

HOW TO CLOG DANCE. A Splendid Article on Page 19.

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BILLY BUNTER ON THE "BOARDS."

(A Startling Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



Bunter on the Boards!

A Magnificent, Long,
Complete School Story
of Harry Wharton &
Co. at Greyfriars.

BY

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. No Room for Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Buzz off!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Billy Bunter, the fat junior of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, broke off indignantly, and advanced cautiously into Study No. 1.

Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, and Frank Nugent were at the table, whilst Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh were standing behind Harry Wharton's chair.

Bob Cherry growled as Billy Bunter advanced.

"Buzz off, Billy!" he said. "Can't you see we're busy?"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly.

"I know you're busy, Bob Cherry!" he said hastily. "I know, too, that you're making out the footer team for the match on Saturday."

"Well?" asked Harry Wharton, looking up as the fat junior paused.

"I want to know if my name is down there!" said Billy Bunter. "You chaps all know that I'm the best goalkeeper in the Remove—perhaps the best in Greyfriars."

"Rats!" growled Bob Cherry. "Buzz off, you fat chump!"

Billy Bunter was not put off by the blunt words of Bob Cherry.

"Of course, I know there's a great amount of jealousy——" he began; but Harry Wharton interrupted him with a groan.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "Don't go over all that again, Billy!"

"Oh, really, Harry, old chap——"

"Brrr!" growled the Remove captain. "If you 'Harry, old chap' me, Bunter, I'll wipe up the floor with you!"

Billy Bunter looked as if he was going to answer, but thought better of it, and contented himself with merely blinking indignantly at Harry Wharton and the other juniors at the table.

"Buzz off, Billy, there's a good chap!" said Frank Nugent. "Come again another day——"

"That'll be too late" to save the Remove!" interrupted Billy Bunter. "You'll be licked to a frazzle on Saturday without me!"

"You'll be licked to a frazzle in a minute!" growled Bob Cherry. "Buzz off, you fat dummy!"

"Oh, really—keep him off, you chaps!"

Billy Bunter retreated hastily to the other side of the study as Bob Cherry advanced towards him. The fat junior was wise enough to keep away from the door, however.

"Look here, Billy," said Johnny Bull quietly, "you're noted at Greyfriars for your kindness, aren't you?"

"Certainly!" said Billy Bunter instantly, whilst the juniors grinned expectantly.

The fat Removeite was too obtuse to see that Johnny Bull was about to pull his leg, but the other juniors could see that something of the sort was going to happen.

"Well, would you be willing to do me a favour?" asked Johnny Bull, in the same quiet tones. "I would, of course, suitably reward you!"

Billy Bunter blinked suspiciously, but Johnny Bull's expression was quite serious—which was more than could be said of the other juniors.

"I do not know that I can accept any reward for doing a friend a favour," he said slowly. "When I do a chap a favour I do it because I like him."

"I see!" said Johnny Bull. "Then perhaps you'll do me a favour by closing the door!"

"Eh?"

Billy Bunter glanced towards the study door, but it was shut.

"How can I do that?" he asked quickly. "It's closed already!"

"Put yourself the other side—then

close it!" said Johnny Bull, with a grin. "That would be really decent of you—a favour I should find it hard to repay!"

"Oh, really!" snorted Billy Bunter. "I thought you were going to ask me to do something—something with a reward attached—ahem!—I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" shouted Billy Bunter, getting excited. "You chaps know jolly well I wouldn't accept a pound-note from Bull just for doing him a favour!"

"Who said anything about a pound-note?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Ahem!" murmured the fat Removeite. "I thought I heard——"

"Will you go to the tuckshop for me, Billy?" asked Harry Wharton suddenly.

"Certainly; anything to oblige an old chum!" said Billy Bunter instantly.

"What do you want? Sausages—they've got some prime sosses in, 'cos I saw them arrive this morning—and some topping cream-tarts, and——"

"Whoa! Half a tick, Billy! I don't want everybody to know what we're buying for this study!"

Billy Bunter blinked knowingly.

"Ah! Of course, you're afraid some beast will catch it!" he said, with a chuckle. "I'll keep it dark, never fear!"

"But as I can't ask you to come and share it—there's not too much room in this study when you're about——"

"Oh, really——"

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind taking half of what you buy for us before you come back?" suggested Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked again—more knowingly than before. He thought it might happen that what he considered a fair half of the purchases would make a very decent meal.

"Oh, in that case, I shall be happy to oblige!" he said magnanimously. "What do you want?"

"Come outside! I'll tell you there—he a surprise to these chaps when you come back!" said Harry Wharton,

jingling some money in his pockets.

"Hope you chaps won't mind?"

"Not at all!" said Bob Cherry, manfully restraining a chuckle.

"The pleasurefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Come on, then, Billy!" said Harry Wharton.

He rose from his chair, and went quickly to the door. Billy Bunter, with visions of a big feed already before his eyes, hurried after him. The fat junior had completely forgotten for what he had gone to Study No. 1 in the glorious prospect of a half-share in the coming purchases from the tuckshop.

Harry Wharton politely held open the door for the fat junior to pass into the corridor, and then, planting himself firmly in the doorway, drew his hand from his pocket and held a coin before the fat junior's eyes. It was a halfpenny!

"Wh-what's that?" stuttered Billy Bunter.

"That's a halfpenny!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "Haven't you seen one before?"

"M-m-my hat! But what about the feed?" demanded the bewildered fat junior.

"Halfpennyworth of bullseyes, please," said Harry Wharton. "You can have half of them on your way back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared, as much at the expression of disgust on Billy Bunter's face as at the words that fell from Harry Wharton's lips.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't take more than half-share, Billy!" roared Bob Cherry. "Leave some for little us!"

"You—you spoofer, Wharton!" roared Billy Bunter, and rushed for the study.

But Harry Wharton was an instant before him, and Billy Bunter crashed into the door as Wharton closed it. For a moment he staggered—then he fell limply to the ground.

"Yow! Oh dear!" he gasped. "Yar-oooh! I'm hurt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Beasts!" howled the fat junior.

He rose unsteadily to his feet, and shook his fists savagely at the door.

"Lemme get at you, Wharton!" he roared. "I'll wipe up the corridor with you!"

Almost beside himself with rage, the fat junior kicked at the door. Suddenly it was thrown open, and the inevitable happened.

Billy Bunter's foot shot out, to kick the closed door yet another hefty kick. But when his boot got there the door was open, and, unable to stop himself, the fat junior shot forward into the study, and collapsed to the floor with a howl of pain and wrath.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about wiping up the corridor with me, Billy?" asked Harry Wharton quickly. "I'm here, you know!"

Billy Bunter set his glasses straight upon his snub nose before he deigned to answer.

"Oh, really, Wharton," he said plaintively. "you might have a little decency with a chap who comes to ask you a civil question!"

Harry Wharton started. He was a good-natured fellow, and had no wish to hurt the feelings of even Billy Bunter.

"What did you want, any old how?" he asked lightly.

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet, and stared indignantly at the captain of the Remove.

"I think you might have asked me that before treating me in such a caddish

way!" went on Billy Bunter. "I merely came—"

"Caddish way!" hooted Harry Wharton. "My hat! I'll—"

Billy Bunter retreated before the angry glare in Harry Wharton's eyes.

"Nunno—not exactly that, Wharton!" he said hastily. "I mean, I only came to ask you a civil question, and then you treated me as if I was a b-baby!"

"Well, aren't you?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"The babyfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Bunter is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"I'm not!" howled Billy Bunter.

"You beasts—"

"Is that being civil, Billy?" asked Harry Wharton quietly.

"Even a good-tempered chap like myself can be japed too much," said Billy Bunter hotly. "I merely came to ask you to put me down to play in goal—"

"I said you were no good!" growled Bob Cherry. "Neither are you!"

"You mind your own business!" snapped Bunter angrily. "I'm talking to the engine, not the oil-rag!"

"My hat!"

The juniors stared at the fat junior. Never had they heard Billy Bunter speak to Bob Cherry, the fighting champion of the Remove, in such a manner.

Bob Cherry was too much taken aback to do anything but stare. But, as his bewildered senses took in the full meaning of what Billy Bunter said, his eyes literally blazed with wrath.

"You gassing bounder!" he roared. "I'll jolly well punch your silly fat head!"

"Keep him off, you chaps!" cried Bunter, and he dodged behind Harry Wharton. "Are you going to put me in the footer eleven, or are you not?"

"Not!" roared the juniors in unison.

Billy Bunter panted for breath, keeping a wary eye on Bob Cherry. The fighting-man of the Remove did not look in a very pleasant mood.

"One moment, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, as the irate junior made another rush for Billy Bunter.

"The silly ass said—" began Bob Cherry heatedly.

"Wait a moment, please!" interrupted Wharton. "Now, look here, Billy. Do you really and honestly think you are good enough to play goal for the Remove against Courtfield?"

"Certainly!" answered Billy Bunter at once. "You know—"

"It is not because you know that a good spread always follows a match with the Courtfield fellows?" asked Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter snorted indignantly.

"Oh, really, you know, you're talking bosh—nunno, I mean, you know very well I'm not a chap of that sort," said Billy Bunter. "Just as if a few chicken-pies or a few mouldy blanchmanges and fruit or a couple of hams would tempt me!"

"My hat! How did you know what we were going to have after the match?" demanded Harry Wharton in surprise.

"Well, I was just passing your study last night—" began Bunter.

"When your bootlace happened to come undone," suggested Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter stared.

"Really, Bull, that was just what did happen," he said. "I believe you must have been watching me! I don't believe in prying into other chap's affairs—"

"My hat!"

"So please don't follow me about any more," went on Billy Bunter, unheeding the menacing looks of the juniors. "My bootlace happened to come undone, Wharton, and I couldn't help hearing you suggesting the stuff for the feed."

"I see," said Harry Wharton softly. "And you are not a prying, fat toad, Billy Bunter?"

"Certainly not! It grieves me to hear you speaking to me like that, Wharton, because I don't think a captain of a footer team should speak to his men in such tones. However, as long as I am down in the team, I can put up with the remarks you fellows make—born, as they are, of petty jealousy!"

"Talks like a giddy gramophone!" growled Bob Cherry. "I think it's time the giddy machinery of that gramophone was busted!"

"And so say all of us!" chimed in Johnny Bull.

"The sayfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter looked alarmed. Bob Cherry looked positively angry, whilst the other juniors leered at Billy Bunter in a manner which suggested that there was a warm time in store for the fat junior.

"Well, you're not in the team," said Harry Wharton evenly. "So I can speak to you as I like. In short, Bunter, there's no room for you!"

"Oh, I say, you know—" began Billy Bunter.

"Hop it!" said Bob Cherry tersely.

"If you don't—"

He left it to Billy Bunter's imagination to finish that sentence. But Billy Bunter was obstinate, and he was not going to drop the subject just then.

Menacing looks failed to deter Billy Bunter.

"I should advise you to go, Billy!" said Harry Wharton. "I'm sorry I can't put all the Remove into one footer team—"

"You could put the best players in, if you didn't stick to your pals so much!" burst out Billy Bunter. "Sheer jealousy and favouritism, I call it!"

"And I call it 'time'!" growled Bob Cherry. "Out you go, you fat freak!"

"Look here—"

"Hump him out!"

In a moment Billy Bunter was seized and whirled towards the door.

"Yow-ow-ow! You're pinching my arm, Cherry, you beast! Yaroooh!" howled the fat junior.

"Heave!" roared Bob Cherry.

And the juniors heaved with such force as to send Billy Bunter spinning across the corridor. He crashed into the wall and slipped to the ground.

"Yaroooh!"

"And if you come back again, my fat tulip," said Bob Cherry warningly. "I'll jolly well boot you all round the quadrangle!"

"Beast!" hooted Billy Bunter.

But, knowing full well that Bob Cherry would certainly carry out his threat if he went back into Study No. 1, the fat junior staggered to his feet, and went off to the Common-room to air his grievances.

Billy Bunter as a goalkeeper was impossible. It would hardly bear thinking about. But the fat junior could not see that there were many other juniors in the Remove Form at Greyfriars who were more entitled to consideration for the coveted position than was he.

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In his opinion, he—Billy Bunter—was the best goalkeeper at Greyfriars, and should at least be in the Remove team.

But Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, thought otherwise, and Billy Bunter's name did not go down to play goal in the match against Courtfield.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Great Idea!

"WHARTON!" Harry Wharton turned as he was leaving the classroom and heard his name called. He had no need to turn in order to know who called—Billy Bunter's tones were unmistakable.

"Hallo, tubby!" said Wharton cheerily.

Billy Bunter hurried after the captain of the Remove.

"I say, old chap," he said plaintively, "I hope you've changed your mind."

Harry Wharton stared.

"Changed my mind?" he ejaculated.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I hope you've put my name down to play for the Remove on Saturday," said Billy Bunter.

"I haven't!" said Harry Wharton sharply. "I've told you, fathead, heaps and heaps of times, that you're not nearly good enough to play for the Remove!"

Bunter's eyes gleamed angrily. For some reason best known to himself, the fat junior of the Remove was very anxious to be included in the team that was to proceed to Courtfield for the match on Saturday.

More than once Billy Bunter had pressed his claims to be the Remove goalie, but a bumping or two had impressed upon him the fact that he was "no good."

But on this occasion he was more obstinate than usual—perhaps it was because there was to be a big feed after the match.

"Look here, Wharton!" he said hotly. "You're not going to tell me that you think that there is a better goalie than myself in the Remove."

Harry Wharton grinned.

"I'll tell you more than that, Bunter," he said. "There are about thirty better chaps than you at goal!"

"Then you're talking out of the back of your neck!" said Billy Bunter, his voice rising as he grew more angry. "It's just petty jealousy! You know I'm good in—"

"Prove yourself to be good at anything, Billy, and I'll give you a chance in goal in one of our matches!" said Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "You're about the silliest cuckoo in the Remove—no good at anything or for anything!"

And Harry Wharton hurried away to his study, leaving Billy Bunter staring after him.

"M-my hat!" stuttered Billy Bunter, nearly bursting with rage. "No good at anything or for anything! Me! Billy Bunter! No good! Oh, my hat!"

And forthwith Billy Bunter forgot all about the coveted position in the Remove team—even forgot all about his dinner—in fact, forgot everything save that Harry Wharton had said he was no good at anything or for anything.

Billy Bunter had always thought that the Remove juniors looked upon him as a really clever fellow. It was only their personal jealousy of his powers

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that kept them silent to his good points and satirical to his good ones.

