

BUMPER CHRISTMAS-WEEK NUMBER!

No. 829. Vol. XXIV. Week ending December 29th, 1923.

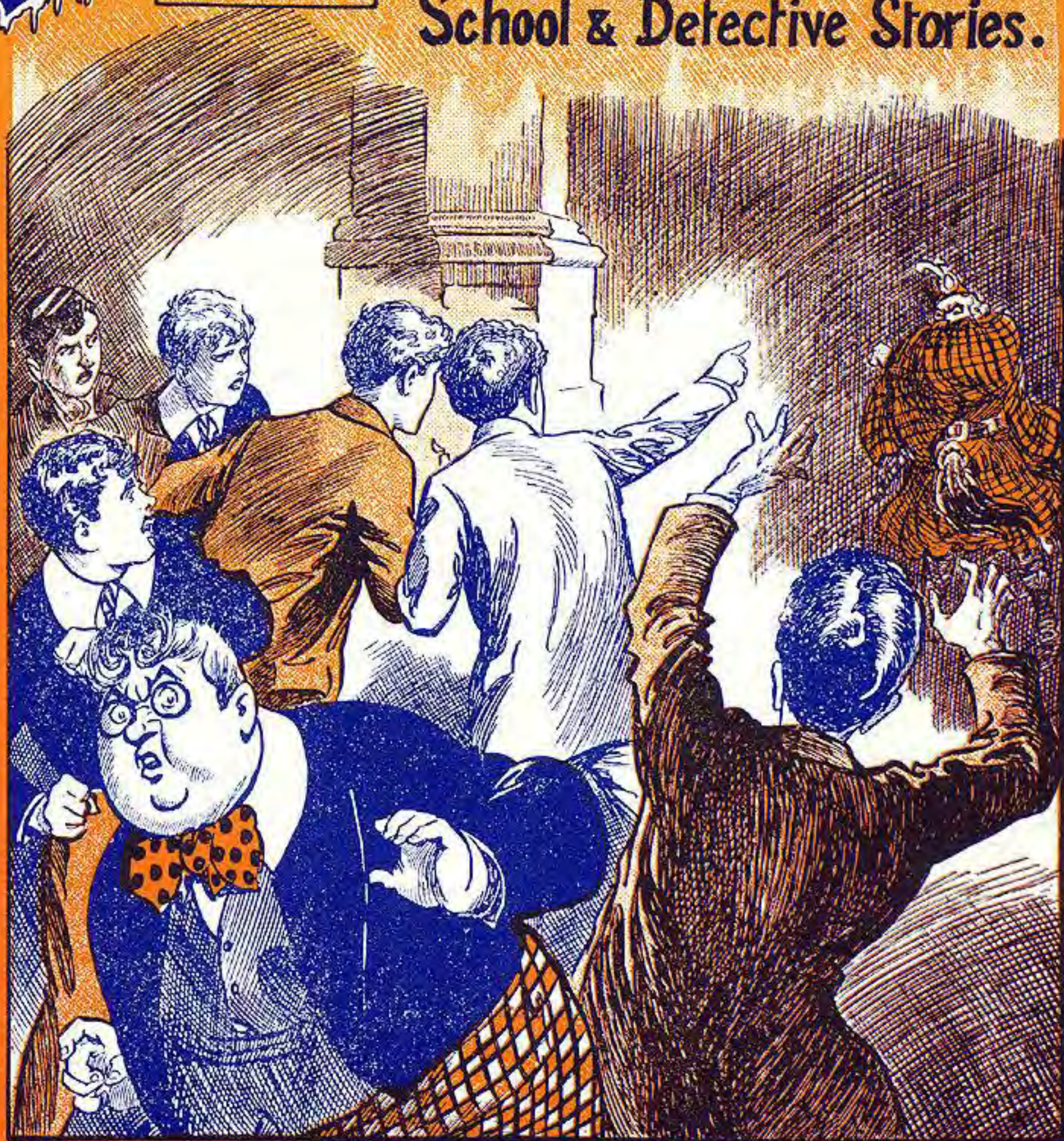
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By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Borrowed Plumes!

"PACK in!" called out Bob Cherry cheerily.

"The packfulness will be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

It really looked like it.

The brake, standing before the steps of the School House at Greyfriars, was already swarming.

It was breaking-up day at the old school, and Greyfriars was beginning to scatter. There were several brakes—quite as many as were needed, in fact, to convey the Greyfriars fellows to the station. But everybody seemed to want to go by the first brake. One had rolled off, crammed; another had followed, swarming. Now there was a scramble for the third, and in that scramble the Famous Five of the Remove were prominent.

"No room!" yelled Skinner.

"Oh, there's room for a dozen yet!" said Johnny Bull. "Wedge in!"

Harry Wharton & Co. wedged in.

"Now I think we're full up," grinned Bob Cherry. "Better start. Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Mauly! Room for one more, Mauly!"

Lord Mauleverer stepped out of the big doorway. But he was not yet dressed for travelling. Mauly never was an early starter.

"There isn't room!" howled Skinner.

"Rats! I'll make room for you, Mauly, if I have to drop Skinner overboard!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Why, you cheeky rotter—" howled Skinner.

"Thanks, old man!" drawled his lordship. "I'm not ready yet. Haven't finished packin'."

"You'll be still packing when the new term opens, I think," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"You see, I can't find my fur overcoat," explained Lord Mauleverer. "Can't go without it. Any of you fellows seen it?"

"Don't you know where you keep it, ass?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Yaas."

"Well, then, look there for it."

"I have; but it isn't there. I suppose I shall have to leave it behind," said his lordship resignedly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Bunter! Get moving, driver!"

"I say, you fellows, stop for me!" roared Bunter.

"No room!"

"I say—"

"You want a lorry, old top!" said Bob Cherry. "This brake carries only a ton. You'd better telephone for a special lorry for yourself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm coming in that brake!" shouted Bunter. "Gimme a hand in."

"Blessed if he isn't fatter than ever!" exclaimed Wharton. "Have you been bolting the House-dame's turkey, Bunter?"

"Yah!"

"What a circumference!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter was always plump, not to say podgy. But on this especial frosty morning he looked plumper and podgier than ever. His girth was, in fact, enormous. He was wearing a roomy ulster, which, roomy as it was, fitted round him very closely. Wide as his natural circumference was, it seemed to have grown amazingly wider quite suddenly. Even the bolting of the housekeeper's turkey could not have accounted for the increase.

He clambered into the brake, seeming to find some difficulty in moving. Skinner raised fresh expostulations, but the Famous Five cheerily shoved Skinner, and helped the Owl of the Remove on board.

Bunter sat down with a gasp.

"Ow!"

"Now we're off!" said Bob.

"Bunter!" shouted Lord Mauleverer.

"Eh? Merry Christmas, Mauly! Drive on quick, you fellows!"

"Have you seen my fur coat, Bunter?"

"I didn't know you had one, old

chap! I say, you fellows, make that driver start!"

"Why, you were asking me to lend it to you yesterday!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.

"Wa-a-as I?"

"Yaas. You told me you were going to spend Christmas in the Highlands, and you'd want a fur coat."

"That's Bunter's little mistake!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "He isn't going to spend Christmas in the Highlands."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, have you bagged my fur coat, Bunter?" demanded his lordship.

Billy Bunter blinked at him indignantly through his big spectacles.

"I hope I'm not likely to borrow a fellow's coat without permission, Mauly!" he said, with dignity.

"You haven't packed it?"

"Certainly not!"

"Look in his box and make sure!" suggested Vernon-Smith. "You know Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Too much trouble!" sighed his lordship. "I believe he's bagged it, all the same."

"Look in my box, if you like!" howled Bunter. "I'll eat any fur coat you find there!"

"Well, if you haven't bagged it, all right," said Lord Mauleverer. "Sorry—but you know what you are, Bunter!"

Bunter waved a fat hand at his lordship.

"Pardon is granted!" he said loftily. "But I must say, I'm surprised at you, Mauly. It's rather low to be suspicious!"

"Oh, gad!"

"I say, you fellows, make that driver start!" exclaimed Bunter. "What's he hanging about for?"

"Putting on the extra horse," said Wharton. "We'll be off in a minute."

"Oh, make him start! We shall lose the train at this rate!"

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"The esteemed Bunter seems to be in a terrific hurry," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a curious look at the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"It occurs to my estimable mind," continued the Nabob of Bhanipur, "that the extreme fatfulness of the esteemed Bunter is a suspicious circumstance, taken conjunctively with the missfulness of the worthy Mauly's fur coat."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What have you got on under that ulster, Bunter?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing?" yelled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean I—I've got my clothes on, of course," gasped Bunter, "and—and an extra waistcoat to keep out the cold. I say, you fellows, do make that man start!"

"Hold on, Mauly!" roared Bob Cherry. "Inky's found a clue to the missing coat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas?" said Lord Mauleverer, turning back.

"Let's look under that ulster, Bunter!" chuckled Nugent.

"Yah! Keep off! I—I've got my own coat on—"

"That wouldn't make you twice as fat as usual."

"I—I've wrapped a blanket round me to keep out the cold!"

"A blanket?" yelled the juniors.

"Yes, two blankets, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's see the blankets!" chorused the juniors. The whole brakeload was interested now.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Open that ulster!" roared Bob.

"I—I can't!"

"Why not?"

"The—the buttons won't come undone!" gasped Bunter. "I say, we shall lose the train! Driver, get off at once!"

"I'll try my hand on the buttons!" chuckled Bob.

Bob tried his hand—with a tremendous wrench.

The buttons came undone then effectively. Most of them flew off. There was a roar of laughter as the ulster came open, and a handsome fur coat was revealed underneath.

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer. "My coat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jerk it off him!"

"I—I say, you fellows, this isn't Mauly's coat!" roared Bunter. "It—it's a coat just like Mauly's—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It—it was a Christmas present from my pater!" gasped Bunter. "It—it came by post this morning!"

"Yank it off him!"

"Leggo!" roared Bunter. "I—I say—I mean to say, it was sent me specially by Sir Philip Angel, to—to keep me warm at Christmas at his place in Scotland. You can ask Angel of the Fourth!"

"Angel's started!" said Bob.

"I know—I mean I didn't know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Leggo!" roared Bunter, as the ulster was plucked from his fat figure by half a dozen hands. "I—I say, Mauly, you can have the ulster if you like. I'll lend it to you with pleasure."

"Begad! I wouldn't be found dead in it, old bean!"

"Leggo! Yow-ow-ow!"

The fur coat came off next. It came

off with some difficulty. It was an ample coat, but Bunter filled it almost to bursting. Bob Cherry lowered it to Mauly over the side of the brake.

"Here you are, old top! Now, pile in and get your packing finished before Christmas!"

"Yaas! Thanks!"

Billy Bunter blinked after Lord Mauleverer as Mauly walked into the House with the coat over his arm.

Whether Bunter was to spend the Christmas vacation in Scotland at Sir Philip Angel's place was still a moot question. But it was settled that if he spent it there, he would not spend it in Mauly's fur coat. That point was quite decided now.

"Now we'll get off," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Beast! Gimme my ulster!"

The brake started at last. Billy Bunter wrapped himself in the ulster, and blinked wrathfully and indignantly at the laughing juniors.

"It will be your fault if I catch cold in the Highlands this Christmas!" he said.

"It won't be our fault if you get to the Highlands!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We'll jolly well see that you don't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

And with that polished reply William George Bunter relapsed into lofty and dignified silence, while the brake rolled away from Greyfriars School amid a buzz of cheery voices.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Off for Christmas!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! There's jolly old Aubrey!"

The platform at Courtfield Junction swarmed with Greyfriars fellows of all Forms. Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth could be seen, walking with lofty dignity, towering over the mob of juniors. Coker of the Fifth was there, bawling to a porter—the said porter having committed some sin of commission or omission with regard to the great Coker's luggage. Hobson of the Shell was chasing a hat that had been knocked off by a snowball, hurled by Tubbs of the Third. Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Fourth looked their cheeriest and nuttiest, and talked to one another loftily about the "hols" they were going to have. Aubrey Angel, also of the Fourth, stood with his study-mate, Kenney, waiting for the train to come in.

"Merry Christmas, Angel!" roared Bob Cherry across about fifty heads.

Angel of the Fourth stared round.

As his glance lighted on Bob's cheery, ruddy face his lip curled, and he turned his back.

Bob flushed red.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "I've a jolly good mind to give Angel a thick ear to carry home with him for Christmas!"

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull.

"The goodfulness of the egg is terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh gently. "But do not forget that we are spending the esteemed festive season with the Angel family, and a thick ear would not be in the picture."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!"

"I think I'll speak to Angel," said Harry Wharton abruptly; and he pushed his way through the throng to the spot where the two Fourth-Formers were standing.

"Angel, old man!" he said quietly. Aubrey Angel looked at him.

"Well?"

"We sha'n't see each other till we get to Scotland," said Harry. "We're booked to spend Christmas with your father and your brother Mick. We've had our rows at school; but it's Christmas now, and holiday time. We want to be on good terms for the hols."

Angel did not answer.

"Let's part friends, and meet as friends," said Harry. "If we can't get on together next term at school, let's leave trouble till it happens. Nothing to row about in the vac."

"I don't want to row," said Angel sulkily.

"That's all right, then."

"Fellows who butt in where they're not wanted—" began Kenney, with an insulting grin.

"It's not a question of that," said Harry very quietly. "Sir Philip Angel and Mick asked us, and we agreed to go. Angel said nothing against it then. If he had—"

"My father isn't a man to argue with," said Aubrey Angel, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And I think—" went on Kenney.

"You needn't tell me what you think!" interrupted Wharton. "I'm speaking to Angel, not to you. Is Kenney coming up to Lochmuir with you, Angel?"

"No fear!" sneered Kenney. "I'm not likely to stand your crowd for the vac!"

"Then you're not concerned in the matter!" Harry Wharton held out his hand to Angel. "Let's part friends, Angel. I don't bear any grudge for old troubles, if you don't. And you know that Mick wants us to be friends."

Angel's hard face softened a little. There was no doubt of his affection for his brother Mick, once the gipsy school-boy of Greyfriars. He had an inward struggle for a moment, and then he held out his hand and shook Wharton's. "It's all right," he said. "I dare say we'll have a jolly Christmas. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Angel!"

Harry Wharton rejoined his friends. The train was signalled, and it came rumbling into the station. There was a rush for carriages. Every one was filled—and over-filled. One carriage held the Famous Five and Vernon-Smith and Redwing and Bolsover major and Skinner and Snoop, and then the fat figure of Billy Bunter wedged in.

"Help a chap in, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Here you are, old fat bean!"

"Yavoooh!" roared Bunter.

Bob Cherry had playfully taken hold of his ears to help him in. Those ears were large enough to give a good hold, and Bunter was safely landed in the carriage; but he did not seem to be satisfied, somehow.

"Ow! Beast! Leggo! Ow!" roared Bunter.

The door slammed.

"We're off!"

"I say, you fellows, which of you is going to give me a seat?" demanded Bunter, as the express rumbled out of the station.

"The whichfulness is terrific!"

"Ask us another, old bean!" chuckled the Boulder.

"If you fellows are going to be selfish—"

"We are—we is!"

"Beast! I say, Wharton, you're all meeting Mick at St. Pancras to go up to Scotland, I think?"

"That's so," said Harry.

"In three days' time?"

"Yes."

"Well, I shall have time to give old D'Arcy, my pal at St. Jim's, a look-in before I join you," said Bunter thoughtfully.

"You'll have time to give everybody at St. Jim's a look-in, if you want to, before you join us," chuckled Bob Cherry. "You won't see us again till next term, Bunt!"

"I couldn't possibly disappoint Mick Angel," said Bunter. "And then there's Aubrey—he expects to see me. And old Sir Philip—you know how he looks forward to my coming—"

"Queer that he never mentioned it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't forget to have a good, big lunch-basket put on the train, you fellows."

"What train?"

"The Scotch express, you ass. I shall get hungry on the journey."

"Bow-wow!"

The express buzzed on, and Billy Bunter continued to discuss the holiday in the Highlands, amid chuckles from the Famous Five. When they changed trains they parted from William George Bunter—and then, as Bob remarked, the holidays really began!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

At St. Pancras!

"MICK!"

"Here we are again!"

A rush of feet and a merry shouting on the crowded platform and Mick was surrounded by his Greyfriars friends, all shaking his hand at once—or nearly at once.

Maurice Angel—once known as Mick, the gipsy schoolboy—fairly beamed with pleasure and satisfaction as he greeted Harry Wharton & Co.

It was a grim December day. Out in the country were clear, cold skies and frosty fields; but in the great metropolis gloom veiled the streets. St. Pancras did not look cheerful in itself; but most of the faces in the hurrying crowds looked cheery. Christmas was coming, and even in these troubled days the spirit of Christmas has not lost its influence.

From their various homes the Famous Five of Greyfriars had met at the London station, and now they had met Mick, with whom they were to travel up to Scotland. They had expected to find his brother Aubrey with him; but Aubrey Angel was not to be seen. That was no disappointment to Harry Wharton & Co.

"It's jolly to see you fellows!" said Mick, grinning cheerily. "Lots of time for the train—seats booked—we're all right. The pater's coming to see us off."

"Isn't your father travelling with us?" asked Bob.

"He was; but he's delayed in London. He's coming on to-morrow or the next day, with Aubrey."

"That's all right," said Bob, with a smile. It was rather a relief not to have Aubrey Angel for a travelling-companion on the long journey.

"Of course, everything's ready for us at Lochmuir," said Mick, "and we can look after ourselves on the journey—what?"

"I fancy so," said Harry Wharton.

"The pater's made all the arrangements, and you're under my wing, you know," said Mick. "I'm sorry Aubrey won't be with us. But he will be at Lochmuir soon after us, so that's all right."

"Right as rain!" said Nugent.

"You haven't seen anything of Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull, with a grin.

"Bunter?" repeated Mick. "No. Were you bringing that fat bouncer with you? Of course, I don't mind."

"No jolly fear! But I shouldn't have been surprised to see him turn up," chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "Talk of angels, and you hear the rustle of their giddy wings! Look!"

"Oh, my hat!"

At a distance on the big platform a fat figure appeared in sight. Two little round eyes blinked about inquisitively through a pair of big spectacles.

"Bunter!"

"The Bunterfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Mick.

"All serene!" said Johnny Bull. "I'll kick him out of the station, if you like!"

"Cover!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He hasn't seen us yet! Let him wander on!"

"Good egg!"

Billy Bunter was coming along, blinking about him, evidently in search of the Greyfriars party. But the short-sighted Owl of the Remove had not sighted them yet.

Harry Wharton & Co. backed behind a great stack of luggage on the platform, and kept in cover, with grinning faces.

From their cover they watched Bunter. The fat junior came rolling along,

blinking to left and right, and stopped at last close by the stack of luggage.

There he spoke to a porter who was loading a trolley:

"I say, my man! Have you seen some fellows waiting about?"

The porter blinked at him.

It was probable that he had seen some thousands of fellows waiting about already that day, and that he would see some thousands, or tens of thousands more, before the murky sun set.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

On the other side of the pile the Greyfriars juniors grinned and kept close.

"Some fellows," said Bunter. "Friends of mine—they're waiting for me. Five or six chaps. Seen them about here?"

The porter went on loading the trolley. Bunter blinked at him, and then extracted a shilling from his pocket.

"There you are, my man!" said Bunter graciously. "It might have been a pound-note, at least, by the way Bunter handed it over. "Now do you think you could find my friends for me?"

The porter was willing to oblige, but it was not an easy task that Bunter had set him.

"What are they like, sir?" he inquired.

"Well, one of them is an ugly nigger," said Bunter.

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, behind the luggage, shook a dusky fist in the air. His comrades grinned.



