGGGG! Yooop! Groooch!"

Billy Bunter leaped up from the floor, howling and spluttering as if his senses had suddenly left him.

He knocked his head on the desk as he rose, and howled again.

Mr. Lathom span towards him, staring. The Fourth-Formers all turned to stare. Bunter was spluttering, spluttering, snorting, gasping, and clutching at his mouth with frantic hands.

"Groogh! Oh, I'm burnt! Yooop! Help! Fire! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Bunter!" roared Mr. Lathom.

"Yarooooop!"

"Boy!"

"I'm burnt! Yooop! Mustard! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is the boy mad?" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Bunter! Be silent! I command you to cease this commotion at once!"

"Yurrrrgggghh!"

"Bunter!"

"Gug-gug-gug-guggg!"

"Bless my soul! Bunter, come out before the class at once! What is the matter with you? Is it a fit? Are you subject to fits? Blake, are you aware whether Bunter is subject to fits?"

"Ha, ha! I—I mean, no sir! I—I think not."

"Bunter! Come here at once! Bless my soul, the boy is foaming at the mouth! Goodness gracious!"

"Yurrrrgggghh! Mustard!" shrieked Bunter. "I'm burnt! Yah! You fat rotter! You did it on purpose! Yaroooh! Ow-ow!"

"Mustard!" repeated Mr. Lathom dazedly. "Has the boy been eating mustard—in class, too? Bunter, what does this mean?"

"Groooh! I'll pulverise him!" shrieked Bunter. "He did it on purpose, and he knew I was after that tart all the time! That's why he wasn't looking! Yow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Silence! What does the boy mean? Bunter, if you are not out of your senses—Why, bless my soul, stop him!" shrieked Mr. Lathom.

Billy Bunter, beside himself with fury, turned upon Fatty Wynn and smote him hip and thigh. He was aware by that time that the jam-tart had been brought into the Form-room for his especial benefit—Fatty Wynn having previously concealed a thick slab of mustard under the jam!

Bunter had crunched that slab of mustard in his mouth, and the effect almost lifted the roof off his mouth.

Water was streaming from his eyes, and his fat face was like unto a newly-boiled beetroot in hue.

Fatty Wynn jumped up as he found himself attacked, and returned the assault with interest. Mr. Lathom waved his arms in great excitement, and shouted to the juniors to drag the infuriated Owl off. He was convinced that it was a fit by this time.

Blake and Roylance and Levison seized Bunter, and yanked him away from Fatty Wynn. The Owl was spun out before the class, still yelling.

"Be gentle with him!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "The unhappy boy is not responsible for his actions."

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

"Silence! How dare you laugh!" thundered Mr. Lathom. "This is not a laughing matter. The unfortunate boy is out of his senses! Calm yourself, Bunter! Pray strive to calm yourself."

"Yaroooh!" "My poor boy! Pray—" "Gug-gug-gugg! Leggo! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Do not let him go, Blake! Hold him, Herries! Lay him gently on the floor, that will be best! Bless my soul! I am quite unacquainted with the treatment of fits! Lay him down gently—very gently."

"Crack!" "Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, as his head came into contact with the Form-room floor. "Ow! Yow! My napper! Yooooooh!"

"Water! Someone fetch water!"

"Don't you chuck any water over me!" howled Bunter. "I ain't in a fit! Yaroooh! If you don't take your knuckles out of my neck, Herries, I'll bung you in the eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Herries, be careful—"

"Tain't a fit!" shrieked Bunter. "I don't have fits! Yaroooh! It was the mustard. It was that fat villain. Ow!"

"The poor boy's mind is wandering," said Mr. Lathom, with deep compassion. "There can be no mustard here. Calm yourself, Bunter."

"It was in the jam-tart!" raved Bunter.

"The what? There is no jam-tart here, Bunter. Pray—pray strive to collect your senses."

"Yaroooh! Leggo my neck, Flake, you beast! I'll spifficate you! Yoop! Take that, Herries, you rotter!"

"Oh!" roared Herries, as Bunter, getting a foot free, lunged at his waistcoat. Herries sat down quite suddenly.

"Bad Jove! Poor old Hewwies!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Buntah—"

"Jemine go!"

Billy Bunter struggled to his feet, and jammed his spectacles on his little fat nose. He was snorting like a grampus, in a state of breathless wrath. Mr. Lathom blinked at him.

"Bunter! Is it possible that you are not in a fit?"

"Of course I'm not!" howled Bunter.

"Then what is the matter with you?"

You may leave him alone, boys. He

does not, I think, require restraint."

"Go hon!" murmured Flake.

"What did you say, Blake?"

"Hem! N-n-nothing, sir."

"You may go back to your places."

Now, Bunter," said the master of the

Fourth sternly, "tell me what this ridiculous scene means?"

"Wow! It was the mustard! My

mouth's burnt off!" gasped Bunter.

"I'm going to be ill! I think very likely

I shall die! Wow! If I do, I hope

they'll hang Fatty Wynn! Yow-ow!"

"You have been eating mustard?"

ejaculated Mr. Lathom.

"It was in the tart," gasped Bunter.

"What utter nonsense! Tarts are not

made with mustard—at least, I have

never heard of such a thing. In any

don't like mustard-tarts. It was to punish Bunter for stealing the tart. I knew he'd bag it, and I hoped it would be a lesson to him, sir."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Lathom understood at last. "Wynn, you have no right to play such childish tricks in the Form-room. I shall cane you, Wynn. As for you, Bunter, you have been deservedly punished for your greediness. I am ashamed of you!"

"Ow!"

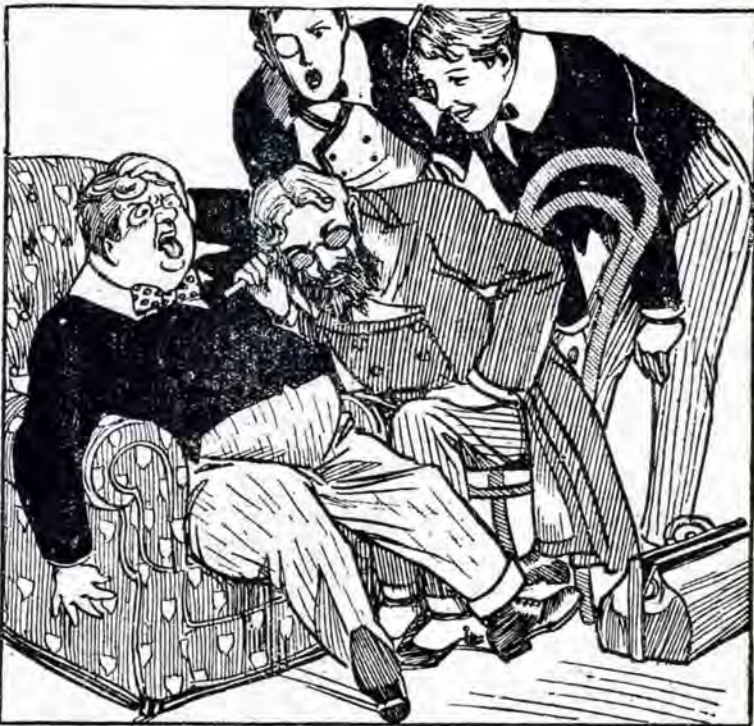
"Wynn, come here, and hold out your

hand!"

Swish, swish!

Fatty Wynn looked a little green as he went back to his seat with his fat hands tucked under his arms. But he comforted himself with the reflection that it was worth it. Bunter was likely to think twice, if not three times, before he bagged tuck from under Fatty's desk again.

"Bunter," said Mr. Lathom severely,



SOUNDING BUNTER'S HEART!

case, what were you doing with a tart in the Form-room, Bunter—if there is such a thing as a mustard tart, which I do not believe for one moment?"

There was a gasp of merriment from the Fourth at the idea of a mustard-tart. Billy Bunter pointed an accusing fat finger at Wynn.

"It was that fat rotter—" he began.

"Bunter! How dare you use such expressions!"

"I—I mean it was him who—"

"You should say it was 'he,' Bunter," interrupted Mr. Lathom.

"It was he—him—he, I mean—he who put the mustard in the tart, and nearly blew my head off!" gasped Bunter.

"Wynn! Can you explain this?"

"Yes, sir," said David Llewellyn Wynn cheerfully. "I put a tart—with mustard in it under my desk, sir."

"You brought a tart here to eat in the Form-room, Wynn!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom severely.

"No fear! I—I mean, no, sir. I

"you will stand in the corner till lessons are over. I am sorry to punish you like a little boy, Bunter, but if you act like one you must be treated like one. Stand in the corner!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the corner of the Form-room, the Fourth-Formers grinning at him as he went. Mr. Lathom's frowning glance restored them to gravity. But as the lesson proceeded the juniors glanced every now and then at the Owl and smiled. Billy Bunter's fat features were incessantly contorted as he stood in the corner. He was still feeling the effects of the mustard.

CHAPTER 5. Very Mysterious!

"O H dear!" That ejaculation came involuntarily from William George Bunter, about a quarter of an hour later, and Mr. Lathom looked round severely.

Billy Bunter was not sensitive, and he was rather glad, at first, to be standing in the corner instead of doing the work of the Form in his place. But his fat little legs were soon tired. They had a good deal of weight to support.

He shifted from one leg to the other, and back again, and grunted and mumbled, and finally ejaculated "Oh dear!"

"Kindly be silent, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

"I'm tired, sir!"

"If you speak again I shall cane you!"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter stood silent, shifting his legs again. His little round eyes were glittering behind his spectacles now. He was feeling very injured. His mouth was still smarting with mustard; and the juniors, instead of being properly sympathetic, evidently only looked on the matter as a joke. And he—the injured party—was set to stand in the corner! It was no wonder that the Owl of Greyfriars felt wrathful, and that he bethought him of his ventriloquist gift—which had earned him more kicks than halfpence, so to speak, at Greyfriars, but was, naturally, not known to the St. Jim's fellows. Some of them had heard of Billy Bunter's ventriloquism, certainly, when at Greyfriars on visits; but Bunter of the Fourth was supposed to be Wally Bunter, and Wally did not share his cousin's queer gift. Billy Bunter felt that it would be quite safe.

Mysterious voices in the Greyfriars studies were generally followed by fellows throwing things at Bunter; but at St. Jim's circumstances were quite different. No one was likely to suspect the supposed Wally.

Bunter cleared his throat with his fat little grunt, and prepared for business—clearing for action, as it were.

Mr. Lathom was devoting his attention just then to Baggy Trimble, who was discovered with bullseyes in his mouth. The Form-master was giving Trimble a severe lecture, to which Baggy listened with downcast eyes, fervently hoping that the little gentleman would not think of making him turn out his pockets. In the midst of Mr. Lathom's lecture a voice proceeded from the back of the class.

"Give us a rest, old nut!"

Mr. Lathom broke off suddenly. He could scarcely believe his ears.

"Mellish!" he thundered.

Percy Mellish stared.

"Yes, sir?" he stammered.

"How dare you interrupt me, and with such a remark, Mellish!"

"I didn't, sir! I never spoke!"

"It was your voice, Mellish!"

"Not at all! Someone behind me, I think, sir!" gasped Mellish.

"There is no one behind you, as you are in the back row, Mellish! It was you who spoke!"

"It-it wasn't! I swear it wasn't, sir! I never opened my lips! I—"

"You are on the w'ong twack, Lathom, old top!"

"Gussy!" gasped Blake, in amazement and alarm.

"D'Arcy!" roared Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir?" said Arthur Augustus innocently, looking up in surprise.

"How dare you!"

"Bai Jove! I do not quite follow you, sir! Have I done anything?" asked the swell of St. Jim's.

"You spoke! You addressed me as—as old top!" shouted Mr. Lathom, justly incensed at being addressed as an old top.

"I, sir? Certainly not! I should wogard it as disrespectful to address a

gentleman of your yeabs, sir, as an old top!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"I heard you, D'Arcy!"

"I assuah you, sir, that you are labahin' undah a misappwension. I heard the wemark made, but I certainly did not make it."

"I repeat, D'Arcy, that I know your voice perfectly well, and that you made the remark. Step out here!"

"Don't go!" came a voice from somewhere.

Mr. Lathom spun round.

"Bless my soul! This is more than impertinence—it is actual rebellion! Who spoke to D'Arcy?"

"Find out!"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

Mr. Lathom looked quite dazed—and so did the juniors. All the fellows were looking round in search of the speaker.