It never occurred to Billy Bunter that he was obtuse—that he was mean. Neither did it enter his head that the juniors might not like his persistent prying into their affairs.

But now Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, had told him that he was no good at anything or for anything, and had, moreover, promised that when he had proved himself any good he would be given a chance at keeping goal for the Remove!

"Goodness me!" muttered the fat junior, as he made his way slowly to his study. "The—the awful rotter!"

Billy Bunter shared Study No. 7 with Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, and the two Todds—Alonso and Peter.

They were in the dining-hall when Billy Bunter entered the study—not in his usual lordly way, but slowly and quietly. It would have caused Peter Todd to think had he seen the expression on Billy Bunter's face.

Bunter's feelings were hurt by Harry Wharton's statement concerning himself and his abilities, and thick-skinned though he was, Billy Bunter was upset.

Many juniors had told Billy as much many times before, but he had passed it all over. But when Harry Wharton coupled the offer of playing for the Remove footer team with his cutting words, Billy Bunter sat up and took notice, so to speak.

Billy sat down in the one comfortable armchair, and peered at nothing in particular, as he mentally pictured the scene as Harry Wharton had spoken to him in the corridor, after leaving the classroom.

"No good—no good!" he muttered.

"Oh, my hat!"

He was brought out of his reverie with a jump. Peter Todd came into the study whistling cheerily. But he broke off sharply as he saw Billy Bunter sitting so quiet in the armchair.

"Hallo, my fat pippin!" he said, with a frown. "What mischief have you been up to?"

"Eh? What?" exclaimed Billy Bunter.

"Oh, is that you, Todd?"

Peter Todd snorted.

"Of course it is, fathead!" he growled. "Do you think I'm the ghost of the Priory?"

"Nunno!" said Billy Bunter lamely.

"I—I—I—I was a bit surprised, that's all."

Peter Todd snorted again.

"When did you get your dinner, Bunter?" he asked, changing the subject abruptly.

Billy Bunter started. He had clean forgotten all about his dinner!

"Dinner!" he echoed. "Oh, my stars! Is dinner over?"

Billy Bunter did not wait for an answer to the question. He rushed from the study like a whirlwind, and left Peter Todd staring at the empty chair, and listening to the pitter-patter of his feet down the corridor.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Peter. "Jumping Aunt Sempronia!"

Tom Dutton came along, and entered the study. Dutton suffered from deafness, and, as is often the case with people afflicted in that way, spoke only when spoken to.

Peter Todd turned to him.

"Did you see Bunter?" he asked quickly.

"Punt?" said Tom Dutton. "What's the punt got to do with me?"

"Bunter!" roared Peter Todd. "Did you see him going down to dinner?"

Tom Dutton stared at his study-mate. "How can we go down to dinner?"

he demanded. "We've got to go into classes this afternoon—it's not a half!"

Peter Todd groaned.

"Oh dear!" he murmured, and raised his voice to a shriek. "Bunter—dinner—fathead!"

Tom Dutton drew back a pace.

"All right!" he said resentfully. "You needn't shout my head off! I'm not so deaf as all that! What about Bunter and his dinner, anyhow? I suppose he hasn't scoffed yours, has he?"

"No. Did you see him as you came up from the hall?" roared Peter Todd.

Tom Dutton nodded calmly.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "Why didn't you say what you meant in the first place?"

Peter Todd could stand no more. He turned and ran from the study.

"Mad!" growled Tom Dutton, as he banged the door to after his chum had left.

If Peter Todd was mad, then it was surely Tom Dutton who was responsible for the junior's unfortunate position.

Todd burst into Study No. 13, where Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, and Wun Lung were usually to be found at that time of the day.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the excited junior slammed the door behind himself, and literally fell into a chair. "What's the giddy game, Peter Todd?"

"Game?" echoed Peter Todd. "Just you go and ask Tom Dutton!"

"No, thanks," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "I'd sooner ask a brick wall the name of its owner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But why this haste, friend Todd?" went on Bob Cherry.

"Hold on to something, and I'll tell you," said Peter Todd. "You'll hardly believe me, I know, but Billy Bunter actually forgot all about his dinner!"

"My hat!"

"The surprisefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"I found him sitting like a dummy—a fat dummy—in the armchair, and he nearly jumped out of his skin when I came up from dinner," said Peter Todd. "But when I mentioned grub—I really think Billy Bunter would make a sprinter with a bit of practice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared at the mere idea of Billy Bunter running on the cinder-track. But Peter Todd's explanation was sufficient to let the juniors understand that something remarkable had taken place.

Billy Bunter had forgotten his dinner, an unheard-of event!

"Something radically wrong with Billy Bunter!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"The illfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous fat chump must be terrific!" said Hurree Singh, with a sage nod of his dusky head.

The juniors were still talking of the wonderful occurrence when the bell rang for afternoon lessons.

Billy Bunter was already in classes when Bob Cherry and his chums entered the room. Mr. Quelch, the Remove Form-master, was also there.

But, although it was nothing new for Mr. Quelch to be one of the first arrivals, it was extraordinary that Billy Bunter should be there.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "The fat chump's here already!"

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Quelch curtly. "Take your places quickly and quietly."

In five minutes there was silence in the Form-room, save for the steady scratching of pens as the juniors worked at their lesson.

Mr. Quelch was sitting at his desk, reading, when there came a sudden interruption.

"Ask that skinny buffer Quelchy!"

Mr. Quelch gasped, and so did Harry Wharton, for the tone of the voice that had broken the silence was unmistakably his own.

"Wharton!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Y-y-yes, sir!" stammered Harry Wharton.

"Come out here, sir—at once!" snapped the Form-master angrily.

Harry Wharton obeyed, but very slowly. He could not quite grasp the situation. He had not spoken, yet everybody in the Form had heard him say:

"Ask that skinny buffer Quelchy!"

It was Sidney James Snoop who sniggered, and Mr. Quelch turned a red, grim face towards the cad of the Remove.

"You find it a laughing matter, Snoop!" he said cuttingly. "Come out here, sir!"

And Snoop joined Wharton. But Snoop was not going to suffer for Billy Bunter's misdeeds.

"It wasn't m-m-me, sir; I'm not a ventriloquist!" he stammered.

Mr. Quelch started, and his eyes became fixed on William George Bunter. But even the grim manner of the Form-master could not prevent a hiss rising from the class.

"Sneak!"

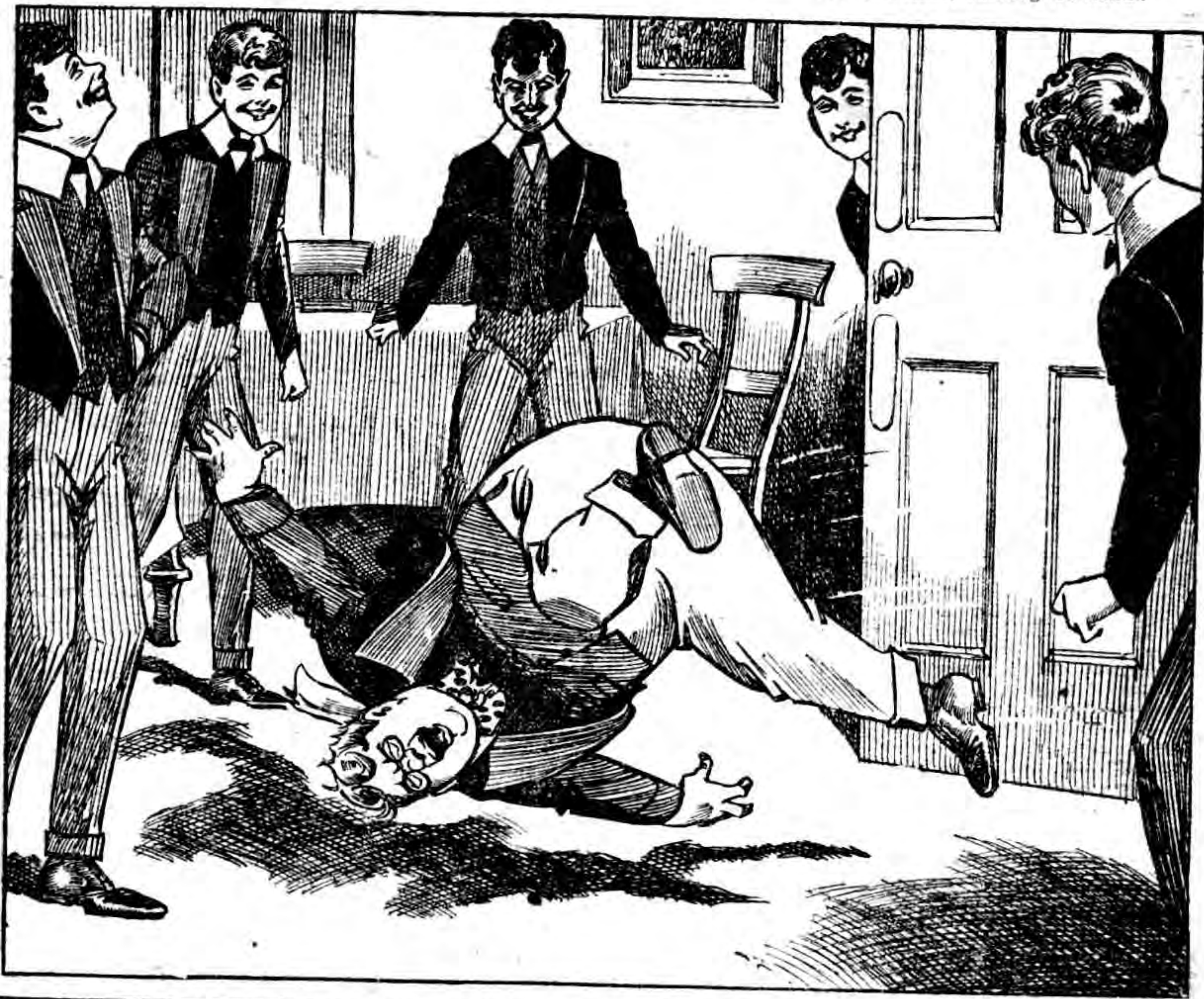
that showed that he possessed a powerful wrist.

Billy Bunter returned to his seat in a very bewildered state of mind. He had attempted to get Harry Wharton into trouble—his way of getting revenge on the captain of the Remove for excluding him from the footer team. But Snoop had upset the apple-cart, so to speak.

"Ripping!" murmured Harold Skinner, the most despised junior in the Remove. "You ought to be on the hals—you'd make a fortune!"

Billy Bunter was suffering too much pain to take much notice of what Harold Skinner was saying.

"Yow-ow! The beast!" muttered Billy Bunter, rubbing his hands.



Billy Bunter's foot shot out, to kick the closed door yet another hefty kick. But when his boot got there the door was open, and, unable to stop himself, the fat junior shot forward into the study and collapsed to the floor with a howl of pain and rage. "Yow-ow-ow!" (See Chapter 1.)

"You will repeat your remark, Wharton!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Repeat, I say—repeat that remark!"

"I—I—I—I didn't speak, sir!" stammered Harry Wharton, and, suddenly catching Billy Bunter's eye, realised who was responsible.

Billy Bunter had at least one accomplishment—he was an expert ventriloquist. And it was he who had made it appear as if Harry Wharton had made the remark.

"I am waiting, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"But—but—but—" stammered Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Quelch, but it was only a half-hearted shout.

The Form-master loathed a sneak as much as did the juniors under his charge.

"Bunter!"

"Y-y-yes, sir! Not at all, sir! Wasn't me! I wouldn't!" stammered Billy Bunter in alarm.

"Come out here!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"B-b-but—p-p-please—"

"Come out!"

"C-c-certainly, sir!"

The next five minutes were very painful to William George Bunter. Mr. Quelch wielded the cane in a manner

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "Ow! Yow-ow-ow! I'm working hard, sir!" said Bunter, hastily proceeding with his work, amidst the chuckles of the Removites.

There were no more interruptions that morning. One attempt at revenge was enough for William George Bunter; he forgot all about Harry Wharton and the position of Remove goalie for the time being.

But there still rankled in his mind the biting words that Harry Wharton had used in the corridor. "He was no good at anything—or for anything!"

Yet Harold Skinner had said he could

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make a fortune on the music-halls. Billy Bunter distinctly remembered hearing Harold Skinner declare that much.

Supposing—

Billy Bunter breathed hard. His life at Greyfriars was not a particularly rosy one—he had himself to blame for that. Life, in the general way, was very sweet to the boys of Greyfriars.

But Billy Bunter's caddish ways—his greedy nature—always led him to trouble in one direction or another. Supposing he left it for a time—and supposing he went on the music-halls to make his fortune as a ventriloquist?

The mere thought nearly took his breath away!

To be free from lessons, to make so much money that he could feed as much and whenever he pleased! But—

There was always a "but" to be found in a case such as William George Bunter was now considering. He might be found out, and then matters would be distinctly uncomfortable for the Owl of the Remove.

Meanwhile, all unknown to Billy Bunter, Mr. Quelch had attracted the attention of the class, and was putting to them questions concerning the lesson they had been writing.

Billy Bunter was awakened from his reverie by the sound of the Form-master grimly calling him by name.

"Bunter!"

William George Bunter jumped.

"Y-y-yes, sir?" he stammered.

"Where did William the Conqueror go after he landed in England?" demanded Mr. Quelch sternly.

"On—on—on the hills, sir!" answered Billy Bunter, still thinking of the new idea.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Mr. Quelch had to laugh at the ridiculous answer Bunter had given.

"Bunter, you are the most stupid boy in the Remove!" said Mr. Quelch. "You are a perfect dunce—perfectly ridiculous! Look at your book, sir—at once!"

Billy Bunter sought his book, and gave the correct answer. But it was a long time before the Remove ceased to chuckle at the idea of William the Conqueror on the music-hall stage.

But to Billy Bunter the matter was far from being one for laughter.

Harold Skinner had unwittingly given Bunter yet another great idea, and Billy Bunter was of the kind that will not rest

until an idea has been put into execution and tested.

In short, William George Bunter had decided to go on the music-hall stage—to earn a fortune as a ventriloquist!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Notes.

"BUNTER!"

Bob Cherry shouted the name as he tumbled out of bed before the sound of the rising-bell had died away. Bob Cherry was always one of the very first to turn out in the mornings, and the mere fact of it being cold outside the blankets never troubled the cheery junior.