"Yah! I haven't got your measly fur coat!" howled Bunter. "Yowp! Leggo!" The ulster was plucked from his fat person by half-a-dozen willing hands, and Lord Mauleverer's missing fur coat was revealed. "You fat fraud!" exclaimed his lordship. "Hand it over!" (See Chapter 1.)

"Another is a low-down looking sort of gipsy," added Bunter.

Mick chuckled inaudibly.

"Then there's Cherry—a chap with enormous feet and a face like a ripe tomato," said Bunter thoughtfully.

Bob Cherry almost emerged from cover as he heard that. But he restrained the desire to kick Bunter.

"And Wharton—a rather lanky, swanking sort of cad," said Bunter.

"Oh!" murmured Harry.

"And a fellow looking like a bulldog, with a jaw like a prizefighter—that's Bull."

Johnny Bull breathed hard.

"The other's a pasty-faced sort of milksop," went on Bunter, completing his description of the Greyfriars party, and Frank Nugent crimsoned with wrath.

The porter shook his head. As a matter of fact, he had seen the Greyfriars party, but he did not recognise them from Billy Bunter's flattering description.

"No, sir, I don't seem to have noticed that lot," he said.

"Perhaps you've seen the old Johnny—Sir Philip Angel?" said Bunter. "A stiff old blighter with a mastiff face and a scowl."

Mick's eyes gleamed.

The porter had removed some of the luggage to the trolley, and over what was left the juniors could see Bunter's hat. Mick reached over and brought down his fist on top of Bunter's hat with a heavy thud.

Crunch!

"Yaroooo!" roared Bunter, greatly startled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yooooop! Ow!"

Bunter's hat was crushed over his eyes and his ears. He wrenched at it furiously, and the porter, grinning, wheeled away his trolley.

"Retreat?" grinned Bob.

The juniors moved off among the crowd, leaving Billy Bunter struggling with his hat.

By the time the Owl of the Remove had extracted his bullet head from the crushed topper, the juniors were lost to sight in the crowds on the platform.

"Adieu to Bunt!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "I wonder if he will ever know what hit him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They did not see Bunter again. Doubtless the Owl of the Remove was still wandering about St. Pancras searching for them. But in the crowds he did not come near them again, fortunately. A little later the party packed into their carriage, and Sir Philip Angel stood at the door to bid them good-bye.

It had been arranged for Sir Philip to travel up to Scotland with the Christmas party, but his affairs detained him in London a couple of days longer. The juniors liked the old gentleman well enough; but they were not sorry to make the journey on their own, without the severe eye of a stiff old gentleman upon them all the time.

"Well, good-bye, my boys!" said Sir Philip. "Mick knows all the arrangements, and you'll find MacNab at Lochmuir, and everything ready for you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The old baronet stood back, and the door closed. As the express moved, Bob glanced over the platform, but there was no sign of Bunter. Apparently the Owl of the Remove had been "left," after all. St. Pancras, and London and its fog sank

away behind, and the express rumbled and puffed and blew on its rapid way to the North.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Northward Ho!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Six juniors jumped at once.

The express had been throbbing on for less than half an hour when a fat face and a large pair of spectacles looked into the carriage from the corridor of the train.

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bunter—on the train!"

Billy Bunter blinked cheerfully. He was dressed in his best, with a necktie warranted to kill at forty rods, and a silk hat which showed serious signs of wear and tear.

"It's all right," he said.

"All right, is it?" granted Johnny Bull.

"Yes, old chap. I nearly missed you at St. Pancras. I don't think you could have been looking out for me," said Bunter severely.

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I got on the train all right, and I've been hunting up and down the train ever since," said Bunter. "Lucky I found you—what?"

"The luckfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Bunter!"

Bunter wedged into the carriage.

"Look here—" began Mick.

"It's all right. I've got my ticket," said Bunter reassuringly. "But it's lucky I found you fellows. I've lost my purse."

"Anything in it?" asked Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"Oh, a trifling sum!" said Bunter airily. "A tanner my father gave me, and a couple of fivers I got from my uncles, and a few pound notes—I really forget how many. Not much to me, though I dare say you fellows would think it a lot of money. You will have to stand my eyes on this journey; but I'll settle up at Lochmuir. I've given instructions for my letters to be forwarded there, and I'm expecting a postal-order when—"

"A—a—a postal-order—"

"Yes; from one of my titled relations," said Bunter cheerily. "How are you getting on, Mick, old man? Jolly glad to see you! We'll have a good time this Christmas—what?"

Mick simply stared at him. He did not quite know how to deal with William George Bunter.

"You're looking quite decent," went on Bunter.

"What?"

"Rather a change from the time when you were with the gipsies—what?" grinned Bunter. "You're fairly respectable now, Mick, old man."

"You cheeky ass!"

"Your manners haven't improved much," said Bunter calmly. "But then, what's to be expected from a fellow brought up practically among savages. I don't mind. I'm no snob!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Mick.

"A bit careless of you fellows, missing me at St. Pancras," went on Bunter. "I should have found you all right, but I was assaulted by a rough, who smashed my hat."

"A—a rough!" ejaculated Mick.

"Yes. Some low scoundrel biffed me on the hat," said Bunter. "I had no end of a job getting it into shape again. I gave him a jolly good hiding, though."

"You gave him a hiding?" roared Bob.

"Yes, rather!"

"The fellow who smashed your hat?"

"Yes."

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

Billy Bunter blinked at them in surprise. He did not see any occasion for merriment.

"What was he like, the fellow who biffed your hat?" gasped Wharton.

"A great, hulking rough," said Bunter. "A fellow you wouldn't have cared to tackle, I fancy. But I just went for him. One terrible blow stretched him on the platform—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! He lay senseless after I had felled him," said Bunter.

"You spoofing toad!" howled Mick. "It was I who biffed your silly hat over your silly head!"

Bunter jumped.

"You!" he gasped.

"Yes; and I've a jolly good mind to biff it again!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter. He backed hurriedly into the corridor. "I—say, Mick, old man—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of—of course, I—I knew it was you all the time, Mick, old fellow!" gasped Bunter. "Your little joke—what? He, he, he! I say, you fellows, can you crowd up a bit and give me room to sit down?"

"No fear!"

"I can't sit on my bag in the corridor all the way to Carlisle!" howled Bunter.

"Get off at the next stop," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter remained in the corridor for a time. He was proceeding by degrees, as it were. Having made his presence known, he allowed it to sink in before going further. But when, at Chesterfield, an enormous lunch-basket was handed in to the Greyfriars party, Bunter somehow contrived to squeeze himself into the carriage and find seating accommodation.

It was fortunate that there was an ample lunch, for Billy Bunter, as usual, distinguished himself as a trencherman.

The express rattled on, and by that time, apparently, Bunter was established as a member of the Greyfriars party.

At Carlisle the party were staying for the night, arrangements having been made at the hotel in advance for them. No arrangements had been made for Bunter, but he was there! Johnny Bull proposed taking him for a walk in Carlisle, and losing him there. But that drastic method was not adopted. By sheer cheek William George Bunter hung on, and the next morning he was in the Edinburgh express with the Christmas party.

Having now become a member of the party, Bunter proceeded to demonstrate that he was the most important member of it. He grumbled at the cold, apparently annoyed to find that it was colder in the north than in the south, and referred many times to Lord Mauleverer's selfishness in declining to lend him his fur coat. He borrowed a rug from Wharton and another rug from Bob to tuck round his fat little legs, and a muffler from Mick.

"Comfy now?" asked Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"No!" grunted Bunter.

"Like to get out and walk?"

"Yah!"

"We're in Scotland now," remarked Bob Cherry, when the train had crossed the Esk. "We're going through what they call the Waverley country."

"What the thump do they call it that for?" asked Bunter. "Who's Waverley?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ever heard of Sir Walter Scott?" grinned Nugent.

"Of course I have! He's the chap who wrote the 'Absent-Minded Beggar!'" said Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean 'Paradise Lost!'" amended Bunter. "Nothing to cackle at, you silly asses! You haven't any knowledge of literary matters."

"Hawick!" said Johnny Bull presently. "If we had time we'd have a look at Branksome Tower."

"What's that?" asked Bunter.

"It's in the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel,' ass!"

"We haven't had that in class, have we?" asked Bunter. "Still, I know all about it. I know all Shakespeare's plays."

"Shakespeare's plays?" yelled Bob. "Oh my hat! It's a poem by Sir Walter Scott, you fat duffer!"

"Rot!" said Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know some of that esteemed poem heartfully," remarked Hurree Janiset Ram Singh. And he proceeded to quote:

"The way was long, the wind was cold,
The minstrel was infernal old."

"Infirm and old!" roared Bob Cherry, and the juniors chuckled.

The juniors looked from the windows through clear, frosty air at a country rich with historical associations. Bunter was not bothering about historical associations, however; he was eating toffee, which he found much more interesting.

"Edinburgh!" said Harry Wharton at last.

"I say, you fellows—"

"What?"

"I'm hungry!"

And Billy Bunter repeated that interesting observation in tones of rising indignation about a score of times before he found himself at last sitting down to a substantial meal, after which, for a long time, his jaws were too busy for speech.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In the Highlands!

EDINBURGH, Perth, Inverness—and after Inverness the Highlands. It was a cheery and enjoyable journey to Harry Wharton & Co., though there was an accompaniment of "grousing" incessantly from William George Bunter.

Bunter seemed to take it as a personal injury that it was rather colder in the Scottish Highlands than in the Sussex downs. He did not like it, and he said so. Indeed, he told Mick that he was beginning to regret that he had consented to come—a remark at which Mick chuckled.

"It's all very well to cackle!" said Bunter, greatly incensed. "I've a jolly good mind to go back! There!"

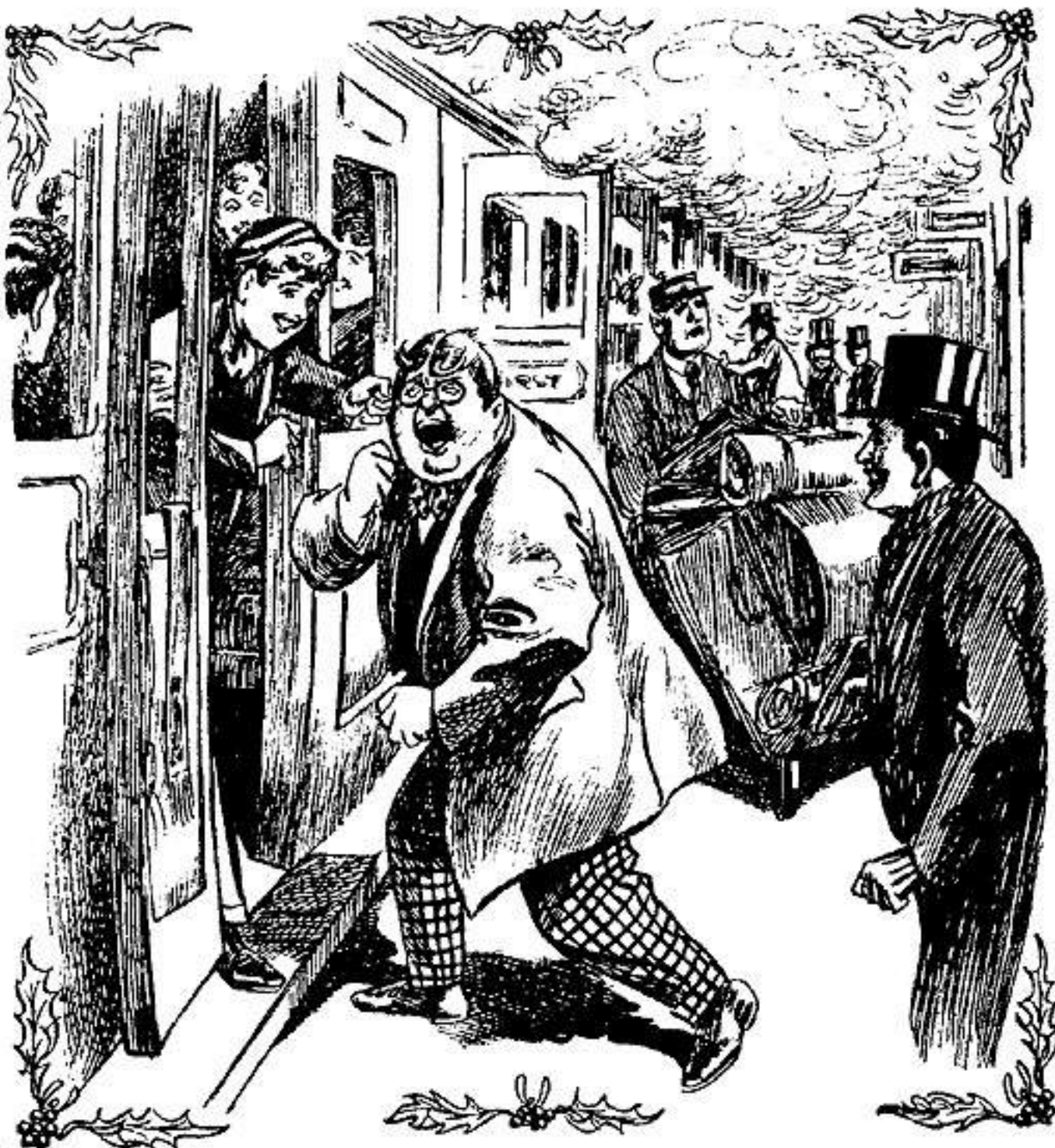
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mick.

"Only I can't very well desert you fellows in this dashed wilderness!" said Bunter. "Besides, having left my purse at home, I can't pay my fare back!"

"We'll club together to buy you a ticket, Bunter!" chorused the Christmas-party eagerly.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter did not accept that munificent offer. Cold as it was in the Highlands in December, apparently Bunter couldn't make up his fat mind to desert his old pals.



"Help a chap in, you fellows!" howled Bunter. "Here you are, old fat bean!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Yaroo!" roared Bunter. Bob had playfully taken hold of his ears to help him in. Those ears were large enough to give a good hold, and Bunter was safely landed in the carriage. "Ow! Beast!" wailed Bunter. "Leggo!" (See Chapter 2.)

"What's this place called?" he asked.

"Dingwall."

"What's that mist over there?"

"That's the sea."

"Where are we going now?"

"Place called Muirland."

"What is it?"

"A village."

"How are we going?"

"By car."

"I hope it's a good car!" said Bunter.

"Gilt-edged, velvet-lined, check-action, ball bearings, and jewelled in every hole!" Bob Cherry assured him.

"Yah!"

The Greyfriars party rolled along snowy roads in a big car. They were following a long road, away from the route of the Highland Railway. Wild moors stretched for unnumbered miles round them, and hill-tops clad in white. The scenery was magnificent, though it did not appeal to William George Bunter in the least.

Wilder and wilder it grew, more and more lonely, as the car ate up the miles.

"When the thump do we get to Muirland?" demanded Bunter.

"Ask the driver."

Bunter tapped on the glass, but the chauffeur did not turn his head. He was on a road that was slippery, and needed careful driving.

Presently there was a stop, and Bunter leaned out.

"Hi, driver!"

The chauffeur looked at him.

"When shall we get to Muirland?"

"Dinna ken," said the chauffeur briefly.

Bunter brightened.

"Dinner! Do you mean we have dinner here?"

"Eh?"

"I can't see any hotel," said Bunter, blinking round at the wild waste. "Where's the hotel, you fellows?"

"There isn't any hotel, ass!"

"But the man says we're going to have dinner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dinna ken" means don't know, fathead!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oh my hat!" gasped Bunter. "Don't they speak English here? Do any of you fellows know the language?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How are we going to ask for what we want if you don't speak the language?" demanded Bunter warmly. "I hope you know the names of things to eat, at least! That's important!"

"Well, I think I could ask for a haggis!" chuckled Bob.

"What's a haggis?"

"Blessed if I know! It's something to eat, anyhow. Ask the chauffeur if he's got a haggis about him!" suggested Bob.

"Is it fit to eat?" asked Bunter suspiciously.

"It's said to be really ripping!"

"Well, I'll ask him."

Bunter approached the driver again. The Highland chauffeur was busy with his engine, and he was a man of few words.

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words. He gave Bunter rather a dour look.

"I say, my man, do you speak English?" asked Bunter.

The Highlander stared, as well he might.

"I'm hungry," went on Bunter. "You know what hungry means? H U N G R Y—hungry!"

The chauffeur still stared.

"Have you got a haggis about you?" continued Bunter, apparently under the impression that a haggis was some sort of a cake, or a biscuit.

"A—a—a what?" stuttered the chauffeur.

"A haggis," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, he seems to understand some English—a few words, I dare say. He looks rather a fatheaded sort of a dummy, but he knows a few words—"

"Mon, you're cheeky!" said the Highlander. And he gave Bunter a gentle push, which sat him down in a snow-bank by the roadside. Then he gave all his attention to his engine.

Billy Bunter sat in the snow and roared till the laughing juniors came and extricated him. He did not ask the chauffeur any further questions about the haggis. It dawned upon his powerful brain at last that Bob had been pulling his fat leg.

The journey was resumed, through wilder and wilder scenery. Dusk was thickening when the car drew up at the inn at Muirland. The little village, shut in by wild hills and moors, was some miles, as the juniors understood, from the old castle of Lochmuir. Lights gleamed from the inn, and a hospitable welcome awaited the juniors there. The chauffeur, having landed his passengers, drove off in the darkness on his return journey. From a window of the inn, Bunter, with his mouth full, watched the disappearing lights of the car twinkle out in the dusky distance.

"I say, you fellows, how do you get to Lochmuir from here?" he asked.

"MacNab's sending the car from the house," said Mick.

"Who's MacNab?"

"The butler in charge of the place."

"When's the car coming?"

"It ought to be here now, ready for us," said Mick. "I daresay there's snow on the road, and it's delayed. Anyhow, you can get a good feed here, Bunter, so don't grouse."

Bunter grunted.

"I manage these things better when I ask fellows to Bunter Court," he said.

"Dry up!" said Bob Cherry.

Bunter devoted his attention to his meal. After that the juniors went out to look for the expected car from Lochmuir. They were a little surprised by its non-arrival. Full instructions had been given by Sir Philip Angel, and the Lochmuir car should have been at Muirland to meet the party. But it was not there, and there was no sign of it.

Darkness had closed in on the Highlands; the snowy hill-tops were hidden in gloom. Only from the village inn lights still twinkled. Mick was growing worried, and his comrades perplexed.

"I daresay we can get something here to take us to the house," said Mick at last. "I'll ask the innkeeper."

The innkeeper was anxious to oblige. But there was no car of any sort to be had for love or money in Muirland.

"You shouldn't have let that Dingwall man go back," growled Billy Bunter.

"Lot of good thinking of that now!" snapped Johnny Bull. "For goodness' sake dry up, Bunter."

"If we can't get a car we can get

something else," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Any old thing will do."

"Any old thing won't do for me!" snapped Bunter.

"Dry up!" roared Johnny Bull.

An open coach, used in the summer time for excursions, was all the obliging innkeeper could supply. But the party were anxious to get to Lochmuir, and they decided on it. Two horses were traced to the coach, and the baggage piled on it, and then the juniors discovered that the innkeeper was in warm altercation with a brawny Highland man, who was apparently to drive. The altercation was conducted chiefly in Gaelic, and the juniors listened without understanding; but they could guess that there was some difficulty afoot. The innkeeper turned to them at last.

"The mon will take ye only as far as the loch," he said. "Muirland men do not like going to Lochmuir after dark."

"Why on earth not?" asked Wharton, in amazement.

"It's the old laird!"

"The what?"

"The old laird who walks the castle at night."