"What—what—what does this mean?" spluttered Mr. Lathom. "Boy! Step out at once! I shall chastise you most condignly!"

Apparently the speaker was not attracted by the prospect of condign chastisement. At all events, he did not step out. Mr. Lathom was almost purple by this time.

"If the boy does not immediately step out I shall punish the whole Form!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"What rot!"

"Wynn! It was you who spoke!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Fatty Wynn in alarm. "Never opened my lips, sir!"

"It was your voice!"

"It wasn't, sir!"

Figgins and Kerr were staring blankly at their fat chum. They, as well as Mr. Lathom, were certainly under the impression that it was Fatty Wynn's voice that had spoken.

"Don't tell me untruths, Wynn! Step out here!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"WYNN!"

"I—I didn't speak, sir!" howled the unfortunate Fatty. "Not a word, sir! It was somebody else!"

"Nonsense! Will you come out here, or must I come and fetch you, Wynn?" shouted the Form-master.

Fatty Wynn reluctantly left his place, as Mr. Lathom grabbed a cane from his desk. In the corner, Billy Bunter grinned serenely. The affair of the mustard-tart was about to be avenged.

"Swish, swish!"

"Now, Wynn, let that be a warning to you—"

"I never spoke, sir!" said Fatty Wynn, rubbing his hands ruefully. "I assure you, sir, I wouldn't speak to you like that! It was caddish, and I wouldn't do it!"

"Nonsense! Go to your place!"

"Wotten! This is vewy unjust!"

"D'Arcy!"

"If you are about to say that I made that wemark, sir, I assuah you that you are mistaken!"

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!"

"I will do as you wquest, sir, but I pwotest!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"I certainly did not say anything!"

"It wasn't D'Arcy, sir!" gasped Blake. "I was looking at him, and he never moved his lips, sir!"

"I know D'Arcy's voice, Blake!"

"Rats!"

"Blake! How dare you!" shrieked Mr. Lathom.

"I didn't say rats!" exclaimed Blake. "I didn't! It—it—it's somebody playing tricks, or else the blessed place is haunted!"

"Yaas, wathah, it is a twick of some sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Some wottah is lidden heah playin' twicks!"

"Oh, you're a silly ass, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Well?" said Herries, staring.

"Hewwies, I wogard that wemark——"

"What do you mean, fathead? I never spoke."

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, in bewilderment. "Really, it does seem that there is trickery of some sort! Surely there cannot be some extraneous person concealed in the Form-room!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Who—who—who was that?"

"Find out!"

Mr. Lathom was blinking blankly at his class. The voice came from somewhere, but where, was a mystery. He certainly could not put his finger on any of the juniors as the speaker.

"This—this—this is most extraordinary!" he exclaimed at last. "There is certainly someone—somewhere——"

"I told you it wasn't me, sir!" said Fatty Wynn, with great dignity.

"I—I believe you, Wynn. I—I am sorry I punished you," gasped Mr. Lathom. "But—but really, where—where is the person who is speaking? It is most extraordinary! Someone must be concealed here!"

Mr. Lathom glanced helplessly round the Form-room. There really was not any likely place where any person, extraneous or otherwise, could be concealed. He gave a jump as a voice came from the door.

"Ta-ta, old nut! I'm off!"

"Bless my soul! It is someone in the passage!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "Someone has called through the key-hole!"

"Keep your wool on!"

Mr. Lathom rushed to the door and threw it open. He rushed into the corridor, his cane ready for action. But the corridor was empty! If the owner of the mysterious voice had turned the corner he had certainly been very swift—at all events, he was not there.

Puzzled and perplexed, Mr. Lathom came back into the Form-room. In his corner Billy Bunter smiled, and winked at the ceiling. Fortunately, the Greyfriars ventriloquist stopped at that point, and the mysterious voice was heard no more in the Fourth Form-room. But there was much perplexity and great wrath in the Form, and William George Bunter felt that the ache in his fat little legs was avenged.

CHAPTER 6.

Bunter Takes the Cake!

"V EWY wemarkable!" That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's opinion, delivered when the Fourth were dismissed from lessons.

The juniors gathered in groups in the corridor discussing the curious happenings of the afternoon. Mr. Lathom had gone to his study quite as perplexed as his pupils.

"Wemarkable!" went on Arthur Augustus, holding forth to a group on the subject. "There was some fearful wottah playin' twicks in the cowwidah, you know—speakin' through the key-hole all the time!"

"Blessed if I see how he could!" said Blake.

"Mr. Lathom spotted him at last, Blake—or, wathah, his voice. He must have got away wathah quickly. But it was vewy odd that he was able to imitate Fatty's voice so vewy neahly——"

"What rot!" said Fatty Wynn. "Why, it was a sort of fat gurgle when Lathom thought it was me speaking!"

"Yaas, wathah—that's what I weap!"

"Why, you silly ass——"

"Weally, Wynn——"

"He got your voice all right, though, Gussy," said Blake. "I thought it was you."

"I suppose that is a joke, Blake?" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "The voice Mr. Lathom took for mine was simply a squeak!"

"Exactly!"
"I regard you as an ass, Blake!"
"Nobody seemed to know his own foot when he heard it," grinned Levison. "It's a jolly queer thing. I suppose it must have been somebody in the passage. But who was it?"

"That is wathah a mystery."
"I say, you fellows—"
"Oh, Bunter knows, of course!" said Blake sarcastically. "Bunter knows everything, and a few over. Who was it, Bunter?"

"I say, perhaps the place is haunted!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at them with owl-like seriousness.

"Fathead!"
"Ass!"
"I say, you fellows, I've heard that there's a ghost at St. Jim's—the ghost of some old monk, or monkey, or something—"

"So there is!" agreed Blake. "He's never been seen or heard, but he belongs to the place. But the ghost of St. Jim's wouldn't haunt the Form-room and cheek a Form-master. Ghosts don't do that."

"Wathah not! You are wathah assine, Buntah!"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"
"Bai Jove! The Shell are not out yet," said Arthur Augustus, glancing up the corridor. "Linton's just gone by. I wonder what they are stickin' in the Form-room for?"

"Detained, perhaps," remarked Blake. "Linton was looking ratty. Let's give 'em a look-in."

Study No. 6 walked along to the Shell-room and looked in. They found the whole Shell sitting dismally at their desks. Evidently it was a case of detention.

Tom Merry glanced at them lugubriously.

"Linton in a wax this afternoon?" asked Jack Blake, with much sympathy. "Yes!" groaned the captain of the Shell. "We're detained for an hour, and we're on blighted mathematics! Improving our minds—"
"Not our tempers!" groaned Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! That is wathah hard lines, deah boys!"

"All through some thumping ass saying 'Rats! to Linton!'" said Talbot. "He couldn't be expected to take it smiling."

"Bai Jove! But it is wathah wuff to detain the whole Form because one fellow said 'Wata! Who was it?'"
"Nobody knows; he wouldn't own up!" growled Tom Merry.

Jack Blake gave a sniff.
"In the Fourth Form a fellow would have owned up at once, under the cires," he remarked.

"In the Fourth a fellow wouldn't have had the nerve to say 'Rats!' to a Form-master at all!" retorted Tom Merry.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake suddenly. "Perhaps it was the same bounder who's been playing tricks in our Form-room? Somebody's been yowling in from the passage through the keyhole, and put Lathom in no end of a wax, and we can't find out who it was!"

"It wasn't through the keyhole here," said Tom. "It was some silly ass in the class, and we're going to find him out presently, and I'll scalp him!"

"I say, you fellows, I believe the place is haunted—"

"Rats!"
"What are you doing here?" came the

deep voice of Mr Linton, from behind the group of juniors in the doorway.

"Bai Jove!"
Blake & Co. did not stop to explain what they were doing there; they bolted. Mr. Linton frowned, and went into the Form-room, possibly suspecting that the detention task would not be thoroughly done unless he was present. Mathematics might have been changed for leapfrog in the absence of the Form-master.

The Fourth-Formers gathered in the Common-room to discuss the incident of the mysterious voice; but Billy Bunter did not accompany them. He had other fish to fry. When the discussion was over—without any result being reached—Blake & Co. went up to Study No. 6 to tea.

There was a startled movement in that celebrated apartment as they entered it. Billy Bunter spun round from the cupboard, and blinked at them over his big glasses.

"I—I say, you fellows—," he gasped. "The cake!" roared Herries. "He's after the cake!"

"I—I haven't touched the cake, Herries!" gasped Bunter, dodging round the table. "There wasn't any cake there, in fact. And—and it's still there, old chap—safe and sound. Just look!"

"Keep him in the study while I look!" said George Herries grimly.

Herries strode to the cupboard, and Bunter cast a longing blink towards the door, where Blake and Digby and D'Arcy barred the exit.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I've got a rather pressing engagement—"

"You should have kept it before coming here, old top!" grinned Dig. "Now you'll be late for it!"

"Yass, wathah!"

"I—I say, Kildare's asked me to tea!" pleaded Bunter. "I—I can't be late to tea with the captain of the school, can I?"

"The cake's gone!" roared Herries. "Just a few crumbs left, that's all! That fat burlar has scoffed the cake!"

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I haven't, you know. Besides, it was only a measly small one, and hardly any plums in it—"

"Collar him!"

"Hold on!" said Blake, so gravely that his chums started, and looked at him. "Don't touch him, you fellows! Bunter, have you eaten the plum-cake?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then it's all right," said Blake, in a tone of great relief. "Thank goodness, you haven't eaten it, Bunter. I don't know whether it would be exactly fatal—"

Bunter jumped.

"Fatal!" he spluttered. "Why should a plum-cake be fatal, you ass?"

"It's all right if you haven't eaten it," said Blake. "When a fellow puts rat-poison in a cake and leaves it for the mice, of course he doesn't count on a greedy bounder coming along and scoffing the cake without asking permission. But it's all right if you haven't eaten it. I was afraid you had."

"Rat-poison!" said Bunter faintly.

"All serene, if you haven't eaten it! You can get out, Bunter!"

"I—I say, how—how much rat-poison did you put into the cake, Blake?" gasped Bunter, his fat face white as chalk.

"Not more than half a pound, I know," said Blake, with an air of deep reflection.

"Half a pound!" shrieked the fat junior.

"Certainly not more!"

"Yow-ow!"

"What's the matter, Bunter?"

"Yaroooh! Help! Send for a

doctor! Fire! Murder! I'm poisoned!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Help!"

"It's all right—if you haven't eaten the cake—"

"Help!"

"You said you hadn't—"

"Yaroooh! Send for a doctor! I'm poisoned!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Medicine Man!

"B AI Jove! Poor old Buntah!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Pway beah up, Buntah! Fewwaps it may not be fatal—"

"Help! Yooop!"

Billy Bunter collapsed into the study armchair, howling. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned to Blake.

"Blake, you must have been a frightful ass to put wat-poison in the cake and leave it in the cupboard!"

"How was I to know Bunter would come along scoffing our cake?" demanded Jack Blake defensively. "A fellow can't foresee these things!"

"You weally might have foreseen it, considewin' that it is Buntah. Bai Jove, I might have eaten the cake myself!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "That would have been a gweat deal more serious!"

"Yarooop! Help! Send for a doctor!"

"Hush—"

"Yah! I won't hush! I'm not going to be poisoned!" roared Bunter. "I'm suffering fearful agony! I'm dying! Send for a doctor! Yooop!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking into the study from the passage. "You fellows killing a pig?"

"The pig's killing himself, to judge by the sound," said Lowther. "What's the matter with Bunter?"

"Yaroooh! I'm poisoned!"

"Poisoned!" exclaimed Manners.

"Help!"

"He's eaten a cake," said Jack Blake, closing one eye at the Terrible Three. "He didn't know it was poisoned for the mice. I didn't put more than half a pound of the rat-poison in it—not so much, in fact—and I don't think it will be really fatal—"

"Yaroooh! I'm dying!"

"It was frightfully careless of Blake. I am sure the cowanah will blame him vevy severely at the inquest."

Billy Bunter burst into a terrific howl at the mention of an inquest. The Owl of Greyfriars dearly loved the limelight as a rule; but he had no desire whatever to be the chief figure in a coroner's inquest.

"Yaroooh! Help! Where's that doctor? Send for a medical man! I'm dying! My—my feet are cold already! I'm in awful pain!"

Tom Merry came towards the suffering youth with a very grave expression on his face.

"Where do you feel the pain, Bunter?" he asked.

"Here—there—everywhere!" gasped Bunter. "Awful agony, like red-hot pins and needles, and stabbing daggers, you know!"