But William George Bunter hugged the blankets just as long as he possibly could. So long as he was down in time to get breakfast, that was all Billy Bunter cared about. His ablutions on cold mornings generally occupied twenty seconds.

"Bunter!"

There was no reply to Bob Cherry's second cry.

"Wake the fat toad up, somebody!" growled Bob Cherry.

"The wakelulness of the toad is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who had already pulled on his trousers.

The dusky Nabob of Bhanipur strode quickly over to Billy Bunter's bed and brought both hands down with a bang—on to an empty bed!

"My hat! The absentfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!" gasped Hurree Singh.

"What?" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Is that fat beast up?"

"The upfulness is likewise terrific, my esteemed chum!" said Hurree Singh dully. "The agefulness of ludicrous miracles has not passfully gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Bunter has!" said Bob Cherry in surprise.

"Yes!"

"My hat!"

Bob Cherry joined Hurree Singh at Billy Bunter's bedside. But the fat junior had indeed gone!

Bob Cherry looked under the bed, in case the Owl of the Remove might have thought of japing him. But Billy Bunter was not under the bed.

Suddenly Bob Cherry caught sight of something pinned to the pillow. It was a scrap of paper.

"Read it out!" said Frank Nugent quickly. "The giddy japer—on a cold morning, too!"

Bob Cherry removed the pin and held the scrap of paper nearer to his eyes.

"Read it out, Bob, old top!" said Harry Wharton. "Solve the giddy mystery!"

"My only aunt!" gasped Bob Cherry, who had been reading the note. "Jehoshaphat!"

"Never mind your aunt!" said Johnny Bull. "Read the giddy note!"

"My stars!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Just listen to this little lot, you chaps!"

And he proceeded to read aloud:

"My life at Greyfriars has come to an end. I cannot stand the jealousy that stops me from joining in all the sports in which the Remove takes part. Moreover, I do not get enough to eat—the Remove chaps collar more than their share. Farewell everybody! And with my last breath I write—I forgive you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared in sheer delight. The message which Billy Bunter had left was not spelt correctly—spelling was not one of Billy Bunter's accomplishments. But Bob Cherry had managed to read it so that the juniors could make out its purport.

"With my last breath I write!"—writes, mark you, with his last breath!—"I forgive you!" roared Bob Cherry. "Oh, the silly dummy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton stifled his merriment with an effort.

"But where has the silly ass got to now?" he said. "That's the point."

"No; the point is how Bunter can write 'I forgive you' with his last breath!" said Bob Cherry, with a laugh. "I should have used a pencil!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck rotting, Bob!" said Harry Wharton hastily. "There's more in this than meets the eye. I—I—I suppose the fat idiot wouldn't—"

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry tersely. "The fat toad hasn't the pluck!"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow, I'm taking this note to Mr. Quelch!" he said firmly. "My belief is that Bunter has bolted!"

"Piffle!" snorted Johnny Bull. "I'll bet he's back for breakfast!"

The juniors nodded. They refused to believe that Billy Bunter had run away from Greyfriars. Juniors had run away from the school before, it was true, but they were juniors who had more pluck than William George Bunter.

"Wait and see if he's at breakfast, Harry," suggested Frank Nugent, in his quiet way. "If he doesn't turn up then he won't turn up at all."

"That's so!" agreed Harry Wharton.

But when the juniors went down to breakfast Billy Bunter was not in the dining-hall. Mr. Quelch was at the top of the table, and as the time passed he began to look at his watch every few minutes.

"Bunter is later than usual to-day," he observed. "Did you leave him in his bed, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No, sir," he said. "He wasn't there when we woke up this morning."

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Please be more explicit, Wharton!" he said. "Do you mean that Bunter was out last night, and has not returned?"

Harry Wharton hesitated. He did not like to give Mr. Quelch the note they had found on Billy Bunter's pillow that

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The man was standing at the dressing-table, looking intently and thoughtfully at an open drawer. It was empty. "Hallo!" said Billy Bunter calmly. "What are you doing here!" The man swung round like lightning. (See Chapter 5.)

morning. Bunter might still be about the school, and Wharton had no wish to land him in trouble.

"I am waiting for an answer, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

Harry Wharton reluctantly handed the Form-master the note, and Mr. Quelch took it and perused the scribbled lines quickly.

An ominous frown grew on his brow as their meaning dawned upon him, and he glanced sharply at Wharton.

"Is this a joke, Wharton?" he asked. Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir," he replied slowly. "Bunter wasn't in bed when we got up at rising-bell."

"There has been no bullying?" demanded Mr. Quelch, with another sharp glance at Bulstrode.

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton instantly. "He was ratty—I mean, wild because I wouldn't let him play goal for the Remove against Courtfield on Saturday, sir—that's what he refers to when he writes of jealousy keeping him out of the games."

Mr. Quelch smiled slightly.

"If that is all, perhaps he will be here shortly," he said. "Pray go on with your breakfast, my boys."

The Removites finished the meal in silence, but once they had left the dining-hall they gathered in little groups to discuss the absence of Billy Bunter.

Not one of the juniors had yet seriously considered the probability of Bunter having run away from the school, much

less carried out that which his note hinted at.

"The silly dummy is pulling our legs," said Bob Cherry with a snort. "I'll pull his fat nose when he comes back!"

"The pullfulness will be terrific!" declared Hurree Singh.

Frank Nugent, who was perhaps the best-natured fellow at Greyfriars, shook his head slowly.

"I must say I think the fat chump has really gone!" he said. "There's no knowing what the silly clown will do if he gets a fatheaded idea in his head!"

And Frank Nugent was nearer the mark than he thought when he made that observation.

"Not him!" growled Johnny Bull. "He's too much of a baby to face the world alone!"

"One never knows!" murmured Mark Linley.

"I guess the jay will open a tuck-shop!" ventured Fisher Tarleton Fish, the American junior at Greyfriars. "But I reckon he'll vamoose that ranch pretty quick—he can't eat his own stock and make a profit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When the bell rang for classes Billy Bunter's note was still being discussed. But there was no sign of Billy Bunter when Mr. Quelch appeared.

The Form-master glanced quickly round the assembled juniors.

"Is Bunter here?" he asked quickly and ominously.

"No, sir!" said Harry Wharton.

"Then please keep silent while I am away!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "I shall see the Head immediately!"

It was those words that brought home to the Removites the first real impression that Billy Bunter, the fat Owl of the Remove, had gone from Greyfriars.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry, as if he had just been told that Billy Bunter was missing. "I suppose the silly ass has really gone?"

"Looks like it!" said Harry Wharton.

Further conversation was rendered impossible by the sudden appearance of Mr. Quelch and Dr. Locke, the headmaster of Greyfriars.

"Wharton!" said Dr. Locke at once.

"Sir?"

"You will take your bicycle and search the neighbourhood for Bunter," said the Head quickly. "You had better take Cherry, Nugent, Vernon-Smith, and Hurree Singh with you."

"Very good, sir!"

And Wharton hurried out of the classroom, closely followed by the juniors named. They were in a happy mood, for it looked as if they were getting off morning lessons.

It was a lovely morning, just cold enough to make it worth while pushing the pedals round, as Bob Cherry remarked.

And the remainder of the Remove fell to tackling their lessons, envying the five juniors who were to spend the morn-

ing on their bikes instead of "swotting" Euclid.

"The station first," said Harry Wharton, as the juniors mounted their machines and sped out of the gates.

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "Good old Bunter!"

Harry Wharton did not laugh. He was conscious of a certain amount of pleasure in getting off classes, but the occasion was a serious one—for William George Bunter, if they found him!

But they did not find him, for the simple reason that Bunter was miles and miles away in the great City of London!

They certainly found out that Bunter had caught the milk-train to London, for their inquiries at the station elicited that fact.

But there they were stumped, so to speak.

"Here's a giddy go!" said Bob Cherry dolorously. "The ass has hopped it all right!"

"He has!" said Vernon-Smith curtly. "The silly fathead!"

"The hopfulness of the ludicrous Bunter is terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "I am hopefully thinking the worthy fat toad is safe and sound!"

"Yes, rather!" assented the other juniors.

"I vote we have a spin round—take advantage of our opportunities, you know," suggested Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Not good enough, Bob," he said quickly. "Bunter has gone—we must let the Head know."

"We might have a ginger-pop as we go back, anyway," said Vernon-Smith.

That idea was adopted, and the juniors stopped at the village tuckshop, and dismounted. Hurree Singh, the wealthy Nabob of Bhanipur, insisted on paying, and took out his wallet.

But in place of the notes that should have been there, there was a badly-scribbled note:

"I will repay. Wun hundred per sent interest. W.G.B."

"My hat!" ejaculated Hurree Singh. "The rottenfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!"

"Eh? What's up now?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Hurree Singh handed him the note, and the juniors crowded round to read it. Their disgust knew no bounds when they realised that Bunter had purloined the Indian junior's cash to pay his way—wherever that might be!

"The rotter!" snapped Harry Wharton. "A fat lot he'll repay!"

"I wonder if he'll ever learn to spell?" murmured Vernon-Smith.

"I would suggestfully propose that nothing be said of this to the esteemed Head," said Hurree Singh softly. "The punishfulness of the ludicrous Bunter will be terrific without any morefulness being added to it!"

"Wait!" said Bob Cherry darkly. "I'll give that fat toad borrowing your money—that's all we can call it, until we know whether he really will repay."

"Anyhow, that does away with the—the—you know, the other thing," said Frank Nugent, with relief. "We know the fat rotter is alive and kicking, at any rate, or otherwise he wouldn't have taken so much of Inky's cash!"

"This won't get us back to Greyfriars," interposed Harry Wharton practically. "Come on, you chaps, drink up your pop, and we'll be off!"

He settled the bill himself, and the juniors rode back to Greyfriars to inform the Head that William George Bunter had gone to London.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 619.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter and the Agent.

"I SAY, porter!"

It was William George Bunter, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, who spoke.

He was just getting out of the train from Friardale as it came to a stop at the London terminus. It was only just dawn, and Billy Bunter found himself in a peculiar position.

He had run away from Greyfriars after a short sleep the night before, had borrowed the money from Hurree Singh's wallet, leaving a note already prepared in place of the more useful notes, had bribed a porter at Friardale with one of the notes thus borrowed to let him get on the train, and had reached London almost before he fully realised the enormity of his act.

To run from Greyfriars was an unforgivable offence in Dr. Locke's eyes, and

your ticket?" grinned the porter. "One pound, please!"

William George Bunter felt like arguing, but he was not enough to see that he was in an awkward position. To quarrel with the porter was likely to cause inquiries to be made, and that he wanted to avoid.

He handed over one of Hurree Singh's pound notes without another word, and the delighted porter showed him the way out of the station.

There were no restaurants open at that early hour of the day, but a coffee-stall provided Bunter with a snack—at any rate, what he called a snack. The coffee-stall proprietor would probably have called it a jolly good meal.

London wakes up early, and by the time Billy Bunter had finished his snack the streets began to fill with waggons and pedestrians.

Bunter went up to a policeman and asked the way to the Strand, without knowing exactly why he asked. But, at the back of his mind, Billy Bunter had an idea that the Strand was the centre of music-hall land, and that it was there he must start on his great effort to make a fortune.

It was scarcely nine o'clock when he arrived in Trafalgar Square, where he sat on a seat to think out his next move.

"I suppose one has to start by getting an agent?" he said to himself. "Or I wonder if I should get a manager right away?"

He decided it more prudent to commence operations by finding an agent, and with this object in view he turned down the Strand.

Fortune smiled on him, for he had hardly proceeded a hundred yards down the famous thoroughfare before his attention was arrested by a notice fastened to a wall outside some offices.

"My hat!" he said. "What luck! Here's the giddy merchant right enough!"

The notice read:

"PHILIP P. PARSONS,
Music-Hall Agent. Artists Only."

"Artists only!" murmured Billy Bunter. "That's me—music-hall artist!"

As was only to be expected, inquiries at the office occupied by Philip P. Parsons elicited the fact that the agent had not yet arrived. Billy Bunter was invited to wait—an invitation he accepted.

The office staff consisted, as far as he could see, of two young ladies. They looked shyly at him and giggled delightedly. Billy Bunter smiled kindly back at them, and they giggled anew.

It was seldom the girls had seen a more amusing spectacle than William George Bunter. He really looked absurd in the office—his great fat figure filling every inch of his Etons. But Bunter honestly thought the girls were impressed by his commanding appearance, and he seemed to swell importantly.

"How long will Mr. Parsons be?" he asked, feeling he ought to say something.

"We never know!" giggled one of the girls. "You see—"

She broke off sharply as there came the rapid pattering of feet up the stairs outside the office door, and when the door was flung violently open and a man strode in the girls were apparently absorbed in their work.

"Ah!" said Bunter expectantly, and rose quickly to his feet with the intention of intercepting the agent.

Mr. Parsons stopped suddenly, peered intently at the fat junior for one moment,

No. 13.

THE EARL MAULEVERER.



The Earl Mauleverer—Christian names, Herbert Plantagenet. The laziest fellow at Greyfriars, yet can be roused at times, and has no end of pluck. Has heaps of money, and gives freely to those in actual need; but is shrewd enough to kick at cadgers. Gets on remarkably well with Delarey and Vivian, the two widely different fellows who share Study No. 12 with him.

William George Bunter had an uneasy feeling of loneliness—friendless in a strange city.

He had been to London with Harry Wharton & Co. on more than one occasion, but it needs a good many visits to enable one to get used to the greatest city in the world.

"Porter!"

The porter turned round quickly as he heard Billy Bunter hail him again. Passengers do not, as a rule, arrive on a milk-train.

"Here, where did you get in, young shaver?" asked the porter.

"Oh, really, you needn't speak like that!" said Billy Bunter importantly.

"Where did you get in—and where's your ticket?" demanded the porter.

Billy Bunter blinked at the man through his spectacles.

"I haven't a ticket—I paid a sovereign for my passage, to a porter!" said the fat junior petulantly. "Which is the way out, please?"

"I'll show you—when you pay for

then passed into an inner room with his nose high in the air.

"Beast!" muttered Billy Bunter. "Doesn't look as if I shall get much out of that rotter!"

The girls, who had watched the passing of the great man, giggled again at the expression on Billy Bunter's face, and the fat junior pulled himself together with an effort.

"Tell the agent I want to see him!" he commanded. "I'm in a hurry!"

One of the girls got up to obey, and disappeared in the office which hid Mr. Parsons.

She came out a moment later, and turned to Bunter.

"Mr. Parsons says you are to wait!" she said, and she spoke as if that was not quite the manner in which the message had been given her.

