

THE YOUNG PRETENDER!

This Week's Ripping School Story
of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.

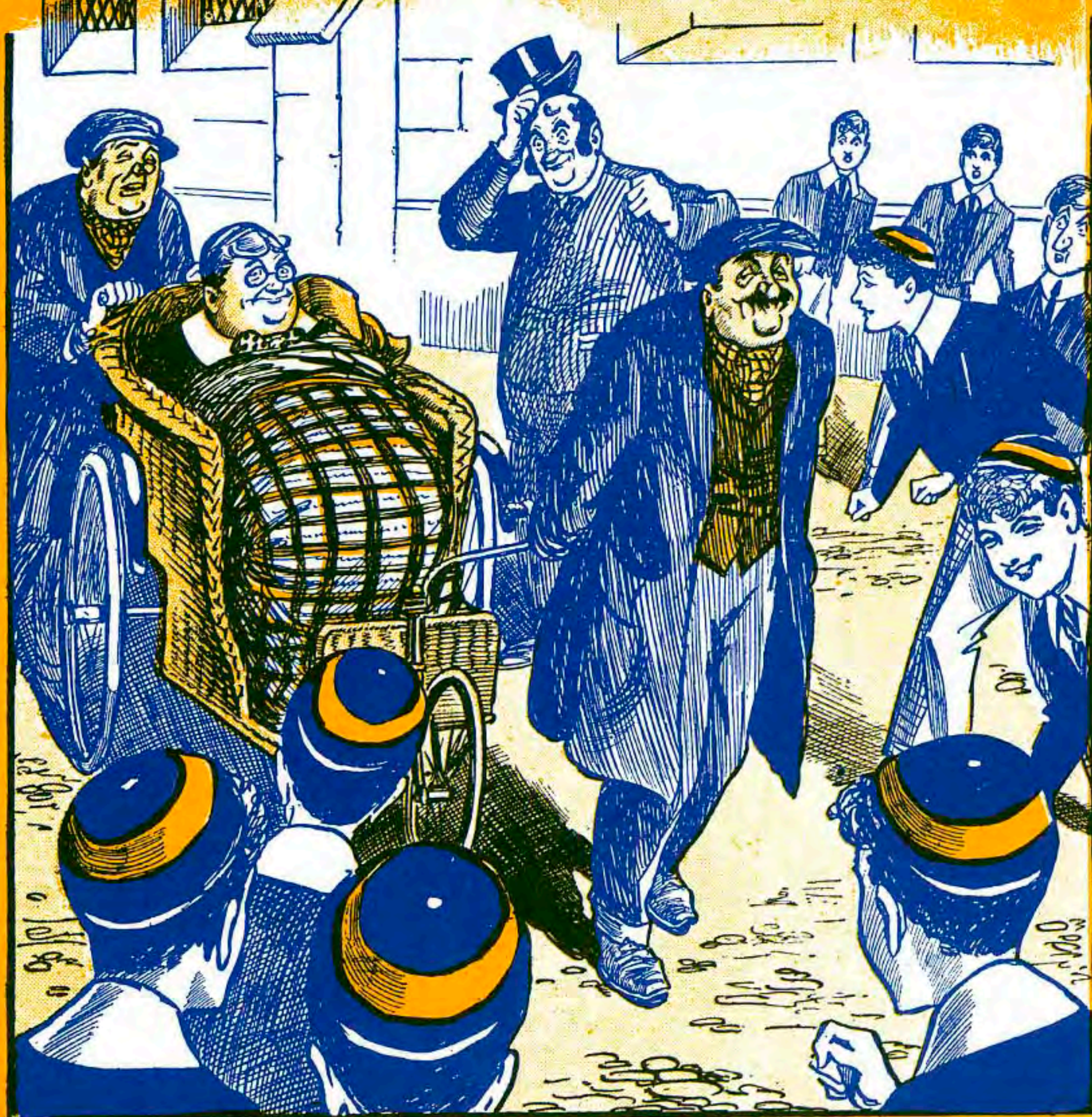
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The Magnet 2^d

Library
of
School & Detective Stories

EVERY
MONDAY.



AFTER THE OPERATION!

BILLY BUNTER'S SENSATIONAL RETURN TO GREYFRIARS!

(A striking incident from this week's extra-long story of Harry Wharton & Co., inside.)

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A STIRRING STORY OF THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE.



The New Recruit!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

On Kelly's Trail!

"**W**HAT'S up?" inquired Joe Clarke mildly, as Mel Ruthven flung himself down on his cot with a crash that nearly broke it.