"Tell me if I touch the spot. Is it there?"

"Yaroooh! Leave off punching me, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I am weally surprised at your laughin' at such a time, you fellows! Pway have some sympathy!"

A crowd of fellows were gathering round the doorway now. A whisper passed among them, and there was a general grin. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy

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caught the whisper, and he grinned, too. He realised that the matter was not so serious as Bunter supposed.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "You spoofin' boundah, Blake—"

"Shush!"

"But it is weally too bad—"

"Yaroooh! Have you sent for a doctor?" howled Bunter. "Tell him to get a stomach-pump, some of you!"

"I've got a bike-pump!" called in Levison. "Will that do?"

"Yah! Beast! I believe you're glad I'm expiring in fearful agony! Tell the doctor to come quick! Ow-wow-yow!"

"Hold on a minute or two, Bunter!" exclaimed Lowther. "I'm going! Don't die till I come back, old chap! Doctor in two ticks!"

Monty Lowther rushed from the study.

But he did not rush for a medical man. He rushed into his own study and dragged open the box in which were kept the "properties" of the Junior Dramatic Society.

With swift, skilled hands, Lowther dabbed grease-paint on his face, affixed thereto a black beard and moustache, and jammed a grey wig on his head, and a pair of glasses on his nose. He hurried on a frock-coat, somewhat crumpled, over his Etons, with a silk muffler to cover up his collar. Monty Lowther was quite a quick-change artist—and though his change was not very thorough it was certainly very rapid.

He came speeding back along the passage, and there was a gasp from the juniors at the sight of him.

"Why—what—" exclaimed Levison. "The doctor!" howled Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hush, my boys!" said Dr. Lowther, in a deep bass voice. "I hear there is someone ill—where is my patient—"

"This way, doctor!" shrieked Bunter from the study. "Have you got the stomach-pump? I'm dying!"

There was a gasp from Blake & Co. as the "doctor" came in. Tom Merry jerked Bunter's glasses from his fat little nose. Bunter was short-sighted, but even Bunter might have spotted the hurried make-up of the medical man. Without his glasses, however, all was safe.

All Bunter saw was a bearded man in a frock-coat bending over him.

"Help!" he moaned faintly. "Help! I'm dying! The poison's working through my system!"

"Stand back, boys!" said the medical man, in his deep voice. "Give him room! Bunter—ahem—I think your name is Bunter—"

"Ow—yes—yow—"

"You have swallowed poison?"

"Yow-ow—yes!"

"An attempt at suicide, I presume?"

"Yoop! No! It was in the cake!" gasped Bunter. "I never dreamed that that silly ass had put rat-poison in the cake. I'm suffering fearfully! Awful shooting pains, like—like daggers and things! Ow!"

William George Bunter quite imagined by that time that he was suffering fearful pains.

"My poor, poor boy!" said the medical man soothingly. "Calm yourself! Let me feel your pulse!"

"Yaroooh!"

"What is the matter now?"

"Yow! You're pinching my wrist! Leggo!"

"I must feel your pulse, Bunter. Bless my soul! Five hundred and sixty-nine—a very high temperature! Keep still while I use my stethoscope, my unfortunate boy!"

"Yow-ow!"

The medical man jammed the end of

a fountain-pen into Bunter's waistcoat, the juniors looking on as gravely as they could.

Lowther listened attentively at the end of the fountain-pen with an expression of owl-like solemnity.

Bunter's round eyes were fixed in anguish upon his face, as if striving to read his doom there.

"Am I—am I very bad?" he gasped.

The medical man sighed.

"My poor, poor boy—"

"Yaroooh!"

"I find traces of fatty degeneration," said the medical man. "I am afraid you are accustomed to over-eating yourself, Bunter."

"Ow! Wow!"

"Have you made your will, Bunter?"

"Yaroooh!"

"Can't you save him, sir?" asked Tom Merry, with a break in his voice.

"I will try," said the medical man gravely. "I have every hope of saving his life. Has anyone a stomach-pump?"

"Ahem! Would a footer-pump do?"

"It would not do, I am afraid. However, there is another method. Raise him from the chair."

Four or five juniors raised Bunter from the chair. It needed the efforts of four or five. Bunter was not a feather-weight.

"Lay him face down on the hearth-rug," said the medical man. "Let him touch the floor with a slight bump."

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Buap!

"Yaroooh!"

"Get the fire-shovel—"

"Here you are, sir!"

"Now strike him gently with the shovel—the flat of the shovel—while I count. This will counteract the effects of the poison. One!"

Whack!

"Yooooop!"

"Two!"

Whack!

"Yaroooh!"

"Be quiet, Bunter! This is for your own good!" said the medical man soothingly. "I think you should strike a little harder—I see no signs of improvement so far."

Whack!

"Yah! Oh! Beast!" howled the patient.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Patience, Master Bunter—we are curing you! This is a new thing in first aid—very suitable to your case. Do you not feel better?"

"Yow! No! Wow!"

"Strike a little harder—"

Whack!

"Help!"

"Are you feeling better, Master Bunter?"

"No!" howled Bunter. "Worse! Yaroooh! Lemme alone! Yooop!"

"We must keep up the treatment till you feel better, my poor boy. It is the only way. A little harder, please, Master Merry!"

WHACK!

"Yow-ow-ow-wooooo!" roared the patient. "Leave off! I'm better—much better! Yow-ow!"

"You are sure you are better, Master Bunter?"

"Yes, you beast! Ow!"

"Do you still feel any pain?"

"Only where that rotter's been whacking me!" wailed Bunter.

"Perhaps a little further treatment will relieve—"

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter struggled furiously in the grasp of his helpers, evidently determined to have no further treatment on those lines. As the fat junior reared up, his head came in contact with the medical man's chin, with a loud concussion. It was the medical man who roared this time.

"Yaroooh! You fat idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him some more—"

"Yaroooh! Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Cave!" yelled Levison minor from the corridor.

"My hat! Here's Railton!"

The crowd in the doorway melted away like snow in the sunshine. But the juniors in the study could not melt away, unfortunately, and they stood breathless round Bunter, who was sitting on the hearthrug, roaring, as the School House master strode into No. 6.

CHAPTER 8.

Not Fatal!

M R. RAILTON looked at Tom Merry & Co., and Tom Merry & Co. looked at Mr. Railton. Monty Lowther made himself as small as possible behind the other fellows. He did not want to meet his Housemaster in his character of an amateur medical man.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What is all this uproar, Blake?"

"This—this uproar, sir?" stammered Blake.

"Yes. A most extraordinary din has been proceeding from this study," said Mr. Railton sternly. "Someone was calling for help."

"Yow-ow-ow! Ow!"
 "Is anything the matter with Bunter?"

"Ahem! I—I think he thinks he's ill, sir," mumbled Tom Merry.

"I am ill!" howled Bunter. "I'm poisoned! I'm dying! Where's that doctor? Has he gone?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What do you mean, Bunter? How can you possibly be poisoned?"

"It was Blake! I hope he will be hanged!" howled Bunter. "Make that doctor come back! Where is he? I'm dying!"

"Have you given Bunter anything, Blake?"

"Not at all, sir."

"He put the poison in the cake!" yelled Bunter. "Where's that doctor?"

"There is no doctor here, Bunter!"

"He was here a minute ago."

"Is he wandering in his mind?" exclaimed the Housemaster. "Surely there is no doctor here—Why—what—who—who is that?"

The Housemaster jumped as his eyes fell upon Dr. Montague Lowther. The other fellows had screened the medical man of the Shell as much as they could—but it was in vain.

"Who are you, sir?" thundered the Housemaster.

"Oh dear! I'm Lowther, sir!" gasped the humorist of the Shell.

"And what does that absurd make-up mean, Lowther?"

"Only a little joke on Bunter, sir," murmured Monty Lowther. "One of the characters in our plays, sir—Dr. Killenquick—"

"Absurd! Is it possible that that ridiculous boy supposed you to be a doctor?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "You should not play these absurd jokes, Lowther. I presume that there is nothing the matter with Bunter?"

"Nothing at all, sir," said Tom.

"Yarook! I'm poisoned—"

"Be quiet, Bunter, and explain to me why you fancy you are poisoned. You certainly do not look ill."

"I'm dying, sir!" moaned Bunter.

"The cake was poisoned—I ate it, not knowing that Blake had put rat-poison in it—"

Mr. Railton started.

"Blake! Were you so utterly reckless as to put rat-poison in a cake and leave it where it could be taken—"

"Not at all, sir," said Blake hastily.

"Never had any rat-poison in the study, that I know of."

"What!" yelled Bunter.

The fat junior jumped up. As he realised that it was a case of "spoof" his fearful agonies departed all of a sudden.

"He told me!" shrieked Bunter, shaking a fat, furious fist at Jack Blake.

"He told me—"

"You told Bunter you had poisoned the cake?" exclaimed the Housemaster angrily.

"No, sir," said Blake meekly. "I told him I hadn't put more than half a pound of poison in it. And I hadn't, sir. I couldn't have, could I, when I hadn't put any at all?"

Mr. Railton stared at Blake's meek face.

"I am afraid, Blake, that you led Bunter to suppose—"

"He broke off."

"Did you find the cake in this study, Bunter?"

"In the cupboard, sir, and Blake said—"

"Whose was the cake?"

"Ours!" grunted Herriea.

"Did Bunter take it without permission?"

Silence.

"I think I understand," said Mr. Railton. "I am afraid you have been

playing this absurd joke on Bunter because he took your cake and ate it. Is that it?"

"Ahem!"

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"You should not play such pranks—and you have caused a great deal of disturbance," said Mr. Railton. "You will take fifty lines each. As for you, Bunter, this should be a lesson to you to respect the property of others."

"I never touched the cake, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"I wouldn't do such a thing, sir! I should disdain to touch a cake that didn't belong to me."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Bless my soul! If you did not eat the cake, Bunter, how was it that you fancied you were poisoned?" asked the Housemaster.

"Oh! Ah—ahem—"

"Answer me, Bunter!"

Mr. Railton simply blinked at the Owl of Greyfriars.

"I hope you believe me, sir!" said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Believe you!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"No, I certainly do not believe you, Bunter! I have never heard such an abominable young liar! You will follow me to my study, Bunter."

"Wha-a-at for, sir?"

"I am going to cane you."

"B-b-but I'm the injured party, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I've been treated ungratefully for performing an act of friendship—"

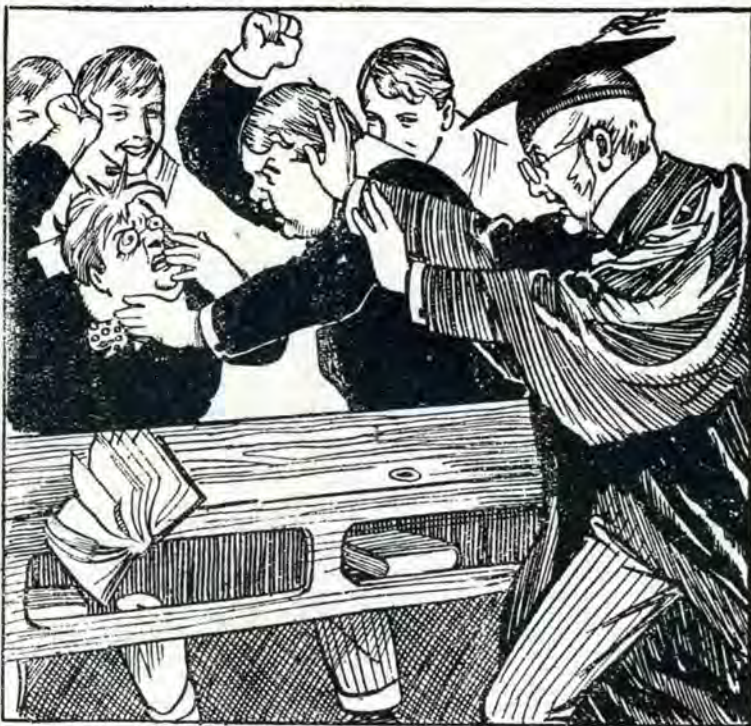
"Follow me!" thundered the Housemaster.

And Billy Bunter jumped, and followed him.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That boundah Buntah weally does take the cake, you know!"

"The dear boy's sorry he took that one by this time!" grinned Blake.

There was no doubt about that! Billy



THE CONFLICT IN THE CLASS-ROOM!