Billy Bunter frowned and looked at his watch. He was anxious to cause an impression, and to an extent he succeeded. It was a funny impression he imposed, and the girls giggled again.

Billy Bunter thereupon sat down again.

He waited two hours impatiently before he decided that Mr. Parsons had kept him long enough. He puckered his brows in thought as he tried to think out a scheme by which he could gain admittance to Mr. Parsons' office.

Suddenly his eyes lighted up, and a smug grin overspread his fat face.

Billy Bunter lay back in his chair, and almost at the same instant there came the sound as of a cat crying in the distance.

"Meowow!"

The girls literally jumped, and stared at each other in dismay, for the sound came from the direction of Mr. Parsons' office.

"Meowowow!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped one of the girls. "He'll be so cross!"

"Meowowowow!"

A chair was thrown back in the agent's office, and Billy Bunter listened to the man's muttering voice, and rightly deduced that the man was searching for the cat.

"Meowowowowowowowow!"

Louder and longer came the piteous cry, and louder became the agent's voice.

"Miss Marsh! Come here—this instant!" he commanded.

One of the girls ran quickly to the office and threw open the door. Billy Bunter could then see that Mr. Parsons was on his knees, looking under his desk for the cat.

"Meowowowowowowowow! Meowowowowowow!"

"How dare you let a cat come into my office?" shouted Mr. Parsons, almost beside himself with rage.

"I haven't, sir!" answered the girl meekly.

"Meowowowow! Phsssss!"

"What is that, then?" roared the agent. "I ask you—what is it?"

"Sounds like a cat, sir!" replied Miss Marsh, in the same meek tones.

Bang! Crash! Crash!

Mr. Parsons, tired of being on his knees, commenced to throw the furniture about in his endeavours to find the cat. And all the time there came the piteous cry:

"Meowowowow!"

Billy Bunter could have laughed until the tears ran down his face at the sight of the agent, who was now almost hysterical.

"Come out of it!" shouted Mr. Parsons.

Crash! Bang! Crash!

Over went the desk on its side, and the piteous cry came from behind the bookcase. In a moment the case was on

its side, but there was no trace of the cat.

"Meowowowow!"

"Oh, my stars!" groaned the agent.

"Where on earth is the beastly thing?"

Billy Bunter thought that was his opportunity to introduce himself, and he left his seat and made his way to the door of the office.

"Can I help you, sir?" he asked meekly.

The agent turned round, fury on his face.

"Help me?" he repeated, in a roar.

"Help me, you great fat booby? You couldn't help—Oh, my gracious!"

"Meowowowowow!"

This time the cry came from right under the agent's nose, and he started back with an exclamation of annoyance and surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter could restrain himself no longer, and he burst out into peal after

No. 14.—HAROLD SKINNER.



Harold Skinner.—The worst fellow in the Remove—unless Stott can be considered such. Skinner has more strength of will, more cunning, and more hardihood than Stott. Spiteful, treacherous, and the enemy of every decent fellow in the Form. Better to have as enemy than friend, for he is not to be trusted. (Study No. 11.)

peal of laughter. For a moment the agent looked as if he would go for the fat junior, but the next his face expressed surprise, incredulity, and then he, too, began to laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "You fat fraud! Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Marsh stared dully at the agent, and from him to the fat junior. She could not see any cause for laughter in the terrible mess in which the office was now in.

"A ventriloquist, I suppose?" ejaculated the agent, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "And this is the way you introduce yourself!"

"I got tired of waiting, sir," explained Billy Bunter, with a chuckle. "Sorry to disturb you, and all that, but I really had to see you somehow!"

"I don't like your methods, young man," said the agent grimly. "But I might tell you that you have succeeded where you might have failed. I had made up my mind to let you wait until you were tired, so that you would go

away without troubling me. I didn't like the look of you!"

"Oh, really, you know—" began Billy Bunter indignantly.

"Half a minute, young man," interrupted the agent. "Just let me get this office to something like its correct order, and then we'll talk business!"

Billy Bunter waited whilst the agent and his young lady assistants set the desk and the other furniture in their proper positions, calmly annexing the first armchair that was set upon its feet.

The agent stared grimly down at him for a moment, and looked as if he meant to throw the fat junior on to the floor. But he changed his mind, if that was the case, for he shrugged his shoulders and continued with his work.

Five minutes later, and the agent and Billy Bunter were alone.

"Now, young sir," said Mr. Parsons.

"What did you want to see me about?"

"I want to go on the halls as a ventriloquist," said Billy Bunter. "I think I have proved I can do a turn!"

"You have!" agreed the agent, with a chuckle. "What would you do?"

Billy Bunter hesitated. He had not thought of that.

"Blessed if I know!" he admitted at last. "I never thought of that part of the business—but it won't take a fellow of my capabilities long to find something interesting!"

"Ahem!"

Mr. Parsons covered a grin with his hand, and his eyes twinkled humorously as he looked at the fat junior.

"What about working the same stunt on the halls as you have worked on me, young man?" suggested Mr. Parsons.

"You know—a music-hall artist wanting a job—can't get an interview with an agent—then introducing the ventriloquism?"

"My only hat!" said Billy Bunter excitedly. "You think that would work?"

"It worked the oracle with me all right!" grunted Mr. Parsons. "I'll get it written for you, and all the etceteras fixed up."

"Good!" said Billy Bunter heartily.

"Now, how about cash?"

The agent hesitated.

"Twenty pounds a week?" he suggested.

A man, in Bunter's position, would have promptly asked for twice that amount on the strength of the agent's tones. But twenty pounds a week represented the fortune for which Billy Bunter had left Greyfriars, and he accepted it at once.

"That will suit me!" he declared.

"When do I start?"

The agent consulted a diary on his desk before replying.

"Saturday night, at Manton Hippodrome!" said the agent. "After a week there—Courtfield!"

Thus it was settled. Billy Bunter was to receive his "part" on the following day, and he had to learn it well enough to be able to perform on Saturday night. He had three days.

"Courtfield!" muttered Billy Bunter, as he walked from the office into the Strand once more. "I must dodge that somehow—there might be some prying rotter from Greyfriars there!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter on the Boards!

"MR. BUNTER!"

Billy Bunter, the fat junior of Greyfriars no longer, but Mr. Bunter, music-hall artiste, jumped as he heard his name called by the boy.

"Coming!" he said.

And Billy Bunter left the dressing-room which had been allotted him, and made his way down to the stage. In the wings he had to wait until a lady with a soprano voice had satisfied the audience.

Billy Bunter could hardly be recognised in his new clothes—purchased with Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's money. He was dressed in a check suit—a huge check suit—one that literally shrieked. He had a very small bowler hat on top of his head—that was part of his make-up.

The hat resembled a pea on top of a haystack—Billy Bunter's huge head lent itself admirably to the purpose.

He wore huge boots, and his trousers were short, the top of his boots being hidden by a pair of pink spats.

Billy Bunter, in fact, would create a laugh even if he never utilised his powers as a ventriloquist. Mr. Parsons had insisted on his making up in that manner.

The soprano came off to the accompaniment of a thunderous clapping of hands, and shrill cries of "Encore!" She shook her head in the direction of the man in the wings who controlled the curtain, and it came down with a rush.

Still the thunder of applause rattled out, and the soprano had to go back and bow her acknowledgments. But she did not sing again.

Suddenly Billy Bunter, who had become fascinated by the applause, heard the orchestra strike up the opening bars of the piece which was to herald his advance on to the stage.

"He walked on immediately the curtain had been raised, and almost staggered back in the glare of the footlights. He stared dully at the expectant audience, but could only make out a mass of white specks which he knew must be faces.

Somebody clapped, and, hardly knowing what he was doing, he bowed. It was not until somebody giggled—a high falsetto giggle that seemed to come from the very roof of the house—that Billy Bunter realised that he had a duty to perform.

Another artist had been engaged by Mr. Parsons to play the part of music-hall agent, and he stamped suddenly past Billy Bunter, and disappeared through a door.

For the purpose of allowing the audience to see what took place in the agent's office, the scene portrayed a waiting-hall and the office—divided by a screen. Into the office the "agent" disappeared.

Then Billy Bunter suddenly commenced.

"May I come in?" he called out.

"Wait!" snapped the agent, busily turning over his papers.

And Billy Bunter waited—until he started his ventriloquism. After that he had the audience in one continual roar of laughter. They knew he was a ventriloquist, and appreciated the really splendid performance which Billy Bunter gave.

The man who was playing the part of agent, played it well, almost in the identical manner in which Mr. Parsons himself had behaved when Billy Bunter had "worked" the interview in the Strand office.

At last it was all over, and thunderous applause broke from the delighted audience. Never had Billy Bunter felt so important, or so proud as he did that night.

Time after time he was called, and time after time he went to the footlights and bowed. Still the audience shouted for more, and, on the spur of the moment Billy made a beautifully carved, gilded figure of a Roman that adorned the roof sing a rag-time song.

The idea of a Roman singing in rag-time was a new one.

time appealed to the public far more than the song, for Billy Bunter certainly could not sing. Finished at last, Billy Bunter bowed his way off the stage, flushed with triumph and panting for breath.

"Magnificent!" said the manager of the Hippodrome, slapping Billy Bunter hard upon the back. "Simply splendid!"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. But for once Billy Bunter grew tired of being lionised, and rushed to his dressing-room.

"My hat!" he muttered, as he closed the door. "M-m-my hat! I wonder what the chaps at Greyfriars would think of that?"

He laughed—laughed for the sheer joy of laughing. He had triumphed—he who had been ridiculed by the captain of the Remove Form at Greyfriars as being no good at anything or for anything!

Billy Bunter had indeed triumphed!

And whilst Billy Bunter was making his debut "on the boards," half Greyfriars was talking about him.

Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Mark Linley had gone to Harry Wharton's study, where also Johnny Bull and Vernon-Smith had congregated.

"All we know is that the fat ass has gone to London," observed Bob Cherry.

"How are we going to find him there?—it would be like looking for the pro-

Bunter was good for nothing, Manton thought differently.

The second house at the Hippodrome was packed to the roof, and Billy Bunter enjoyed yet another great ovation.

As was only to be expected, the fat junior promptly developed a "swelled head," and he marched about the hall as if he were the owner instead of an artist.

But the manager did not mind that; he could see that Billy Bunter and his ventriloquial "turn" was going to fill the tills at the box-office, and he was quite prepared to put up with the fat junior's loftiness.

That night, as Billy Bunter sat down to a sumptuous feed at the hotel at which he was staying, his thoughts wandered again to Greyfriars.

"Wharton will jolly well have to put me in the footer team now!" he murmured. "He said he would if I proved I was good at anything—when he hears of my music-hall turn he'll realise that, as a ventriloquist, I can't be beaten!"

It never occurred to Billy Bunter that he had to get back to Greyfriars before he could become a member of the footer team. It was not exactly the getting back that would be the trouble, it was the getting in.

And even if he succeeded in getting in, it was extremely likely that Dr. Locke would exercise his powers as headmaster and send him out of Greyfriars again—expel him from the school.

Little details like that never appealed to William George Bunter. He lived only for the present, and let the future take care of itself.

He had hardly finished his meal when he saw the manager of the Hippodrome approaching him. There was so serious an expression on the man's face that Billy Bunter instantly thought he had been discovered.

"W-what's the matter?" he demanded nervously, as the manager came up and sat down at the table.

"You needn't be alarmed, Mr. Bunter," said the manager. "There has not been much damage yet. But I thought I ought to warn you that there is a gang of criminals working on the halls. They made an unsuccessful attempt to rob the box-office till this very night."

"My hat!" exclaimed Billy Bunter.

"Your hat is all right," said the manager, with a slight frown. "It is all the valuables that I am worried about."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Bunter. "That's only an expression, you know. We always use expressions like that at Grey—ahem!—I mean, that's all right, you know."

Billy Bunter broke off in confusion as he nearly gave himself away. The manager stared suspiciously for a moment, but, fortunately for Billy Bunter, dismissed the matter from his mind.

"I rather pride myself as a detective," said Billy Bunter hurriedly. "I suppose you have come to ask me to capture the giddy burglars for you?"

The manager laughed.

"If you can—yes," he said abruptly. "But I think it will take a more experienced man than you to do that, Mr. Bunter!"

"Oh, don't worry," said Billy Bunter loftily. "All the chaps will admit that I'm a jolly good detective!"

"All the chaps?" echoed the manager, mystified. "What do you mean?"

"Er—the—ahem!—my friends, you know," said Billy Bunter hastily. "I'm a jolly good detective, Mr. Scott, and I'll jolly soon lay the rotters low."

Mr. Scott nodded thoughtfully. He could not quite make out Billy Bunter.

"THE LOVELORN GRUNDY!"

is the title of a splendid long, complete story of St. Jim's in this week's

"GEM"

BE SURE NOT TO MISS IT!

verbial needle in the proverbial haystack!"

"We can't do anything!" said Harry Wharton. "It is up to the Head to make any arrangements to bring the fat chump back again!"

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"Couldn't we go after him?" he asked suddenly. "You may remember Jimmy Silver told us half his chums had chased him to London when he left Rookwood?"

"They had something to chase!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Blessed if I think Billy Bunter is worth risking a licking for!"

"It's out of the question," said Harry Wharton slowly. "We shall have to wait and see what happens."

"I'll bet the fat beast is pulling somebody's leg for a feed!" said Vernon-Smith. "He'd spend all the cash he took from Inky's wallet in the first few hours in London!"

But there Vernon-Smith was very much wrong. Billy Bunter was, at that precise moment, enjoying to the full the thunderous applause of a delighted and appreciative audience.

Nobody at Greyfriars would have believed him had he told them of the huge success of his sketch—they would have required to witness the performance and listen to the audience's applause before they would accept the fact that Billy Bunter was good at something!

But if the Removites did think Billy

"No objection to your trying, of course, Mr. Bunter," he said. "I merely came to warn you, however, in case you have any valuables amongst your props."

"I have, as a matter of fact," said Billy Bunter importantly. "But you leave this little job to William George Bunter, Mr. Scott."

The manager shook hands with Billy Bunter, and hurriedly departed to warn the other members of the touring company who were performing at the Manton Hippodrome for the ensuing week.

This particular company was staying for two weeks in Manton, of which one had passed. Thus Billy Bunter had a week in which to capture the thieves.

Mr. Scott had not told Billy Bunter very much of what had happened in the

shortly afterwards, and Billy Bunter promptly went up to him.