"That misery, Mike Kelly—that's what's up!" growled Ruthven.

"The moonshining gentleman?"

"The same; and I've got to catch him."

"Wish you joy," answered Clarke, with a grin.

"Just when I'd put in for a week's leave, too!" groaned Ruthven, with a comical expression of annoyance on his good-looking face.

"Who are you taking?" inquired Joe.

He and Mel usually hunted in couple.

"That's the worst of it. That irresponsible young ass, Bill Adams!"

Clarke chuckled.

"You've got a picnic before you."

Ruthven knew it. Bill Adams, though a fine, strapping recruit, was a scatter-brained youth, and so far all attempts to drill him into the responsibilities of his work as a Canadian Mounted Policeman had proved unavailing. Now the officer in command at Fort Alexandra had handed him over to Corporal Ruthven to lick into shape, and ordered him to take him to help arrest Mike Kelly.

Kelly was a long-limbed, cheerful Irishman, with an hereditary delight in setting the liquor laws at defiance. His potheen was famous the country over, and never a drop of it had paid duty. The eyes of the Revenue authorities had long been on him, and news had been received that he was running a still in the Elk Hills.

Ruthven's job was to find and destroy the still, and capture the owner thereof.

Bright and early next morning the corporal and young Adams rode out of the fort.

All day long, except for a short halt at mid-day, the two travelled over flower-decked, undulating prairie, and about five sighted a clump of curious, conical hills, the lower slopes of which were covered with a thick growth of pines.

"There are the Elk Hills," said Ruthven.

It took all Ruthven's knowledge of woodcraft to hit Kelly's trail. But at last he got it at the bottom of the nearest hill.

"Now tie up your horse," he ordered Adams, "and follow me! Don't speak, and be careful where you walk. Kelly has ears like a lynx."

The tracks became clearer. Ruthven had suddenly come upon the pack-trail, along which the moonshiner despatched ponies laden with spirit-barrels.

Now, if they could only creep upon the still unawares, the chances were they would catch the man red-handed.

The two had walked, perhaps, half a mile up a steepish trail, which twisted in and out

among the trees, when Ruthven stopped and pointed. A thin feather of grey wood smoke was rising from a thicket a couple of hundred yards away.

"There's the still," he whispered.

At that very moment there came a loud whining, and the sound of a horse's feet up the path behind.

As Ruthven turned in amazement, he saw Adams' horse come trotting sharply towards them, the halter-rope dangling loosely.

"Idiot!" exclaimed the corporal, bitterly annoyed. "Can't you even tie a horse up safe? Catch him, and follow me!"

As he spoke he broke into a rapid run towards the thicket.

But the mischief had been done. The still was there, sure enough, artfully hidden in a hollow in the centre of the thicket, with the fire still burning under it, and the clear, but potent, liquor dripping into the receiver. But the artful Kelly had made good his escape.

Ruthven wasted no time in vain regrets, but turned out again on the Irishman's trail. A path led him to a dug-out in the hillside. This one-roomed, turf-roofed hut was evidently Kelly's home; but he had left it. As it was now growing dusk, Ruthven knew it would be useless to continue the search for the present. So, gruffly ordering Adams to prepare supper, he went back himself to fetch up the horses.

Imagine the state of his feelings when he found them both gone! On the tree to which he had left his own tied was pinned a scrap of paper, with this insulting message:

"For sail.—Two decent horses. Price, mi still and mi liberty.—Appli MIKE KELLY."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Drugged Spirit!

MEL RUTHVEN was a good-tempered man, and had a keen sense of humour. But this was too much. He would be the laughing-stock of the whole countryside, to say nothing of the fort, when they heard how neatly this scamp had tricked him.

Worse than all, it was by this time far too dark to see the tracks, and heavy clouds blowing over from the south-east promised rain, which would effectually destroy the trail by morning. He stalked back to the dug-out in a towering rage.

Kicking the door open, he found, to his amazement, that all was dark. There was no fire lighted, no supper in sight.

Was this another of the good Kelly's tricks? But no. There was a sound of heavy breathing somewhere.

Mel struck a match, and could hardly believe his eyes at sight of Bill Adams flat on his back on Kelly's bunk, snoring peacefully.

"You lazy young sweep, wake up!" roared

Mel, and, catching the other by the collar, he swung him off the bed.

Adams toppled on to the floor like a sack of potatoes, and lay there, still snoring.

A light broke on Mel.

"The young scoundrel's drunk!" he muttered, and now he was really angry.