But Billy Bunter couldn't. For once even the Owl of Greyfriars was not ready with a "whopper." No "whopper" that he could think of on the spur of the moment would meet the case. He blinked helplessly at the Housemaster.

"You did eat the cake, Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Railton sternly.

"I—I—I—"

"Did you or not?"

"I—I may have tasted it, sir," gasped Bunter. "Now I come to think of it, I certainly did taste it. I—I only wanted to see whether it was—was digestible, sir. Some cakes ain't, sir, and—and I was afraid these chaps might get indigestion, so—"

"Bai Jove!"

"It was really kindness on my part, sir," said Bunter, growing more confident. "I'm always doing these kind actions, and never getting any gratitude."

"Bless my soul!"

Bunter came along about five minutes later, rubbing his fat hands. He paused to blink into Study No. 6.

"Yah!" was his elegant remark.

"Weally, Buntah—"

"Yah! I deeprise you! Yah!"

With that Parthian shot Bunter rolled on. There was a loud chortle in the Study as he went. The fact that W. G. Bunter despised them did not have the effect of dashing the spirits of Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 9.

Tea in No. 2!

"I'll make 'em sit up!"

Bunter of the Fourth made that remark in his own study, No. 2 in the Fourth. His study-mates, Mellish and Trimble, were at tea. Bunter wasn't at tea. Bunter had had tea in Hall; for what that was worth—not much.

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to Bunter, who was equal to half a dozen teas in Hall. But there was no tea in the study for the Owl of the Fourth, for funds were low—as they generally were with Bunter—and his study-mates were not the fellows to carry a passenger at tea-time—far from it.

Bunter reclined in the armchair, blinking crossly at his study-mates through his big spectacles, like a podgy Peri at the gates of Paradise. Mellish and Trimble had quite a good supply, and the amiable youths enjoyed it all the more owing to Bunter's hungry looks.

"Hallo! Whom are you going to make sit up?" asked Mellish, helping himself to pickle.

"Everybody!" said Bunter comprehensively. "I ain't having a good time at this school."

"Whose fault is that?" grinned Mellish. "You don't make yourself popular, old gun."

"I was jolly popular at Greyfriars—"

"Were you ever at Greyfriars?" exclaimed Mellish, in surprise.

"I—I—I mean, when I was there on a visit to my cousin in the Remove," stammered Bunter.

"You must have paid a jolly long visit to your Greyfriars cousin," said Percy Mellish, looking at him curiously. "You're always talking about that school."

"Better show than this," said Bunter. "Jolly good fellows there—and they liked me no end. You should have seen the way Wharton and Bob Cherry and the rest used to praise me. Always welcome in any study—fellows used to compete to get me to come in to tea."

"Jolly queer tastes they must have at Greyfriars—if that's true!"

"Which it isn't!" chuckled Baggy Trimble.

"The fellows nearly cried when I left," said Bunter. "Bob Cherry simply couldn't bear up! My Form-master—"

"Your Form-master?"

"Yes; old Quelch—"

"How the thump could he be your Form-master if you were a visitor at the school?"

"I—I—I mean, my cousin's Form-master, of course! You—you see, I—I stayed rather a long time. The Form-master, as I was saying, came and shook hands with me when I left—like a real pal. Old Lathom never treats me like that. The Form-masters here are beasts. This school ain't up to Greyfriars in any way. Why, even the lessons are on a lower scale—you learn the same stuff in the Fourth here that they have in the Remove at Greyfriars!"

"You mean the Forms are called by different names, you silly ass! The fellows are the same age."

"Everything's rotten here, in comparison," pursued Billy Bunter, who was plainly in a pessimistic mood. "Old Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, was really chummy with me—used to call me Billy when—"

"Why the thump should he call you Billy when you're name's Walter?"

"I mean, he used to call me Bunt!" gasped the Owl. "Look at Kildare here! He called me a fat frog to-day!"

"Looks as if Kildare knows you better than Wingate does!"

"I'm getting fed up!" said Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to go back to Greyfriars—I mean, to go to Greyfriars. Only—only—"

"Could you go to Greyfriars if you liked?" asked Mellish.

"Certainly I could!"

"My hat! I wish you would, old scout! I'll tell you what—go to Greyfriars, and stay there; and we'll all pass a vote of thanks!"

"Beast!" said Bunter. "If it wasn't for that cardsharp chap I owe money to, and some little debts, and—some other things, I'd jolly well go! I'm not being treated here as I expected! I'm kept out of games, and I could play any fellow's head off here. D'Arcy is stand-offish, though I was willing to be friendly with him. I'm stuck in this study, with two mean rotters who don't even ask a fellow if he's hungry at tea-time—"

"No good asking—we know!" grinned Mellish.

"I'll have some of those pickles, Mellish—"

"You jolly well won't!"

"No fear!" said Baggy Trimble emphatically.

"I call that mean!"

"Call it what you like, old chap—but you don't bag our tea!" chuckled Mellish.

"Buy your own pickles, my son!"

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order—"

"The same one you were disappointed about last week?" asked Mellish.

"Or the one you were disappointed about the week before?" chuckled Trimble.

"Well, I'm going to make 'em sit up—and you, too!" said Bunter. "I can do it, too! I'm an awfully clever chap—"

"Never seen any signs of it! You turn poor old Lathom's hair grey in class!"

Bunter sniffed contemptuously.

"I don't mean class work—that rot! I could tell you something, if I chose!" said Bunter mysteriously.

"Lies, most likely!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Billy Bunter relapsed into silence, and watched the feasters hungrily. He was feeling very dissatisfied. Certainly, there had been no realisation of the rosy dreams he had dreamed when he changed places with Wally Bunter and came to St. Jim's. It was his own fault, but Bunter found no comfort in that—even if he knew it.

Footsteps passed the door, and Bunter looked up quickly. It was a chance for the exercise of his weird powers as a ventriloquist—and Bunter's brain always worked actively when it was a question of grub.

"Come on, you chaps!" called a voice, apparently from the passage. "Ain't you coming, Baggy? Chance for you, Bunter!"

"What's on, Blake?" called back Mellish.

"Gussy's treat in the tuckshop—he's blowing a fiver!"

"I'm on!"

Mellish and Trimble jumped up at once. They had nearly finished tea, and the remnant was certainly not to be compared with a treat in the school shop stood by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, if that youth was "blowing" a fiver!

"I'll go!" exclaimed Bunter. "You fellows stay here—"

"Catch us!" grinned Trimble. "Come on, Percy!"

And Mellish and Trimble ran out of the study, anxious not to be late at the festive spread in Dame Taggles' shop.

Billy Bunter grinned.

He lost no time when he was left alone. He picked up a bag, and crammed into it what was left of the eatables, and departed in hot haste—in the direction opposite to that taken by his study-mates.

Mellish and Trimble rushed downstairs, and sped across to the tuckshop.

They found that establishment empty. There was no feed going on, that was certain; and they were puzzled and disappointed.

"That beast Blake was pulling our

leg!" growled Mellish. "Hallo, there's D'Arcy! Let's ask him!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sighted in the quad as the disappointed juniors came out of the tuckshop, and they bore down on him.

"Are you standing a feed?" demanded Mellish.

"Sowwy, dear boy—no!"

"Not blowing a fiver in the tuckshop?" exclaimed Trimble.

"I wgwot to state that I do not possess a fiver, Twimble; and if I did I should not blow it, as you express it!"

"Blake said so!" howled Mellish. "He called into our study—"

"Bai Jove! I weally fail to compwehend why Blake should have made such a statement, deah boys!"

Mellish and Trimble returned to the School House, and found Jack Blake in the hall talking to Roylance and Levison.

"Do you call that a joke?" demanded Mellish sourly.

"Eh?"

"I call it a lie, if you want to know!" snapped Mellish.

Blake stared at him.

"Are you talking to me?" he demanded.

"Yes, I am!"

"Will you explain what you're talking about, before I knock your silly head on the banisters?" inquired Blake politely.

"You called into our study that D'Arcy was standing a feed in the tuckshop—"

"I did!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes; you did!"

"When?"

"Five or six minutes ago!"

"I've just come from the Common-room, where I've been for the last quarter of an hour," said Blake. "Somebody's been pulling your leg!"

"I suppose I know your voice?" sneered Mellish.

"I know I jolly well do!" said Trimble.

"You're mistaken!" said Blake gruffly.

"I haven't been anywhere near your study."

"Rats!"

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"Don't you take my word?" he demanded.

"You're making a mistake, Mellish!" said Levison. "I was with Blake in the Common-room—so was Roylance."

"Oh, rot! I know Blake's voice!"

"Same here!" said Trimble. "No good telling me—Yoooop!"

Jack Blake's temper was growing warm by that time. He made a grasp at the two, and seized their collars, and their heads came together with a sounding concussion.

"Crack!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Now do you take my word?" demanded Blake.

"Yow-ow-oh! Yes! Yahi! Ohi! Of course! Leggo! Oh, dear!"

Mellish and Trimble escaped up the staircase, rubbing their heads. They came back to Study No. 2 in a savage mood to finish their tea.

But their tea was already finished.

What they had left of it was gone—quite gone! And so was W. G. Bunter!

CHAPTER 10.

Haunted!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY of the Shell rubbed his nose thoughtfully, and blinked at Wilkins and Gunn.

"It's awfully queer!" he said.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Wilkins. "A bit stubby, if you like; but I shouldn't call it awfully queer!"

"Stubby?" repeated Grundy.

"A bit pug!" said Wilkins. "But I've seen lots of noses worse!"

"Noses!" said Grundy, staring. "Who's talking about noses?"

"Eh? Didn't you remark that your nose was awfully queer?"

"You silly ass!" roared George Alfred. "No, I did not! I wasn't talking about my nose!"

"Oh! You were rubbing it, and you said— So I thought—"

"Don't be such an ass, Wilkins! And if you give me too much of your funny back-chat, I'll make your nose awfully queer, and your eye, too!" said Grundy darkly. "I said it was awfully queer, and so it is! Blessed if I'm not beginning to think the place is haunted! You remember what happened in the Form-room the other day? Somebody said 'Rats!' to Linton, and we were detained. We never found out who it was. Then there was something of the sort in the Fourth Form-room, and I heard Mellish and Trimble talking about something of the kind. And now— It's a corker!"

Grundy rubbed his nose again very thoughtfully, but Wilkins decided not to misunderstand this time.

"I was cuffing Bunter in the passage," went on Grundy.

"What for?"

"Oh, nothing special! I thought a cuff would do him good. He's rather a slithy cove, you know. I was cuffing him, and then I heard Railton call out to me from the stairs. Now, I know Railton's voice, don't I?"

"You ought to," agreed Gunn.

"Well, it was his foot. He called out to me to go to him at once, and I thought he was ratty. Hearing Bunter yell, he might have thought I was bullying him, or some such rot. However, I went. And he wasn't there!"

"He'd gone?"

"Well, you see, there wasn't anybody on the staircase at all," said Grundy. "Railton couldn't have got away in the time, unless he slid down the banisters. A Housemaster wouldn't do that would he?"

"Ye gods! I rather think not!"

"Besides, Railton couldn't very well, with his gammy arm. He's got a bad fin, you know, from when he was in the Army. Then how did it happen?" demanded Grundy. "Isn't it jolly queer? I'm beginning to think the place is really haunted. It's a mystery—it puzzles me."

Evidently Grundy considered that a mystery must be very deep indeed if it puzzled him.

"Perhaps you imagined it!" suggested Gunn, rather unfortunately.

Grundy gave him a freezing glare. "Is that meant for a joke, Gunn?" he inquired.

"Nunno!"

"If you're serious, I can only say it shows you to be the silly ass I've always thought you, Gunn. I don't imagine I hear voices," said Grundy. "I heard Railton's foot right enough, and he wasn't there! It beats me! If the place isn't haunted, what does it mean?"

Gunn did not venture upon another suggestion.

"What do you think, Wilkins?"

"I think it's time we had tea."

"You silly ass—"

"I'm going to tea with Talbot," remarked Gunn. "Ta-ta!"

"I was thinking of giving Tom Merry a look-in," said Wilkins. And he followed Gunn from the study.

Grundy snorted.

He was very much perplexed by the mysterious happening—that had happened, and he had expected his study-mates to enter deeply and seriously into the puzzling question. Perhaps his way of receiving suggestions was not encourag-

ing to them. At all events, they left him to probe into the mystery on "his own," so to speak.

Grundy stirred the fire, and jammed the kettle on it. He was thus engaged when a fat face and pair of large spectacles glimmered in at the doorway.