The juniors blinked. Mick had told them, they remembered now, that there was a ghost story attached to the old castle of Lochmuir. But that it was anything more than a legend they had not imagined. Apparently it was taken more seriously in the vicinity of the place.

"The jolly old Christmas ghost!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Well, we're not afraid of jolly old ghosts."

"The mon will take ye as far as the loch," said the innkeeper, with a frown. "If you like you can leave your luggage at old Sandy Bean's cottage by the loch, and walk the rest. Then you can send the servants for your luggage—if they're there!"

"If they're there!" repeated Mick. "Of course they're there."

The Highland innkeeper shook his head.

"Strange things happen at Lochmuir," he said. "There's nae luck to the house since the old laird was killed."

"Was he killed?" asked Wharton.

"When was that?"

"At Culloden moor."

"Oh, my hat! That was a jolly long time ago: Do you mean that he was one of the rebels?" asked Wharton.

"He was one of the King's men," said the innkeeper dourly. "He fought for Prince Charlie and was killed, and then the castle was besieged and harried by the Duke of Cumberland. And ever since the old laird has walked, to keep strangers away from the land of his fathers."

"Oh, my hat!" said Harry.

To the Greyfriars juniors Prince Charlie and the battle of Culloden, and the harrying of the Highlands by the Duke of Cumberland, were incidents of the "history class." It was a little difficult to realise that they were now in a region where such things were memories handed down from father to son. To the Highland innkeeper the old Laird of Lochmuir was no rebel; he was one of the faithful adherents of Bonnie Prince Charlie, who was "out in the forty-five," and had paid for his loyalty with his life. And in the old laird's own country the Angel family evidently were regarded as newcomers and intruders, though they had held the land of Lochmuir for more than a hundred years.

"Well, this beats it!" said Frank Nugent. "All the same, we're going on to Lochmuir."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific," said

Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The esteemed spook will not scare us away-fully."

"Ha, ha! No fear!"

"Well, will ye go as far as the loch?" asked the innkeeper. "It's a short walk from Sandy Bean's cottage to the mansion, if ye care for it."

"Yes, that's all right," said Mick. "By the way, who's Sandy Bean?"

"The piper."

"We're in the land of the pipers now," said Wharton, with a smile. "Is he a Lochmuir man?"

"Is he?" said the innkeeper. "The Beans were pipers to the MacDermid, lairds of Lochmuir, before the first Stuart reigned in Scotland."

"A giddy hereditary piper," said Bob. "We'll be jolly glad to see Mr. Bean. I daresay he's a jolly old bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nae laughing matter, young sir. But if ye'll go, ye'll go, and it's nae business of mine."

And a few minutes later the Greyfriars juniors were rolling away on the road to the loch.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Strange Arrival!

"WHAT—what's that?"

Billy Bunter gasped out the question.

The other fellows started and listened. Round them they could see nothing but blackness, broken here and there by a glimmer of a ridge of snow.

Faintly, glimmering in the bosom of the darkness, the loch appeared, a broad sheet of water washing the bases of great hills swallowed up in the night. The Muirland coach rattled and jolted by a rough stony road at the side of the loch—a narrow way between the water and the abrupt hillsides. Suddenly, through the veil of night and mountain mist, came a low, wailing sound—like the wail of a lost spirit in the mountain solitudes.

The juniors peered at one another with startled faces. Wailing sounds followed, echoing strangely in the hollows of the hills, coming from what direction they could not determine.

"What the dickens is it?" muttered Bob Cherry.

"The wind—"

"It's not the wind—there's hardly any wind. It can't be some animal crying."

"I—I say, you fellows, d-d-d-do you think it's the ghost?" gasped Bunter.

"Fathead!"

Harry Wharton leaned over and touched the driver on the shoulder of his rough frieze coat.

"What's that noise?" he asked.

The man peered round.

"Noise?" he repeated.

"Yes—you can hear it."

"I hear nae noise," retorted the driver.

"But, maybe, ye mean the pipes."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We are nigh Sandy Bean's sheiling the noo," added the driver.

The juniors understood now. The wailing came from the bagpipes, played by Sandy Bean in his cottage by the loch. The juniors had heard sweet music extracted from bagpipes; but Sandy Bean was not discoursing sweet music by any means—he seemed to be set on producing a wild and melancholy wailing, that thrilled strangely on the ear. Possibly it was the ancestral dirge of the MacDermid, whom Sandy's ancestors had served and piped for since the beginning of Highland history.

The coach stopped.

Faintly, a light glimmered through

the darkness. The driver dismounted, and moved towards the light. The juniors followed suit. Dimly they made out a little tumble-down cottage, built apparently of the stones from the hill-side. The door stood wide open, and cold and bitter as the weather was, there was no trace of a fire in the cottage. No doubt Sandy Bean was hardened to this exacting climate.

The juniors, in silence, looked in at the open doorway.

A single candle glimmered on a rough table. On a bench sat an old man, clad in the Highland costume, very worn and torn. He was playing the bagpipes, and he did not cease or look up as the party arrived at the doorway. He seemed unconscious of their presence. His face was old, wrinkled and bitten with age, his hair a snowy-white under the Highland cap, his brows like snow; but under them his eyes were keen, alert, almost fierce.

He played on, the pipes wailing wildly, the juniors watching him in silence. Mick made a movement at last, but the driver touched his arm quickly. He spoke hurriedly, in Gaelic, and then repeated his words in English.

"Silence, young sir."

"But—"

"It's nae lucky to speak to the man when the fit's on him," muttered the coachman, "Sandy Bean is fey."

"Fey!" murmured Mick blankly.

"Hoot, say nothing."

The wailing continued. There was something almost unearthly about the old man, alone in the solitary cottage under the mountain, by the waste waters of the loch, wailing out the dirge of a forgotten clan. Harry Wharton & Co. felt something like a superstitious thrill, as they stood in silence and waited.

The old man laid down the pipes at last, and raised his sunken, fierce old eyes to the visitors.

Then the coachman spoke hurriedly in Gaelic. Sandy Bean rose to his feet, and made a stride towards them, his eyes fixed on Mick. Long he stared at the face of the gipsy schoolboy, and then, turning away without a word, sat down,

his face averted. The Muirland coachman spoke again, in the Gaelic tongue, and the old man answered not a word.

"Well, what does all this mean?" asked Wharton, growing impatient. "Can we leave the baggage here. What does Bean say?"

"Sandy Bean says that he will not close his door to a stranger or to an enemy this dark night," answered the coachman. "But he will not salute the stranger who enters the halls of the MacDermid."

"Dash it all, that old chap ought to be in a ballad, not in real life," murmured Bob Cherry. "He looks jolly nearly old enough to have been at the Battle of Culloden himself."

"His father's father's father was slain there," said the Highland coachman. "He died by the side of the MacDermid, playing the pipes to the last to spur on the clan. In old Sandy's mind the land still belongs to the MacDermid, though they are dead and gone. But Sir Philip Angel has been a good man to him—his cottage is on the Lochmuir land, and old Sandy pays no rent."

"How does he live?" asked Harry, in a low voice.

"They do not let the old piper starve," said the man, apparently alluding to the few scattered inhabitants of the moorlands.

The juniors looked again at the old man. He sat motionless, his gnarled old face averted from them. They left the cottage, and the coachman transferred their bags from the coach. Then he pointed out the way to the Greyfriars juniors.

"You won't come on to the house?" asked Mick.

The man shook his head. As he stood he was glancing to right and left; fearfully, in the gloom, as if in anticipation of seeing the phantom of the old Laird start up from the shadows.

"There's a curse on the place, since the old laird was slain," he said. "No man of this country will walk by it at night, and not by his own will in the day."

He backed his horses, and turned the

old coach in the road. It was evident that nothing would induce him to go on to the house; but he pointed out the way carefully to the juniors. The coach rattled away by the loch, and the Greyfriars party were left alone. From the cottage in the shadows, a fresh wailing burst forth.

"Let's get on!" said Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, I don't like this!" mumbled Bunter.

"Like to walk back?"

"Beast!"

"Then dry up, and come on."

The juniors followed the road. It was a rough and stony road, difficult for travel, and the trend was upward. In ten minutes or so they came in sight of an ancient gateway, of which the stone pillars still stood, though the gate was long gone. From the gateway they followed a winding drive, between stunted snow-laden trees, towards the old castle of Lochmuir.

"That's the place," said Mick, at last.

It was an old stone house, with many windows—on the right was a mass of ruins, shapeless in the gloom. The greater part of the old castle had been battered down by the Duke of Cumberland's cannon, in the days following the flight of Prince Charlie, after the Battle of Culloden, when the Highlands had been harried with fire and sword by the ruthless victors.

Not a light gleamed from a window. The whole place was wrapped in darkness.

"It looks deserted," said Nugent.

"Blessed if I can understand it," muttered Mick. "I've never been here before, of course; but this is the place right enough. There are six servants there, with MacNab—or there ought to be. They were sent here from Perth weeks ago, to get the old place ready for Christmas—nobody in this neighbourhood could be induced to take service there—I suppose on account of the ghosts." He grinned rather ruefully. "Let's get on—there must be somebody at home!"

The juniors, with grave faces now, pushed on to the house. There was no



Mick reached over and brought down his fist on top of Bunter's hat with a heavy thud. Crunch! "Yaroo!" roared Bunter, greatly startled. "Yow!" The fat-junior's hat was crushed over his eyes and his ears. He wrenched at it furiously, and the porter, grinning, wheeled away his trolley. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. (See Chapter 3.)

light—no sound! To their amazement, they found the great oaken door standing wide open—yet there was not a glimmer of a light within.

The house of Lochmuir was deserted. It was amazing—almost incredible—but it was evidently true. In the lonely house in the Highlands there was not a soul to greet the Christmas visitors.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Haunted!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry stood in the dark hall, and shouted. His shout echoed back, in a thousand thunderous echoes, from corridors and staircases and empty rooms. But there was no answering voice.

"My hat!" said Wharton. "This is queer! That's why the car did not come to Muirland—the servants are gone."

"The goneliness is terrific!"

"I can't understand it," said Mick.

"It's a blessed puzzle, and no mistake."

Billy Bunter's teeth were chattering, not wholly with cold, though it was very cold.

"I—I say, you fellows, d-d-do you think the ghosts frightened them away?" mumbled Bunter.

"Fathead!"

"Well, they're gone. I say, how are we going to get any supper?"

"Bother supper," grunted Johnny Bull, "you've had oho supper, you fat boulder."

"That was an hour ago," said Bunter, indignantly.

"We'd better look about the place," said Harry Wharton, "we must get a light somehow."

Matches were struck, and by the glimmer the juniors peered about the dark, black-oak-walled hall. The walls were adorned with trophies of Highland weapons, targets and dirks and claymores, and huge antlers of stags. They passed through an open doorway into a great room that was evidently the dining-room. The long mahogany table was set for a meal. In the centre of it stood a huge lamp, which the juniors were glad enough to see. It was in excellent order, and Harry Wharton soon had it alight.

Then the juniors explored further. Lighting matches as they went, they found their way into the kitchens. There they discovered lamps and candles, and lighted half-a-dozen of them. In the great fireplace were ashes that were still warm: it was clear that it was very recently that the house had been abandoned.

Where were the servants gone—and why? It was, at present, an insolvable mystery.

Taking lamps to light their way, the juniors trod up the broad, low stairs to the second floor. Here were the bedrooms, and all the rooms were in perfect order. No trouble or expense had been spared to make the old house comfortable for the sojourn of the Christmas party. Fires were laid in the rooms, and the juniors thoughtfully lighted them all, and soon there was a ruddy, cheery glare in half-a-dozen different places. It made the silent old house seem much less desolate.

After exploring the upper regions, Harry Wharton and Co. came downstairs again. They were utterly mystified.

"Well, this beats it, and no mistake," said Bob Cherry. "What do you make of it, Mick, old man?"

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Mick shook his head.

"It beats me!" he said. "I'm sorry for this, you fellows. Not much of a welcome for you fellows."

"Oh, that's all right," said Wharton. "We can look after ourselves. We can't send down to Sandy Bean's for the bags, as there's nobody to send. But we can camp out somehow till to-morrow."

"Yes, rather."

"There's plenty of grub in the house," said Bunter. "I looked while you fellows were in the kitchen. Tons of it! Looks as if they laid in enough for a siege before they cleared off. But look here, Mick Angel, I don't like this! This isn't the way I treat fellows when they come to Bunter Court for Christmas."

"Shut up, Bunter."

"Something must have happened here to-day," said Mick. "There's some reason for the servants bolting in this extraordinary way."

"The giddy ghost—"

"Well, they may have fancied something," said Mick, "or—blessed if I can make it out. Anyhow, we can get supper, and turn in, and we'll see what's to be done to-morrow."

"That's a good idea."

The party returned to the kitchen. The fire was raked together and stacked with coal and wood, and was soon roaring away cheerily in the ancient chimney. The larders were well stored, and there was no shortage of provisions. But it was with strange feelings that the Greyfriars party sat down to supper in the haunted house in the Highlands. The wind had risen, and was wailing about the old stone walls, recalling the wild notes of Sandy Bean's bagpipes to their minds. The hour was late, and after supper the juniors bolted the big door, looked to the windows, and went up to bed.

They were tired with their journey, and in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings they were soon fast asleep.

Harry Wharton was dreaming of Highland pipers and kilted warriors with dirk and claymore, when he awoke suddenly.

A wild yell rang in his ears.

He started up in bed.

The moon had risen, and a pale, ghostly light came in at the casement of his room.

The house seemed full of sound—yell followed yell, ringing and echoing in the gloomy old mansion.

"Good heavens!" panted Wharton.

He leaped out of bed. As he rushed from the door, Bob Cherry emerged from another door, half dressed, a lighted lamp in his hand.

"What—" shouted Bob.

"It's Bunter!"

"Oh! oh! ow! Help!" Bunter's voice was yelling, from the dark staircase. "Help! Oh! Help!"

All the juniors were awake and up now. They rushed down the stairs. On the landing, in the curve of the staircase, they found Bunter. A candle, which the fat junior had evidently been carrying, lay on the dark oak, extinguished. Bunter was standing with wide-open staring eyes, yelling at the top of his voice in a frenzy of terror.

Harry Wharton caught him by the shoulder.

"Bunter—what—"

"Help! Oh! The—the ghost!"

A heavy weight fell on Wharton—he clutched Bunter and held him. The juniors gathered round with pale, startled faces.

"Bunter! What's happened?"

But there was no answer from Bunter.

His fat face was set, and as white as chalk; his eyes were closed. Billy Bunter had fainted.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Phantom of the Night!

"F AINTED!"

"But what—what's happened?"

"Goodness knows!"

Billy Bunter was quite unconscious. Evidently the fat junior had received the scare of his life. What he had seen, or fancied that he had seen, the juniors could not guess. In the flickering candle-light, they stared and peered about them into the shadows of the staircase and the old hall below.

"Give me a hand with Bunter," said Wharton.

The Owl of the Remove was carried up to his room and laid on the bed. He was breathing stertorously and mumbling. His fat face was bathed in cold water, and in a few minutes his eyes opened.

"It's all right, Bunter," said Harry, as he met the fat junior's frightened stare.

"Ow! Oh dear!" moaned Bunter.

"Keep still, old chap."

Bunter's startled gaze roamed round the room.

"Where is it?"

"Where's what?"

"Have you seen it?"

"Never mind now," said Harry, thinking it better that Bunter should not dwell upon the cause of his fright in the present state of his nerves. "Get to bed, old fellow."

"I saw it!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, yes—"

"I tell you I saw it—the—the—the ghost!" stuttered Bunter, with chattering teeth. "I say, you fellows, shut that door!"

Nugent shut the bed-room door.

"Better not talk about it now, Bunter," said Harry. "You shouldn't have gone down alone in the dark. Why did you go down?"

"Hungry."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I woke up hungry," mumbled Bunter. "I thought I'd go down and have a snack. Then—then I saw it!"

"Well, what did you see?" asked Harry, as it was clear that Bunter would not drop the subject.

"The ghost!"

"What sort of a ghost?"

"A Highlander, in kilt and plaid!" gasped Bunter. "Just like that picture of the old laird in the hall. He was stalking along in the hall below when I got to the middle landing. I—I just saw the eagle feather in his bonnet first, and—and wondered what it was, and then I saw him! He looked at me—"

Bunter shuddered from head to foot. The juniors exchanged glances.

That Bunter had seen anything of the kind seemed to them impossible. The strange circumstances of their arrival at Lochmuir, the legend of the haunted house, and a heavy supper, accounted for it, to their minds. But the Owl of the Remove was taking it seriously, and was plainly frightened almost out of his fat wits.

"He looked at me!" repeated Bunter.

"His eyes were like—like burning coals! His face was nearly hidden in his plaid, and I only saw his eyes—burning!"

He shuddered again.

"Then I think I dropped my candle—it was all dark, and I didn't see him again. I think I called for help."



In silence the juniors looked in at the open doorway. A single candle glimmered on a rough table. On a bench sat an old man clad in the Highland costume, very worn and torn. He was playing a mournful dirge on the bagpipes, and did not look up as the juniors arrived at the doorway. (See Chapter 6.)

"I think you did!" said Bob Cherry, with a faint grin.

"Ow! It was awful!" shivered Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, I'm not going to sleep alone after this! I say, can't we get away from this place to-night?"

"Scarcely," said Harry. "It's jolly nearly morning. Get to sleep and forget all about it, Bunter."

"I'm hungry!"

"What?"

"Hungry!" said Bunter.

The juniors stared at him, and Mick chuckled. The scare of the ghost had not, apparently, affected Bunter's appetite.

"Some of you fellows go and get me a snack," said Bunter. "You say you ain't afraid of ghosts!"

Bob Cherry laughed.

"I'll go!" he said.

"We'll come with you," said Johnny Bull quickly.

There was a roar from Bunter:

"I say, you fellows, don't you leave me alone! Yaroooooh!"

"I will stayfully remain with the esteemed funky Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. And he sat on the side of the bed. Billy Bunter snuggled under the bedclothes.

The other fellows, taking the candles, left the room and went down the staircase. They looked up and down passages and into empty rooms, and scanned shadowy corners and recesses of the old house. But there was no trace to be seen of the ghost that had frightened Bunter. Then they repaired to the kitchen, and secured a supply of provisions for the Owl of the Remove, and returned to the bed-room.

Bunter sat up in bed and ate.

He ate ravenously; but evidently not with his usual enjoyment. His eyes blinked to right and left and over his shoulders continually. Bob Cherry gave a deep yawn.

"Well, I'm going back to bed," he remarked.

"I—I say, you fellows, don't go to bed! All of you sit up to-night and keep me company!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Then I shall be able to get some sleep—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't think!"

Bob took his candle and walked away to his room, and Nugent and Johnny Bull followed his example.

"I'll stay if you like, Bunter," said Mick.

"Why can't you all stay?" grunted Bunter. "I should feel safer. I never saw such selfish fellows!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned, and strolled away to bed. Harry Wharton remained.

"We'll get some blankets here and camp, Mick," he said. "We don't want that fat ass to be frightened into a fit."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Right-ho!" said Mick.

There was an immense ancient couch in the room, along one side, on which three or four fellows could have camped. Wharton and Mick fetched blankets and pillows, and arranged them on the couch.

"Leave the lamp burning," said Bunter drowsily.

The lamp was left burning. In a few minutes more Bunter, replete with a second supper, was sinking into slumber, and his deep and resonant snore echoed through the room.

Mick dropped asleep on the couch, rolled in blankets. Harry Wharton closed his eyes, but sleep came slowly.

Bunter's snore helped to keep him awake.

He sat up on the couch, and watched the moonlight at the window. The lamp burned low, and Wharton rose and turned it out. The room was dimly lighted now by the glimmering moonlight.