A bottle of strong spirit open on the table, and an empty glass beside it, seemed full explanation. Ruthven went out, found a bucket of water, and dashed a quantity in Adams' face.

The young fellow never budged, or showed a sign of life.

"Strange!" muttered Mel. "Why, there's only one glass of the stuff gone! He can't have got so bad as this on one glass!"

He tasted the liquor. Though he only took a mouthful, yet almost at once his head began to spin. At last he understood.

"Drugged, by the Lord Harry!" he muttered, and blindly staggered against the wall.

When he woke again it was still quite dark, and the rain was drumming softly on the thick roof. His head ached horribly, but he was glad to find that he was able to stand. As for Adams, he was still under the influence of the drug, and quite helpless.

Mel's first idea was to light the fire and make the cup of coffee which his parched throat and burning head longed for. But, on second thoughts, he decided against doing so. Mike Kelly, very possibly, was not far away. He might have counted on the efficacy of his sleep medicine, and, seeing no light, would doubtless have taken advantage of the dark hours to remove his still. A still is a costly thing, and Mel knew that Mike would not sacrifice it willingly.

Groping round in the darkness, Mel Ruthven found the bucket of water, drank about a quart, and then ducked his head. After that he sat down to wait, with what patience he might, for daylight.

Rarely had he felt so sore and angry, and again and again he vowed that he would make Master Kelly smart for his tricks.

After a long time the rain ceased, and soon afterwards, to Mel's intense relief, he saw a greyness in the east. Eating a couple of dry biscuits by way of breakfast, he tightened his belt, slipped his revolver, which he had left on the table, into its holster, and, pushing the door open very gently, crept out into the dim dawn.

Crawling stealthily through the soaking herbage, and taking shelter as he went behind every tree, he made his way to the hidden still. His lips closed a little more tightly as he saw that his suspicions had been correct.

The moonshiner had succeeded in carrying off the still. The remainder of the apparatus was where he had left it.

"He's bound to have left a trail, anyhow," thought the trooper; and, on emerging from

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Bunter's weakness for gorging has landed him into trouble on more occasions than it is possible to enumerate. But the Owl's digestive organism has always stood the terrific strain imposed upon it. There comes a time, however, when the last jam tart—the proverbial straw on the camel's back—puts that digestive organism out of gear. And once Bunter is unable to eat he begins to imagine that his number is up.



The Young Pretender!

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Wheeze That Worked!

"**N**OW, boys," said Mr. Quelch. "I want you to pay close attention while I demonstrate to—"

Crash!

The Remove master stopped short with a startled expression on his face. The class looked startled, too. For the sound was that of a human body falling to the floor.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

His eyes roved round the Form-room and rested on the place where Billy Bunter sat—or rather, where Billy Bunter had been sitting prior to that crash.

There was no sign of the fat junior now. One moment he had been seated at the desk, as usual, the next he had disappeared from mortal ken, so to speak.

As a matter of fact, Bunter had suddenly slipped off the seat, and his ample form had hit the floor-boards with a sounding concussion.

"Yaroooooop!"

That yell of anguish clearly proved that Bunter was present, though invisible. It was a dreadful yell that rang through the Form-room—a yell like that of a soul in torment.

"Bless my soul!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Bunter!"

"Ow!"

"What are you doing on the floor?"

"Wow!"

"How came you to be unseated in that manner?"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as Skinner, who had been sitting next to him, playfully prodded him in the ribs with his boot.

Mr. Quelch frowned. There were storm-signals on his brow. But Billy Bunter, unseeing and unseen, failed to notice them.

"Bunter!" thundered the Remove master. "Resume your seat immediately!"

"Ow! I'd like to oblige you, sir," came a muffled voice. "But I—I can't!"

"What! You cannot resume your seat?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir. The fact is, I can't move hand or foot. I'm absolutely helpless, sir. And the pain is simply awful!"

"Pain?" echoed Mr. Quelch.

"Yessir!" groaned Bunter. "I've broken my back, I believe. I've fractured my collar-bone at least. But I had pains before I fell off the form, sir."

"What sort of pains?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"Violent eternal pains, sir."

There was a subdued titter from the class. Mr. Quelch's frown deepened.

"I do not understand you, Bunter," he said. "What, pray, do you mean by 'eternal' pains?"

"Yow! Pains in my inside, sir—in-fernal pains!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Quelch, rapping sharply on the desk with his pointer. "Presumably you mean internal pains, Bunter?"