"Look here, Mr. Scott," said Billy Bunter. "It is important that I should know the details of what happened last night."

Mr. Scott hesitated. He knew very little about Billy Bunter—perhaps that was as well for the fat junior—and he did not know whether he should impart the information purely on the score of Bunter being a music-hall artist performing at the Hippodrome.

But Billy Bunter was a great success, and a great success filled the coffers of the music-hall manager. Thus Mr. Scott felt more or less bound to let Bunter know what he wanted.

"Well, all I can tell you—" he began.

booking money and entrance money being locked in the safe in my private office immediately the curtain goes up, the thieves only got away with a matter of two pounds and a few shillings."

"My hat!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "Have you looked for finger-prints?"

The manager smiled.

"The police have, Mr. Bunter," he said.

Billy Bunter snorted.

"Brrr! The police are no good in a case like this," he said, in tones of deep disgust. "A fellow with brains is required."

"Like yourself?" suggested Mr. Scott, with a faint smile.

"Exactly!" agreed Billy Bunter, and he wondered why the manager laughed. Mr. Scott made an excuse and hurried



Billy Bunter himself searched the stranger, and there was an exclamation of triumph as he pulled from one of the man's breast-pockets a string of pearls! "Got you, you rotter!" said Billy Bunter, with a grin. "My name is Bunter—you thought it was Hunter. Anyhow, I've hunted you down all right!" (See Chapter 7.)

box-office, but Bunter determined to find out all that was to be found out early the next morning.

It being Sunday, there was only the fireman in the Hippodrome when Billy Bunter went round the next morning. The fat junior had no difficulty in persuading the man to allow him to enter the building. Billy Bunter was already a famous music-hall artist.

Bunter did not know where to start his investigations. He had little information to go upon, and could have kicked himself for not having questioned Mr. Scott, the manager of the Hippodrome, as to the circumstances of the attempted robbery of the box-office tills.

Fortunately, the manager walked in

"But I must know all," interrupted Billy Bunter calmly.

Mr. Scott shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, Mr. Bunter," he said. "Whilst the performance was on last night, two young men—both in evening-dress—got into conversation with the young lady who looks after the box-office. They told her that I wanted her, so she, doubtless thinking that so well-dressed men were decent, promptly came to look for me."

"Yes?" said Billy Bunter encouragingly, as the other hesitated.

"Then, of course, when we got back to see what the little game was, the men had gone. The tills had been broken open; but as I always insist upon all the

away, leaving Billy Bunter to pursue his "investigations" as he wished.

Billy Bunter stood in the attitude he fondly imagined Sexton Blake or Ferrers Locke would stand, and puckered his brows in deep thought.

But he could think of nothing that would help him. Billy Bunter suddenly discovered that a detective's job is not an easy one.

His attention was attracted by a man who crossed the stage and entered one of the dressing-rooms, and, remembering that Ferrers Locke had once told the juniors at Greyfriars that everybody is guilty until proved innocent, Billy Bunter promptly followed the stranger.

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The fat junior did not take the trouble to knock at the door, which had closed behind the man. He walked straight in.

The man was standing at the dressing-table, looking intently and thoughtfully at an open drawer. It was empty.

"Hallo!" said Billy Bunter calmly. "What are you doing here?"

The man swung round like lightning, and for a moment Billy Bunter thought he saw an expression of terror flash across the man's face. But it was gone the next instant, and the man smiled coolly at him.

"My dressing-room," he explained lightly. "Surely I can come in when I happen to leave my—er—cigarette-case behind?"

Billy Bunter was bristling with suspicion, but the man's manner and tone were so courteous and polite, there was no sting in the words he uttered.

Billy Bunter felt he had made a mistake, and hastened to correct himself.

"Sorry, old chap," he said hastily. "I don't remember having seen you last night. But then, I had to keep away from the stage owing to all the people wanting to shake me by the hand, you know."

"You are the wonderful ventriloquist, I believe?" said the man easily.

Bunter threw out his chest.

"I am!" he said proudly. "But I'm trying to find the giddy robbers just now."

"Ha, ha—ahem! Excuse me, but has there been a robbery?" asked the man, who seemed to find it difficult to speak. "The idea of a robbery at a place like this—er—strikes me as amusing."

"It won't be amusing for the robbers," said Billy Bunter darkly. "I'm after them, and I am known—I might say famous—as an amateur detective."

The man choked.

"I—I—I seemed to have heard of you," he said, and glanced quickly at the massive gold watch he took from his pocket. "I must be going. I have an appointment, Mr. Hunter."

"Bunter," corrected the fat junior. "Mr. Bunter."

"Ah, yes, of course, Mr. Bunter," murmured the man. "Well, good-morning! Your name ought to have been Hunter, seeing that you are hunting burglars."

"He, he, he!" laughed Billy Bunter. "Quite good, that!"

The man nodded, smiled, and passed by Bunter and disappeared in the darkness of the corridors.

Billy Bunter spent some hours in the Hippodrome, but he eventually left, tired, exceedingly hungry, and unable to say that he found out anything connected with the attempted robbery.

But, he reflected, even the greatest of detectives do not find their clues in five minutes.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Still Going Strong!

"HURRAH!"

Billy Bunter bowed again and again to the packed house in acknowledgment of their thunderous applause. His performance had again gone smoothly, to the shrieks of laughter from the crowd as they watched the infuriated "agent" chasing the cat that was not there.

"Encore!"

Billy Bunter shook his head. He could hardly speak. He was nearly bursting with pride.

He backed off the stage, bowing low, and still the thunderous clapping of hands continued, and he had to go on

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again and make the Roman figure on the ceiling of the hall sing a rag-time song.

Huge shrieks of merriment broke out as soon as he stopped, and again he had to bow his way off the stage, to reappear and bow again.

"Ripping!" said Mr. Scott enthusiastically. "You're a wonder!"

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I can't do any more!"

The curtain came down with a swing, and at last the audience ceased in their acclamations.

Billy Bunter hurried away to his dressing-room, and changed into the everyday suit he had worn since he left the office of Mr. Parsons, music-hall agent, in the Strand.

The fat junior was still determined to demonstrate his wonderful powers as a detective, and discover some clues that would lead to the capture of the men who had attempted to rob the box-office of its monetary contents.

No. 15. HORACE COKER.



Horace James Coker—Coker major. A big and powerful fellow, with the brain of a boy of twelve and the muscles of a fellow of twenty. Spells worse than badly, and is no credit to Mr. Prout in other respects. Imagines himself good at everything. At the same time absolutely straight, brave as a lion, and very generous. Inclined to be heavy-handed with the fags, but is no bully in reality. (Study No. 4, Fifth Form).

The fact that two days had gone did not deter Billy Bunter. He felt certain that his marvellous ingenuity would bring the culprits to justice, even if weeks elapsed.

The police had been working on the case longer than Billy Bunter; so why shouldn't he persevere as much as they?

No reason at all, reflected Billy Bunter, and, with that point in view, he made his way down to the box-office, and made the acquaintance of the young lady who looked after it.

"I'm William George Bunter!" he said, introducing himself. "You may have heard of me?"

"Is there anybody in Manton who has not, Mr. Bunter?" asked the young lady gently. "My name is Morrison—Madge Morrison—so—"

"Well, look here, Madge," said Billy Bunter, with supreme indifference to the fact that it was rude to make use of the lady's Christian name without her permission. "I'm going to rout out those rotters who smashed open your tills, so

if you would kindly leave me alone for a few minutes—"

"Oh, no, thank you!" said Miss Morrison quietly. "I was caught that way on Saturday night!"

"Oh, really, Madge," expostulated Billy Bunter. "I'm a detective—not a giddy burglar!"

"They were apparently gentlemen, too," observed Miss Morrison calmly. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bunter, but you can come in here only when Mr. Scott, the manager, is with you!"

"But—" began Billy Bunter.

"I'm not going to leave this office, Mr. Bunter," said Miss Morrison determinedly, "and you are not coming in until Mr. Scott is here, too!"

Billy Bunter snorted indignantly.

"I've a jolly good mind to let the burglars escape!" he said angrily. "Here am I giving my services free, gratis, and for nothing, and yet I am stopped in the—the most important part of the business!"

"I'm sorry," murmured Miss Morrison; "but—"

She did not finish what she was going to say, and Billy Bunter turned away from the office and walked slowly back to his dressing-room.

He was within ten yards of the door when he saw the same man who had entered a dressing-room on the morning before—Sunday morning, when Billy Bunter had started his "investigations."

He was carrying a wig in his hand, and his face showed signs of grease-paint. He nodded kindly to Billy Bunter as he approached.

"My congratulations, Mr. Hunter!" he said enthusiastically.

"Bunter!" corrected Billy Bunter.

"Ah, I'm thinking of your hunt more than ever, I fear!" laughed the stranger. "Sorry I can't stop to chat. I'm about due for my turn."

And he hurried on. Billy Bunter stared thoughtfully after him for a moment, then he made his way into the dressing-room to think matters over.

But Billy Bunter was all at sea; he could think of nothing which would lead him to anything.

"Jolly rotten job detectives have!" he muttered. "Blessed if I ever thought it was so difficult!"

Billy Bunter was not the first "outsider" who had come to that conclusion.

He had to change again to perform before the second house, and for the time being Billy Bunter forgot all about the detective business.

Once again he had the audience shrieking with laughter, a triumph in which the man who was playing the part of "agent" duly shared. Again and again they were called, and their backs ached with bowing their acknowledgments of the applause.

And every time he bowed, Billy Bunter regretted that Harry Wharton & Co. could not be there to witness his triumph—especially Harry Wharton, who had bluntly informed him he was good for nothing, nor good at nothing!

The only drawback to that would have been that Harry Wharton & Co. would have promptly marched him back to Greyfriars—to Dr. Locke—to answer for running away.

His turn had come after most of the other artistes had gone through their performances, and very shortly after Billy Bunter had once more changed he heard the National Anthem being played, which signified that the end of the show had been reached.

It was not five minutes later that he ran into Mr. Scott, whose white face and distracted expression told Billy Bunter at once that something had happened.

Bunter ran after the manager, and caught him by the coat.

"More trouble, sir?" he asked quickly.

The manager nodded quickly.

"Yes—oh, goodness, yes!" he almost gasped. "Nearly a hundred pounds' worth of jewellery belonging to the prima donna has been stolen whilst she was on the stage!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "So the giddy burglar is still hanging around!"

Mr. Scott nodded, and hastened off to meet the police-inspector, who had been telephoned for. For a moment Billy Bunter hesitated, and then he ran towards the dressing-room he knew was temporarily occupied by the lady with the soprano voice.

Here Billy Bunter did not enter without knocking, but waited for an answer to his summons.

A maid opened the door a very short time after he knocked.

"Madame cannot see anybody just now!" she announced quickly. "Madame she is all of ze 'eap!"

"French!" murmured Billy Bunter, as he stared at the door the maid had closed immediately after having imparted the information. "I wonder—"

No sooner thought of than acted upon.

Billy Bunter rushed down to the main entrance-hall, where he found Mr. Scott in earnest conversation with the police-inspector.

"Have you tackled the maid?" he demanded unceremoniously. "She's French!"

"And perfectly honest!" snapped the inspector biting.

Billy Bunter reddened furiously.

"All right! I'm just about fed up!" he almost shouted. "I'll leave you to find the giddy robber by yourself—there!"

"Thanks very much!" said the inspector coolly.

And Billy Bunter, who had not experienced being "told off" since he had left Greyfriars, turned on his heel and stamped away, feeling more or less crushed.

"The beast!" he said, under his breath. "He's jolly well jealous, that's what's the matter with him! Hoo! Jealousy again! Blessed if it isn't a nuisance being a real clever chap!"

It never occurred to William George Bunter that the police-inspector was quite able to conduct his own affairs. Neither did it cross his mind that his interference was unwarrantable.

Billy Bunter was obsessed with one thought—he was as good a detective as there could be found in the Police Force. Wherefore, if the inspector refused his aid and advice, he—Billy Bunter—was not to blame.

The perpetrators of the theft were not found, despite the work put in by the police and the investigations made by Billy Bunter. The police were convinced that there was only one man responsible for the robbery, and with this conviction Billy Bunter entirely agreed.

But it is doubtful if Billy Bunter could have explained on what grounds he came to that conclusion.

Billy Bunter enjoyed a tremendous success with his sketch on the boards, and, indeed, had almost forgotten there was such a place as Greyfriars.

It was only when he lay in his bed at the hotel that Bunter thought of the good old days at Greyfriars. He remembered the feeds he had enjoyed at the school, and the merry laughter of the Removites as they went about their business and pleasures.

Sometimes Bunter even thought he had had enough of the music-halls, but every time he thought of that he thought of

the money he was making—and money brought to Billy Bunter all that he desired.

And if Billy Bunter was thinking of the Greyfriars fellows they were also thinking of him.

Curious to relate, although many of the Removites had declared they would never miss Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, many found that they did. Billy Bunter was always a source of amusement to the juniors, and there was generally fun when Billy Bunter was about.

Harry Wharton & Co. had not even complained when Sammy Bunter, Billy's young brother, made the best of his elder's absence, and wheedled feeds out of them to keep up his "fast-falling hopes" that William George was alive and well.

Even Bob Cherry, who had declared his intention of giving Billy Bunter the licking of his life for purloining Hurree

Billy Bunter took the notes, and stuffed them into his waistcoat-pocket, with a word of thanks. Half the pleasure of receiving such a large amount of money was overwhelmed by the thoughts of going to Courtfield.

But there was no way out of it, and that night William George Bunter boarded the night mail-train to Courtfield, half-fearing, half-hoping that there would be a number of Greyfriars fellows present on the opening night to witness his turn, and his triumph.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Great Day!

"ROUSE out! Rouse out, my merry lads!"

Thus Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

Rising-bell had gone, and as usual, Bob Cherry had taken upon himself the duty of waking up the Remove fellows.

Some of Bob Cherry's methods of waking his chums were not exactly gentle. Hurree Singh, for one, had a rigid objection to having a sponge filled with cold water forced down his back.

Such as Skinner and Snoop were turned out by the simple method of being rolled on to the floor. It did not matter to Bob Cherry if they were awake or asleep when he commenced operations.

"Rouse out! Come on; out you come, lads!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Rising-bell's gone nearly three minutes now!"

"The get-upfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh, leaping nimbly out of bed as Bob Cherry approached with a sponge in his hand.