Harry Wharton walked to and fro for a time, hoping to tire himself into drowsiness. Then he went at last to the casement and looked out. From the window the ruined castle of Lochmuir was visible, shattered walls and casements and battlements looming eerily in the dimness of the moon.

Suddenly Wharton gave a violent start.

On the old battlemented wall, where in ancient days defenders of the castle

had looked down on their foes approaching by the road up from the loch, a strange figure appeared.

Wharton stared at it blankly.

It was the figure of a tall Highlander, in kilt and plaid and bonnet with eagle plume. Full in the glimmering light of the moon it appeared, pacing the old battlements.

Wharton rubbed his eyes; and looked again. Was he half-asleep and dreaming?

The moon sailed behind a dark bank of clouds. All was darkness now, and he could see nothing.

He watched with beating heart till the moon reappeared. Once more the pale, ghostly light gleamed on the crumbling battlements.

But the plaided figure had vanished—if ever it had been there. The moonlight glimmered on crumbling stone and moss and gleaming ridges of snow.

Wharton breathed hard.

What had he seen? Was it a trick of the imagination? Or—

He returned to the couch where Mick was sleeping peacefully. But sleep did not visit Wharton's eyes till the winter sun was glimmering in at the casement.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery!

BOB CHERRY was first up in the morning. It was not long before the others followed his example—further sleep would have been difficult when once the energetic Bob was afoot. Even Billy Bunter, with loud protests, was routed out. But a scent of cooking from the kitchen comforted Bunter; in spite of the number and extent of his suppers, he was more than ready for breakfast.

Bob had constituted himself cook. He turned out a substantial breakfast, and the party disposed of it round the roaring kitchen fire with great comfort and satisfaction. Snow had begun to fall with the dawn, and the white flakes floated down thickly past the old windows. But the Greyfriars party were

feeling quite cheery now—even Billy Bunter was cheery. Ghosts or no ghosts, there was plenty of tuck—and in the daytime, at least, Bunter was not afraid of ghosts.

After breakfast Bunter was left still busy, and the juniors turned out into the frosty air.

"Ripping air, anyhow!" said Bob Cherry. "Jolly, healthy up here! It's a queer old show, but I like it."

"If you fellows would like to clear—" began Mick.

"No fear!"

"I mean I shouldn't mind; this isn't exactly the kind of Christmas I asked you for," said Mick ruefully.

"My dear chap," said Bob, "a Christmas without a ghost wouldn't be the genuine article. I wouldn't change this show for anything."

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, I should have to stick it," said Mick. "The pater and Aubrey will be here to-day or to-morrow. They're bringing some friends with them. But—"

"We'll get the place ready for them somehow," said Harry Wharton. "First thing is to get our baggage up from Sandy Bean's cottage. As there's nobody to fetch it, we shall have to carry it ourselves. Then we've got to find out where the servants have gone, and get them back if possible."

The juniors walked down the rough road to the loch. On the broad sheet of water, washing the foot of the hill, the sun gleamed and reflected. Snow was falling in light flakes, but through it was a gleam of winter sunshine. The keen, invigorating air of the mountains made the Greyfriars juniors feel bright and cheerful. On the way down to the loch Wharton told his comrades of what he had seen—or fancied he had seen—from the window in the night.

"Half-asleep and dreaming, old chap," said Bob.

And Wharton wondered whether that was the explanation. Certainly, in the gleaming frosty day, what he had seen seemed fantastically impossible.

They found Sandy Bean's door on the latch, but the old piper was not to be seen. The next few hours were occupied in conveying their baggage to Lochmuir.

Bunter was set to cooking, and a substantial lunch was produced, after which the party set out to explore the neighbourhood, and to discover, if they could, some clue to the strange disappearance of the servants.

Billy Bunter loudly protested that he wanted a nap after lunch; but he declined to remain alone in the house, so he toddled, grumbling, after the others when they started.

There was no habitation, excepting Sandy Bean's cottage, anywhere near Lochmuir, though in the glen the juniors found traces of ancient habitations long destroyed—the cabins of Highlanders who had been burnt out by Cumberland's dragoons after the rebellion of 1745. Fire and sword had wasted the land in those old days, and the clan and the chief of the MacDermid had perished together; the lands and the ruined castle had passed into the hands of strangers.

Only old Sandy Bean remained, to mourn over a past forgotten by others, lingering like a phantom in the demesne where his forefathers had dwelt.

In the late afternoon the juniors, returning from a long ramble, came on the old piper.

They found Sandy Bean standing on a rock, looking over the waters of the loch. He was standing like a figure

carved in stone, and did not glance at the party as they came up. It flashed into Wharton's mind as he looked at the old man that Sandy Bean was not quite in his right senses. There was something strange and unearthly in the old man's look, and the wild, solitary life he had led for long years could scarcely have failed to affect his intellect. A man who in the twentieth century was still brooding over the events of the '45 must be, at least, the victim of an obsession. The piper of the MacDermid was living, as it were, not in his own days, but in the days of his father's grandfather.

"Let's speak to him," said Harry in a low voice. "He's the only chap living anywhere near Lochmuir, and he may know something of what happened here yesterday. Something must have happened to scare the servants away."

The juniors stopped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" greeted Bob Cherry cheerily, in a voice that boomed across the glimmering waters of the loch.

The old man turned his head. With a native courtesy he doffed his Highland bonnet, though his gnarled face expressed nothing.

Harry Wharton proceeded to explain to Sandy. The old man listened without a change of a muscle in his face; it almost seemed that he did not hear what was said to him. But when Wharton had finished he spoke.

"They fled!" he said briefly.

"The servants were here yesterday," said Harry.

Sandy Bean nodded.

"Did you see them go?"

Another nod.

"But why?"

"They dared not remain in the halls of the MacDermid."

"But why?" said Wharton again.

"Why did they go?"

A wrinkled smile crossed Sandy's gnarled face for a moment.

"They saw the laird!"

"Oh my hat! The ghost?"

Another nod.

"And that scared them away?"

Nod.

"We were expecting the car to be sent to Muirland to bring us to the house," said Harry. "We haven't found a car in the garage at Lochmuir. Did they go in the car?"

"Yes."

"Did they leave no message for us?"

"None!"

"The funky asses!" growled Bob Cherry. "Your pater will jolly well sack the lot for this, Mick. If they're scared so bad as that they won't be coming back."

"Not likely!" said Mick ruefully.

Sandy Bean turned away and resumed his contemplation of the loch. He seemed to forget the presence of the juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked on to the house, puzzled and perplexed. What was best to be done in the strange circumstances they did not know. The early winter dusk was falling, and the snow was thickening. They were glad to get into the house again and to build a huge log fire in the spacious fireplace in the old hall.

As the darkness deepened round the house Billy Bunter began to cast uneasy glances about him. An ample supper cheered up Bunter, but the wail of the rising wind startled and scared him. The ghost of the previous night was fresh in his memory.

"I say, you fellows, we ought to clear!" he growled. "Call this a Christmas holiday!"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I tell you the place is haunted——"

"Bow-wow!"

The juniors stacked logs on the fire and sat round it, chatting, while the night grew older.

"I—I say, you fellows, what—— What was that?" exclaimed Bunter suddenly.

"What——"

"Hark!"

From somewhere in the house came a sound—a strange sound. It was a low, faint, echoing wail.

"Was—was that the wind?" muttered Bob.

Wharton shook his head. He knew that it was not the wind. The sound was in the house, echoing faintly, eerily, in the dim old passages and deserted rooms. He rose quickly and took up a candle.

"Come on!" he muttered.

"I say, you fellows——"

The juniors did not heed Bunter. They followed Wharton. The wailing sound was repeated, and Wharton followed it, holding up the candle, into a dim stone corridor that led towards the ruins.

"Look!" yelled Bob Cherry, startled.

Full before their eyes loomed up a strange figure—the figure of a Highland chief in kilt and plaid, the heavy folds of the plaid almost covering the face, revealing to view only a pair of strange, burning eyes. In utter amazement and terror the juniors crowded back from the apparition. The figure was advancing upon them, and with one accord the juniors rushed back into the lighted hall. There, with pale faces, they stared back; but the figure had not followed.

For some minutes there was deep silence, broken only by the crackling of the logs.

Wharton set his teeth.

"It's a trick—a trick of some sort!" he panted. "Come on—we're going to see this through!"

He seized a lamp, and led the way back to the stone passage. From end to end the juniors searched it; but the apparition had vanished. Phantom or not, it was gone, leaving no trace behind.

The juniors gathered in the hall again. They were startled and shaken. Bunter was quivering with terror, and mumbling. Suddenly, in the silence, came a loud sound without.

"Hoot! hoot!"

It was a motor-horn.

Wharton rushed to the big oak door and flung it open. Outside, on the snowy drive, gleamed the lights of a motor-car. From the car descended a traveller wrapped in a fur coat, and the lights gleamed on the handsome face of Aubrey Angel.

"Aubrey!" shouted Mick.

And he ran out to greet his brother.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Aubrey!

AUBREY ANGEL stood before the leaping fire, a smile on his handsome face. It was rather a cynical smile. Bob Cherry, thoughtfully hospitable, had taken the chauffeur into the kitchen to supply him with refreshments after his arduous drive to Lochmuir. Angel listened to what the juniors had to tell him with scarcely polite attention. It was quite clear, from his look, that he regarded the story of the spectral Highlander as all moonshine, and Harry Wharton and Co. as the victims of an attack of nerves.

The Co. had almost forgotten their dislike of Aubrey Angel; but the mocking look on his handsome face reminded

(Continued on page 17.)



HARRY WHARTON



FRANK NUGENT



BOB CHERRY

THE GREYFRIARS HERALD



MARK LINLEY



HURREE SINGH



PETER TODD

Supplement No. 155.

HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week ending December 29th, 1923.



The Sorrows of Skinner!

Related by Himself

EDITORIAL!

By
HARRY WHARTON.

I WANTED to write to my pater yesterday. My supply of pocket-money had dwindled down to three-halfpence, so I thought I'd give the old man a gentle reminder.

Writing letters is a fearful fag, however. Besides, my fountain-pen has a tendency to leak, and it sheds big blots all over the paper. And my pater has a horror of blots.

"Why not pop into Quelchy's study and use his typewriter?" suggested Snoop. "You'll be quite safe. Quelchy's out golfing."

"A very happy suggestion, Snoopey!" I said, brightening up. "I know how to use a typewriter, and it won't take me ten minutes to knock off a letter to the pater."

So I toddled along to Quelchy's study, and found it uninhabited.

The typewriter was on the desk, all ready for use. I inserted a sheet of paper, and started to type my letter; but I soon made the tragic discovery that there was something wrong. The letter "e" had been broken, and it refused to come out at all.

Nothing daunted, however, I went ahead with my letter, and in place of the letter "e" I substituted an "x."

I'm afraid my letter had rather a comical appearance by the time it was finished. This is how it looked:

"My dxar Patxr.—Just a fw lnx to inform you that my pockxt-monxy has run short. I'vx only got about thrxx-halfpxnxx. Will you plxasx snd mx fivx bob at onxx, so that I can hold a study exlxbRATION for thx bxxnxf of my pals.

"I'm gxtting on quxtx wxll at Grxyfriars, but I wish I was in a hixhr Form than thx Rxmoxv. Old Quxlchy, our Form mastxr, is a bxast and a tyrant. Hx gavx mx 100 lnx only this morning, bxxaux I wasn't paying attxnion during thx lxsson.

"Quxlchy is out golfing at thx momxnt, so I am taking thx opportunity of using his typxwritxr. Onx of thx lxttxrs has gonx wrong, so I am using thx lxttxr 'x' instxad, and

Supplement i.]

I hopx you will bx ablx to undxrstand this lxttxr.—Your affxctionatx son,

"HAROLD."

Rather a comical letter, you will agree; but you must blame Quelchy for it, not me. The old buffer shouldn't have broken his typewriter!

It occurred to me afterwards that I might have left the letter "e" blank, and filled it in afterwards in ink. But the deed was done now, and the letter would have to stand.

I was burrowing about for an envelope, when suddenly I heard a quick footstep in the passage. It sent cold shivers down my spine. Quelchy was returning from his golfing expedition!

Before I had time to make myself scarce the door was thrown open, and Quelchy strode into the study.

"Skinner!" he thundered. "What are you doing here?"

"Ahem!"

"Answer me, Skinner!"

"I—I thought you wouldn't mind your favourite pupil borrowing your typewriter, sir!" I stammered.

"Favourite pupil?" roared Quelchy. "You are no favourite of mine! Let me see what you have been typing!"

The fat was in the fire now, with a vengeance! Quelchy saw the letter I had written, and the unflattering reference to himself, and he flew into a fearful paddy. He picked up his cane, and laid into me good and proper, as the saying goes. And I sha'n't borrow Quelchy's "tapper" again in a hurry!

IT'S

"THE HOLIDAY
ANNUAL"

YOU WANT!

OUR special number this week deals chiefly with the art of letter-writing. It is almost a lost art nowadays. In the rush and scurry of modern life, very few people have a chance to write letters properly, even if they trouble to write them at all! The telephone and the wireless service have helped to make letter-writing a back number. If you want to give a message to your pal, you either ring him up or communicate with him by wireless if you are lucky enough to be able to get in touch with him by this means.

Probably the best letter-writer the world has even known was Lord Byron. His letters are masterpieces of descriptive writing. But things have changed since Byron's day. At that time there was no telegraph, telephone, or wireless service. Consequently, letter-writing was the only means of communication with distant friends; and in those days letters took a jolly long time to get to their destination! They didn't have three or four deliveries a day, like we now have in our large towns.

Most people find letter-writing a fearful bore. When a Greyfriars fellow writes home, his letter seldom occupies more than a half-sheet of notepaper.

This is the usual style of letter:

"Dear Mother,—Just a few lines hoping you are quite well, as it leaves me at present.—Your loving

"PERCY."

Personally, I think it would be a splendid thing if the art of letter-writing was revived. For although we may not enjoy writing letters, our friends always enjoy receiving them. The postman is always a welcome guest, and a letter from a true pal will transform a gloomy morning into a bright and sunny one. However, I am not setting out to preach, because I'm aware that I am a shocking correspondent myself! There is quite a pile of letters on my desk awaiting answers. I have put off the job from day to day, but I shall have to tackle it sooner or later. So I'll act on that most excellent maxim and DO IT NOW!

HARRY WHARTON.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 829.



My Luckiest Letter!

The Postman often brings pleasant surprises
Our contributors chat
about their luckiest letters.

BOB CHERRY:

The only letters that I label "lucky letters" are those which contain remittances! A letter asking me if I am quite well, as it leaves the writer at present, always leaves me cold. I've had quite a legion of lucky letters in my time, but I think the luckiest was that which contained a "tenner" from my paternal relative. He woke up one morning in a generous mood, and I only wish these generous moods would occur about seven times a week!

BILLY BUNTER:

The luckiest letter I ever received wasn't really intended for me at all! One of my distant relations wished to send young Sammy a quid. He wasn't sure of Sammy's initials—being a very distant relation—so he simply addressed the envelope to "Master Bunter." I bagged the letter, likewise the remittance!

It didn't come out for a long time that the quid had been intended for Sammy. When my miner eventually got to know of it there was weeping and nashing of molars!

DICK PENFOLD:

Lucky letters from my betters seldom come my way; but Bull and Toddy and everybody has them, strange to say! Rich relations send donations to the other chaps, but I'm dejected and neglected. Luck will change, perhaps!

DICK RUSSELL:

My luckiest letter—shall I ever forget the thrilling moment when it arrived?—was from the editor of a popular weekly paper, informing me that I had won a prize in a football competition. I'm not going to say how much I won, or Billy Bunter will haunt me day and night, cadging for a loan! Wish a few more

lucky letters would come my way. They relieve the monotony of life.

WILLIAM GOSLING:

Which I ain't in the habit of receiving letters, lucky or otherwise. Nobody never writes to me, and I never writes to nobody! What I says is this here—letter-writing is all very well for them what have had a good education; but a man like me, what ain't used to stringing words and sentences together, makes a sorry mess of it when he tries to write a letter. Besides, it costs three-half-pence a time to send a letter, and I can find a better use for my hard-earned money!

DICKY NUGENT:

My major frank gets all the Lucky Letters & nobody ever thinks of poor little Me & i'm fed-up with not reseerving no news from nowhere & i'm jolly well going to start writing a lot of letters and posting them to myself!

HAROLD SKINNER:

I can't say which was my luckiest letter, but I know which was my unluckiest! "Dear Harold, I am sending you five pounds," it began. I had visions of fishing a crisp banknote out of the envelope. But alas! The letter continued: "As soon as I receive a satisfactory report about you from your Form master!" Now, Quelch never sends a satisfactory report about me, and he never will; so it's good-bye to my hopes of getting a "fiver"!

HOW TO WRITE LETTERS!

By Billy Bunter.

Some people sneer at begging-letter writers, and call them all sorts of horrid names. But, believe me, it is quite a work of art to write a letter which will coax a remittance out of anyone.

It's not a bit of use writing home to your people and saying: "Please send me a fiver by return of post." They will turn a deaf ear to such a blunt request. You want to wrap it up in a skilful manner. That is to say, your letter should deal with totally different topics, and the request for a remittance should be a postscript—a sort of afterthought.

Let me give you an egg-sample of what I mean. Here is a letter I sent to my Uncle Bob a few days ago:

"Dear Uncle Bob,—I trusted you are in the pink, and that everything in the garden is lovely, as it leaves me at prezzant.

"I played footer for the Remove the other day, and kicked six goals, including the winning one.

"I am making fine progress with my lessons—in fact, Mr. Quelch says I'm a dead cert. for the spelling prize this year.

"Sammy is still as plump as ever, and he sends his kind regards. He is in good health, but his white mice have got hooping-koff.

"You are always in our thoughts, dear uncle—not bekawse you happen to be a wealthy bachelor, but bekawse we have a genuine and sinseer regard for you. You are a real brick, and we wish you every posterity.

"With fond love, I remane,
"Your affeckshunate nevvew,
"BILLY.

"P.S.—A good way of dodging Excess Prophet Duty is to send large sums of munny to your nevvews from time to time."

Now that's what I call a really top-hole letter. Cunningly worded, if you like; but then you have to employ cunning if you want to skweeze a remittance out of anybody.

Uncle Bob turned up trumps this morning with a tanner postle-order, so I am now as rich as Crowsus. And all bekawse I had mastered the art of begging-letter writing!

A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND
A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR
FROM
THE EDITOR AND HIS STAFF.

TELEGRAMS ON "TICK"!

(The following dialogue was overheard in Friardale post-office.)

BILLY BUNTER: "Good-morning, ma'am! I want you to despatch this telegram for me."

POSTMISTRESS: "Very good, Master Bunter. That will be three-and-sixpence. It is rather a lengthy wire."

BILLY BUNTER: "Ahem! I—I happen to be short of cash at the moment, ma'am, but if you'll let me send this telegram on tick, I'll settle with you as soon as my postal-order comes. I've been expecting it every day for the last five years."

POSTMISTRESS: "We don't transact business on those terms, Master Bunter. Three-and-six, please, or this telegram cannot go."

BILLY BUNTER: "Yah! The Post Office is a beastly fraud! I shall withdraw my patronage! I won't send another telegram in my life, so there!"

(Exit BUNTER in deep disgust.)





A False Alarm!

By Mark Linley

BILLY BUNTER rolled along the Sixth Form passage, and tapped on the door of Wingate's study. "Come in!" called the captain of Greyfriars, in gruff tones.

The fat junior promptly stepped inside. Wingate, who was in the act of writing a letter, turned his head as Bunter entered. On seeing that his visitor was nobody of any consequence, he went on writing.