"I say, you fellows—I mean, I say, Grundy—"

George Alfred looked round.

"Have you come back for another cuffing, Bunter?" he inquired.

"N-no."

"You'll get it, if you don't mizzle."

"I was going to ask you to tea," said Bunter, with dignity.

"I don't come to tea with fags."

"Well, I'll come to tea with you, old chap. It's all the same to me."

"It may be!" assented Grundy. "But it isn't all the same to me, you fat boulder. I give you one second to clear."

"Oh, really, Grundy—"

George Alfred Grundy picked up the tongs, apparently to use either as a missile or as a weapon. Grundy was rather a heavy-handed youth, and he did not enjoy Bunter's society. Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his glasses.

"One second!" said Grundy. "Now, I—"

"Oh, don't play the goat, Grundy!"

Grundy jumped.

It was the voice of George Wilkins, and it came—or seemed to come—from under the study table.

"Wilkins! What—"

"Oh, give your chin a rest, Grundy!"

"What?"

"You're always nagging your chin, old top. Dry up!"

Grundy's face was a study. He came towards the table with the tongs in his hand. The tongs were no longer intended for Bunter.

"You silly clump!" exclaimed Grundy.

"You told me you were going to tea with Tom Merry, and you sneak into the study and hide under the table like a silly fag! Come out!"

"Sha'n't!"

"Come out!" roared Grundy. "I've got the tongs ready for you!"

There was a large cover over the table, and Grundy could not see under it. But he had no doubt that Wilkins was there! He knew Wilkins' voice—as well as he knew Mr. Railton's!

"Will you come out, Wilkins?"

"Not for you! Go and eat coke!"

"I'm going to wallop you!"

"You couldn't!"

"Couldn't I?" roared Grundy, in great wrath. "I'll jolly well show you! If you don't come out this minute I'll shove the tongs at you!"

"Rats!"

Grundy stopped, with a crimson face, and thrust the tongs under the table with a mighty thrust. If Wilkins of the Shell had been there, there was no doubt that Wilkins of the Shell would have been hurt. But as it happened the tongs met with no resistance at all, and that was so unexpected that Grundy pitched forward with the force of the thrust and his nose tapped against the edge of the table—hard!

"Yoooooop!" gasped Grundy.

"He, he, he!"

"I'll give you something to cackle for in a minute, Bunter! Wait till I've finished with Wilkins! Now, Wilkins, you rotter—"

Grundy tore off the table-cover, and dropped on his knees, to make a frontal attack with the tongs on the junior under the table. But he did not make the attack. He remained petrified, glaring under the table as if mesmerised. For the space was empty. Wilkins was not there!

CHAPTER 11.

Trouble in Tom Merry's Study!

"Owl!" Grundy gasped. The sight of the Kaiser sitting under his table could not have surprised Grundy more than the empty space, with no one at all sitting there!

He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Oh!" he stuttered. "Ah! Oh!"

Grundy rose slowly to his feet, and backed away from the table with an expression almost of dread on his face. It was really a most unnerving experience.

"You—you heard him, Bunter?" he stammered.

The Owl nodded.

"Well, he—he's not there!"

"Extraordinary!" said Bunter. "How do you account for it, Grundy?"

"I can't account for it," said Grundy.

"Unless the school is haunted, there's no accounting for it. And if I can't account for it you can bet that it's unaccountable!"

"Ho, he, he!"

"This isn't a laughing matter, Bunter!" roared Grundy, making a jump at the fat junior.

Billy Bunter made a jump at the same moment into the passage. He executed a strategic retreat into Tom Merry's study, farther along. There were seven juniors in that study—the Terrible Three, Blake & Co. from No. 6 in the Fourth. There had been a hamper from Miss Priscilla that day, and Tom Merry was whacking out his good luck.

Seven forefingers pointed to the door as Billy Bunter blinked in.

"Outside!" said Tom Merry.

"Room for one more?" pleaded Bunter.

Monty Lowther jumped up.

"I never finished doctoring Bunter yesterday," he said. "Get the shovel, Tommy, and we'll give him some more medical attentions."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter was interrupted. Grundy came along the passage, shoved the fat junior unceremoniously aside, and strode into the study.

"Wilkins here?" he exclaimed.

"No," said Tom.

"He said he was coming here."

"He looked in, old top; but passed on, as we had a party," said Tom Merry. "I believe he's gone along to see Kangaroo, if you want him. Anything the matter?"

"Yes," said Grundy impressively. "I think now that Wilkins must have been playing a trick, somehow. He spoke to me from under my table, and when I looked for him he wasn't there."

"Eh?"

"Unless the dashed place is haunted, it's a trick of some sort!" said Grundy.

"As Wilkins isn't here, I dare say he was around my study somewhere playing a trick, and I'm going to let Wilkins know that he can't play tricks on me. He's not hiding here I suppose?"

"No, ass!"

"Is he gone?" came a voice from behind the bookcase in the corner.

There was a general exclamation, and all eyes turned on the bookcase. Grundy uttered an exclamation.

"So he is here!"

"My hat! I—I suppose he is! That's his voice," said Tom Merry, in astonishment. "How the thump did he get behind that bookcase?"

"You didn't know he was there?" said Grundy sarcastically.

"No, fathead!"

"Well, I don't see how he could hide

behind your bookcase without your knowing it, that's all. He was asking you if I was gone, too!"

Tom Merry's lips opened for a sharp reply, but he closed them again. It was really very amazing. The bookcase was a big one, and it stood across a corner of the study, an arrangement which was supposed to save space. Behind it, of course, was a triangular space, between the bookcase and the corner of the room, in which a fellow could have stood; but he could only have reached it by climbing on top of the bookcase and dropping down behind. The bookcase was pretty well filled, and was too heavy for one fellow to move and replace, and certainly none of the tea-party had moved it.

Tom Merry & Co. stared at the bookcase blankly. There were several articles on top of it, such as foils and a hatbox and one or two other things, which did not seem to have been disturbed.

Grundy pushed back his cuffs, and came farther into the study. The fact that Wilkins had hidden himself like this was proof enough that he had, somehow, played that trick in Grundy's study—at least, it was proof good enough for George Alfred.

"I knew he was here," he said. "You can come out of that, Wilkins!"

"Look here, don't kick up a shindy in our study," said Manners. "Wilkins will keep."

"Yas, wathah! Pway don't be a wuffian, Grundy," said Arthur Augustus chidingly.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, cut off, Bunter!"

"I'm going to have Wilkins out!" roared Grundy. "Do you think I'm going to be played tricks on? Why, he made me almost believe that the place was haunted. George Wilkins!"

"Oh, go away, Grundy!" came the well-known voice of Wilkins, and Tom Merry & Co. could only stare.

"How on earth did he get there, dear boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom. "We were all here when he looked in and went along the passage."

"You think I'm going to believe that?" sneered Grundy.

"Please yourself!" growled Tom.

"And go and eat cake!"

"I twust, Grundy, that you are not wufusin' to accept Tom Mewwy's word!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "If you are askin' for a feahful thwashin', Grundy—"

Snort from Grundy.

"How did you get there, Wilkins?" he demanded.

"Tom Merry bunked me up over the bookcase."

"I didn't!" roared Tom.

"D'Arcy helped him."

"Bai Joe, that statement is an utfah fabrication!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "I was not even awah that you were in the studay at all, Wilkins."

"Likely story!" sneered Grundy.

Tom Merry jumped up.

"We'll have him out of that!" he exclaimed. "We'll jolly well see whether he'll repeat that when we can get at him. Come out, Wilkins, you rotter!"

"Shan't!"

"We'll soon have you out!" exclaimed Lowther. "Lend a hand with this bookcase, you fellows."

The tea-party were all on their feet now in great excitement. The only fellow who wasn't excited was Bunter of the Fourth, who was leaning against the doorpost with a fat grin on his face.

"Bai Jove! I wegard Wilkins with utfah contempt!" said Arthur Augustus. "He is actudly beawin' false witness,

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you know. You fellows know I nevah helped bunk the wottah up."

"Help me with this blessed bookcase!" said Grundy, grasping the heavy article of furniture. "Now, then, careful!"

Many hands were laid upon the bookcase, and it swayed a little away from the wall. There was a roar as a pair of foils came tumbling down.

"Yaroooh! What's that?" roared Grundy. "Who's chucking things at me? Ow, my napper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackin' asses—"

"Weally, Grundy— Yawoooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as the bookcase swayed again, and a hatbox whizzed down and smote him on the head. "Yow-ow! Bai Jove!"

"My hat! Do you keep half your happy home on top of the bookcase?" exclaimed Blake, as he dodged a whizzing cricket-bat. "Look out!"

"Better take the things off the top first," grinned Digby.

Tom Merry mounted on a chair and cleared the rest of the articles off. Then the juniors grasped the bookcase again, and it swayed forward, catching a little in the rumpled carpet.

"Look out!" yelled Herries.

The glass doors flew open, and a shower of books came forth like a hailstorm. There was a crash as Grundy's elbow went through one glass panel, and a howl as Blake's head caught the edge of the other door. Some of the juniors jumped clear, and the others held on desperately as the bookcase rocked and swayed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Look out! Hold on!"

"It's going!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Stand clear!" roared Lowther.

The juniors scrambled hastily out of the way as the bookcase lurched forward and fell. Showers of books, papers, inkpots, chess and draughts, and other articles, poured out and strewed the floor, and the top of the bookcase crashed on the tea-table, and the table danced. And there was a sound of smashing crockery.

"You clumsy asses!" gasped Grundy.

"You silly chump!" shrieked Tom Merry. "It was you who did it! What did you drag it forward for?"

"What a smash-up!" gasped Manners.

"That idiot Grundy—"

"That dangerous maniac Grundy—"

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus uttered a yell of amazement. "Where is Wilkins?"

In the excitement of the disaster the juniors had forgotten for a moment that they were removing the bookcase to get at Wilkins of the Shell. D'Arcy was the first to remember, and he looked in the corner for Wilkins. But the corner was empty. There was no trace of anybody there.

"Wilkins!" stuttered Grundy.

"Where's Wilkins?"

"Great pip!"

"Bai Jove! He—he—he's not there!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared into the empty corner in blank amazement and consternation. George Wilkins was not there—that was certain.

"How—how—how did he get away?" stammered Grundy.

"I—I say, was it Wilkins at all, or is the dashed place haunted?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say, you fellows, Wilkins is coming along the passage!" chuckled Bunter.

"What?"

The fat junior grinned.

"He's just come out of Kangaroo's study," he said cheerfully. "He, he, he!"

"Wats!"

"He—he can't have. He was here!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! If he was here, where is he now, Tom Mewwy? That is wathah a puzzle."

Grundy mopped his heated brow. "It beats me!" he said. "It beats me hollow! And if a thing beats me hollow—"

"Look at our study!" groaned Manners. "Look at our bookcase!"

"He, he, he!"

"Hallo! You chape breaking up the happy home?" asked a cheery voice at the door, and Wilkins of the Shell looked in in surprise. "What the merry dickens have you been up to?"

The juniors stared at Wilkins as if he had been a ghost. Indeed, they were half inclined to think that he was a ghost at that moment.

"W-W-W-Wilkins!" stuttered Grundy.

"Gweat Scott!"

"You there—here— Oh, my hat!"

babbled Blake.

Wilkins stared at them.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"How did you get out of this study?" roared Tom Merry.

"Eh? I haven't been in the study."

"You were behind the bookcase."

"Behind the bookcase!" repeated Wilkins in wonder. "I've been having tea in Kangaroo's study."

"Wha-a-t?"

"That's right," said Kangaroo of the Shell, looking in over Wilkins' shoulder. "Wilkins has had tea with us, you fellows. What about it?"

"He—he—he's been in your study?" babbled Tom Merry.

"Certainly!"

"Well, my hat!"

"Bai Jove! The place must weally be haunted!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in an awed voice. "I must weally remark that I fail to comprehend this, Bai Jove!"

"We—we—we heard somebody behind the bookcase. It—it—it was your voice, Wilkins!"

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"It was your voice!" roared Grundy.

Wilkins grinned.

"Well, I haven't lent anybody my voice that I know of, old top," he said.

"If anybody's borrowed it without my permission I think it's cheeky. But I don't see how he could have, for I've been using it in Kangaroo's study—haven't I, Kangy?"

"All the time," assented Kangaroo, with a grin.