"Now then, Wharton!" roared Bob Cherry. "I'll—"

"You'll be an hour after me if you don't hurry!" said Harry Wharton, who was already drying himself after his ablutions.

"Why didn't you tell me you were up?" demanded Bob Cherry wrathfully. "Wait for me, Harry! Sha'n't be two shakes of a guinea-pig's tail!"

And Bob Cherry, satisfied that everybody was up or getting up, hurried with his dressing.

Spirits were always high on Saturday morning, for that day was a "half," and there was usually football in the afternoon, and games at night.

But this particular Saturday there was no match for the Remove, and arrangements had yet to be made for passing the time.

Harry Wharton & Co. always left such arrangements until they could see what the weather was going to be like. Thus, when they rose in the morning, Harry Wharton had not the faintest idea as to how they were going to spend the day.

Morning lessons were soon over, and the study fires were lighted. Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Mark Linley went along to Harry Wharton's study as soon as they had finished their dinner to see what their chums were going to do.

"What's the programme, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Blessed if I know, old top!" said Harry Wharton. "Got any suggestions to make?"

The Co. from Study No. 13 shook their heads.

"Pity the Courtfield match wasn't this Saturday!" said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "I read in the local paper that there's a tophole company coming to the music-hall, a thundering good ventriloquist turn for one item."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Perhaps it's our one and only Billy

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No. 16.—SAMPSON QUINCY IFFLEY FIELD.



Sampson Quincy Iffley Field—of the Remove. Called "Squiff" for short. Comes from New South Wales. A great japer, a fine all-round man, and a first-rate fellow in every way. The chief of the brotherhood of three—the Three Colonials—which also includes Delarey and Tom Brown. (Study No. 14.)

Singh's notes, had made up his mind he would let the fat junior off if he would only come back to the Remove.

Billy Bunter, in short, was part and parcel of the Greyfriars Remove, and the juniors wanted him back.

But Billy Bunter was, at that time, miles away, enjoying a triumph such as no junior could ever dream would come his way.

The fat junior was to proceed to Courtfield on the Friday night after his performance, and though he tried his best to get out of that engagement, he could not.

"I've very good reasons for not wanting to go there," he said to Mr. Parsons, who had come to witness the triumph of his new "turn." "I'm on the track of the criminals who have been robbing the Hippodrome and the prima donna."

Mr. Parsons merely smiled.

"We'll leave that to the police, Mr. Bunter," he said calmly. "You're wanted at Courtfield next week! Oh, and, by the way, here's your twenty pounds!"

Bunter!" he said jokingly. "Fancy Billy on the boards!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter at the mere idea.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea to go and see the show," said Frank Nugent. "It would remind us of Billy Bunter. Old times' sake, you know!"

"I'm on!" said Bob Cherry instantly.

"I rather like a decent show."

"So do I," said Mark Linley.

"The likefulness is terrific!" purred Hurree Singh.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Then we're all on!" he said, with a laugh. "That's this evening booked up! What shall we do this afternoon? Have a kick at the nets?"

"Why not walk out to Courtfield?" suggested Mark Linley. "That's jolly good exercise!"

"Right!"

"But it's only a matter of three miles," said Bob Cherry. "We can do that on our heads in an hour!"

"Well, we'll find something to do," said Harry Wharton. "Come on, you chaps: let's change!"

And the juniors went up to the dormitory to wash and change. They did not hurry, as they had plenty of time.

During the walk to Courtfield, Bob Cherry produced a small rubber ball, and as a result of their kicking and dribbling it along the lane, it was nearly tea-time when they reached Courtfield.

"There you are, you chaps!" exclaimed Harry Wharton suddenly.

He pointed, as he spoke, to a huge advertisement hoarding, and the juniors stopped to read the announcement, which was printed in huge letters, occupying the most important part of the hoarding.

"SEEKING AN INTERVIEW!

The Greatest Success of Modern Times!
How the Ventriloquist Beat the Agent!
One Long Scream! Roars of Laughter!
Book now! Book now! Book now!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "They don't usually boom a chap like that for a small place like Courtfield! He must be hot stuff!"

"Not a bad idea to book now!" said Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I want to stand! I can laugh much more when I'm sitting down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at!" growled Bob Cherry. "Come on; let's get our seats booked, and then we'll have some tea."

They were fortunate enough to secure seats in the stalls. The man in the booking-office told them that they were practically the only seats left in the house, having been booked once by some of the boys from Courtfield Council School, and afterwards cancelled.

Tea was ordered and consumed with great gusto, all the juniors keenly looking forward to the great ventriloquist's performance.

There were a few Greyfriars fellows in the hall when they arrived, amongst them being Johnny Bull, who promptly persuaded a young man, whose seat was next to Harry Wharton's, to change places with him.

"Where've you been, Johnny?" asked Harry Wharton, as they waited for the curtain to rise.

"I had to come into Courtfield, so I thought I would stop and see the show," explained Johnny Bull. "I hear there's a topping ventriloquist performing here to-night. Had a tremendous success in Manton!"

"Good!" said the juniors heartily.

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They applauded as the orchestra struck up a lively tune, and clapped again when they had finished.

The soprano, who was the first "turn" to appear, received a tremendous reception from the audience, not the quietest acclamations coming from Harry Wharton & Co.

An acrobat followed, who, in turn, was followed by a comic singer. The juniors thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and applauded every turn with their hands and voices.

At last the star turn of the evening was announced by the electric sign, and the audience moved in their chairs, restless with expectancy.

The orchestra struck up, and the curtain rose. There was nobody on the stage, only the scenery, the waiting-hall, and the "agent's" office being visible.

Suddenly there walked on the stage the great ventriloquist, and the Greyfriars juniors sat spellbound!

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry, finding his voice at last.

"Billy Bunter!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"M-m-m-m-my only topper!" gasped Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter heard them, and although the juniors could not hear him, they knew that he groaned.

"This puts the lid on it!" was what Billy Bunter muttered.

Before the juniors had half recovered from their astonishment, the sketch had commenced.

The agent came tearing across the stage to his office, and was intercepted by Billy Bunter.

But the agent thrust him aside, and proceeded into his office. Billy Bunter thereupon sat down for a moment, then got to his feet.

"Can—c-c-can I come in?" he stammered, his eyes watching the juniors from Greyfriars.

"Wait!" snapped the agent, and looked uneasily across the stage as he noticed Billy Bunter's hesitating tones.

Was Billy Bunter about to experience stage-fright, after having gone through the last two weeks with such consummate ease?

Then there came to Billy Bunter the awful thought that he was caught—that this was his last performance! The dreaded had happened—there were Greyfriars juniors in Courtfield who would assuredly take him back to the school.

And almost instantly there came to Billy Bunter the idea that this was the finest opportunity of proving his worth that he could ever expect to have.

He would show them that he was good at something—that what Harry Wharton said was all wrong!

And, minutes after he should have commenced, Billy Bunter started the ventriloquial part of the turn.

"Meowowowow!"

The cat cried, and the agent looked up. It cried again, and he thrust aside his chair.

Two minutes later and the furniture was flying in all directions, whilst Billy Bunter, a smug smile of satisfaction on his lips, sat back in his seat in the "waiting-hall," his mouth apparently tightly closed.

Roars of laughter broke out at the antics of the agent hunting the elusive cat.

"M-m-m-m-my only hat!" gasped Harry Wharton. "The—the dummy! Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"Oh, ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

Billy Bunter fairly beamed. What were Harry Wharton & Co. thinking about now?

Bunter would have given his week's money to have an answer to that question.

Again the part where Billy Bunter offered his assistance to the irate agent, and the crying of the cat under his very nose, brought the house into fresh shrieks of laughter.

Then the interview and the business part of the turn, and all was over. Never had the hall heard such a thunderous applause as broke out when Billy Bunter bowed himself off the stage.

"Our Bunt!" shrieked Bob Cherry frantically. "Our Billy Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Johnny Bull, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Did you ever?"

"No, I never!" gasped Frank Nugent.

"The neverfulness is terrific!" gurgled Hurree Singh. "The funnifulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Bunter is unbelievable!"

"Encore! Encore!" shouted the audience.

Billy Bunter came on again, hesitated a second, and there suddenly broke out a ragtime song, which appeared to come from the very roof.

Here again there was a carved figure, and Billy Bunter made the same use of it as he had the old Roman figure at Manton Hippodrome.

Everybody was either looking up at the figure, or peering intently at Billy Bunter to see if his lips moved, and few people saw a man come down into one of the rows of stalls a short distance from the front, and take his seat.

But amongst that few was Billy Bunter.

He broke off, stared incredulously at the man who had just entered, then, with a dramatic move of the hand, pointed towards him.

"Collar that man, Wharton!" he shouted. "Collar him!"

The juniors looked round at the man, startled. But they were not nearly so startled as the man himself.

His face was positively livid, and there was the look of the hunted animal in his eyes.

"Collar him!" roared Bob Cherry.

And with a bound he had left his seat, and the next moment had thrown himself upon the stranger as he attempted to rise.

"Got you, you beast!" said Bob Cherry, between his teeth.

Bob Cherry had not the faintest idea why he called the man a beast. Sufficient for him that Billy Bunter had stopped his song to shout to the Greyfriars chaps.

The audience were spellbound, hardly knowing if this was part of the performance. They turned and watched the Greyfriars juniors as they piled on top of the man.

They pulled him to his feet at last; his collar was split, his tie was hanging out of his waistcoat, his coat was hopelessly torn, his hair was ruffled, and he was covered with dust from head to foot.

"I'll have damages!" he muttered fiercely.

"You're damaged enough already!" said Bob Cherry lightly; but he felt a tremor of uneasiness run through him as he realised that it was only because Billy Bunter had told them that they had collared and rough-handled the stranger.

"Got him?" cried Bunter from the stage.

"Yes!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Hold him—I'll be there in a second!" said Bunter, and he ran off the stage.

He was more than a second putting in an appearance—in fact, he was nearly four long minutes.

Bob Cherry grew more and more uneasy as the time went on—every minute

seemed an hour. Supposing this was just a ruse on Bunter's part to get away again?

Bob Cherry and the other juniors shuddered at the mere thought—it naturally occurred to all of them.

But Billy Bunter came at last, and with him was the manager of the hall.

"Search him, please!" said the manager tersely.

Billy Bunter himself searched the stranger, and there was an exclamation of triumph as he pulled from one of the man's breast-pockets—a string of pearls!

"Got you, you rotter!" said Billy Bunter, with a grin. "My name is Bunter—you thought it was Hunter! Anyhow, I've hunted you down all right!"

The man muttered something under his breath, and if looks could have killed Billy Bunter would have died on the spot.

The juniors, still keeping a tight hold on the man, were mystified as to what all this meant, and mystified they remained, for Billy Bunter and the manager, with the hall policeman, took the man out of the stalls.

That was the last the juniors saw of him.

"What's all the giddy mystery?" murmured Bob Cherry, as the juniors resumed their seats.

"Blessed if I know—but I'm jolly well going to know soon!" said Harry Wharton warmly. "It seems to me, you chaps, that this is Billy Bunter's day of triumph!"

"The seemfulness is terrific!" observed Hurree Singh.

The performance proceeded, but the juniors paid little or no heed. They were thinking only of Billy Bunter and the extraordinary scene that had occurred.

In the middle of the last turn they left the circle, and found their way to the back of the stage. Here also was Billy Bunter, the personification of all that was triumphant.

"Well?" he asked coolly.

"W-w-well?" stammered Harry Wharton, taken aback.

Bob Cherry grasped the fat junior by the shoulder.

"Don't you think you might explain, Bunter?" he asked quietly.

Billy Bunter nodded calmly.

"I will do so, Cherry!" he observed.

"But you must wait my time!"

Bob Cherry gasped, but he knew he could not touch Billy Bunter whilst he was in his present position. Bunter held the reins, and it was he who was master—then.

He let go of the fat junior's shoulder as if it had been red-hot, and Bunter turned to the manager of the hall.

"Sorry I must go—but, you see, I'm only a schoolboy," he said. "I belong

to Greyfriars, which is just near here, and I must go back."

"But—but the rest of the week?" asked the manager in dismay.

"I will ask the Head—Dr. Locke, you know—if I may carry out my obligations for this week!" said Billy Bunter magnanimously.

"I will speak to him on the telephone," said the manager. "I shall be ruined if you don't get here, Mr. Bunter! I've advertised your appearance so much—no explanations will be accepted by the public!"

"I'll do my best!" said Billy Bunter.

And he meant what he said.

The manager turned away, and Billy Bunter moved towards the Greyfriars juniors.

"I'm ready, you chaps," he said, with a heavy sigh. "I've had a good time—but, all the same, I'm not sorry to go back to the Remove."

"Explain, you fat duffer!" said Bob Cherry sulphureously. "Can't you see I'm dancing with curiosity to know what it all means?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait, Cherry," said Billy Bunter. "I'm too tired to explain to you chaps now, and to the Head again later on."

Billy Bunter was undoubtedly tired. The juniors could not realise how a performance, such as Bunter had gone through, will tire.

"Oh, all right, Billy!" said Bob Cherry quickly. "Here—I'll get a cab!"

And the good-hearted Removite dashed away.

An hour later, when Billy Bunter was ushered into the Head's private drawing-room by Harry Wharton & Co., he had somewhat recovered, and faced Dr. Locke quite calmly.

"Bunter!" rapped out the Head. "Twenty minutes ago I was informed of your return to Greyfriars. As I hear that these other juniors brought you back, I ordered them to come as well. You will please explain!"

Bunter was attired in the suit he had been using every day. He had changed whilst Bob Cherry was fetching the cab to the music-hall.

"I-i-if you p-p-please, sir—" began Bunter nervously.

"Wait a minute!" interrupted the Head. "As you doubtless have much to say, Bunter, and, taking into consideration that you are apparently tired, I will allow you to sit down."

The juniors were surprised that the Head should be so kind on such an occasion. That he was a thorough "good sort" they had always known, but that he would carry his kindness to such a point as to allow Billy Bunter to sit down whilst accounting for his behaviour they never dreamt.

Billy Bunter lost no time in accepting Dr. Locke's offer. His knees were shaky.

"Well, sir," he began, "I was kept out of all sports by the jealousy of the chaps, sir. I couldn't get in any of the games. I was left out of everything. And then one day Skinner—that is to say, a little bird—whispered to me, and

He broke off confusedly, but the Head signed to him to go on.

"Well, I got the idea of making a fortune on the music-halls—"

"The music-halls! Go on, Bunter!"