"Please, Wingate, I've brought my lines—"

"Wait!" snapped Wingate.

So Bunter waited. And, being of an inquisitive turn of mind, he crept stealthily up to Wingate, whose back was towards him, in order to discover, if possible, what the captain of Greyfriars was writing.

Wingate's pen was travelling swiftly, and was reaching the foot of the sheet of notepaper. Billy Bunter, standing on tip-toe and peering over the writer's shoulder, was startled to see these words:—

"I mean to resign the captaincy."

"My hat!" breathed the fat junior, fairly quivering with excitement.

Having come to the end of the page, Wingate laid down his pen for a moment, and turned to Bunter, who had stealthily dodged back a yard or two.

"Let me see your lines!" said the Greyfriars captain, curtly.

Bunter handed over his imposition. Wingate glanced through the pages of spider-like scrawl, and gave a grunt.

"Very carelessly written," he said, "but it will do. Cut off now, and see if you can manage to keep out of trouble for a day or two."

Billy Bunter rolled to the door, and took his departure.

Straight to No. 1 Study the fat junior went, his little round eyes fairly gleaming with excitement.

The Famous Five of the Remove were at tea, when Billy Bunter burst in upon them like a boisterous gale.

"I say, you fellows, heard the latest? Old Wingate's going to resign!"

Billy Bunter had expected his news to make an impression. And it did! Harry Wharton and Co. looked up from their plates, and stared blankly at their informant.

"Is this another of your inventions, Bunter?" asked Wharton, after a pause.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Anybody would think I was in the habit of telling fibs! It's a fact about old Wingate resigning."

"How do you know?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Ahem! Wingate told me so himself, not two minutes ago. We're great pals,

me and old Wingate. We don't have any secrets from each other. 'Bunty, old boy,' he said, 'I'm fed up with the captaincy of Greyfriars, and I mean to resign.'"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

A peal of laughter followed Bunter's statement. The idea of George Wingate taking the egregious Owl of the Remove into his confidence struck the Famous Five as being decidedly comical.

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully at the hilarious quintette.

"Beasts!" he snorted. "I'm giving you the straight goods, but you don't seem to believe me. Wingate's going to chuck up the captaincy, I tell you!"

"Gammon!"

"Bosh!"

"The boshfulness is terrific!"



"Let this be a lesson to you not to read other people's letters!" rapped Wingate.

"Very well," said Bunter, glowering at the Famous Five. "If you don't believe me, go and ask old Wingate. And if you find I've told you a whopper, you're at liberty to give me a record bumping!"

Harry Wharton and his chums looked hard at Bunter. They began to think there must be something in it, or he would never have made an offer like that.

The juniors felt uneasy. Wingate of the Sixth stood very high in their esteem. It was hardly too much to say that they hero-worshipped the stalwart, manly skipper of Greyfriars.

If Wingate resigned the captaincy, it would be a tragedy. Greyfriars could ill-afford to lose the services of such a leader.

Besides, in the event of Wingate resigning, who would fill the vacancy? The juniors had a horrible fear that a

cad like Gerald Loder might step into Wingate's shoes.

"I think we'd better step along and see old Wingate, and find out if there's any truth in this," said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent.

Billy Bunter's eyes sparkled. He was hoping that the Famous Five would leave him alone in the study, so that he could finish their tea for them.

But the glutton of the Remove was soon disillusioned. Harry Wharton's grasp descended on his collar.

"This way, Bunter! You're coming with us to Wingate's study."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"March him along!" said Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter was whirled along the winding corridors until the Sixth Form quarters were reached.

Wharton tapped at the door of Wingate's study, and the procession filed in.

"What the thunder—?" began Wingate, in amazement.

"Sorry to disturb you, Wingate," said Harry Wharton, "but Bunter's been to us with a yarn that you're going to resign the captaincy. Any truth in it?"

"Certainly not!"

There was a murmur of relief from the Famous Five, and a gasp of dismay from Billy Bunter.

"You—you're not going to resign, Wingate?" faltered the fat junior.

"No."

"But—but you distinctly said in your letter, 'I mean to resign the captaincy!'"

Wingate looked grim.

"So you've been spying on me, what?" he said. "You must have peeped over my shoulder while I was writing. Matter of fact, you've only got half the story. I certainly wrote the words you mention, but it was not a complete sentence. It is continued on the next page. The complete sentence reads: 'I mean to resign the captaincy when I leave Greyfriars, and not before!'"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter realised that he had jumped too hastily to conclusions.

Wingate was not resigning the captaincy, after all. And the Famous Five were glad.

But Bunter had no cause to be glad. Wingate picked up an ash-plant and administered a couple of stinging cuts on each of Bunter's fat palms. Wild yells of anguish floated through the study.

"There!" panted Wingate. "That'll be a lesson to you not to read other people's letters in future!"

But if Wingate thinks that Bunter will ever be cured of his curiosity, he's an optimist!



CANDID COMMUNICATIONS!

Addressed by the Editor to Various
People in the Public Eye.

To GERALD LODER (Sixth Form).

Most Pompous Personage,—I hear you have started a sort of Anti-Herald League—a movement which has for its object the suppression of our little supplement. You say it is an appalling "rag," and you describe its contents as "unadulterated piffle" and "utter balderdash."

The fact is, my dear Loder, some of the articles in the "Greyfriars Herald" are a jolly sight too candid and outspoken for your liking. The Herald is no respecter of persons, and it oftens puts prefects in the pillory—when they deserve it. You don't like being criticised and shown up; and so you are going to do your best—or rather, your worst—to get the paper squashed. But you will never succeed, my lean, lanky lamp-post of a Loder! The Herald is too deeply rooted in the affections of British boys.

We shall spend no sleepless nights on account of your precious Anti-Herald League; and we cheerfully raise the sword of defiance against the biggest tyrant in the school!

Yours contemptuously,
HARRY WHARTON.

To HORACE COKER (Fifth Form).

Dear "Funnycuts,"—You have been lifting up your voice in lamentation, and asking why the Head doesn't appoint you captain of Greyfriars, as you are such a brilliant "skoller" and such a clever "atherlete."

Before the Head took such a step as you suggest, he would need to be clean off his rocker! The captain of Greyfriars wants brains in his noddle—not sawdust; and you will have to wait until the Millennium arrives before you find yourself in that exalted position. You can think yourself lucky that a fellow who can't spell a word with more than five letters in it has aspired so high as the Fifth Form. Strictly speaking, you ought to take your lessons with the Babes of the First!

Let me also add that the captain of Greyfriars should possess the qualification of being a good athlete. You, my dear Horace, are the biggest comedian who ever kicked a football the wrong way, or held a cricket-bat by its blade!

When you see this letter, perhaps you will stop wondering why the Head doesn't appoint you captain of Greyfriars!

Merrily yours,
HARRY WHARTON.

To MR. PAUL PONTIFEX PROUT
(Master of the Fifth Form).

Plump and Portly Pedagogue,—You have been airing your views on the subject of shooting. You declare that rifle and revolver shooting should be taught in all schools, and that every youngster ought to be a skilled shot.

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With all respect, sir, I should like to suggest that there is quite enough danger lurking about, from your Winchester repeater, without allowing fags to run amok with rifles and revolvers. As you are aware, a certain amount of shooting instruction is given in the Greyfriars Cadet Corps. This ought to be quite sufficient. Shooting is not nearly such a fascinating pastime as footer, and I, for one, am jolly glad we don't have to spend half our lives on the rifle range!

Just because you happen to be madly in love with shooting, sir, that's no reason why it should be made a general thing. Mr. Lascelles is fond of his pipe; but he doesn't insist that all the Greyfriars fellows should become pipe-smokers! The Head is fond of an hour's nap after dinner; but he doesn't turn round and say to all the Greyfriars chaps: "Go thou and do likewise!"

Yours, with due respect,
HARRY WHARTON.

To WILLIAM GOSLING (Keeper of the Gate).

Dear Old Fossil,—Allow us to congratulate you on the occasion of your ninety-ninth birthday! At least, we assume it is your ninety-ninth, for judging by your venerable and weather-

WRITING HOME BY NUMBERS! By DICK PENFOLD.

Dear Pater,—I am pleased to st-8
That I am getting on first-r-8;
In fact, I do not hesit-8
To say that I feel simply gr-8.

It gives me pleasure to rel-8
I've scored a dozen goals, to d-8;
And very soon 'twill be my f-8
To bag a dozen more—just w-8!

Please give my love to Sister K-8,
I hope these greetings aren't too l-8;
But really, I abomin-8
This letter-writing, sad to st-8.

I shortly shall enjoy a pl-8
Of peaches, with my study-m-8;
He's making tea; and if it's l-8,
He'll get a fives-bat on his p-8!

My funds are in a shocking st-8,
For fresh supplies I sit and w-8,
Expecting, at no distant d-8,
A "fiver" to eventu-8!

It's getting harder to cre-8,
Fresh phrases from the figure 8.
Please send me funds, and don't be l-8,
Or I shall sing a hymn of h-8!

beaten appearance, you've seen nearly a hundred summers and winters.

As a small token of the esteem in which you are held, my venerable patriarch, we have clubbed together to buy you a birthday cake. It has been specially made by Mrs. Mimbble, of tuckshop fame, and we hope you've enough fangs left to eat it with!

May you continue to keep hale and hearty for another hundred years, at least! That is the sincere wish of

Yours cheerily,
HARRY WHARTON.

To MASTER GEORGE TUBB (Third Form).

My Dear Infant,—We have just sent Gosling a cake, on the occasion of his ninety-ninth birthday; and we now confer the same favour upon you.

Knowing that you belong to the Army of the Great Unwashed, we are sending you a fragrant and delicious cake—of soap! Please note that it is to be taken externally—not internally. We hope you will use it regularly every morning, and not make it last about ten years!

Kindly let us know when you propose to start operations with the soap. It will be a rare and refreshing spectacle, to see Tubb tub!

Yours humorously,
HARRY WHARTON.

P.S.—We shall be pleased to send any of your grubby friends a similar cake, if they care to apply to the editorial office of the "Greyfriars Herald."

To GEORGE WINGATE (Captain of Greyfriars).

My dear George,—Now that we are fast coming to the end of the year, I suppose the obnoxious Loder will once again be dreaming of wresting the captaincy from you. This paper does not, as a rule, lend its pages for the purpose of propaganda, but I want to assure you that, should the aforesaid beast challenge you at the poll, we'll jolly soon publish sufficient data to freeze away anybody who thought of voting for him!

A certain fat friend of ours has said that we ought to charge you for this support. We charged him instead—into the passage!

We support you because you are a good fellow, and one of the best captains Greyfriars has ever had. And we know you'll never do anything to cause us to change our opinion!

Yours loyally,
HARRY WHARTON.

To MRS. MIMBLE (The Tuckshop).

Dear Ma'am,—It has come to our "herring" that you have seriously thought of setting off a portion of your shop for the sale of hot fried fish and chips. Whilst we should not think of doing anything which would stop you from earning your living, we do not think Greyfriars is the "place" for that.

We look forward to a "skate" now and then, and some of us are "dabs." But other schools might "chip" us, and then you wouldn't be the only one to "batter." So, if you don't mind, let the village have the sole right to that trade!

But perhaps the news is all "cod"?

Yours respectfully,
HARRY WHARTON.
[Supplement iv.]

THE PHANTOM OF THE HIGHLANDS!

(Continued from page 12.)



them that he was still Angel of the Fourth, the supercilious cad of Greyfriars.

"Gad! what a story!" drawled Angel at last. "So there's no servants in the place?"

"Nobody but ourselves," said Wharton.

"Oh, gad! This looks like a jolly Christmas, and no mistake!"

"We've got to fix something up before the pater arrives," said Mick.

Angel shook his head.

"The pater isn't arrivin'" he answered. "He's kept in London by election business. He's sorry, an' all that—he sent no end of excuses—but he simply can't get away from London, after all, for days at a time. There won't be a gathering here for Christmas after all."

"Oh!" said Mick, blankly.

Angel smiled again. He was the bearer of rather disconcerting news; but it did not seem to distress him at all.

"I say, you fellows, I'm not going to stay, anyhow," said Bunter. "Now there's a car here let's all get out."

"Best thing you can do," said Angel with a nod. "The fact is, I came up expectin' to take Maurice away with me. I suppose you're fed up with this, Maurice?"

Mick coloured. Angel of the Fourth deliberately ignored his comrades, and brows began to darken among the Greyfriars juniors.

Mick looked at them.

"If the fellows want to go, I'm ready," he said. "That is, I'm ready to let them go, but I don't want to go."

"You don't want to stay on here," urged Angel.

"I do. I want to get to the bottom of this ghost business," said Mick. "I want to know what it means before I leave Lochmuir."

"What rot!"

"But I won't keep you, Aubrey, if you don't want to stay," said Mick, with an effort.

Angel shrugged his shoulders.

"It's understood that we're spending Christmas together," he said. "There's nothin' goin' on at home—the pater would be anythin' but pleased if we turned up there. He's up to the neck in political business. That's what comes of bein' a member of the House of Chin-wag, and havin' election scares sprung on you suddenly by dashed politicians. He's got to get busy gassing and promising, if he's to keep his seat. But we can go to Kenney's place—Paul Kenney will be glad to have us. He's asked me."

Harry Wharton set his lips.

He realised that Aubrey Angel would be glad, if he could, to take his brother away, and leave the Greyfriars party stranded for Christmas, now that it was too late for other arrangements to be made. The morrow was Christmas Eve. Angel's old enmity had slept, but it was not dead. Sir Philip Angel's change of plans gave him his chance, and he was using it.

But Mick was not likely to fall into the trap. Ghosts or no ghosts at Lochmuir, festivities or no festivities, the Greyfriars party could not spend their

Christmas in railway travelling, to turn up unexpectedly at their homes. Mick had not the faintest idea of following his brother's lead, and "letting down" his guests. The thought did not even cross his honest mind.

"We can get away in the car," resumed Angel lightly. "I daresay your friends will be glad to go after the scare they've had." He grinned. "The pater won't come, anyway—he can't. Of course, he says you're to stay on here if you like. He thinks the house is staffed and comfortable. I daresay he thinks a set of schoolboys could enjoy a holiday in a place like this—"

"That's so, too," said Johnny Bull. "I want nothing better. There's plenty to do here."

Angel sneered.

"Well, I want somethin' a little more lively," he said. "The Christmas party bein' off, I want to be off too. As it turns out that the place is deserted, there's nothin' to stay for. Maurice, old chap"—Angel's voice was kind and affectionate in speaking to his brother—"you'll come back with me?"

Mick shook his head.

"We're here for Christmas," he said. "I won't keep the fellows if they want to clear; but I want to stay, and I want them to stay, if they will."

"Of course we will," said Harry. "As a matter of fact, it's a bit too late to think of anything else. We could scarcely get away from here before Christmas now."

"And we don't want to," said Bob Cherry, coming back from the kitchen. "We're all right here, and we're going to see that jolly old ghost home before we quit."

"Maurice—" urged Angel.

"I'm staying!"

Angel bit his lip. He did not want to go without his brother, but it was plain that he did not want to stay. He gave the Greyfriars fellows a rather evil look.

"But you needn't hang on, Aubrey," added Mick hastily. "You've got the car—"

"I'm stayin' if you do."

"I want you to, old chap," said Mick simply.

"Well, that's settled, then," said Aubrey Angel, more good-humouredly than might have been expected. "I'm certainly not goin' and leavin' you here, Maurice. Let's make the best of it."

And, having made up his lofty mind to that, Aubrey Angel threw off his disagreeable manner and condescended to make himself pleasant to the Christmas party. That change in his manner was a great relief to Mick—which was probably the reason for the change. Aubrey's affection for his young brother was the one quality that the Greyfriars fellows liked in him. Bitter as his feelings were towards Harry Wharton and Co., Angel did his best to refrain from distressing Mick by a display of them.

After supper Angel went up to his room—which Mick had prepared for him, lighting a huge log fire. Angel went up first, probably to smoke a cigarette or two before going to bed. The party sat round the fire in the hall, chatting, but

their chat was interrupted a couple of minutes later. There was a hurried step on the stairs, and Aubrey Angel came running down, his face white and startled and furious.

"Who's playin' tricks here?" he shouted.

"What's that?"

"Which of you?"

Angel's eyes ran over the party. They were all present, and it was evident that Angel had expected to find one of them missing.

"Then—then it wasn't one of you!" he ejaculated.

"One of us! What do you mean?" exclaimed Wharton.

"There was somebody in my room—somebody dressed up like a Highlander!"

"Wh-a-at?"

"I know there's a lot of old Highland rig in the old presses here," snapped Angel. "I thought one of you fellows had dressed up to startle me. It's somebody, anyhow. He dodged out of the other door of the room as I went in. Who was it?"

Silence.

"You must know!" exclaimed Angel angrily. "Who's in the house besides yourselves?"

"Only the chauffeur who brought you here, and he's in the kitchen," said Bob Cherry.

Angel knitted his brows.

"There's somebody else! I saw him, I tell you!"

"Ow! It's the—the g-g-ghost!" wailed Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I shan't stay here any longer! Ow!"

"Rot!" snapped Angel.

"It must be the same thing that we saw!" muttered Frank Nugent. "I say, this is getting rather thick!"

"It's a trick of some sort!" growled Angel.

But he seemed disinclined to go up the stairs again, and he did not go to bed before the others went. Billy Bunter loudly refused to sleep alone, and Mick camped on the couch in his room. But the night passed without further alarm.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Good-bye!

"I'M going!"

Billy Bunter made that announcement the next morning.

The chauffeur who had brought Aubrey Angel up from Dingwall was preparing his car for the return journey. He had stayed the night at Lochmuir. Aubrey Angel would gladly have gone back in the car, if Mick would have gone with him; but Mick was adamant on that point, and Angel had made up his mind to it. Billy Bunter's announcement that he was going did not excite the dismay in the Christmas party that the Owl of the Remove seemed to expect.

"I'm going!" he repeated firmly, blinking round through his big spectacles after breakfast. "I'm not standing any more of this!"

"Hurrah!" roared Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It's going to be a merry Christmas, after all!" said Bob heartily, and the juniors chuckled.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter was in earnest. The party feared that he wasn't, but he was. He had very little packing to do, having relied on the other fellows for necessary supplies during his Christmas in the Highlands. His bag was put in the car, and Bunter followed it in. Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round with smiling faces to see him off.

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"I say, you fellows—"
 "Good-bye, Bunter!"
 "Any message for your uncle, Wharton?"
 "My uncle?" ejaculated Wharton.
 "Yes. I shall give him a look-in."
 Harry Wharton laughed.
 "Wish him a merry Christmas for me!" he said. "He's gone to Cannes for Christmas, with my aunt."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh!" said Bunter. "I say, Franky, old chap, I'll look in on your people if you like."
 "I don't like," said Nugent.
 "What about your Auntie Bull, Johnny?"
 "Nothing about my Auntie Bull!" answered Johnny.
 "I say, Aubrey!" shouted Bunter.
 "Don't call me Aubrey, you fat boulder!" snapped Angel of the Fourth, without looking round.
 "Hem! I—I'll take a message to your father in London, if you like."
 "You'll be kicked out if you do!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "If you fellows think I'm fishing for invitations, you're jolly well mistaken!" said Bunter, with a glare round at the grinning Co. "As a matter of fact, I shall be very busy this Christmas. I shall keep an old promise, and look up my old pal D'Arcy of St. Jim's."
 "Poor chap!" said Nugent.
 "Yah!"

That classic monosyllable was Bunter's good-bye. He had borrowed a rug from Wharton, a coat from Mick, a muffler from Bob, and several pounds from several members of the party. Now he had done with them, and he turned up his fat little nose at them as the car rolled away with him.