"That's it, sir! They are tying me up in knots, and causing me terrible agony, sir. I'm not the sort of fellow to make a fuss over a twinge or two, but this pain is too awful for words. It's more than I can bear. Ow-ow-ow!"

Mr. Quelch beckoned to Skinner and Bolsover.

"Pray assist Bunter to his feet," he said.

"Certainly, sir!"

Skinner and Bolsover promptly dived under the desk and hauled Billy Bunter to his feet. It was no easy task, and Skinner murmured to Bolsover that a steam crane was necessary. However, the herculean task was accomplished with much gasping and grunting, and Billy Bunter came into public view once more, supported in an upright position by Skinner and Bolsover.

Mr. Quelch looked searchingly at the fat junior. Bunter certainly looked ill. His face was as white as chalk—he had possibly chalked it beforehand—and his features were distorted as if with acute anguish. He looked the picture of abject misery as he stood there, leaning heavily on his two schoolfellows.

"You are still in pain, Bunter?" questioned Mr. Quelch.

"Terrible pain, sir—shooting, stabbing pain, like knives going through me."

And Billy Bunter gave a number of heartrending groans. They fell upon unsympathetic ears, so far as the class was concerned. The Removites believed that their plump schoolfellow was malingering in order to be excused lessons. And they had every reason to believe so, for this was quite an old dodge of Bunter's.

But Mr. Quelch, scanning Bunter's white face, and listening to those appalling groans, came to the conclusion that the fat junior was really ill.

"What did you have for breakfast, Bunter?" he inquired.

"Nothing much, sir: only six rashers of bacon, and a few fried eggs, and some toast, and marmalade—"

"Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "No wonder you are suffering internal pains! You have been over-eating, you gluttonous boy! I regret that I was unavoidably absent from the breakfast-table. Had I been there, I would not have permitted such a disgusting orgy."

"Oh, really, sir—" moaned Bunter feebly.

"You have partaken of too much food, with this painful result," Mr. Quelch went on. "I will excuse you from taking any further part in the lessons."

Billy Bunter's face brightened up, but only for a fleeting second. Then he started groaning again.

"You will proceed to the sanatorium, Bunter, and place yourself in the care of the matron," said Mr. Quelch.

"Skinner and Bolsover will assist you."

"Ahem! I—I think I can just manage to stagger round to the sanny without help, sir," said Bunter.

"Very well, Bunter. You may go."

With his hands clasped in the region of his lowest waistcoat-button, Billy Bunter rolled to the door, moaning piteously. He appeared to be bent almost double with anguish, and Mr. Quelch glanced at him with genuine pity. But nobody else did.

"Exit the merry wangler!" murmured Bob Cherry.

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"It is a stantful wheeze of Bunter's for dodgefully avoiding lessons," whispered Hurree Singh. "He has succeeded in deceiving the Quelch sahib."

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "The lesson will now proceed."

The door of the Remove Form-room closed behind Billy Bunter.

Once out in the passage his manner changed as if by magic. He ceased to groan, and he held himself erect. A broad grin overspread his countenance.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled softly. "It worked like a charm! Old Quelch reckons he's a downy bird, but I spoofed him all right that time. And now I'll get to business."

So saying, Billy Bunter rolled away—not in the direction of the sanny, but towards the Remove passage. And he continued to chuckle as he rolled joyously on his way.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Glorious Grub!

BILLY BUNTER was hungry. He was, in fact, ravenous. It was true that he had eaten an enormous breakfast, which would have sustained most people for a whole day. But that breakfast was ancient history now, so far as Bunter was concerned, and he was hungering for another meal.

He knew where he could find one. He had seen a tuck-hamper arrive that morning for his study-mate, Peter Todd.

The hamper had not been delivered until the bell was ringing for morning lessons, and Peter Todd had not had time to unpack it, much less start on its contents. He had hurried along to Study No. 7 with the hamper and dumped it on the table, and even that hasty manoeuvre had made him a minute late for lessons.

Peter Todd was eagerly awaiting the time of dismissal, so that he could perform the enjoyable task of unpacking the hamper. But Billy Bunter, ever an obliging fellow, had decided to save Peter the trouble. He would open the hamper himself, and make a rapid in-road into its contents.

Bunter had no qualms of conscience in the matter. After all, he argued, he was one of Peter Todd's oldest pals, and a fellow never minds going halves with an old pal when a tuck-hamper comes along.

"I'll just take half, and leave Toddy the rest," murmured Bunter. "Share and share alike's a jolly good motto. I've always thought that."

The fat junior stepped into Study No. 7, and he took the precaution of closing and locking the door.