"So I—I—I ran away, sir. The agent I went to wouldn't give me an interview, so I used my wonderful powers as a ventriloquist to secure an interview. It—it was rather funny, sir, and we went—that is to say, I went on the music-hall as a ventriloquist. The scene was almost the same as happened when I tried—"

"Never mind about that, Bunter."

"I was paid twenty pounds a week, sir—"

"Bless my soul! Twenty pounds!"

"Yes, sir, and I was worth it, too, sir. I was a tremendous success, and everybody applauded—"

"They did, sir?" interrupted Bob Cherry warmly.

"Silence, Cherry! Proceed, Bunter!"

"Then there was an attempted robbery at the box-office. I determined to do my best to capture the rotter, sir—ahem! I mean, to capture the thief, sir. I saw a man once or twice who appeared to be one of the artistes."

"Yes?"

Bunter began to get excited as his story grew.

"Then to-night, when I was performing at Courtfield, I saw the same man again. He was up in the stalls, with Harry Wharton & Co.—that is to say, these chaps, sir—and I yelled to them to collar the chap."

"Why?"

"I know he didn't come from Manton with us, sir, and when I saw him I thought it funny that he should be there all the same. So I risked everything—and well, he was the thief right enough, sir. He's in gaol now, sir. And—and that's all, sir."

"Dear me! A most remarkable story!" murmured the Head. "Did you see the thief, Wharton?"

"Oh, really, sir—" began Bunter.

"Yes, we collared him right enough, sir," said Harry Wharton, breaking into what Billy Bunter was going to say. "Bunter was a stupendous success, sir."

"Dear me! I will consider the matter!" said the Head. "You may go, Bunter. I will inform you of my decision later on. You have no other defence for running away other than the



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absurd one concerning the supposed jealousy of your friends?"

"N-n-no, sir," admitted Billy Bunter.

"Then you may go," said the Head.

And Billy Bunter went, followed by Harry Wharton & Co.

All Greyfriars knew of Billy Bunter's escapade before another hour had gone, and practically all Greyfriars knew that there would be only one verdict from Dr. Locke—expulsion.

But the Remove considered that Billy Bunter's wonderful triumph on the music-halls, and his subsequent smart capture of the thief, deserved some special recognition.

They stood Billy Bunter the greatest feed ever known to have been held at Greyfriars, and he was forced to recount his adventures to the grinning throng of juniors as they crowded round the tables.

"Well, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, speaking quietly and slowly when the Removites had ceased to cheer Bunter. "I frankly apologise for what I said about your being no good at anything or for anything. You've proved otherwise, and I'll stick to my word. I'll give you a trial in the Remove footer team."

The door opened suddenly, and in walked Dr. Locke, closely followed by Mr. Quelch, the Remove Form-master.

"Bunter," said the Head, after one casual glance at the remnants of the feast. "I have decided that as you have rendered Justice a good turn, Justice shall render you one. I will overlook your atrocious behaviour on this occasion."

"Hurrah!"

It was the Remove that roared its pleasure at the verdict. Billy Bunter was too overwhelmed to do anything but gasp with relief.

"I have spoken to the manager of the music-hall," went on the Head when he had obtained silence. "I shall allow you to carry out your performance for this week only, and that only on the distinct understanding that the pay you receive goes to the Cottage Hospital. That is all. Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!" chorused the Remove, and somebody started "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

The Head and the Form-master disappeared from the room, but most of the juniors caught sight of the smiles of gratification on their faces.

"I think I have done right, Mr. Quelch," said the Head, as he closed the door.

"Undoubtedly, sir!" said Mr. Quelch heartily.

The Remove thought the same.

It is only necessary to add that Billy Bunter repaid the money he had taken from Hurree Singh's purse, as Mr. Parsons insisted on his taking an extra week's money as a parting gift. Perhaps Mr. Parsons had made a good deal out of Billy Bunter's ventriloquial turn.

Thus for once did Billy Bunter triumph all along the line, and thus also did Billy Bunter act in a manner which nobody could call mean.

And it will be many a day before Greyfriars forgets the many things that happened to Bunter on the Boards!

THE END.

(There will be another Splendid Long Complete Story of HARRY WHARTON & CO., next week. Order your copy in advance!)
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 619.

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE GEM. THE BOYS' FRIEND. CHUCKLES. THE PENNY POPULAR.
Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

A COMPLAINT.

You may have noticed as you tramp on through this fascinating, yet often somewhat trying old world, that there is never a week curls itself away to go down on the records of the bygone without there being a complaint of some kind or another—that is, something to give grounds for a growl. It may be something amiss with the breakfast, an overdose of grounds in the coffee, a faulty bit of damask, any old thing, but a grumble there must be.

I have been most generously dealt with of late by my correspondents, and had I asked the majority of them the old military question, "Any complaints?" the answer would have been "Nary one."

But here comes a cavil from that dear old historic town of historical significance, Falkirk. The writer asks me whether the circulation of the Companion Papers is so tremendous in Scotland that I can afford to make a Scottish character take the role of the villain. Yes, he asked that! I will not deceive you. It seems it was a mistake.

During the war Scotland showed itself a nation of heroes. It did, and so we are all agreed; but surely my friend up North might take proportion into account. He would have had an American play a bad part. Ah, yes! But what about the States? There are plenty of heroes there, too. Now, though I cannot see through a brick wall on a foggy day, I can make out some things, and I do feel that this correspondent is making the proverbial mountain out of the ditto molehill.

Disparage Scotland! Not likely! If he knew what I think about Caledonia stern and wild, Fit home for a poetic child; yes, and about the people, and their bravery and their hospitality, and the scenery up there, all sunny mist and purple heather and blue lakes—such scenery as is remembered for a lifetime, he would blush. He might!

No, let an author have a little latitude, please. We do not want to crib, cabin, and confine a writer so that he is afraid of saying anything. Scotland for ever!

A HINT!

I have so many notices from readers these days, all wanting immediate publication, that I have been glad to avail myself of the columns of the "Penny Popular," likewise the hospitality of the "Boys' Friend," since all the various announcements could not conceivably be inserted in the MAGNET or the "Gem."

So please keep an extra sharp eye on the "Penny Popular" these days. Besides, even if the notice you are looking for is not in that paper, you will never have any occasion to feel sorry that you acquired a copy of the "P.P."

NO ADDRESS.

From the mining North a chum writes to me to point out that, though he watches the correspondence notices

assiduously, never has he seen a request for a correspondence on mining. "Is it because a pit-lad is not good enough to correspond with? Is there no one that will think of them, and take up the cudgels for their rights? If there is any one, will he send his name to the correspondence column? I know of other readers in my district who have been disappointed at having no one to write to."

I sincerely hope the hint will be taken. As for his first question, I can assure my chum that he is right off the mark. The sort of feeling that he suggests scarcely exists in these times. We know better.

I also happen to know something else as well. Perhaps he fancies that a man in London knows nothing of the life of a fellow in the pit. If he thinks that he is mistaken. One does understand something of the subject, of the braininess of the pit-worker, of his mastery of difficult problems, of his way of thinking out things, and of how he gets there by sheer hard work, and, often enough, becomes even more than a keen worker, for he finds himself frequently helping to shape the destinies of his country.

A REMINDER!

Please to remember—no, this has nothing to do with the Fifth of November!—that notices are appearing nowadays in the "Penny Popular," as well as in the other Companion Papers.

Your Editor

A BEAUTIFUL BOOK FOR LOVERS OF GREYFRIARS—

A MAGNIFICENT NEW SCHOOL STORY OF ROKWOOD, GREYFRIARS & ST JIM'S

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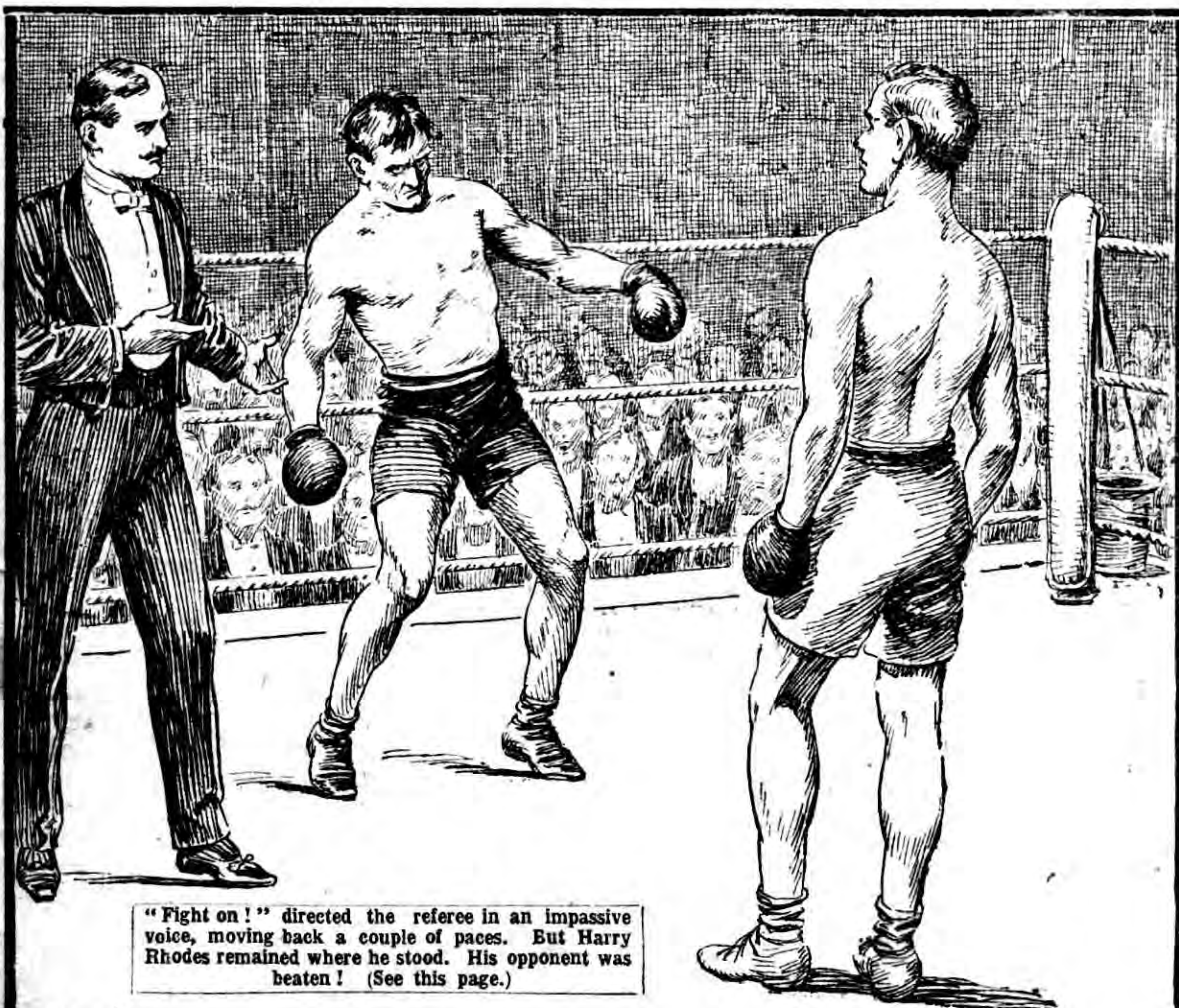
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"THE MINERS' CHAMPION"

A Stirring New Tale of the Ring.

By PERCY LONGHURST.



"Fight on!" directed the referee in an impassive voice, moving back a couple of paces. But Harry Rhodes remained where he stood. His opponent was beaten! (See this page.)

SYNOPSIS.

Harry Rhodes, a miner and amateur boxer, of Lexborough, a mining village, meets Joshua Martin, the manager and principal backer of Anthony Hanna—"Cast-Iron Tony"—a wonderful Scottish light-weight boxer, who has come to Lexborough to train. Harry lives with an uncle, James Rhodes, who has trained him, and who had himself been a boxer years before. He had left the Ring through some tragedy of which Joshua Martin knows the facts, much to James Rhodes' alarm.

Hanna, who is a thorough scoundrel, becomes Harry's sworn enemy.

A strike at the pit where Harry works is settled by means of a boxing contest between Harry and Bob Durham, the mine-owner's son.

Bertram Godfrey, a friend of Mr. Durham's, interests himself in Harry Rhodes.

Hanna returns to Lexborough, and makes an unsuccessful attempt on Harry's life.

Harry learns that James Rhodes is his father, and that he was responsible for the death of a boxer some years previously.

Harry, his father, and Bertram Godfrey go to London, where Godfrey fixes a private contest between Harry and Jules Meunier, Parisian light-weight champion. In the ninth round the Frenchman is knocked out.

(Now read on.)

Harry's Chance.

CHAMPLAIN was right; Jules Meunier would fight no more that evening. He had done all that a gallant fellow could, but Fate and a better man had been too much for him. The gong had counted off five seconds before his brain awoke to the realisation of even that compelling sound. But although the flesh was too weak to respond, a flicker of the indomitable spirit yet remained.

At "Six!" his eyes were open. Before the eighth stroke fell he was making desperate but futile efforts to compel nerves and muscles to fulfil the commands of the brain. And cheer after cheer rang through the hall, spontaneous tribute to his splendid pluck, when it was seen that Nature had been so far overcome that he was on his feet again before the fatal "Out!"

Swaying unsteadily, eyes but partly open, he stood, making feeble attempts to lift his hands.

"Fight on!" directed the referee in

an impassive voice, moving back a couple of paces.

But Harry Rhodes remained where he stood. His opponent was beaten. To batter further a man in such condition was something to which he was unable to bring himself. Appealingly he glanced at the referee, who misunderstood him.

"Yes; you may attack your man!" he said sharply.

"I'd rather not attack a man who's not capable of defending himself," Harry answered.

And from the seats immediately around the ring were heard words of approval of the reply.

The referee, a military officer who had notably identified himself with the development of boxing in the Army, glanced at Harry with more than a little surprise.

"Something out of the ordinary run of professional boxers," he was thinking. At the same time, he was a rigid interpreter of the letter of the law.

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"Do you mean that you refuse to continue boxing?" he demanded.

"Not if my opponent can," returned Harry. "But, as you can see for yourself, he is unable. I can hardly strike a helpless man."

And then Meunier put an end to the situation by again falling.

The formality was gone through of counting him out, and the referee announced Harry as the winner.

Picking up the Frenchman, Harry carried him to his corner.

James Rhodes slipped the dressing-robe over Harry, and was about to hurry him to the dressing-room, when Godfrey, whom a beckoning finger had taken to where Lord Shorthill sat, came towards him.