"Why, you ass—"

"But—but—but—" gasped Tom Merry, wondering whether he was awake or dreaming. "It—it's a trick of some sort. I—I—"

Tom Merry broke off. He was simply "beat," and so were the other fellows in the study. There was excited discussion as No. 10 in the Shell was put to rights. Billy Bunter did not join in the discussion, or in helping to put the study to right. The Owl of Greyfriars rolled away down the passage with a fat grin on his face.

He was feeling that he was scoring at last, and Tom Merry & Co. were not yet done with Bunter on the war-path. Billy Bunter was not enjoying his sojourn at St. Jim's as he had anticipated, and it looked as if the other fellows were not destined to enjoy it, either.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE HAUNTED SCHOOL!"—by Martin Clifford.)



ROBIN HOOD'S RUSE! By Dick Brooke.

MASTER PETER TUBB and his dancing bear, Barney, sat at the door of a hut, one of a number built around a little clearing in the heart of Sherwood Forest. During the week that had passed since Robin Hood and his merry men had rescued him from the clutches of the Sheriff of Nottingham, Peter and the bear had done little but eat, sleep, and grow fat, which suited them very well. Now they watched a broad-shouldered friar stirring a big pot slung above a fire in the middle of the glade, and felt happy.

Presently he tasted, and smacked his lips. "It's near ready, Master Peter!" he cried. "And I'll warrant 'twill be to your liking, seeing I mixed it myself, and there be no prettier hand at a venison stew in all England."

"That be so, Father Tuck," replied Peter, "and Barney do know it, too. Look to 'un!" Barney had risen on end and advanced towards the fire, whining softly as he always did when he was hungry.

"Nay, brother, stick not thy long nose in my pot! Be not greedy, or I will bestow upon thee a buffet. Nay, I will wrestle with thee, and put thee on thy back, an' thou comest nearer!" And, so saying, the friar turned back his wide sleeves, showing a pair of tremendous arms, and stood ready.

If ever bear smiled, Barney did. This was a game his master had taught him, and he accepted the invitation at once, throwing his forearms round Friar Tuck's shoulders with a grunt of pleasure. The friar gripped him and heaved. Barney shoved with all his weight, but neither gave way. Round and round they danced till, at the edge of the brook tinkling through the clearing, the friar's foot slipped, and the pair rolled, with a mighty splash, into the shallow water.

They scrambled out, dripping, and Barney stood up once again. But the friar shook his head, laughing.

"Nay, brother. Enough is as good as a feast; and I would rather wrestle wi' good venison than take another turn wi' thee now. Shake thy coat, and I will even change mine, and we'll to dinner."

Which, being done, he blew a whistle. A dozen men, who had spent the night on the watch by the forest paths, came yawning from the huts, and fell to with hearty good will. But scarcely was the first edge off their appetites when a sudden bugle-call rang down the glade, and a party, headed by Robin Hood himself, came in sight. In their midst, borne on a litter of boughs, was a lad of some fourteen or fifteen years, richly clothed, but sadly bedraggled with mud, his head bound up in blood-stained cloths. He seemed insensible, but revived when the litter was set down.

"Where am I?" he said in a faint voice. "Where is my horse?"

"You be safe, lad!" said Robin Hood, holding a horn of wine to his lips. "Drink, then talk. That is our rule in the greenwood. We found you lying like dead, and your horse with a broken neck beside you. Who might you be, and how came you to that pass?"

The wine seemed to put new life into the boy. He sat up.

"My thanks to you, good sir, whoever you may be!" said he. "My name is Richard Fernal, your friend—an' you need one—from this on. Yesterday I came to my manor of Walmering, which lies some way about the purlieus of this Sherwood, seeing it for the first time, because I am new come to England out of Normandy, where I have bided

since my father fell a-fighting for England and her King. Now, this manor has since then lain in the hands of my father's cousin, Sir Ralph Petteley. Mayhap you know him, good sir?"

"I have heard tell of him," replied Robin drily.

"He seems in no very good repute hereabouts," went on the lad. "But he gave me welcome, and promised an account of his stewardship in a week from now. This morning he rode out with me to show me the boundaries, I on the beast you found me by. We had come to the forest's edge, and were halted, when from a covert stepped an ill-looking old fellow, with a red scar athwart his face, waving a lighted torch, at the which my horse took fright, bolting down the path into the forest, the bit in his teeth, so that I could not guide or rein him in, and presently ran full-tilt into a great oak. Then I awakened here. Prithce, good sir, have word sent by one of your fellows to my kinsman, who doubtless is seeking me even now."

"All in good season, young sir," quoth Robin. "Yet perchance there is more in this matter than may be seen at the first glance. Tell me, an' ye will, who is next of kin to you, to take your estate if you had left your life at yon tree's foot?"

"John Fernal, my natural uncle; but seeing that he hath long been attainted of treason, and cares not to venture within the realm, it would seem that the next is this same Sir Ralph."

"Ah, I thought as much!" Robin chuckled. "Come hither, John Ball! You know Sir Ralph Petteley?"

"Ay; and if ever I have him in arrow-shoot he will know me!" growled John. "Turned me from the house where my folks had bided time out o' mind, and took my cow and plenshing, because I was behind wi' the rent through the forest deer taking of my corn. He could ha' waited, but, seeing I would lick no man's boots, out I mun go!"

"And you know that black horse this young gentile was riding?"

"Sartin sure! That was Courtain. A good beast enough, but never could bide the sight of flames since the fire in the old stable when he were a colt."

"And know you an ill-looking man with a red-scarred face?"

"That would be Long Daniel, that hath done much dirty work for Sir Ralph."

"And here is somewhat we found fast to your horse's tail," went on Robin, holding up a bunch of thorns tied with whiplcord.

"There was a slip-nosed thereto, as though it had been put on suddenly. Now, Master Fernal, ye have evidence. Doth it not all show that your good kinsman hath gone about to compass your death, the which would greatly enrich him?"

"That is a true word!" cried Fernal. "Here is ground for stern work. Come ye with me, good sir, and we will swear to this before a justice!"

"The law and we folks have nought to say to each other," said Robin, laughing. "Maybe ye have heard tell of Robin Hood? I am he, and these are my good followers."

The boy rose shakily to his feet.

"I have heard that ye take toll of the rich," said he. "Well, ye can take from me, and welcome, if ye will! I shall still owe ye thanks for your aid!" And, so saying, he proffered the heavy purse at his girdle.

Robin smiled.

"Nay, lad; you be our guest. Likewise you be in sad need of help, seeing you come

among folks who are wolfish to you for their gain. Sit we to meat, and recover yourself at your leisure, while I think upon a way to be even with Sir Ralph, for the Manor House is strong, and hardly to be taken by my force. Hey? What is it, Master Peter?"

"If it please you," said Peter, "I have been a-listening. Now, it seems to me that this here Sir Ralph, knowing as there was bound to be a spill, most like knows by now how you have picked up this here gentleman."

"Tis the way o' the wicked to think all folks is as bad as themselves, so if I goes along to him, like as if I was from you, maybe we could turn an honest penny. Either he'd be willing to pay for his kinsman to be given to his loving hands, or wishful for us to finish the job for him. Anyways, I can spy the land. I can talk, having a lot o' practice at fairs. Let me go, cap'n!"

"All right!" said Robin. "Three of you go with him, but lie hid when he comes to the Manor House. An' you can get pence out yon man, Peter, a fair third shall be your portion. Get to it!"

II.

WALMERING MANOR stood some two miles beyond the forest's edge, a low, rambling house, surrounded by a high wall and a deep, water-filled moat, crossed by a drawbridge that was always kept raised. When Peter, leaving his companions hidden in the brushwood, advanced to the moat-side and shouted, a loud barking answered him, a face appeared at an arrow-slit in the low tower above the gate, and a harsh voice inquired his business.

"I come from the wild wood on the matter o' a black horse," said Peter. "A good beast, but dead. There is also a saddle, likewise something that was in it."

"Alive or dead?" asked the voice.

"Well," said Peter cheerfully, "tis alive at this present, but there be alius time for t'other, which is what I come to see about."

At this the windlass in the tower began to creak, and with a groaning and screeching of unrolled bolts the narrow bridge descended.

"Come over!" said the voice.

Peter obeyed, found himself at a door, climbed a stair, and entered a little room, lit by narrow arrow-slits. A man, shrouded in a cloak, sat by the windlass, a dagger glinting in his hand.

"I give ye warning that if it's mischief you be after I will give you no mercy!" said he. "Now, what is this you babble of?"

"A horse, a thorn, a flaming torch, and a lad who is, mebbe, in some folks' way," replied Peter boldly. "We be no fools under the greenwood, and can put two and two together as well as most. We reckons either to tell the lad what we thinks and put him on the road to the King's justice, or bring him back to you. We ain't partic'lar about his health. What we thinks on is money most times, Sir Ralph."

The knight threw back the hood of his cloak and stood up.

"It seems ye know me, fellow! Well, no matter; I will be plain. This lad is dear to me for his father's sake, and I would not have his mind poisoned against me with wild tales such as the folks hereabouts take pleasure to tell of me. Is he much hurt? I searched long, but found only the horse, so feared the worst."

"He is hurt, but not so much as he might be," answered Peter. "But for fifty golden ducats we will bring him to the wood's edge over yonder in whatever case you choose."

"Fifty ducats! Yet, an' the lad he's dying, 'tis worth it—to soothe his last moments, poor boy!" said Sir Ralph. "Fetch him to the little thicket by the pond at sundown to-morrow and the money is yours!"

"Done," cried Peter. "We will bring him in a covered litter w' all the care o' the world. Give ye good-even, Sir Knight!"

"A black beast he is!" said he, rejoicing his comrades. "He would ha' us do the lad to death, or near it. Well, maybe we will find a lad that will have the laugh of him."

But, despite their entreaties, he would say no more.

On his return to camp he went straight to Robin Hood, and talked long with him before turning in for the night.

Next day, as dusk was coming on, a small band of foresters set down a litter covered with a canvas tilt in the midst of the little thicket by the pond where Sir Ralph had made tryst. A man who had been lurking there for near an hour thrust his scarred face cautiously from the covert.

"You have him?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Ah! O' course! What else do you reckon we'd be here for?" replied Peter. "But who be you, and where be your master and his money?"

"I be called Long Dan, and the money will be to hand when 'is needed. But you sure didn't go for to think as the master would be fool enough to trust himself to a gang o' runagate knaves like you 'uns, did ye?" said Dan. "I be taking a bit of a chance myself, like, but needs must when the devil drives. Now, let's ha' a peep at the goods."

"He be mighty poorly," said Peter. "If you axes me, I'd say as he ain't got much chance, going off as he is." He grinned slyly.

Long Dan lifted the canvas and looked down on the face of Richard Fernal. He lay scarce breathing. His eyes were closed, and in the flickering light of a single torch looked as though he were near death.

"There's some one as we knows on will be pleased to see him looking that way, I reckon," said Dan. "I ain't; but that don't signify."

"It don't! So now for the ducats!" said Peter. "No tricks, now!"

"There ain't none intended!" growled Dan. And, burrowing under the bushes where he had waited, he drew out a leather bag. "This here's the money. Count it if you wants to."

"We ain't taking it on trust. Here, you look to it, good Sir Friar!" said Peter. He slipped from the circle that closed around Dan, and Friar Tuck was at once lost in the gloom beyond the ring of torch-light.

Very slowly, often pausing to bite a coin or ring one upon a stone, the friar made the count.

"All told," said he at length. "Some be clipped and some sweated, I doubt. But we be not Jews, therefore we say nought more about them. And now, Master Daniel, seeing you ha' none w' you, and ha' but one pair of hands, I will e'en take an end of you litter to help, these others being uneasy of coming further this way. Together we can manage it."

"Thankee kindly!" said Dan. "Tain't very far." And while the group of outlaws melted into the forest he laid hold of the front of the litter and lifted as Tuck bade him. "My bones!" he ejaculated. "It be terrible heavy! Who'd ha' thought as a lad would weigh that much?"

"'Tis the litter that weighs," explained Friar Tuck. "It be made o' green boughs. See that ye do not stumble, for 'twould be ill work hurting the boy after getting him this far."

"Oh, ay?" grunted Dan under his breath. "But he'll be hurted worse before he's better, I'm a-thinking!"

For a little there was silence; then, when they had left the shadow of the trees and come out upon the road close to the Manor House, something stirred ahead, and a voice challenged sharply.

"It he me, Sir Ralph, and one other—a good friar," replied Dan.

"Have ye got my kinsman?" asked the knight, stepping into sight. "Ay, I see ye have! Set him down. Good father, ye have my thanks. And good-night to ye! We can carry this to my house alone."