The tuck-hamper stood on the table, just as Peter Todd had left it. It was a big, bulging, Billy Bunter of a hamper—a glorious sight for a glutton to feast his eyes on. Bunter took careful stock of it, smacking his lips the while.

"Jolly fine hamper, and no mistake!" he murmured. "Toddy's a lucky beggar. But then, so am I. I've got the pleasure of having first whack."

Now came the task of unpacking the hamper. That was soon accomplished. Billy Bunter wrenched and tugged at the lid, until it suddenly parted company with the rest of the hamper, and came away in his hands.

Tossing the lid into a corner, Billy Bunter blinked through his spectacles at the interior of the hamper.

Good things galore greeted his gaze. And Bunter lifted them out one by one and set them on the table.

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There was a large cake, with marzipan and icing on the top. There was a big pie, cold, but already baked. Whether it was an apple-pie or a meat-pie Bunter couldn't tell at a glance, but he would speedily discover! There was another cake—a cherry-cake this time—there were tins of peaches and apricots and pears; there were a couple of honeycombs, carefully packed to prevent the honey leaking through on to the rest of the things; and there were other dainties too numerous to mention.

Billy Bunter applied himself with great gusto to the task of unpacking. It was a glorious task—much better than "moggling" Latin verbs in the Remove Form room.

The table in Study No. 7 soon presented a very crowded appearance. Seldom had Bunter seen such a tempting array of tuck. After he had finished unpacking he stood spellbound for a moment, like an Alpine climber pausing to drink in a magnificent view.

"The puzzle is, where to start," he murmured. "I think I'll take a peep at the pie first."

He prized up the crust with a fork, and then gave a whoop of delight.

"Rabbit, by Jove! What's nicer than a rabbit-pie, I should like to know? I'll tackle it right away!"

Billy Bunter seated himself at the table, and plied a knife and fork very industriously. Bob Cherry had often declared that the only time Bunter worked really hard was when he was feeding; and his jaws certainly worked overtime on this occasion.

The pie was good—excellent, in fact. It seemed to melt in the mouth. Billy Bunter consumed about half of it, and generously left the other half for Peter Todd. Then, like Alexander of old, he sought fresh worlds to conquer.

"I'll start on the cake now!" he murmured. And he cut a hefty slice which would have been a meal in itself for some people.

Had anyone peeped through the study window at that moment and seen the trencherman of the Remove at work, they would have imagined that Bunter had not had a square meal for a week. He ate almost ravenously, without regard for the possible consequences.

Billy Bunter had often pictured himself, in his dreams, locked in a room with a tuck-hamper all to himself. And now his dreams had come true.

Never had he enjoyed a feed so much. There was variety, and there was abundance. And what more could the soul of a Bunter desire?

But as time wore on and the supply of tuck grew small by degrees and beautifully less, Billy Bunter became conscious of a pain in his interior. It was a sudden sharp twinge, which seemed to be a warning to him to stop stuffing.

But Bunter disregarded the warning, and went on eating—with disastrous results.

Another sharp twinge came, and then another, to be followed by a third, which made the fat junior give a yelp.

"Yow! That was a nasty one. Seemed to go right through me! I think I'd better give over."

He rose to his feet—not without difficulty—and staggered towards the armchair. As he did so he caught sight of his reflection in the mirror over the mantelpiece, and he was startled to observe that his complexion was a sickly yellow.

"Oh crumbs!" he muttered in dismay. "I—I must have gone too far!"

Bunter certainly had. That tremendous orgy, following so quickly upon an unusually big breakfast, had caused

Bunter's digestive organs to rise in revolt. They would not stand such treatment, and they told Bunter so plainly by giving him a series of sharp, stabbing pains.

The fat junior collapsed in the armchair, which groaned beneath his huge bulk.

"Oh dear! I—I think I'm going to be ill!" he groaned.

The pains grew rapidly worse, and more frequent. There was no longer any need for Bunter to simulate internal pains, as he had done in the Remove Form room. He actually had them; and instead of bearing them with stoical fortitude, he gave vent to loud yelps of anguish.

There he lay, huddled in the armchair, regarding the food on the table with a jaundiced eye. The sight of it had been most appetising at first. Now it was most loathsome. Billy Bunter felt that he never wanted to touch a morsel of food again.

Presently there was a scurrying of feet in the passage, and a chorus of yells and cat-calls such as only schoolboys can give. Morning lessons were over, and the Removites were revelling in their freedom.

Footsteps halted outside the door of Study No. 7. Familiar voices came to the ears of the suffering Bunter.