"Don't get Harry into his bath for a minute or two," he whispered. "The prince has expressed the wish to have a word with him in his dressing-room."

Rhodes grumbled a bit, but it was plain that he was highly delighted by such an extreme mark of consideration.

"You're the lucky boy, Harry," he said, as he closed the door. "I never had a prince want to shake hands with me. Dukes and such used to come and see a fight often enough, but I never heard of one of 'em who'd a word to say to 'em afterwards. Boxing's looking up, I reckon!"

There was a tap.

"May I come in?" a quiet voice asked; and James Rhodes promptly opened the door to the youthful royalty. Smiling, he advanced, and taking Harry's hand, shook it warmly.

"A jolly good fight; I've enjoyed it immensely," he said boyishly. Then he laughed. "Enjoyed it a lot more than you, who've had all the hard work, will have done, I expect. It was a grand show!"

"Thank you, sir! You make me feel more pleased than I was before that I won," Harry answered, without any appearance or feeling of awkwardness.

It was impossible to feel shy or uneasy with such a pleasant-faced, quietly-spoken lad—very little older than himself—whatever his rank might be.

"The Frenchman is a wonderful fighter, sir, and as plucky as could be," added Harry.

"Then there is a pair of you!" the prince laughed. "I think I have never enjoyed a contest so much, or seen one so fairly and cleanly fought. I want to congratulate you. I wish there were more such men"—he smiled slyly—"as you in the game; it would have fewer enemies if those who are opposed to it could be made aware of the absence of ill-feeling, the real bravery, and the chivalry that some boxers display in the ring. And amongst these you must hold a very high place, Mr. Rhodes."

"It is very kind of you to say so, sir."

"Well, it is the fact, so I can't help saying it. But I mustn't be selfish enough to interrupt any longer the attentions of your second. Besides, I want to have a word with your opponent before I go. Once again let me congratulate you, and express the pleasure your contest has given me. I can promise you, Mr. Rhodes, that it will be something very important that will keep me from being a spectator on the next occasion when you take the ring. Good-bye!"

And off he went, a fine English gentleman and a true sportsman, with all the charm of manner and that happy knack of making himself liked by all, high or

low, with whom he came into contact, that his grandfather had possessed.

"Been an eye-opener for Mr. Bowman, eh, Harry," cried James Rhodes delightedly, "if he had been in here just now? If only what the prince has had to say to you could get into the papers, I reckon you wouldn't want much more of an introduction for London to be wanting to see you perform."

"I expect not," replied Harry. "Only, as this to-night is a private show, I don't suppose any word of it will get into the papers. And you and I can't say anything."

Bertram Godfrey looked in for thirty seconds to add his congratulations, and to say that he had a special motor waiting outside to take Harry back to Highgate as soon as he was ready.

"Afraid I can't drive you back myself as I'd intended," he explained. "Our royal guest seems inclined to stay a bit longer than I'd thought. Doesn't get much chance, you know, of a quiet bit of sport and amusement such as he's had to-night, and he seems inclined to make the most of it. Think he seemed pleased with your show, Harry? He ought!"

"Said he was delighted—and meant it, I should say."

"So would I. See you in the morning, if you're in bed by the time I get home—whenever that is."

Twenty minutes later, bathed, rubbed down, but feeling pretty considerably sore and stiff, Harry was going down the steps of the hall. He was feeling very pleased with himself, but, now that the excitement had worn away, tired and willing for sleep. A closed motor was waiting by the kerb, and at their appearance the chauffeur stirred himself.

"Gentlemen for Highgate?" he asked, leaving his seat.

"That's right!" replied James Rhodes. "In you get, Harry. There, confound it! Don't go off at once! I've left a rug in the dressing-room. Be back in half a minute!"

From within the car Harry saw his father disappear within the entrance, and, almost at the same moment, two other men came out, to stand together for a few seconds at the top of the steps. One wore an opera-hat, and was muffled in a voluminous cloak, and by the light of the big lamp above the entrance Harry recognised him as the prince. The other man was older, bareheaded, and without an outdoor garment. Him Harry did not recognise. As a matter of fact, he was Lord Shorthill. Through the open window of the car their parting words fell upon the lad's ears.

"Well, good-night, and very many thanks to you! I've had no end of a jolly evening—enjoyed myself top-hole!" he heard the prince say.

"Glad indeed to hear it. Your coming was highly appreciated, even though it was a trifle sub rosa. You don't get many chances of a bit of excitement on your own—eh, sir?"

"No; it doesn't happen often. That's why I appreciate it so much when I am able to slip away." And the speaker laughed boyishly.

"Well, good-night, sir! You'll get back all right?"

"No trouble at all, thanks! Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

(There will be another splendid instalment of this grand boxing story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET. Order your copy in advance.)

VENTRILOQUISM IN A MONTH

(Conclusion.)

Quite an effective item is the ascent of a rocket. By blowing hard through pursed lips, and striking the mouth rapidly with sharp little blows with closed fingers, the curious sound of an ascending rocket may be reproduced with perfect fidelity. This slowly fades away, there is a moment's pause, and then the final pop as the stars burst.

Naturally, such an imitation should be performed in the shelter of the screen. As a last example, an imitation of the itinerant knife-grinder may be attempted. Keep the lips and the teeth closed to produce the rasping up and down of the steel upon the grindstone, the while working an imaginary treadle with the right foot.

THE COMPLETE ENTERTAINMENT.

By this time the young ventriloquist should have at his command both "near" and "distant" voices and imitations. It only remains to say a few words regarding the manner of giving an entertainment.

Although smart dialogue is very entertaining, it is apt, after a little while, to pall; and to obviate this it will be found well to introduce an occasional song or comic recitation. In both cases these may take the form of parodies, but in the former a serious song really well sung by the ventriloquial figure will evoke both admiration and applause.

Those not possessed of particularly good vocal qualifications may feel that the singing of a song successfully is beyond their capabilities. They should, however, bear in mind that nothing like "finish" or cleverness in execution is expected from a wooden figure. One or two verses and the chorus are quite enough to venture upon, as singing ventriloquially is extremely tiring.

The best time to introduce a song is when dialogue between yourself and the automata has been in progress for seven or eight minutes. Either the little boy, or the old man or the old woman, can essay to try his or her skill as a vocalist, or the affair may be competitive.

Much amusement may be caused by the little boy extolling his own skill as a vocalist, and the nigger challenging him. To settle the matter, let one sing the first verse of a song and the other the second, the little boy making a terrible hash of his part of the performance. If his mistakes are greeted with groans of derision from the old man, or cries of horror from the old woman, the audience will be immensely pleased.

While the song is in progress the ventriloquist should look about him unconcernedly, feigning total disinterestedness in the affair. Towards the end of the song he may glance sharply once or twice at the singer, and applaud him for his effort—which applause, it is to be hoped, the audience will generously supplement.

It is not intended that these few observations on the art of ventriloquism should be taken as covering all the ground over which this fascinating subject spreads. Enough has been said, however, to show anyone who is sufficiently interested how to give a really pleasing drawing-room performance which shall earn for him the reputation of being quite a creditable exponent of the wondrous and mystifying art of Valentine Vox.



How to Clog-Dance

THE FIRST OF TWO SPLENDID ARTICLES ON THE
CLEVER AND AMUSING ART OF CLOG-DANCING.

When the old Morris dances decayed in the country districts, many of the local customs and manners died with them, and are now entirely lost; but what is considered a survival can yet be found in some of the North of England towns, and is familiar to many of us under the name of clog-dancing.

The old Morris dancers had attached to their ankles bands of bells, which sounded with the jerking and kicking of the dancers' feet as they kept time with the measure and music of the accompaniment.

The use of these bells has now, however, almost entirely ceased, and the heavy wooden clog alone remains. In place of the ringing and jingling with which the Morris man accompanied his dance, the clog makes only a tapping



Fig. 1. Correct Standing Position.

against the floor, sharper in its precision, if less musical than the old bells.

The clogs suitable for drawing-room dancing have wooden soles and leather uppers. These can be obtained in endless variety, from the plain black or red morocco to the stylish patent-leather shoes.

But, whatever the style or make of the clogs, one thing is essential—they must fit perfectly. The appearance matters little so long as the clogs are an exact fit. Nobody present cares to see your feet, but everybody desires to see a skilful dance, and that cannot be performed with a loose shoe.

Having obtained the shoes, the next thing to arrange is the floor. A smooth wood floor, or a slate slab, provide excellent surfaces for practising and learning upon; while for the actual drawing-room performance, a thick, smooth piece of wood, about two and a half feet square, and neatly polished, is very suitable. This can be moved at pleasure, and taken away after the performance is concluded, without any awkward rolling back of carpets or moving furniture.

It is necessary now to devote a little attention to the more important steps to be learned. In the diagrams illustrating this subject, the letter R denotes the right, and L the left foot, and this

must be constantly borne in mind to make the illustrations intelligible.

The first and most important thing to remember is to keep the toes well turned outwards whenever the nature of the figure does not render this impossible. A glance at Fig. 1 will illustrate this. In all the steps practice with the left foot is needed more than with the right, as the latter can generally be trusted to take care of itself.

THE FIRST STEP.

The first step to learn is the shuffle, which should be attempted with one foot first, preferably the left.

Stand firmly upon the right foot, and strike the left toe forward (as in Fig. 2) towards A, at the same time making a tap upon the floor. Draw it back from A towards B, making another tap. This should be done repeatedly, until it is possible to make the taps in quick succession and in even time.

Having mastered this with the left foot, acquire the same proficiency with the right. The ankle must be kept loose and mobile. Any stiffness or inflexibility will utterly spoil all efforts.

SINGLE OR DOUBLE SHUFFLES.

Having become familiar with the taps with both feet, attempts to use right and left alternately should be made, the while standing upon the toes. Thus: Left forward and back, two taps; right forward and back, two taps, making in all four taps in rapid and even succession.

This is known as the single shuffle, and it is surprising how many music-hall artistes and public performers know no more than this rudimentary movement. Yet it shows how necessary it is to be perfectly easy and familiar with the action, which may be considered, together with the double shuffle, as the groundwork of the art.



Fig. 2. The Single Shuffle.

The double shuffle is simply a duplication of the single shuffle. Each foot goes forward and backwards twice, making four taps for the right and four for the left, or eight taps in all. This is really no harder than the single shuffle, and must be learned thoroughly. Indeed, it is wise to practise no more steps until

these two shuffles have been perfectly mastered.

Having grown familiar with the steps already described, it is time to learn some of the variations of the two shuffles. Begin with the single shuffle and

Variation No. 1.—Stand upon the toes of both feet, give one tap with the left toe, and a single shuffle with the right foot. Then one tap with the right, and a single shuffle with the left. Keep this up continuously, and as clearly and rapidly as possible, taking care that the beats are all equal, and that no one tap is louder than any of the others.

The result will be a continuous roll like that of a drum, and is very effective.

Variation No. 2.—Give one tap with the left foot, and a shuffle with the right, as in the preceding step; then hop on the left, tap with the right, shuffle with the left, and hop on the right. This

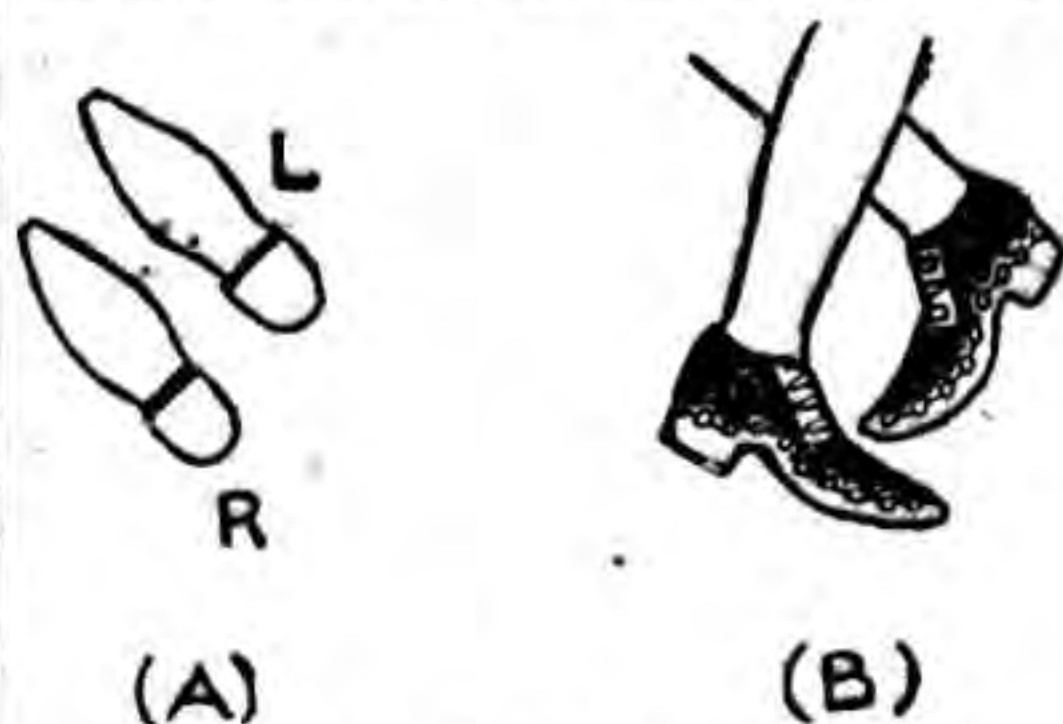


Fig. 3. The Third Variation.

makes eight taps in all, and produces another continuous roll. By pausing on the hop each time, another step is apparently introduced, and the smooth action is varied.

The hopping mentioned above does not mean a skip into the air. It is simply employed to give a tap, and is more for the sake of appearance than for actual sound. It can therefore be replaced by making a tap with the heel, which is in itself a prominent feature in the clog dance. Indeed, the tap from the heel is often preferable, as being more characteristic and elegant than the hop, which has to be done most gracefully to look at all well.

Variation No. 3.—Make one tap with the left toe, shuffle with the right foot, tap with the left heel, and bring the right toe behind the left foot, as in Fig 3, A and B.

This must be learned carefully, and repeated in the opposite way—that is, tap on right toe, shuffle with left foot, tap with right heel, and finish up by bringing the left toe behind the right foot.

Practise both of these steps, and introduce them, one after the other, in the actual performance.

(The second grand article on Clog-Dancing will appear on this page in next Monday's issue.)

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