Billy Bunter disappeared in the misty distance—the first of the Greyfriars party to be scared away by the ghost of the old Laird. It remained to be seen whether any more of the party would follow suit. It was not likely.

Harry Wharton & Co., after Bunter had gone, were busy. There was no longer any possibility that the servants would return, or that further guests would arrive at Lochmuir. The Greyfriars party had the place to themselves for Christmas, and in a way they liked the prospect. There were ample supplies of every kind in the house, and Harry Wharton & Co. were prepared to look after themselves—though Aubrey Angel made it clear that he did not intend to lend a hand. Work of any sort was not in Aubrey's line.

That day Bob Cherry made the Christmas pudding. He found all the necessary ingredients—and a good many that were not necessary—and, being rather doubtful as to the exact composition of a Christmas pudding, he put them all in. All the fellows were called upon in turn to stir, and finally the pudding was put on

to boil. Bob left it on to boil all night, banking up a huge fire under it. Whether it was overboiled or underboiled did not matter very much, as nobody was likely to eat it.

A ramble on the wild moor in the falling snow was quite an agreeable form of exercise to Harry Wharton & Co., but Aubrey Angel did not care to join in it. He stayed indoors and smoked cigarettes.

At supper the wild wailing of Sandy Bean's bagpipes was suddenly heard floating tremulously through the darkness of the night. Aubrey Angel started and stared as he heard it.

"What the thump's that?" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Only the giddy bagpipes," he said. "There's a jolly old piper, Sandy Bean, lives in a cottage by the loch."

"I've seen him!" grunted Angel. "He must be mad to be out on a night like this, playing the pipes."

"I think he is a little bit loose in the tiles," admitted Bob. "A queer old sort, anyhow!"

The juniors listened to the wailing of the pipes. Old Sandy, unseen somewhere out in the darkness, was piping the dirge of the MacDermid. The melancholy wailing came eerily through the wild winter night.

It died away at last.

"Cheerful!" grunted Aubrey Angel, and he sat staring sulkily at the crackling fire, taking no part in the merry buzz of talk that enlivened the old shadowy hall.

But several times he glanced at the cheery faces of the Greyfriars juniors, ruddy in the firelight, with a peculiar expression in his eyes. Strange thoughts were working in the mind of Angel of the Fourth.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Christmas Night!

"MERRY CHRISTMAS!"

Bob Cherry's powerful voice awoke every echo of the old house of Lochmuir.

It was Christmas Day!

A strange enough Christmas for the Greyfriars party—camping by themselves in the ancient haunted house, shut in by the wild moors and mists of the Highlands.

Yet from its very strangeness it somehow appealed to them. The mystery of the haunted Highland house had a strange attraction for their imaginations. And there was plenty to keep them occupied that day, in the absence of any assistance "below stairs." The Christmas dinner had to be prepared—and it was a dinner worthy of the occasion. Aubrey Angel dawdled and smoked while the other fellows were cheerfully busy. Mick, with his old-time experience among the gipsies, proved to be an excellent cook—even as good as Billy Bunter in that line. The turkey was done to a turn; the old panelled hall, decorated with holly and mistletoe, gleamed cheerily in the blaze of the great log fire. Quite a merry party sat down, at last, to the turkey; but merry faces became a little grave when Bob Cherry, with an impressive manner, carried in the Christmas pudding.

Aubrey Angel grinned as it was turned out, but the other fellows seemed to feel a sudden solemnity. Bob Cherry took up the knife to cut it.

He seemed a little puzzled as he stuck the knife into a rather glaucous-looking mass.

"You fellows think it boiled long enough?" he asked.

"Hem!"



The juniors rushed down the stairs and found Billy Bunter on the landing in the curve of the staircase. A candle, which the fat junior had evidently been carrying, lay on the dark oak, extinguished. Bunter was standing with wide-open eyes, yelling at the top of his voice. Wharton caught him by the shoulder. "Bunter—what—" "Help! Oh! The ghost!" yelled the Owl. (See Chapter 7.)

"It smells nice," said Bob.
"Hum!"
"It—it tastes all right, too."
"Mmmmmmm."
"Here you are, old fellows."

Bob Cherry began to serve. This task presented some difficulties. Nugent suggested using a spoon for it—a suggestion that Bob did not seem to hear.

Certainly there seemed something wrong with that pudding. Bob had been rather afraid that it might be too hard. But it had turned out quite soft—very soft indeed—in fact, almost flowing. Somehow or other portions of the pudding were transferred to the plates. Bob, with rather a heightened colour, began on his portion. The juniors took up their forks—and hesitated.

"Go it!" said Bob.

The juniors went it—slowly. A strange expression came over Mick's face as he tasted it.

"D-d-did you put any vinegar in this pudding?" he asked.

"I—I think not."

"Ow!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Tastes all right to me," said Bob, with a touch of defiance.

"After that turkey, I—I think I'll give the pudding a miss," murmured Wharton. "Enough's as good as a feast."

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

Bob Cherry was the only fellow who was eating the pudding. He was eating slowly—very slowly. He stopped at last.

"It isn't boiled enough," he said.

"Something's wrong with it, certainly," agreed Nugent.

"I—I'll shove it back in the cloth and put it on again to-morrow," said Bob. "We mustn't lose our Christmas pudding."

"Hem!"

Five juniors registered a mental vow that on the morrow that pudding would be missing.

But in spite of the pudding the dinner was a great success.

Every face was bright and cheery—after the pudding had disappeared.

The snow fell heavily that day; the early winter darkness closed in. But in the old hall of Lochmuir the lights gleamed brightly, the log fire roared and crackled. Even Aubrey Angel unbent and became cheery and good-humoured.

"A merry Christmas, after all," said Bob.

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh declared that the merryfulness was terrific.

It was at rather a late hour that the juniors sought their beds, and they were soon fast asleep. The old house was in darkness save for the faint red glow of the dying fire in the hall. Round the old walls and crumbling moss-grown battlements the winter wind howled and roared. It was long past midnight when Harry Wharton awoke suddenly.

What had awakened him he did not know; but he awoke with a strange shiver, and a feeling that he was not alone in his room. There was no glimmer of light—save a pale reflection from the snow at the window.

Wharton sat up in bed.

From the darkness near him came a faint sound of movement—a sound as of almost noiseless gliding feet. He sat in bed, staring before him intently.

His heart was beating almost to suffocation.

Someone—something—was in his room—within a few feet of him, unseen in the darkness. The phantom—the thing—that haunted the House of Lochmuir was at his side, in the darkness.



Wharton made out dimly, faintly, eerily, a figure in kilt and plaid—a shadow among shadows. For some moments the junior sat frozen. Then, with a cry, he leaped from the bed. "Help!" He plunged wildly, almost in a frenzy, at the shadowy figure. "Help!" (See Chapter 12.)

As he strove to pierce the gloom, he made out, dimly, faintly, eerily, a figure in kilt and plaid—a shadow among shadows. Two gleaming, burning eyes looked at him, like balls of fire in the darkness.

For some moments Wharton sat frozen.

Then, with a cry, he leaped from the bed.

"Help!"

He plunged wildly, almost in a frenzy, at the shadowy figure. His hands came into contact with something—he knew that it was the heavy folds of a Highland plaid. He clutched it, and gripped it, and shouted wildly to his comrades.

A hand was laid upon him—a hand that seemed of ice. It sent a shiver through the junior.

"Help!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry's answering shout rang through the darkness. "I'm coming!—What—"

"Help!"

The icy hand pressed Wharton back. He lost his grip on the plaid. He staggered, and then ran forward with arms extended, feeling for his enemy in the darkness. But his hands encountered only emptiness.

A light glimmered in at the door. Bob Cherry stood there, with a startled face, a candle in his hand.

"Harry—what—"

Wharton stared wildly about the room. Save for himself, and the junior at the door, it was empty. His hands

had touched something in the darkness—he knew an icy hand had gripped him—but there was nothing to be seen. Was it a phantom of the night that had touched him—the hand of the dead? Wharton felt that his brain was reeling.

"It—it's gone!" he panted. His voice was husky and broken. "I—I touched it—it's gone—"

"What—what was it?"

But Wharton could not reply to that. What was it that had lurked in the darkness, and touched him with the hand of death?

There was no more sleep at Lochmuir that wild night. Till the winter sun glimmered in at the windows, the Greyfriars juniors watched, and listened to the wailing of the wind, echoing eerily in the nooks and crannies of the ancient house. The night of Christmas wore away, and at last came dawn.

THE END.

(What is the solution of the mystery of Lochmuir who is the ghostly visitant? Both these questions are answered by Frank Richards in our grand New Year story, entitled "The Wraith of Lochmuir!" Make certain of obtaining your copy of the MAGNET by ordering it now, chums!)

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Christmas Crackers!

By
THE JOKER.

A CLOSE SHAVE!

The village cricket team was doing pretty well, and their crack bat—the local architect—had yet to make the big innings which was naturally expected from him. But in the first over a risky short run was met with a confident appeal for “run out.” The village barber was umpire, and he answered the appeal with an emphatic “Not out!” “Ah,” said the batsman, with a sigh of relief, to the umpire, “that was a close shave!” “It was that!” agreed the umpire, “and”—in an audible whisper—“if ye wasn’t in the habit of having a shampoo afterwards I should have said, ‘Next gentleman, please!’”

SO CLEVER!



Proud Mother: “Yes, Willie is a wonderfully clever boy; we are taking him to the Zoo to-morrow!”

Bored Visitor: “Really? We are sending our boy to college!”

BEAT-EN!

Young Murphy, eager to join the police-force, came to London to pass the necessary medical examination. This he easily did, and the next day he was interviewed by a high official. “Well, my man,” said the latter, “you look a promising sort of fellow; where were you educated?” “Oh,” said the recruit, “shure I was educated in Dublin.” “Ah, and you have a good knowledge, I hope?” “I have, sor!” “I wonder can you tell me, for example, how many miles it is from London to Manchester?” At this the recruit became nervously agitated, and at length he blurted out: “Look here, bejabbers, if you’re going to put me on that beat, I’m done wi’ the force!”

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PARLEY-VOUS FRANCAIS?

A certain town has a coalman who knows some French, and occasionally little phrases keep slipping into his casual speech. Recently he was asked by a lady customer the price of his coal. “Well, madam,” he replied, “if you take it a la carte, it’s forty-nine shillings the ton; but if you take it cul-de-sac, it’s a shilling extra for the bag!”

HIS OWN DEDUCTION!

An old American negro was asked by the proprietor of a store how he happened to need credit when he had such a good crop of cotton. “De ducks got ’bout all dat cotton, sah,” was the mournful reply. “What do you mean, the ducks got it?” “Well, you see,” explained the old man, “I sent dat cotton up to Memphis, an’ dey deducks de freight; an’ dey deducks de storage charges, an’ dey deducks de commission, an’ dey deducks de taxes; yes, sah, de ducks got ’bout all dat cotton, an’ dat’s why I’m here.”

CURIOUS COINCIDENCE.

The conductor of a train in the Wild West observed a tramp stowed away on the front end of the baggage truck. He ordered the brakeman to throw him off at the next station. The brakeman went, and he was about to start the throwing-off process when the tramp drew a revolver and advised him to retreat. The advice seemed good, and the brakeman took it. Upon his return the conductor asked him if he had got rid of the tramp. “No,” returned the brakeman, “I didn’t have the heart to turn him off. You see, he turned out to be an old schoolmate of mine.” “That don’t cut no ice with me!” said the conductor angrily. “Just wait until I get him. You’ll see something flying in the air then!” The conductor went forward, but soon returned, looking pale. “Well, and did you throw him off?” asked the brakeman. “No,” answered the conductor, “he—er—turned out to be an old schoolmate of mine, too!”

CONUNDRUMS.

Q. Why are clouds like coachmen?
A. Because they hold the rains (reins).

Q. When does a ship tell a falsehood?
A. When it lies at a wharf.

Q. Why may a beggar wear a short coat?
A. Because it will be long enough before he gets another.

Q. Why is the opening of a letter like a very queer method of entering a room?
A. Because it’s breaking through the sealing (ceiling).

THE VIRTUE OF DEAFNESS!



Old Gent: “well, my dears, what are you all crying for?”

The Choir: “We ain’t crying, guv’nor; we’re singing ‘All the ‘appy day!’”

Q. Why does a sailor know there is a man in the moon?
A. Because he’s been to sea (see).

Q. When can donkey be spelt with one letter?
A. When it’s “U.”

Q. Why is a sculptor’s death more terrible?
A. Because he makes faces and busts.

Q. What part of a fish weighs most?
A. The scales.

Q. Why is a policeman like a rainbow?
A. Because he rarely appears until the storm is over.

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The Clue of the Blotting Pad!

THE young footballer seemed incapable of speech or action for a few moments. He appeared stunned, bewildered. Then the faint sound of an approaching motor seemed to awake Blakeney from the state of coma he had fallen into. He banged his manacled wrists together in a futile effort to rid himself of the steel bracelets, and then he realised how hopeless such a proceeding was.

"Inspector," he said hoarsely, "you're making the biggest mistake of your career. I'm no more guilty of the murder of Mornington Hardacre than you are. I—"

He broke off as the sergeant, who had been fumbling with the sandbag, slit open one end of the weapon and withdrew a small, hard substance that proved to be a piece of iron.

"Weighted!" he grunted triumphantly. "I thought it was heavy!"

"That fact makes the case all the more complete," said the inspector. "Evidently a deliberate and premeditated attack. I was rather puzzled to account for the wound in the victim's head if a sandbag had been used. I can understand now. Come, Mr. Blakeney, the taxi is outside."

Like a man in a dream Jim Blakeney followed the inspector, whilst the sergeant walked behind. From the police-cab a professional-looking gentleman, carrying a bag, alighted, in company with a uniformed constable.

"Brown," rapped the inspector, "when Dr. White has made his examination you are to lock up the library and remain on duty. See that no one enters!"

"Very good, sir," said the constable.

The police doctor was ushered into the library by the trembling Jenkins to make his examination. And by the time the medico had completed his investigations and the constable had locked and sealed the room in which the tragedy had taken place, Jim Blakeney was agitatedly pacing up and down his narrow cell in the station at Middleham.

Before another hour had elapsed the whole of the town was startled to hear that the managing-director of the Rangers had been foully murdered, and that his young protege, Jim Blakeney, was under arrest as his assassin!

"Yes, yes, this is Ferrers Locke!"

The great detective of Baker Street rapped out the words somewhat impatiently in reply to the anxious inquiry of the speaker at the other end of the wire. The famous sleuth had been working in his laboratory on some deep, intriguing analysis when he had been summoned to the telephone.

"Jim Blakeney! Oh! sorry, my lad—thought you were some loquacious busy-

HOW THE STORY OPENS.

JIM BLAKENEY, the eighteen-year-old centre-forward of the Middleham Rangers, who is a nephew of

TIGER SLEEK, a notorious criminal, who has escaped the clutches of the police, and who now has designs upon a secret wireless ray invented by

MORNINGTON HARDACRE, the managing-director of the Middleham Rangers.

RONALD SWIVELLER, the inside-left in the Rangers eleven, and nephew of Mornington Hardacre. Jealous of Blakeney's rapid strides into favour, Swiveller has sworn to get the centre-forward turned out of Middleham. The Tiger gets to know of Swiveller's animosity towards Jim Blakeney, and uses it as a leverage to attain his own ends.

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective, and his clever young assistant,

JACK DRAKE, are by a strange series of circumstances, thrown into contact with Jim Blakeney, who confides in the famous sleuth. It transpires that Tiger Sleek seeks to compel Jim Blakeney to steal the specifications of Mornington Hardacre's invention, and when he finds the lad obstinate, resorts to brutal methods of persuasion. Ferrers Locke offers to take a hand in the case. Some time later Jim Blakeney receives a letter purporting to have come from Mornington Hardacre, inviting him to the Myrtles to dinner. The writer requests Jim to present himself at the french windows of the library at a quarter past seven sharp. Jim arrives to time, and finds to his horror that Mornington Hardacre has been murdered. He is surprised in the act of standing over the dead man, fingering a sandbag which he has picked up from the floor, by Jenkins, the butler, who at once denounces him as the assassin. The police arrive on the scene, and Jim is requested to present the letter which he states can explain his presence in the library. But the note-paper, which originally was covered in writing, is now an absolute blank! The inspector of police formally charges Blakeney as the murderer of Mornington Hardacre, and dexterously slips the handcuffs over his wrists.

(Read on from here.)

body. What?" he added, in a startled tone. "Murder—Mornington Hardacre—Great heavens! Coming down to Middleham in fifteen minutes—"

Without waiting for further particulars, the world-famed sleuth jammed the receiver on the hooks and swung round on his young assistant.

"Get the car, Jack," he said briskly. "We've got to go down to Middleham."

"Very good, sir."

Without eliciting any surprise at these hurried and unexpected commands, Jack Drake vacated the sitting-room en route for the garage. In less than five minutes the shrill sounding of a motor-horn below indicated that he had returned with the car.

Snatching up a greatcoat—for the night was bitterly cold—Ferrers Locke descended the stairs and entered the high-powered Hawk racer which was purring its steady note at the kerb.

"You drive, my lad!" said Locke briefly, as he climbed into the car. "I want to think. See if you can get Middleham Police Station under the quarter."

"Right-ho! guv'nor," said Jack Drake enthusiastically. "I'll do it!"

The prospect of a speedy run through the crisp night air appealed to the lad, and inside eight minutes the great Hawk car was merging clear of the twinkling lights of the metropolis. Once clear of the main-road traffic, Jack Drake opened the throttle, and the speedometer recorded an average speed of forty miles an hour for the next seven minutes.

The clocks of Middleham were chiming the hour of ten when the Hawk pulled in at the police-station. Quite a crowd of eager, curious, amazed, and horrified townspeople had gathered in the vicinity, and the police had all their work cut out to hold the cordon they had formed. The arrest of Jim Blakeney, the popular centre-forward of the Rangers, on the charge of murdering Mornington Hardacre had brought the inhabitants of Middleham to the station like so many bees round a honey-pot.

A constable came forward as the Hawk drew to a standstill, and smartly saluted. He recognised in the tall figure muffled in the greatcoat the celebrated detective of Baker Street.

"This way, Mr. Locke," he said
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respectfully. "The Chief Commissioner is expecting you."

One of the foremost faces in the crowd paled visibly at mention of the world-famous detective's name. That same face peered forward eagerly as the sleuth stepped from the car and followed in the wake of the constable. Then—

"My heavens! Then he's not dead!"

The words escaped the owner of the pale face like the hissing of a snake. For one moment the man stared after the upright figure of Ferrers Locke, and then jostled his way out of the crowd as if a thousand devils were at his heels.

Unconscious of the effect his appearance had caused, Ferrers Locke walked on, and eventually found himself in the presence of the Chief Commissioner of Middleham—a tall, military-looking individual, whose iron-grey hair gave an added strength and dignity to his finely chiselled features.

"Ah! Mr. Locke, I'm glad you've arrived!"

The private detective shook hands with the police official, and seated himself in the chair thrust forward by an attentive constable.

"And now," smiled Locke grimly, "what's the trouble, major?"

Major Carstairs shook his head wearily, and pursed his lips with an intake of breath that was significant of the trouble that occupied his mind.

"Middleham has broken its record, Mr. Locke," he said regretfully. "For the first time since I was appointed Chief Commissioner of the district my charge-sheet shows the ugly stain of murder. Not ordinary murder, either, but a cruel and premeditated attack. And the last person in Middleham I personally would accuse of committing such a crime is brought before me, more or less convicted before he steps into the dock. I refer to Jim Blakeney. You know him, I am fully aware, for I gave him permission to 'phone you twenty minutes ago. The whole thing seems incredible. And yet—the evidence is damning!"