"Buck up, Toddy!"

"Open the door!"

"We're dying to see the giddy hamper!"

The doorhandle rattled and shook, and there was a snort from Peter Todd.

"This blessed door's locked on the inside!"

"Eh?"

"Somebody's in my study!" roared Peter.

There was a moment's pause—a pause of blank consternation. And then Johnny Bull's voice became audible.

"Listen, you fellows! I thought I heard somebody groan."

Another pause. Then deep groans of dire anguish came to the ears of the juniors outside the door.

"Ow-ow-ow! Oh dear! Help! I'm dying! Send for the doctor, somebody!"

The juniors started violently.

"Why, that's Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Instantly the truth flashed into Peter Todd's mind.

"The fat pirate has raided my tuck-hamper!" he roared. "My hat! Now I can see what his little game was in pretending to be ill. Instead of going to the sanny, he came here and scoffed my tuck!"

A mighty shout of indignation arose—a shout which ought to have made Billy Bunter tremble and quake. But he was too much concerned with his present sufferings to worry about the vengeance of Peter Todd. By this time he was really ill.

"Bunter, you fat villain," roared Bob Cherry, "unlock this door!"

"Wow! I can't!" came a pitiful wail from within. "How can you expect a fellow to drag himself to the door when he's dying?"

"You're shamming!" shouted Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy, I assure you I'm frightfully ill! I've got those eternal pains again. Yarooooooh!"

Peter Todd clenched his hands in wrath.

"If you don't unlock this door in two minutes we'll bash it in!" he exclaimed.

"And then the bashfulness of the unworthy Bunter will take place!" chimed in Hurree Singh.

Billy Bunter made no move to unlock



"Well, my boy, what's the matter with you?" asked Dr. Short. A sepulchral groan escaped Billy Bunter. "Ow! My number's up, doctor, I think. You might be able to prolong my life a little longer, but that's all!" "Nonsense!" rapped Dr. Short. "Where do you feel the pain?" "Everywhere!" groaned Bunter, squirming on the bed. (See Chapter 3.)

the door. The juniors waited, stamping their feet with growing impatience. And the groans of their fat schoolfellow on the other side of the door grew more and more heartrending.

"Time's up!" said Peter Todd grimly, as soon as the two minutes had expired. "I don't like the idea of committing assault and battery on my own study door, but—"

"What about the window?" suggested Bob Cherry, with a flash of inspiration.

"Oh, good! I'd forgotten that!"

Peter Todd hurried down into the Close, while the rest of the juniors remained outside the study door awaiting events.

The window of Study No. 7 was at no great distance from the ground, and Peter Todd, with the agility of a panther, made a flying leap, and drew himself up on to the sill. The window was open, and Peter clambered through into the study. He gazed at the remnants of his tuck, and gave a roar like that of the Bull of Bashan.

"Nearly half my grub gone! I'll have your scalp for this, you fat cad!"

Groan!

"Get up out of that chair!"

Another groan—deeper and more prolonged.

Peter Todd took a quick stride towards the armchair with a view to hauling Bunter out of it. Then he halted suddenly, and stared at his plump study-mate in alarm. He saw at once that this was no play-acting on Bunter's part. The fat junior was really ill—so much so, that he was powerless to move from the armchair. He did make an effort to rise, only to sink back with a groan.

"Unlock the door, Toddy!" called Harry Wharton, from the passage.

Peter obeyed, and the famous Five swarmed into the study.

"Go easy with Bunter, you fellows," said Peter Todd. "He's genuinely ill this time—no hanky-panky about it. Just look at his complexion! It's an art shade in yellow. And he's suffering pretty badly by the look of him."

Billy Bunter's legs were thrashing the air, and his hands were clasped across his middle. There could be no question that he was in pain. Even the most sceptical of the juniors had to admit that, when they looked at him.

"Great Scott! You've fairly done it this time, Bunter!" said Frank Nugent.

"Groo!"

"Can't you get up?" asked Wharton.

"Of course not—yow! People can't get up and prance round the study when they're dying!"

"Ass! You're a long way from dying. You've given yourself a bad bout of indigestion, that's all. But it's bad enough to be jolly painful. We shall have to take you along to the sanny."

"Buck up, then!" moaned Bunter. "I—I feel I haven't got many more minutes to live."

The task of carrying Billy Bunter round to the sanny was not an enjoyable one. And Bunter enjoyed it least of all. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry supported one end of him, and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh saw to the other; while Frank Nugent stepped out into the passage to clear a way for the procession.