Tuck turned away, but his eyes never left the shadowy figure, for they caught the glint of something bright that slid from the knight's sleeve as he stooped over the litter.

"Hey, Richard, lad, is it well with ye?" cried Sir Ralph. "Speak! Or have those forest thieves done ye harm? Speak, lad! And with that he thrust the long, slim dagger through the canvas.

Then an amazing thing happened. There was a grinding jar as of steel breaking upon steel, the canvas tilt was rent suddenly to a dozen places, and, instead of Richard Fernal, Barney, the bear, a chain-mail shirt grotesquely adorning the upper part of his body, rolled from the litter, and, with a fierce, growling roar, sprang at Sir Ralph.

Yes, Barney! Peter had kept him at hand in the wood, and while Dan had watched the counting of the ducats, put him in Fernal's place, and bade him lie still. This the well-trained beast had done until the dagger broke upon the shirt which Peter, anticipating just such foul play, had girt upon him. Yes, he was a good bear, but the jar spoiled his temper for the moment.

"Witchcraft!" screamed Sir Ralph, and fled for the drawbridge, Barney bot on his heels. He reached it, set foot on it, and then, with a wild cry, plunged headlong into the black waters of the moat as Barney's flailing paw came to home.

"Bills and bows!" bellowed Friar Tuck, close behind the avenger. "Over, lad! I'm w' ye!" And together they crossed the narrow bridge and stopped at the half-open gate. "Hold we this pass till the lads come!" he said. And from under his gown drew a heavy, knotted club.

Lights were flashing in the courtyard below. Half a score men snatched up weapons, and, bawling for their leader, dashed into the archway, to recoil as Tuck's club and Barney's paws beat down the foremost.

"Bring bows!" shouted one.

But before it could be done there was a clatter of hoofs, a rush of feet, and Richard Fernal, with Robin Hood by his side and half the Sherwood band at his back, swept the defenders clear into the yard.

"Down with your arms!" shouted Fernal. "Ye know me for your rightful lord! Know also that Sir Ralph went about to procure my death that he might inherit my lands! Now he hath paid for it, being drowned in this foul water here! Will ye serve me faithfully?"

"That we will!" they cried; and came forward to swear their obedience and loyalty.

It was later—so much later that the sun was warning the high tree-tops—when the Sherwood men straggled none too steadily back to their forest home, their pouches well lined with silver pennies from Fernal's store and their heads singing praise of his good wine. Peter and Friar Tuck marched on either side of Barney, each with a hand on his back to steady him, of course.

"An' ye go on this way, ye may be a knight before ye die!" mumbled Tuck.

"M-m-m-m!" stuttered Peter. "B-h-b-but I t-t-think B-Barney will be first!"

"Of what Order, think ye?" said Tuck sleepily.

"Of the Bath," replied Peter. "Who is f-f-fatter for the B-Bath than one wearing a h-h-hair skin?"

THE END.

she said. "It's adorable! Yes, Tommy is a love!"

"Who—who is Tommy?" Figgins choked. "Surely, Ethel, I—I—you—you can't mean Tom M—"

No more could poor Figgins say. The lump in his throat simply would not let him. He was amazed, bewildered. He would never have credited this had it not come from cousin Ethel's own lips! He wondered vaguely whether he was dreaming.

Cousin Ethel gave him a sympathetic glance. "Tommy is an angel!" she continued. "I love him! He carries himself so perfectly, too! His manner, his walk, his whole bearing—"

"Don't!" pleaded Figgins. "Who—who is Tommy? Tell me!"

Poor Figgins looked the picture of broken-hearted dejection. He stared straight into the fire, his chin in his cupped hands. He did not notice that cousin Ethel was looking at him in a way—well, a way in which she never looks at any of the rest of us!

"Then his tail!" she continued, ignoring Figgins's earnest entreaty.

Figgins looked up. Amusement was written all over his face.

"His—his t-tail?" he stuttered. Cousin Ethel looked surprised.

"Yes, his tail!" she repeated.

"B-but fellows don't have t-tails!" stammered Figgins, forced to consider the awful possibility of cousin Ethel having taken leave of her senses.

"Boys! Who ever is talking about boys?" exclaimed cousin Ethel, in a tone which implied that she was not aware such creatures existed.

"Weren't you?" Figgins asked, hope gleaming in his eyes again.

"Of course not, you silly!"

"Then—then who on earth—"

Cousin Ethel laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Oh dear!" she sobbed, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. "I am so sorry for taking you in! I am, really! I—I was talking about Mrs. Holmes' pet Persian!"

THE END.

A BALLAD OF TOWSER!

By MONTY LOWTHER.

Good old Towser! A toast to your name!

These verses are written to show
How deserving you are of your fame—

According to Herries, you know!

You're a wonderful bulldog, old chap,

And all of us worship you so.

You would eat out of anyone's lap—
According to Herries, you know!

You will make friends with everyone, too,

And even old Gussy (although—
Well, I can't say old Gussy likes you)—

According to Herries, you know!

Then your instinct's the talk of the town,

Though mean fellows say that you're slow.
(You can track down a flipper, I'll own)—

According to Herries, you know!

As a house-dog you'd really excel:

You'd soon bring a burglar to woe.
At the sight of your molars he'd yell—

According to Herries, you know!

Your dear master's command you obey,

And that of Tom Merry & Co.
(But you don't obey me, by the way)—

According to Herries, you know!

You're a champion pal in a fray;

You'd daunt e'en the hardest foe.
You would keep a whole regiment at bay—

According to Herries, you know!

But I don't really mean to be hard.

We admit, dear old Towser, though slow,
You may be, you are trusty on guard,

And determined and dogged, we know.

Peggy's Rival.

"HE has lovely eyes!" said cousin Ethel dreamily.

It was on the occasion of one of cousin Ethel's numerous flying visits to Mrs. Holmes. Figgins's invitation to a study spread had been graciously accepted, and, after the meal, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were grouped round their honoured guest in front of a blazing fire. When cousin Ethel made that reflective remark Figgins's naturally long visage lengthened perceptibly.

"Lovely eyes!" he muttered.

"Yes. And simply adorable hair!"

"A-a-adorable hair?" repeated poor Figgins, while Kerr and Fatty Wynn looked on in amazed silence.

But cousin Ethel did not appear to notice either Figgins's discomfiture or the others' amazement.

"That's the only word that describes it!"

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 38.—Bernard Glyn.

THERE is quite a lot to tell about Bernard Glyn, the inventive genius from Lancashire. But it will not be necessary to tell it all. Reference to a few of his many inventions will serve our turn as well as a complete and detailed list of them. And, indeed, such a list would be impossible. Glyn is always at it. We have heard very little of him lately, but that does not mean that he has been idle. Some time before long, I dare say, we shall learn of something else that will astonish us.

Glyn is quite unlike the other St. Jim's inventor. His dodges work. Skimpole's never do.

There is another difference. Skimpy's inventions are for the benefit of humanity. Glyn's are usually for the amusement of St. Jim's.

I have no doubt that Skimpy reads Emerson, who told us to hitch our waggon to stars. What that means you may think out for yourselves; and if you cannot make sense of it you will not lose much. For it really is not very practical advice; and when Glyn is busy upon a mechanical dog or an automatic Arthur Augustus he never thinks of it, I am sure; whereas it might well be in Skimpy's mind all the time that he is inventing a flying-machine that will never fly, or a collapsible submarine that collapses at the wrong moment and never comes up again.

Glyn's talent is hereditary—to some extent, at least. His father was a famous engineer, who made pots of money. That is another way in which Glyn has the advantage of Skimpy. Money is always tight with the Shell genius, whereas the Fourth Form inventor has what Reilly might call "lashin's and lavin's of it." But if Skimpy had as much cash as his rival he would still be very far below him in practical ability.

Bernard Glyn's people live quite near St. Jim's—at Glyn House. Both his father and his sister Edith, the pretty girl with whom Ratty fell in love, and whom Kangaroo saved from peril when a horse ran away with her, are very hospitable folk, and there has been many a merry party at Glyn House. Do you remember the one to which Baggy Trimble went uninvited in borrowed plumage? That sticks in one's mind; but there have been plenty of others ungraced by the presence of the heir of the Trimbles.

But Glyn is not a day boy. Probably it is because he likes the full association with everything that goes on at school, which is so difficult for the fellow who goes home after classes, that Bernard himself elected to be a boarder.

There is a model railway in the grounds at Glyn House; and no doubt some of you will recall how Glyn took his friends at St. Jim's to see it, and how Gore and Mellish maliciously tried to upset the train when it was on its own, and Tom Merry were whirling round at a high speed. The brakes were applied only just in time, and the train was pulled up a yard or so from the jagged fragment of wood that must have overturned it—with possible tragic results that the two young scoundrels had not sufficiently taken into account. The two took cover in the house itself. Mellish, the less guilty of them, escaped; but Gore was caught in Glyn's electric chair—his trespasser-catcher, as he called it. The chair was in his workshop, and when anyone sat in it a bell at once started ringing, and sooner or later the butler's attention was drawn. Also, when anyone sat in it the bottom collapsed, and the sitter was doubled up, legs and body much in the shape of a letter V. Skimpy, who was one of the party Glyn took along, had sat in it before Gore, and its mechanism had been explained to him and the rest.

Many other interesting things were on view in Glyn's workshop. Of course, there were aeroplane inventions. What inventor has not dabbled in that kind of thing? There was a burglar-stopper, in the shape of a bar with an electric current, easy to grip, but impossible to let go.

There was another armchair, but that was in Glyn's study at St. Jim's. When anyone sat in it the arms closed round him, and he could not get out. Skimpy sat in it, and Glyn wheeled him out of the room and left

him in the passage. Herr Schneider sat in it, and the crusty Herr was not at all pleased. He could not get out until Glyn got the spring into working order—and Glyn did not get the spring working until the German master had mentioned that he was disposed to overlook the little matter of an electric-bell—not the official bell—which had caused him to dismiss his class ten minutes before time.

You have already been told how Glyn and Dane and Noble came to share a study. There was some squabbling before that was settled; but it has worked out all right in the long run, and the trio are the best of chums, almost as inseparable as the Terrible Three. No doubt Kangaroo and the Canadian junior grumble now and then at the mess Glyn's inventions make; no doubt they sometimes find themselves shut out of their own study when Glyn is specially busy; but they can stand that. After all, something does come out of all Glyn's labour, and something worth while, too.

The line machine was greatly worth while, for instance. What schoolboy would not welcome a machine that would make the getting of lines a matter of no importance at all? And that was how the things worked



out while Glyn's invention was in use. It was the machine that did them. But Gordon Gay got hold of it, as will fall to be told when one deals with that enterprising youth; and it was not a short time that Shell and Fourth revelled in the knowledge that lines were no longer hard lines for them.

Then there was Towser the Second, a very lifelike imitation of Herries' famous bulldog—lifelike enough to take in and frighten Knox of the Sixth, anyway. And there was the mechanical man. The mechanical man was over seven feet high. He walked with a jerky, heavy stride, and from his eyes came a terrible glare. The very shadow he cast was appalling. He was designed to scare the New House fellows; but he started by scaring Herries and Digby, who saw him in the dark, and he nearly scared the life out of Mellish. Mr. Selby was greatly alarmed, and even Kildare jumped when he saw the monstrosity. It was Mellish who sent the automaton into the room of the ill-tempered Third Form-master; and Mellish had to go and confess

or to have the gloves on with Arthur Augustus. That was the alternative; but Mellish wangled out of it after his own crafty fashion. He confessed—that he had been pursued by the figure, and had run into Mr. Selby's room in sheer desperation. Which was a long way off being a full and true confession—as may easily be guessed.

Skimpole the Third was Kerr in disguise. But Skimpole the Second was another of Glyn's inventions. It was really a wonderful piece of work, and Glyn was naturally proud of it. It blinked its eyes and moved its mouth. It did not talk; but to those who know Skimpy well that might be regarded as a distinct improvement upon the original.