Ferrers Locke listened patiently whilst the kindly official acquainted him with the known details of the crime, and now and again jotted down his impressions in his note-book.

"A very interesting case indeed, my dear major," he said, when the other had concluded.

"Interesting!" echoed Major Carstairs reproachfully. "I must be dull-witted, for I fail to find anything interesting in the regrettable business which has taken the respectable town of Middleham by storm to-night. Interesting? Atrocious and confoundedly unpleasant, I grant you. But interesting—never!"

"Then you think the case is complete?" suggested Ferrers Locke. "Jim Blakeney is a—"

"No doubt about it," returned the Commissioner wearily. "His whole story is too weak for words. But there, you will learn for yourself. Mr. Blakeney has asked for you to see him, and wishes you to undertake his case."

"That is quite in order, major," smiled Locke. "I am a member of the Bar, although I seldom go to the length of representing a client in court. Still, my credentials are open to inspection."

"My dear Locke," said the Commissioner, "you forget that I have known you, followed your meteoric rise to fame—yes, and envied you your successes—for this last twenty years. Say no more! Come, you would wish to interview the prisoner!"

Without another word Ferrers Locke followed the dignified figure of the Commissioner and was escorted to the cell

which had been set apart for the suspected murderer of Mornington Hardacre.

A warder accompanied the sleuth and the Commissioner, and it was the former's jingling keys that aroused Jim Blakeney, who had fallen into a semi-stupor, and brought him to his feet. As the grille in the cell door slid back and the young footballer came face to face with Ferrers Locke, a startling transformation in the face of the former took place.

"Thank heaven, you've come, sir!" gasped Jim. "This is awful—overwhelming!"

"Cheer up, my lad," smiled the great sleuth. "I'll have you out of this in less than twenty-four hours or my name's not Ferrers Locke."

"Big words, my dear friend," admonished the Commissioner. "But I wish you luck, all the same," he added in an undertone. "Blakeney looks no more like an accomplished murderer than—"

"I do, eh?" chuckled Locke. "And you're right, major. After I've had a few words with my young friend here I would like to visit the scene of the tragedy."

"That you can readily do," answered the Commissioner. "I will issue instructions that you are to be allowed to make what investigations you might think fit."

"Very many thanks," replied the private detective.

The Commissioner walked back to his own quarters, leaving the warder within sight and earshot of the prisoner and Ferrers Locke.

"And now, my lad," whispered the sleuth, hurriedly, "let me have the facts of the matter as you know them. Time is short in a case like this—and I must have something to work on. Don't start telling me that you are innocent—that would be a waste of time. If I thought otherwise I should not be here to help you."

In faltering tones Jim Blakeney acquainted Ferrers Locke with the astonishing series of events which had culminated in his arrest on a charge of which he was entirely innocent.

"Very deep indeed," commented the sleuth when the young man had finished his narrative. "I must see that mysterious piece of blank paper which once bore the message purporting to have come from Mornington Hardacre without delay. It might afford a clue."

"Then you think—" began Jim, hopefully.

"Nothing!" interrupted the detective, rather abruptly. "To indulge in any theory at this early stage would be guesswork—a fatal habit to the detective faculty. You must have patience, my lad. Remember, Ferrers Locke has his reputation at stake. I have sworn to see you clear of this ugly charge within twenty-four hours. And Ferrers Locke always keeps his word. Keep a stiff upper lip, Jim, and leave things to me."

With a word of farewell to the prisoner, who already felt considerably easier in his mind and optimistic to a degree, Ferrers Locke was ushered into the charge-room. Of the inspector there he requested the blank sheet of notepaper which had been produced by the

prisoner as the letter containing Mornington Hardacre's invitation to the Myrtles, and with the single sheet of notepaper safely stowed in his breast pocket, the sleuth took his leave of the Commissioner and entered the Hawk.

"The Myrtles, Jack," muttered Locke as he settled himself in his seat. "I pointed the place out to you the last time we were down this way, remember!"

Jack Drake nodded.

With a dexterous movement of the wheel, the nose of the high-powered car was swung round, and its gleaming headlights swiftly picked their way to the late Mornington Hardacre's fine old mansion. In reply to Locke's summons upon the bell, the aged figure of Jenkins, the butler, appeared.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a quavering voice.

"My name is Locke," replied the detective. "Constable Brown is expecting me!"

"This way, Mr. Locke," came a gruff voice from the region of the hallway. "Put a light on, Jenkins!"

The electric light was switched on, and Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake found themselves confronting a typical member of the Force. He saluted smartly as the celebrated private detective presented the pass authorising him to view the scene of the tragedy, duly signed by Major Carstairs, the Commissioner of Police.

"Quite in order, sir," grunted Constable Brown. "The Chief telephoned instructions before you arrived."

"Good!" muttered Locke. "Then I would like to look round without delay, officer!"

The constable pushed open the door of the library and strode in. On the threshold Locke paused to glance round the apartment, noting with a sweeping gaze the inert heap of lifeless humanity on the floor, the smouldering remains of a fire in the grate, the position of the armchair before the fire, and lastly the open french windows.

Then, with impassive face, he knelt beside the remains of the man whom he had met a short time since as Mornington Hardacre. He carefully examined the gaping wound in the forehead, and noted the rumpled state of the rug upon which the deceased man was lying. For a long time he scrutinised the rug through the powerful medium of a pocket Rontgen lens, without which he never set forth on a case. Then, with a peculiar grunt that might have meant anything, Ferrers Locke walked over to the open french window and stood gazing down at the polished flooring of the library. This in turn was treated to a penetrating survey.

Next the great detective walked over to the open bureau and stood regarding it in silent contemplation for fully five minutes. Suddenly his eyebrows elevated a trifle, and a slight hissing sound escaped his lips. With a careless glance over his shoulder, which took in the fact that the constable's attention was engaged elsewhere, Ferrers Locke stooped over the bureau and tore the uppermost sheet of blotting paper from the pad. Hastily concealing the portion of blotting paper in his pocket, the sleuth turned to the police officer.

"I would like to glance over the dead man's effects," he said casually.

"Certainly, sir!"

The contents of the dead man's pockets were turned out on the table and examined. Locke showed little interest in the majority of the articles brought to view. The cheque book of

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

the deceased man, however, seemed to hold some peculiar attraction for him. He turned over the filled-in counterfoils until he came to one peculiar entry that caused him to start involuntarily. On the accompanying counterfoil to the last cheque Mornington Hardacre had signed was the following inscription:

"£150
S. Extrav."

Ferrers Locke mentally made a note of that peculiar entry and handed back the cheque book to the constable.

"Thanks very much, officer," he said, gratefully. "Do you see anything amongst these articles that will afford a clue?"

"No, sir," said the stolid official. "I don't think any clues will be needed. We've got our man!"

"Hum!" grunted Ferrers Locke, crossing over to the french windows again, this time examining the hasp. "Appears to have been neatly forced with a knife, I should say. I think that will complete my investigation of the room, officer."

"Have you discovered anything, sir?"

"No more I expect than you have discovered yourself," replied Locke, flatteringly. "But I would like to interview the butler before I go. There are one or two points that I should like to clear up."

"Very good, sir," said the constable. "Jenkins!"

The figure of the aged butler entered the library in response to the call.

"Now, my man," said Ferrers Locke, "I would like to ask you a few simple questions."

"Ye-yes, sir," replied Jenkins nervously.

"In the first place, I understand that when you discovered the tragedy which had taken place in this room to-night the clock in the hall had just chimed the quarter—quarter-past seven?"

"Yes, sir! About half a minute later I entered the room, and—"

"Exactly," broke in the sleuth, "When I glanced at the clock in the hall just a few moments ago I realised that it was five minutes slow—"

"It's always five minutes slow, sir," said Jenkins hurriedly. "I've been intending to have it repaired for this last three months, only it got put off—"

"Quite so," smiled Locke easily. "Now, Jenkins, you see the blotting-pad on the bureau? When was that placed there?"

"Why, sir," said the astonished servant, "I put it there only this evening. The master had written some letters, and as he gave me them to post he requested me to replenish the pad."

"Ah! Can you, Jenkins, give me a rough idea of the time you performed that task?"

"Certainly, sir! When I came into this room at a quarter-past six to see if the master wanted anything, I brought the new blotting-paper with me and replenished the pad."

"Good! I understand that it was the custom of your late master to sleep for an hour before dinner. At what time did he usually take his nap?"

"At a quarter-past six, sir!"

"Then from the time you replenished the blotter until the time you expected your master to awake no visitor to the house was given admittance."

"No, sir. The last person I admitted and showed out was Mr. Ronald—my poor master's nephew."

"Indeed! I presume you mean Mr. Ronald Swiveller? Good! At what time did Mr. Swiveller depart?"

"Just before six o'clock, sir, if I remember rightly," answered Jenkins, wondering for what purpose he was being subjected to this severe cross-questioning.

"Thank you, Jenkins!" smiled the detective. "That will be all!"

With obvious haste the butler withdrew from the library, leaving behind him a dumbfounded and semi-contemptuous police official in the person of Constable Brown.



With a careless glance over his shoulder, which took in the fact that the constable's attention was engaged elsewhere, Ferrers Locke stooped over the bureau and tore the uppermost sheet of blotting paper from the pad. (See page 22.)

"What's the idea, sir?" he asked Ferrers Locke. "Blessed if I could see where your questions were leading."

"I never leave anything to chance, officer," replied the private detective smoothly. "I don't know that I have discovered anything that you yourself have not discovered, but—"

He broke off, and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Come, Jack," he continued in a different tone of voice. "We must be making a move. There's a lot to be done, and I have only twenty-four hours to work in."

With a friendly smile in the direction of the constable on duty, Ferrers Locke took his leave, and five minutes later was being whirled back to London at the maximum speed of which the Hawk was capable.

Conclusive Evidence!

"COME here, my lad, and have a look at this!"

Ferrers Locke looked up from a miscellaneous collection of glass tubes and retorts in his laboratory, and beckoned to his assistant to approach.

"Oh, great Scott!"

The exclamation escaped Jack Drake's lips in semi-wonder as his eyes rested on a single sheet of notepaper which bore the following inscription:

"My dear Jim,—It has long since been my desire that you should meet my niece, and a foolish old man's whim can be gratified to-day. Daphne is staying with me over the holidays, and arrives this evening. I wonder if you'd give us the honour of your company at dinner to-night? I rather think you will humour me in this, so I am bold enough to give you the following instructions. I have planned a little surprise for both Daphne and yourself. Will you therefore present yourself outside the french windows of the library—which you will find open—at seven fifteen sharp. Don't come in through the hall, you understand? Will explain the idea when I see you. But be prepared for something in the nature of a surprise."

"You will come!"

"Yours sincerely,

"(Signed) MORNINGTON HARDACRE."

"Why, sir," declared Drake, his eyes shining with admiration. "Jim Blakeney's as good as a free man!"

"Almost," muttered Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "I must confess that I hardly expected to reproduce the original writing on this sheet of paper or to learn the fact that Tiger Sleek—unless I'm greatly mistaken—penned these astonishing words."

"Tiger Sleek!" echoed Drake in astonishment. "But how—why—"

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"Easy does it, sonny," smiled the sleuth. "Let's start at the beginning. For this last three hours I have treated this piece of paper to a formula of my own invention, and after several ineffectual attempts have resurrected, as it were, the original words of the mysterious letter Jim Blakeney received. For your edification, my lad, this letter was written originally in a cobalt chloride fluid mixed with some other compound which I have yet to discover."

"The effect of cobalt chloride on paper is to produce a pinky colouring, which remains visible to the eye so long as it retains a certain moisture. Held to the fire or the ordinary heat of a room the moisture becomes absorbed, and the writing disappears. So far so good. As I have said, this particular fluid has been subjected to some other acid to preserve it longer than just mere cobalt chloride would do. Again, it has been mixed with a darker colour of some kind which enables it to pass muster as ordinary black ink."

"That the whole thing had been timed to a nicety by its perpetrator is amply evidenced by the fact that Jim Blakeney looked at this letter before he left his digs en route for Hardacre's house, and read it word for word."

"Then the Tiger—you say he wrote it," chimed in Jack Drake—"timed his inky preparation to stand the test of an ordinary inspection until seven o'clock. That would be the latest Jim Blakeney could possibly leave his own digs, assuming that he intended to be punctual. For he was expected by Mornington Hardacre, according to the terms of the letter, at a quarter-past seven sharp!"

"Exactly, my lad!" said Locke, with approval. "Don't you think it was very ingenious of the Tiger?"

"I certainly do, guv'nor," replied Jack Drake emphatically. "But how do you know, sir, that he wrote the letter?"

The great detective, for answer, held up the sheet of notepaper with a pair of tweezers.

"Look at this paper carefully, my lad," he said. "I have dusted certain portions of it with a powder. What do you see?"

"Why, several finger prints," ejaculated his assistant.

"Quite so. If you have studied my finger-prints, Jack, you will observe that this paper holds one of them. The remainder can be put down as follows: Jim Blakeney, who, naturally enough, handled the letter when he read it; the inspector to whom Jim gave it in the library before he was arrested; and, lastly, Tiger Sleek's. Don't stare at me like that. I have achieved nothing wonderful. You remember some time ago Tiger Sleek pinched my gold hunter?"

TIGER SLEEK.



"My name's Sleek—some call me the Tiger. You should take a few tips from Ferrers Locke, my man—"

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You remember also that he returned it to me by post? Good! Can't you see now?"

"Think I do, guv'nor," replied Jack Drake brightly. "The morning you received your gold watch you took it into the laboratory, I remember. I suppose you examined it under the microscope, found one or two finger-marks, and photographed them."

"Exactly!" smiled Locke. "Also I took a photograph of the Tiger's finger-prints on the balcony in front of the spare room when he visited Jim Blakeney the night we fished the lad from the river."

"Great Scott, guv'nor!" exclaimed Jack Drake. "Then there's no doubt about it! The Tiger murdered Mornington Hardacre—"

"Not so fast, my lad. I haven't proved that. What I have proved, however, irrespective of the evidence of the letter luring Jim Blakeney to the Myrtles, is that someone else entered the room of the library and—Hullo! There's the bell! Expect it's Major Carstairs, from Middleham. I phoned him up half an hour ago, and informed him that I could prove Jim Blakeney's innocence. He nearly exploded when I told him that I had discovered something, and informed me that he was coming along here without delay. Show him up, Jack!"

Two minutes later the tired figure of the Chief Commissioner of Police in Middleham entered the cosily appointed sitting-room of Ferrers Locke. The sleuth had doffed his laboratory coat, and save for a few ominous stains on his lean fingers, showed little trace of the business which had kept him employed in his laboratory for over three hours.

"Ah, Locke!" greeted Major Carstairs, panting a little after his exertions. "No man but Ferrers Locke could drag me from my bed at three o'clock in the morning! Tell me, my dear chap, what have you discovered?"

For answer the celebrated detective handed his old friend the sheet of notepaper, and chuckled grimly as he noted the look of astonishment that crept into the grey eyes of the old soldier as he perused the peculiar missive.

"Dang me!" muttered the major. "Then Blakeney was telling the truth after all!"

"Yes, poor fellow!" returned Locke gravely. "Jim Blakeney has been the victim of an ingenious plot which for sheer cunning deserved to succeed. This letter is a clever forgery."

"It is certainly identical with the words the prisoner uttered in the presence of my inspector," admitted the commissioner. "But I am afraid it is not sufficient to acquit him."

"I beg to differ," retorted the detective quietly. "But I have obtained stronger evidence."

"The deuce you have?" ejaculated the major, sitting bolt upright in his chair.

"I can prove, for instance," continued Locke, "that someone else visited the library at the Myrtles after a quarter-past six—the hour at which it was Hardacre's eccentric custom to take a nap—and if the butler is speaking the truth, that same visitor was not admitted by the front door."

"What?" Major Carstairs rose to his feet excitedly.

"Whilst I was making my investigation of the library, my dear fellow," said the sleuth impressively, "my attention was drawn to the new blotting-pad on the open flap of the bureau. On the uppermost sheet of the blotter was this inscription in alphabetical characters—

INSPECTOR MOTLEY.



"You scoundrel, Sleek! You—you—" Words failed the inspector.

'One Hundred and Fifty Pounds,' followed a short distance underneath by '£150 Os. 0d.' in figures, and the rough imprint of a signature which undoubtedly was Mornington Hardacre's. What would you deduce from that, major?"

"That a cheque had been written out and blotted, of course," returned the Chief Commissioner wonderingly. "But what—"

"I'm coming to it, major," admonished the private detective, with a smile. "I examined the cheque-book of the deceased man, and found that the counterfoil corresponding with the last used cheque was for the amount of one hundred and fifty pounds."

"I'm blessed if I can see your line of argument," grunted Major Carstairs. "What's the cheque got to do with it, anyway?"

"A great deal, major," replied Locke, "for it was written or made out after a quarter-past six—after the butler had posted the evening's letters. You follow?"

"I'm beginning to see daylight," said the Chief Commissioner slowly. "I take it that you know what time the blotting-pad was placed on the bureau, or else it would be quite feasible to suppose that the cheque had been written hours ago."

"Exactly! The butler informed me that he placed the new blotter on the bureau at a quarter-past six, which means, obviously, that the cheque was written out after that time. You see that? Well, then, where is the cheque? Blakeney was examined, I take it, when he was arrested?"

"Yes," admitted the police official. "But we discovered no cheque upon his person. But surely the counterfoil in the cheque-book will show you to whom the cheque was made payable?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't," returned Ferrers Locke regretfully. "It would save an awful lot of bother if it did. The counterfoil bears the amount of the cheque, followed by an ordinary letter 'S' and the word 'Extrav.' What either of those two points will lead me to I can't for the moment say. But both prove conclusively that someone else visited Hardacre between the hour of quarter-past six and a quarter-past seven."

"Ah!" exclaimed the major triumphantly. "We shall learn at the bank who entered the library and received the cheque, for that same person will cash the cheque, sure enough."

"I rather have my doubts on that point," muttered Ferrers Locke. "However, that is by the way. I am not frightfully interested in who committed the crime. My interest is solely in proving Jim Blakeney's innocence."

"And you've done that my dear

fellow," returned the Chief Commissioner warmly. "Your deduction of the case is wonderful!"

"Merely elementary, I assure you, my dear friend," said Locke with a wave of the hand. "With the exception of the actual murderer, I think I can reconstruct the crime fairly well."

"Then I wish you would tell me why it was the writer of this forged letter desired Jim Blakeney to present himself at the open french windows of the library at a quarter-past seven sharp," said Major Carstairs. "I feel hopelessly at sea!"

"That, also, is quite easy of explanation," smiled Ferrers Locke, as he looked from the puzzled police official to his astonished assistant, Jack Drake. "Moreover, I will give you the name of the writer of the mysterious letter you now hold in your hand. Don't interrupt, there's a good chap"—as the Chief Commissioner was about to interpolate a remark—"but let me answer your question. It is obvious that the man behind this scheme desired Jim Blakeney to be found in the room with the dead man by the butler, Jenkins, hence the passage in the letter referring to the time of 'a quarter-past seven sharp.' Very well—"

"But he wouldn't be found in the presence of the deceased man," broke in the police official triumphantly, "if he arrived to time, for it was the custom of the butler to awake his master at a quarter-past seven. Blakeney would have only just arrived."

"Your argument is quite good, with the exception that you forget a certain discrepancy in the timepiece of Jim Blakeney's and the clock in the hall at the Myrtles. The latter, I have gathered from the butler, has been five minutes slow for three months or so," said Ferrers Locke.