Breathlessly the juniors bore their human burden round the winding corridors, and up a flight of stairs; and finally, purple in the face with their exertions, they dumped Billy Bunter on to a bed in the sick-bay. Then they summoned the matron, to whose tender mercies the fat junior was abandoned.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Bombshell for Bunter!

"OVER-EATING again!" said the matron sternly.

Billy Bunter groaned.

"Where do you feel the pain?" demanded the dame.

"Everywhere!" was the comprehensive reply. "In every limb and every joint. It's awful, ma'am! I wish it would give

over, so that I could have a peaceful end."

"What nonsense!" snapped the matron. "I am convinced you have been over-eating again, and that you are suffering from a severe attack of indigestion. Let me take your temperature."

The thermometer was inserted beneath Bunter's tongue, and while it remained there the matron felt his pulse.

Billy Bunter lay on the bed, fully-dressed, his legs working convulsively. The matron was really sorry for him, but she dared not say so. It was always a bad policy to express sympathy with Bunter's ailments. He only took advantage of it, and made out he was ten times worse than he really was.

The matron removed the thermometer from Bunter's mouth and shook it and examined it. Then she gave quite a start.

"Dear me! It is not usual for a high temperature to accompany an attack of indigestion. I must send for the doctor."

"He'll never get here in time, ma'am," groaned Bunter. "I'm sinking fast. Tell the Head it's no use wiring for my people. I should expire long before my titled relations got here."

The matron frowned.

"You are talking a lot of wild nonsense!" she said. "You are certainly ill, and you have a high temperature; but it is ridiculous to talk as if you were at death's door. I will telephone for Dr. Short, and he will tell me what is wrong with you, and what treatment I should administer."

The matron hurried away, leaving Billy Bunter alone with his anguish.

A cheerful fire burned in the grate, and the room was cosy and comfortable. But Bunter was not in a condition to appreciate these things. He lay turning and tossing on the bed, and the merry shouts of his schoolfellow, who were punting a football about in the Close, were wafted to his ears.

An hour passed before Dr. Short, the

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medical practitioner from Friardale, arrived on the scene. He came into the sick-bay, carrying a little black bag, and followed by the matron.

Having removed his overcoat and gloves, the doctor frowned at the squirming figure on the bed.

"Well, my boy, what's the matter with you?" he asked.

A sepulchral groan escaped Billy Bunter.

"Ow! My number's up, doctor, I think. You might be able to prolong my life a little longer, but that's all."

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Short. "Where do you feel the pain?"

"Everywhere!"

"Where do you feel it most?"

"Here," moaned Bunter, drawing his hands across the middle portion of his anatomy.

"Very well," said the doctor. "I will make an examination."

He did so; and Billy Bunter yelled as the medico's fingers prodded and pressed him.

"Did that hurt you very much?" asked Dr. Short, after giving a particularly sharp prod.

"Yarooooo!" roared Bunter—which was another way of saying, "Yes! It hurt like the very dickens!"

Dr. Short looked grave.

"It's! It is on the extreme right," he murmured. "There can be little question as to the nature of the complaint. Severe internal pains on the right-hand side, coupled with a high temperature, strongly suggest appendicitis."

"What?"

Billy Bunter fairly shouted the word. And he nearly rolled off the bed in his agitation.

"Appendicitis?" he gasped. "Impossible!"

The doctor smiled slightly.

"And why should it be impossible, pray?" he said. "Thousands of people get appendicitis in the course of a year. Operations are performed daily—"

"Operations?" echoed Billy Bunter, with a shudder. The mention of that sinister word struck quite a chill into his heart.

Bunter had never yet undergone an operation; and he had no eager longings for such an experience. The mere thought was terrifying. To be stretched out on an operating-table, at the mercy of the surgeon's knife—what a ghastly and gruesome business!

Billy Bunter got into quite a panic.

"I won't have an operation!" he cried wildly. "My frail and delicate constitution would never stand it!"

"Come, come, my boy!" said Dr. Short more kindly. "An operation is the only sensible course. Modern surgery is so skilful that you will suffer the minimum of discomfort. The removal of an appendix is a simple matter nowadays—always provided the operation is performed without delay. In cases of this kind, delays are indeed dangerous. Appendicitis, if neglected, becomes peritonitis; and when matters reach that stage, it is long odds against an operation proving successful. But you need not be alarmed, my boy. Provided you have the operation at once, all will be well."

"At—at once?" faltered Bunter.