At the time when Glyn perfected his invention Skimpy was busy on a very special machine of his own—a weird arrangement of wheels and—er—other things (I am not an engineer) which was, somehow or other, to revolutionise domestic service by doing all the work that servants are kept to do. He showed it to Binks, the page—this was before the days of Toby—and Binks, perhaps too much impressed by its dread possibilities, perhaps merely clumsy, contrived to wreck it. Binks might have left that alone, if he really did it with intent, for Skimpy's inventions can be guaranteed not to throw anybody out of work by working on their own account. But the wrecking of the machine happened after the day when both Glyn and Skimpole, too absorbed to bother about classes, were absent from the Form-room, and Mr. Linton went in search of them. Glyn heard him coming, and slipped into the chest in which he usually kept the figure. The irate master took Skimpole the Second for the original Skimpy, and grew still more irate when to all he said the dumb figure returned no word. He started in with the cane, and the figure fell with a crash. Mr. Linton was greatly alarmed; he feared that he had done the harmless Skimpy some deadly injury. The heart of the figure did not beat, Glyn's genius stopping short at the provision of a heart. Mr. Linton rushed off to tell the Head. Skimpy, who had entered the Form-room the moment after the master left it, was able to prove an alibi; and it was well for him that he could, as the master naturally supposed a trick had been played upon him. And Glyn had to confess.

But that was not the end of Skimpole the Second. He was used to take in Herr Schneider, who had sentenced the real Skimpole to detention. The figure was substituted. The Herr found out the trick that had been played upon him, and went to fetch Dr. Holmes. Meanwhile, Skimpy himself came back, and the figure was thrust into the cupboard. The sequel was rather unpleasant for the genius of the Shell, into whom Herr Schneider thrust a pin in order to demonstrate to the Head that he could not feel—an error, as it turned out.

Then Glyn made the figure talk. It was done by means of phonograph records. Of course, it could not carry on a conversation; but that did not make it unlike Skimpy. When you come to think of it, Skimpy does not converse; he harangues, declaims, speechifies. The figure did that—all about determinism, and heredity, and environment, and so on.

And after that Kerr became Skimpole the Third. But what he did in that role, masquerading as the figure, not as the original, would take too long to tell here, and has not much to do with Glyn, anyway. In the event, when Kerr was bowled out, he was ransomed by Figgy's returning the automaton.

There was the patent bowling machine, too. It was in the form of a tripod, with the legs weighted down. From the top of it projected a disc, with a number of arms; there were a long spring, and a crank, and a handle, and a kind of feeder trough. It worked, though at first it hardly worked with the perfection Glyn had expected. It smashed some of the Form-room windows; it went wrong suddenly, and fairly rained balls upon Gussy at the wicket. But these things were due only to minor defects, which could be and were overcome; and the thing was obviously not only useful, but valuable. Bernard applied for a

patent; but there was some wangling, and Levison—these were his bad days—got into heavy trouble for trying to steal the Shell fellow's invention.

Then there was the mechanical Gussy. That was really great value. Gussy came in while Glyn was at work on it, and was flattered when told that he could help—that, in fact, he was the only fellow who could. But it was only as a model that Glyn needed him; and when he touched the handle which worked the figure, and tumbled it off the table, Glyn tumbled him out of the door, and Arthur Augustus wanted to defer a proposed visit to the cinema till he had given Glyn the usual "fearful thwashin'," so much more often threatened than carried out.

Gussy, always patriotic, was especially so about this time. He would not go to the cinema after all, because American films were

on exhibit. He tried to keep others from going, too. Glyn seized on the craze of the moment, and D'Arcy the Second spouted at length about the iniquity of going to see American films, and so failing to support properly British industries. It completely took in Kangaroo when tried upon him. Glyn had got Gussy to talk into the phonograph, of course.

But before that D'Arcy the Second had taken in Knox, very much in the same way as Skimpole the Second took in Mr. Linton. Knox knocked the figure over, and fancied that he had killed Gussy. He even offered Glyn five pounds to keep dark about it—to clear out and let someone else find the supposed corpse. All Knox's concern was for himself, and he thoroughly deserved the bad time through which Glyn made him go.

Towler was taken in. He bit the leg of

D'Arcy the Second, but did not find it meaty. Herries, not yet in the secret, was quite alarmed—more for Towler's sake than for Gussy's, it is to be feared, however. But the real fun came when Gussy himself met his double, and got the automaton's head into chancery, and smashed the wax face beyond recognition, and was horrified by what he had done.

Glyn's inventions take up most of his spare time; and, though he is far from being a duffer at games, he has not the same keenness for them that his chum Kangaroo has. It was at Kangaroo's suggestion that Tom Merry made him skipper of the Shell Second Footer Eleven in the Sports Competition, and Glyn proved then that he could keep goal in fine style. But it is not likely that he will ever want to dispute honours with Fatty Wynn, or even with Herries.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE HAUNTED SCHOOL!"

By Martin Clifford.

It is not necessary to say much about next week's story, to anyone who has read this week's, for it must be obvious that Billy Bunter has not finished his ventriloquial dodges, and that we are sure to hear more of them in this yarn.

Will Bunter be caught out? That is the question. And it is a question which I am not going to answer here.

Are you telling all your chums about these great yarns? You should do so; it is greedy to keep anything so good to yourselves.

I really do not think that the GEM has ever had more humorous stories than these. To my mind Billy Bunter licks the much-vaunted Charlie Chaplin into a cocked hat.

THE "PENNY POPULAR."

Don't overlook the fact that there are tales of St. Jim's appearing regularly in this ripping paper, which has just been restarted after a period of suspension due to paper shortage. The reappearance has been a triumphant success—even a bigger success than we anticipated, and that is saying quite a lot.

Besides the St. Jim's story each week, there is another of Greyfriars, a school about which all GEM readers know something, and one of Rookwood, which is also more or less familiar to them.

But if you really mean to get the paper you must order in advance, you know. The price, by the way, is at present three-halfpence. War conditions have not yet disappeared, and war prices have not yet come down.

THE "MAGNET" SERIAL.

Do you remember Johnny Goggs' visit to St. Jim's, told of in the GEM eighteen months or so ago? That popular character is now at Rylcombe Grammar School, and the serial which has just started in the "Magnet"—

"Goggs, Grammarian"—

tells of his doings there; of how he made the Grammar School fellows believe him as simple as he looks; of how he made friends and enemies there; and so on. Before long Tom Merry and many other of your favourite figures will be appearing upon the scene, too: You should read this story.

Upon Editor

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted by—

J. Sitenhof, 24, Lytton Road, Leytonstone, E. 11.—with readers, 14-16. Interested in forming a theatrical party.

Miss Rita Lee, 17, Lewisham High Road, New Cross, S.E. 14.—with readers in the United Kingdom.

F. George, 28, Mount Pleasant, Southville, Bristol.—with readers anywhere interested in stamps and back numbers.

Miss Rose Bagnall, 162, Green Lane, Walsall, Staffs.—with girl reader, about 14, living in Australia, India, or Africa.

R. A. Matthews, The Bothy, R.H.S. Gardens, Ripley, Surrey.—with readers interested in postcards and stamps. He can put correspondents in touch with exchange and educational clubs.

C. B. McMenamin, P.O. Box 120, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.—with readers, 14-16, in the British Empire.

A. Walker, 20, Hustlers Row, Meanwood Leeds, wants members—12-14—for Junior Sports and Hobby Club.

J. W. Spencer, 5, Dogford Road, Rayton, near Oldham, Lancs., wants to hear from readers for the Mersey Correspondence Club. Members required, aged 16 or thereabouts. The M.C.C. is a serious collectors' club.

Miss N. Brown, 61, Scarborough Street, West Hartlepool.—with girl readers, 15 and upwards.

F. McCarthy, 32, Surrey Grove, Walworth, S.E. 17, wants readers for amateur magazine and correspondence club. Magazine, 3d.

Charles E. Boyd, 113, Cemetery Road, Doncaster.—with readers, 13-15, in India or Australia.

Eric W. Hutton, 52, Stapleton Road, Bristol, offers to write stories for amateur magazines.

Alick Morton Eglantine, Rathmines Road, Dublin, wants members for the United League; circulates hectographed for clubs and small magazines. Stamped addressed envelope for catalogue.

Back numbers wanted by—

M. Ridley, 94, Wessex Flats, Wedmore Street, Upper Holloway, London, N. 19.—any numbers of GEM, "Magnet," and "Penny Popular" before 1916. 2d. each offered; 3d. double numbers.

Edward MacPherson, P.O. Box 311, Port Elizabeth, South Africa—"Boys' Friend" Library, Nos. 7, 11, 14, 15, 24, 32, 33, 41. Six shillings offered. Write first.

James O'Leary, 94, Cockburn Street, Dingle, Liverpool—"Magnets" and GEMS of or before Christmas, 1912. 2d. each. Write first.

Alfred J. Sharing, 32, West Terrace, North Ormesby, Middlesbrough, Yorks.—GEMS and "Magnets," 1400. Any condition. Write first. "Miss Annie Parker, 94, Livingstone Road, Hove, Sussex.—GEMS, 483, 484, 485. Double price offered.

Max Nachimovitz, P.O. Box 126, Oudtshoorn, Cape Province, South Africa—"Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves," "The Honour of a Jew." 3d. offered for each.

Sam Joseph, P.O. Box 159, Oudtshoorn, Cape Province, South Africa—"After Lights Out," "The Boy Without a Name," 8d. offered. "R-B Cherry's Barring-Out," 3d; "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves," 4d.

Leonard Jacobson, P.O. Box 30, Oudtshoorn, Cape Province, South Africa—"School and Sport," is offered; "Greyfriars v. St. Jim's," "The Sports of the School," "Bunter the Prize-Winner," "The Greyfriars Cricketers," 3d. each with postage.

F. Entwistle, 34, Cranbrook Street, Bethnal Green, E. 2.—"Magnets," 238-250; GEMS, 50-209. Gordon F. Anderson, 5, Seymour Street, Observatory Road, near Cape Town, South Africa.—GEM, "A Sailor's Son" and following four numbers; also "Magnet," same numbers. Write first.

A. Harris, 8, Townshend Road, Richmond, Surrey.—GEMS, 518, 519, 521, 522, 524, 525, 526, 528, 530, 532, 535.

Cedric F. F. Rickard, 172A, Hollingdean Terrace, Ditchling Road, Brighton—"Rivals and Chums," "School and Sport," "After Lights Out," "A Stolen Holiday," "Magnet," 197. 3d. for Libraries; 11d. others.

Nigel Van Blene, 9, Station Road, Finsbury Park, N.—"Nelson Lee Library," 1-50; 1s. for No. 1. Write first.

L. Turner, 49, Western Road, Wolverton, Bucks.—GEM and "Magnet" Christmas Numbers before 1916. 2d. each. Write first.

Arthur Johnson, c/o Spring Valley Mills, Farsley, near Leeds—"Magnet," 504. "The Greyfriars Barring-Out," 3d. and postage.

F. S. Beney, 39, Nelson Road, Hastings—"Magnets," 179 190 149, 148, 160, 363, 373, 388, 392, 239, 243, 267, 275, 167, 171, 283, 284, 240.

Harold Ashton, 148, Admiral Street, Dingle, Liverpool—GEMS, 466, 467, 468, 470, 471, 473, 474, 476, 480, 485, 490, 497. Double price. Write first.

Miss Helen Florence, 31, Nightingale Road, Wood Green, N. 22.—GEMS, 511, 488, 471, 475; also tales of Levison before 452; and Cardew and Vernon-Smith tales. Write first.

E. J. Blundell, 19, Kingston Road, Longfleet, Poole.—any "Magnets" before 540. 11d. offered. Write first.

George Lowrey, 33, Craven Road, Woodhouse Street, Leeds—"Magnets," 397, 399, 387. 2d. each offered.

PEACE!

By Erast Levison.

When the Armistice was signed and the thrilling news was read, Tom Merry called his liegemen bold, and to them all he said: "To celebrate this day we'll have a dormitory spread!

The dorm that night was crowded, but we all squeezed in at last.

The candle-ends were lighted, and the door was bolted fast.

And everyone was thankful that the cloud of war had passed.

There were good things there in plenty, and at least four kinds of jam.

And New House mixed with School House, like the lion with the lamb.

And every fellow ate his fill—as much as he could cram!

("Tain't true! I didn't have half enough!—Bagley Trimble.)

Then Merry rose and made a speech; the proper thing to do.

"I think," he said, "that all of you will quite endorse my view.

That as between the Houses we are cock House of the two!"

"Rats!" came a score of voices, and "Hurrah!" Above the din,

"Rag him!" "Scare him!" "Bump him!" came from Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn.

Then Fizzy rapped a sharp command to all his men: "Pile in!"

The Shell dorm must have sounded like a barnyard full of geese.

When Mr. Raillon forced the door and caused the fight to cease.

"We're sorry, sir!" said Tom, "We met to celebrate the PEACE!"