"Ah! I must confess that I overlooked that point," admitted the Commissioner. "And it makes a world of difference. Naturally enough, a young man arriving at the open french windows of a room and finding the body of a friend lying still upon the floor would walk in and investigate."

"And like as not," put in Ferrers Locke, "pick up the very weapon with which the deed had been done."

"Then Jim Blakeney's telling the truth," repeated Major Carstairs. "That's just what he did do, according to his statement. But, my dear Locke, the person behind this vile plot must be familiar with the workings of the house—how else his knowledge of the hour in which Hardacre slept of an evening or the clock in the hall being five minutes slow?"

"I agree, major," said the private detective grimly. "I have formed a theory as to who that person is; but for the moment his name must be left out of our discussion."

"But the writer of the mysterious letter, Locke—surely he is the murderer?"

"Not necessarily. Tiger Sleek has been morally responsible for a good many crimes of that description, but he has never actually been the assassin!"

"Tiger Sleek," muttered the Chief Commissioner. "I know the name. Ah, I've fixed him. Wanted by the police in three countries—eh? Always been a bit too clever for us. My word, Locke, I would give something to have him in the dock! But how do you know he's responsible for the letter?"

Without more ado, Ferrers Locke showed his old friend the finger-prints on the written letter, and, for comparison,

handed him two photographs, each bearing a finger-print.

"Why, my dear chap," ejaculated the Commissioner, "they're identical! Now to get on the Tiger's track!"

"He's not more than twenty minutes' journey away," said the detective quietly. "In fact, he's in Middleham!"

"What?"

Briefly the sleuth told of his capture by the gang, and his subsequent dive into the murky waters of the Twee, giving as a reason for this murderous attack on him by the Tiger, the story of Lady Bransford's pearl necklace, which he had traced to the scoundrel who resided in a tenement house on the banks of the river.

Five minutes later Major Carstairs was

jamming on his hat and making for the door. On the threshold he paused.

"Locke, my dear chap," he said gratefully, "you have saved me from making a most hideous blunder. I can save my reputation now. Jim Blakeney will be released from custody before two hours have elapsed, without a stain on his character. To his thanks should be added the gratitude of Major Carstairs. Locke, old chap, you're a wonder!"

As a distant clock proclaimed the early hour of 5 a.m., two motor-cars, in which were bunched a dozen men, raced along the deserted road to the dreary row of tenement houses that faced the River Twee.

In the foremost car, like some carved statue, sat Chief Commissioner Major Carstairs. His usually bright face was grim and clouded; his eyes gleamed a deadly purpose. Without loss of time the old soldier had returned to the Middleham Station, after Ferrers Locke's astonishing revelations, and had gathered around him a posse of picked men.

With a grinding of brakes the two police cars pulled up, and the constables alighted. Inspector Motley, who now felt very small at having arrested an innocent man, was determined to redeem his reputation. He called his men together.

"Thomson, Ratcliff and Stetson will go with Corporal Wilson," he whispered. "You are to approach the house from



"Get down on your stomachs!" roared the inspector. Even as he spoke there came a deafening explosion, and the haunt of the Tiger and his gang was blown sky-high. Bricks and pieces of debris hurtled over the heads of the recumbent policemen. When, finally, the inspector turned to look at the house which had once sheltered Tiger Sleek he saw a mass of smouldering ruins and twisted ironwork. (See page 26.)

the rear, and at a given signal from me will rush the place."

The remainder of the posse were given their instructions, and then split up into their respective parties, and faded away into the shadows of the trees. With two men and the Chief Commissioner, Inspector Motley crept silently towards the entrance of the dwelling-house that sheltered Tiger Sleek and his gang. But no sooner had the inspector pushed open the gate leading to the house when hoarse cries sounded from below.

"Quick, men, they've got wind of our presence!" rapped the inspector.

He dragged out his whistle as he spoke and blew a piercing blast. Simultaneously the cordon of police advanced at the double and rushed the house. The door was unceremoniously broken down by the energetic corporal, who carried a hatchet, and the whole party rushed in and clambered below stairs. The iron-studded door of the underground room presented a more formidable barrier to negotiate, and again the hatchet in the hands of Corporal Wilson came into play.

Suddenly to the ears of the alert inspector there came a faint, hissing sound, growing louder and louder as the seconds ticked by.

"Back, men!" gasped the inspector hoarsely. "There's a bomb inside!"

The party of police drew back, alarmed. All ears now caught the faint hissing emanating from the other side of the door, and something else. A strong odour like the burning of a fuse began to leak out through the crevices of the door.

"Back for your lives!"

The police darted up the narrow, winding staircase again and out into the grounds of the house. As the last member of the posse rushed out through the gate there came a deafening explosion.

"Get down on your stomachs!" roared the inspector, suiting the action to the word.

But the policemen needed no instructions on that score. Even as the terrific report echoed out all of them flung themselves flat on the ground. Over their heads and bodies bricks and pieces of debris whizzed about like so many bullets from a machine-gun.

When, finally, the inspector chanced to look at the house which had once sheltered the notorious scoundrel Tiger Sleek, he saw a mass of smouldering ruins and twisted ironwork.

"The hounds!" he spluttered. "Our attack must have leaked out. The scoundrels were evidently prepared for us!"

He ground his teeth with rage and annoyance, and then his eyes turned riverwards. The sight that met his gaze caused him to give voice to a volley of bitter expletives. For about a hundred yards downstream was a fast-moving motor-boat, crammed full of men—a motor-boat that was taking away to safety the master-criminal, Tiger Sleek, and his precious associates.

"After them, men!" shouted the inspector, making a futile dash along the river-bank. "Put a volley over their heads!"

Crack, crack! Crack! Crack, crack!

A dozen revolvers were emptied in the direction of the motor-boat, but still the craft sped downstream.

Crack, crack, crack!

Another volley rang out, this time coming from the direction of the motor-boat. The police immediately took cover, but not before one of their number

had been hit in the shoulder. The inspector also had a narrow escape. A bullet whizzed over his head dangerously near, whilst another scorched his peak cap.

"Into the cars, men!"

He rapped the order savagely. He was conscious of the fact that he was not exactly shining in the eyes of the Chief Commissioner. The police jumped into the cars, and were carried away at a pace that exceeded their own speed limit twice over. By reason of the fact that the row of tenement houses faced directly on the river, it was impossible to follow the flight of the motor-boat without backing into the main road, and then taking a branch road that ran parallel with the river-bank a few hundred yards further on.

When at last the two police cars were speeding along this latter road, sign of the motor-boat containing the Tiger and his gang there was none. The inspector stamped his foot with rage, and chewed savagely at the ends of his waxed moustache. On the face of the Chief Commissioner there was a peculiar smile.

"Fraid they've given us the slip, inspector," he said consolingly. "Mr. Ferrers Locke was right, the Tiger is a master-criminal. His finesse is developed to a marked degree. But I think we should thank Providence that we didn't enter the underground room. If we had—well, there's no need to conjecture on that point. The remains of the house speak eloquently enough. You have failed to arrest the Tiger, Inspector Motley, but your timely warning downstairs undoubtedly saved the lives of your men and myself. You have done well!"

The inspector beamed upon his superior a bright smile. These words of praise, coming from the "Chief," poured oil upon troubled water, as it were. Apparently Major Carstairs had overlooked his official blunder in arresting Jim Blakeney for the murder of Mornington Hardacre.

"I failed to arrest the murderer of Mornington Hardacre, sir," said the inspector slowly, "and I've failed to arrest Tiger Sleek and his gang. But I'll stake my reputation that I'll bag one or both of them within the next—"

"Month!" cautioned the Chief grimly. "Better make it that, at least, inspector. I wish you luck!"

The policemen crowded into their cars and journeyed back to the station. Before two minutes had elapsed after Inspector Motley's arrival, all the River Police stations were being notified of the escape of the notorious criminal, Tiger Sleek, and his gang of six. Police-launches put off from every landing-stage along the river, and a close inspection was made of all the likely hiding-places along the Twee.

But it was nine o'clock in the morning before any news came through to Middleham, and then it was over the telephone.

"Hallo! Yes. This is Middleham Station," snapped Inspector Motley as he placed the receiver to his ear. "What—"

"Motor-boat No. 779,065 found scuttled near Marsden's disused wharf," came the voice of the speaker at the other end of the wire. "According to footmarks on the landing-stage, it is assumed that the Tiger and his men disembarked there and entered a waiting car and—"

But Inspector Motley did not wait to hear more. With a muttered imprec-

ation he jammed the receiver on the hook and bit his lip. His quarry had escaped him.

"Burn him!" he said viciously, clenching his fist at an imaginary figure of the redoubtable Tiger Sleek. "I'd like to get my hands on him! I'd—"

He broke off abruptly as the telephone-bell again whirled at his elbow.

"Hallo!" he roared into the receiver. "Who are you?"

"My name's Sleek!" came a sibilant voice through the receiver. "Some call me the Tiger. Thought someone at the station would like to hear of me again, and how we managed to dodge you fellows in the raid. Quite easy, really. One of my men spotted Ferrers Locke arriving at your station yesterday evening, and hastened back to our rendezvous to give the alarm. We prepared that bomb for you, and made our get-away by means of a motor-boat which we had always kept in a secret room opening on to the river, in case of emergency. Sorry you had your journey for nothing. I—"

"You scoundrel!" hissed the inspector in a boiling rage. "You—"

"Ha, ha!" came a gentle laugh over the wires. "You should take a few tips from Ferrers Locke, my man. Why, he's worth the whole of the Middleham police force put together! Cheerio! Can't wait any longer. Remember, some call me the Tiger!"

The caller rang off, leaving a dumb-founded and enraged inspector of police gazing as if paralysed at the telephone instrument, the receiver of which he still unconsciously held tightly in his hand. Then the inspector recovered power of speech and action.

With a roar like a bull he frantically rang up the exchange, and inquired of the operator if she knew whence the call had come, but the operator could give nothing definite to work upon. With a volley of bitter expletives, Inspector Motley jammed on his hat and departed homewards for breakfast. In the course of his varied career he had handled and hunted scores of criminals, but never during that time had one had the audacity to phone the station to acquaint the police of his escape. It was being borne in upon the rather obtuse mind of Inspector Motley that Tiger Sleek was indeed a master-criminal, and, with that thought well before him, the police-officer's usually healthy appetite paled considerably.

A Clever Alibi.

JIM BLAKENEY strode out in the direction of his own quarters with a step as light and carefree as any child of three. A bright sun gleamed overhead, its early morning rays giving an extra sparkle to the little specks of dew that lay thickly on the greensward of the Meibourn Lane.

"Free!"

Jim Blakeney voiced the word with fervour and began to whistle. An hour earlier he had been writhing on the rack of mental torture. Free! It hardly seemed credible. For hours the young man had twisted and turned on his narrow bed in the cell at Middleham, seeking the sleep and oblivion that would not come. Accused of murder! Of murdering the one man who had been the first to assist him since his arrival at Middleham. The letter; the finding of Mornington Hardacre stretched lifeless on the floor; the

entry of the butler; and, finally, his arrest. It was a picture that would live in his memory all the days of his life, but for the moment it was out of focus. He was a free man—released without a stain on his character.

Major Carstairs, the Chief Commissioner, had been as good as his word. Within an hour of his arrival back at the Middleham police-station after his memorable visit to the great detective of Baker Street, Jim Blakeney had been acquainted of the remarkable discoveries Ferrers Locke had made, and had been set free.

"Ferrers Locke!"

There was a world of eloquent gratitude in the words, although there was none but the chattering birds in the trees to hear them. Jim Blakeney owed the great sleuth his life—of that he felt convinced.

Before the young man had shaken the dust of the police-station from his feet Major Carstairs had informed him that Ferrers Locke intended visiting Blakeney at his lodgings that same morning. It was now a quarter to five, a.m. At eleven o'clock England's greatest detective was to call on him.

Jim pinched himself to make sure that he was not dreaming. But this was no dream. The town stretched before him, the birds twittered above his head, and a bright and friendly sun streamed down—far different from the sordid surroundings of his prison cell.

Still whistling blithely, Jim Blakeney let himself into his suite of rooms and calmly undressed. He was dogged tired and in dire need of sleep. Despite the hour, he was fast asleep within two minutes of having laid his head on his pillow.

And with sleep came forgetfulness of the events of the last twelve hours.

"And so Mr. Swiveller cannot see anyone—eh?"

Ferrers Locke asked the question of the portly Mrs. Buttrix, as that good lady presented herself at the door in answer to his summons.

"No, he can't!" was the emphatic reply. "Mr. Swiveller was taken bad with a cold—influenza it is—at six o'clock last night, and he's got a temperature. The doctor's with him now, and his orders are that Mr. Swiveller is not to be disturbed."

Before the detective could make any reply the professional figure of the local doctor entered the hallway.

"You will administer the medicine I have prescribed, Mrs. Buttrix," he said gravely, "every three hours. And remember that Mr. Swiveller is not on any account to be disturbed!"

"Leave that to me, sir!"

With a gracious nod the good lady of the house bade the medico good-morning, and then turned again to Ferrers Locke.

"Did you hear that, sir?" she demanded of the detective.

"Yes," smiled Locke agreeably. "I'm sorry Mr. Swiveller is ill; he seemed all right at half-past six last night, and—"

"I don't know who you are, sir," thundered Mrs. Buttrix; "but you are not speaking the truth! Mr. Swiveller was taken bad at six o'clock last night, and he went straight to bed. I can vouch for that, for I sent up the page-boy with a bowl of gruel for him. Now I come to look at you, you appear to be a canvasser, or debt collector; they usually try and stuff a respectable woman with a lot of lies!" she added severely. "You run away, mister, and—"

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think again! Seemed all right at half-past six last night, did he? Take that! I don't like the look of you!"

And before the celebrated detective knew what was happening the front door had slammed in his face.

"Seems a bit of an Amazon!" he muttered good-humouredly. "I've been taken for many things in my time, but never a canvasser or a debt collector. Ha, ha! Mr. Swiveller's landlady has cleared the field a little. I was rather inclined to the theory that Swiveller it was who committed the murder; but, as Euclid tells us, a man can't be in two places at once. Then there's the doctor—he wouldn't be taken in by any play-acting. Swiveller is genuinely ill, and was ill at six o'clock last night. That being the case, I can wipe him off the slate of suspects, although instinct prompts me to keep an eye on him. Rather funny he was taken ill so suddenly. Jenkins, the butler at the

Myrtles, had not evidently noticed the fact. Hum! It's a tangled skein I've got to unravel. But there's one consolation—Jim Blakeney's a free man."

Reflecting thuswise, Ferrers Locke took the road to Jim Blakeney's lodgings, and within five minutes was clasping that young man by the hand.

"Congratulations, Jim, my boy!" he exclaimed warmly. "How do you feel?"

"Fit as a fiddle, sir!" replied Jim, with equal earnestness. "And ready to do anything in my power to show you my gratitude for what you've done!"

"Tush! Say no more about it, sonny!" said Ferrers Locke protestingly.

"The curtain's only just rung up on the Middleham drama; time enough for the applause when the last scene is enacted and the Tiger is safe under lock and key and the murderer of Mornington Hardacre a prisoner in the dock!"

(There is another long and thrilling instalment of this powerful serial, boys, in next Monday's special New Year issue of the MAGNET. Order your copy now, and get your pals to start the New Year well by becoming regular readers.)

ASK YOUR CHUM—

Q. When is a clock on the stairs dangerous?

A. When it runs down and strikes one.

Q. Why is a watch like a river?

A. Because it won't run along without winding.

Q. Why is a well-trained horse like a benevolent man?

A. Because he stops at the sound of wo(e).

Q. What is taken from you before you get it?

A. Your portrait.

Q. When is a silver cup most likely to run?

A. When it's chased.

Q. Why would a compliment from a chicken be an insult?

A. Because it would be fowl language.

Q. If you were to ride upon a donkey what fruit would you resemble?

A. A pear (pair).

Q. What is the most dangerous time to visit the country?

A. When the bull-rushes out, the cow-slips about, and the little sprigs are shooting all around.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS, CHUMS,
AND
A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!
From YOUR EDITOR.

AT HOME WITH YOUR EDITOR!

ANOTHER HOLIDAY NUMBER!

IT strikes me as just lucky that the present issue of the MAGNET comes right plum in the midst of the Christmas festivities. Last week I wished you all the best, but good wishes can be repeated with perfect safety. They are always welcome; and, talking about welcomes, I am certain you will extend a hearty one to the copy of the MAGNET now in your hands. It is as seasonable as anybody could wish. Our joke department will be found most suitable. You can chuckle over the crisp and novel funninesses as you make yourself snug by a jolly good fire. Nothing, is there, to equal a winter evening in comfortable quarters with the latest MAGNET to keep things cheery and interesting.

"THE WRAITH OF LOCHMUIR!"

Of course, the fine old Christmas spirit is not finished with yet for this season, seeing that next week's number of the MAGNET sees the brilliant culmination of the Highland series of top-hole yarns. The Greyfriars fellows take the prestige and the sporting spirit of the old school wherever they go, and their Scottish trip has been no exception. These yarns have been real winners. The wind-up is better still. Harry Wharton & Co. encounter some mighty strange experiences up in the snowy north. Those of you who know the Highlands of Caldonia, stern and wild, will find the narrative humming with reality. It is a veritable mystery of the lone mountains. Up there in the solitudes, where one can walk for days and only meet an occasional shepherd, you find

the most wonderful legends extant. Frank Richards has been at pains to show us something of the poetry to be found in Scotland, and the peril. Don't miss this fine yarn, boys!

"A MARKED MAN!"

Another magnetic instalment of our serial will be found in the next issue. Keep your eye on Jim Blakeney—you cannot do other—and Ferrers Locke, who has here a "case" which goes right home to him, for it is full of problems, and Locke is a whale for difficulties. They bring out the best in him. Danger hems in Blakeney. But as to the murder of Mornington

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A Wonderful Tale of Mystery and Adventure, introducing the Famous Baker Street Detective and Dr. Huxton Rymor.

No. 313.—THE AFFAIR OF THE THREE GUNMEN.

A Fascinating Romance of Mystery in NEW YORK and LONDON. By the Author of "The Shield of the Law," "The Path of Fear," etc.

No. 314.—THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS GERMS.

A Story of Baffling Mystery and Thrilling Adventure. By the Author of "The Desert Trail," etc.

Hardacre, Ferrers Locke has quite other ideas to those fostered by headquarters. The instalment bristles with actuality and pithy detail.

A NEW YEAR SUPPLEMENT!

It is now a matter of full speed-ahead for 1924, and H. W. & Co. are not forgetting it. Next week's supplement of the "Greyfriars Herald" takes well into account the full ferocity of the tempus fugit detail. New days, new ideas. That is the ticket! The "Greyfriars Herald" moves with the times, and the splendid issue which will see the light during the week when January 1st, 1924, comes in is a real live business, calculated to knock spots off rivals, and clear up any mouldy relics of the bygone. There are big hopes for 1924, but that's not enough. Everybody has to do a bit of cloud-pushing. It will be a great year so long as all take a share. The new "Greyfriars Herald" is like the first tap at the door of the New Year. It will prove to be a good lead.

A STORY OF THE SEA!

Make sure you get the "Boys' Friend," with its brilliant new serial, "Topsail Tony!" by David Goodwin. The old Green 'Un has another splendid scoop to its credit in this gripping yarn of the sea. You will find in it just that magic atmosphere of the deep which everybody likes, with romance and adventure in plenty. David Goodwin is a name to conjure with. He is the author of a series of the finest stories of exploration on sea and land ever written. But it is a dead certainty that he has never done anything so dramatic as "Topsail Tony!" for in it we get the experiences of a man who has sojourned in many countries, and who knows the mysteries of the Seven Seas.

Your Editor.

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