"Yes—this afternoon. I will arrange for you to be taken to the Courtfield Nursing Home in an ambulance. I will also get in touch with Dr. Wright, the surgeon. He will, I feel sure, be pleased to perform the operation."

No doubt Dr. Wright would be

pleased. But Billy Bunter wasn't. The prospect of an immediate operation was gall and wormwood to him. It had burst upon him like a bombshell. A few hours before he had been well and happy, without a care in the world. And now he had come bang up against the biggest crisis of his life.

"Of course," said the doctor, "your father will be telegraphed to, and his consent obtained for the operation to be performed. I have no doubt he will readily give it. Being a man of experience, he will realise the danger of delay. I will now go and see the headmaster, and lay all the facts before him."

So saying, Dr. Short hurried away.

When he had gone the matron did her best to cheer Bunter up, and to put him into a more tractable frame of mind.

"Operations are not nearly such terrible things as you imagine," she said. "The worst part is the apprehension. The actual operation is nothing, since you know nothing about it. You will be put to sleep—"

"Don't, ma'am!" pleaded Bunter. "I—I can't bear it! The thought of an operation gives me the shudders! Suppose—suppose I were to go under! Wouldn't it be awful! I'm not thinking of myself—I never was a selfish sort of chap, as you know. I'm thinking of the school. How would Greyfriars get on without me?"

In spite of her concern for Bunter, the matron found it difficult to repress a smile.

"You are taking far too gloomy a view of the matter, my dear boy," she said. "You have youth in your favour, and the operation is almost certain to prove successful. And the internal pains which you are now suffering will automatically vanish."

"They—they're beginning to vanish already, ma'am!" said Bunter.

"What?"

"They started to go away when the doctor was here—as soon as he mentioned an operation, in fact."

But the matron was not to be deceived. She saw for herself that Bunter was still in pain, and that he only pretended otherwise in the hope of escaping the coming ordeal.

"Whilst we are waiting for your father's consent to the operation," she said, "perhaps you would like to see some of your friends?"

Bunter nodded.

"I suppose I'd better say good-bye to Wharton and the others—and to my minor Sammy," he said.

"There is no question of your saying good-bye, you silly boy! You really must try and rid yourself of the impression that you are not going to recover. I merely suggested that your friends should come up and see you, so that it might relieve the tedium of waiting. It will be better for you to have company than to be left alone with your thoughts. Tell me whom you would like to see, and I will summon them here at once."

"Very well, ma'am," said Bunter. "I'll see young Sammy and Wharton and Nugent and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurrea Singh. And I'll see Peter Todd, too, and ask him not to be ratty with me for pitching into his tuck-hammer."

Accordingly the matron sent a messenger to request the fellows whom Bunter had mentioned to step along to the sauny and see him. And the fat junior, feeling a trifle more resigned to his fate, lay on his bed and awaited their arrival.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Bequests!

GREYFRIARS was in a buzz. The news that Billy Bunter was to be operated upon for appendicitis caused quite a sensation.

Everybody felt extremely sorry for Bunter—even those who had disliked and detested him in the ordinary course of events. Even the stony-hearted Skinner murmured words of sympathy, and said it was terribly rough luck on poor old Bunter.

"Of course," said Bob Cherry, as he wended his way to the sanatorium with his chums, "Bunter was simply asking for trouble. He ate a brekker that would have satisfied three ordinary fellows, and then he went and scoffed pretty nearly half of Toddy's tuck. I wonder he didn't burst! Anyway, he's got himself into a fine old mess. But I can't help feeling sorry for him. It's no joke having to go under an operation."

"No jolly fear!" said Nugent. "I wouldn't be in Bunter's shoes for a pension."

"We must do our best to cheer him up," said Wharton. "I dare say he's feeling pretty down at the moment."

When the juniors entered the sick-bay, they found Billy Bunter lying on the bed, with his minor Sammy seated at the bedside. Sammy was whimpering.

"This is awful, Billy!" he was saying. "Don't you honestly think you'll get through the operation?"

"Eh? Of course he'll get through!" chimed in Bob Cherry, advancing into the room. "Hallo, Bunt! How are you feeling?"

"Rotten!" groaned Bunter.

"Never mind," said Bob. "It will soon be all over."

"I know that, Cherry. You needn't rub it in. I realise perfectly well that I've only a few hours to live."

"What rot!" said Harry Wharton. "When Bob said it would soon be all over he didn't mean that you were going to shuffle off this mortal coil."

"Of course I didn't!" said Bob Cherry. "I meant that the operation would soon be over, and that you'd come safely through, Bunt."

Billy Bunter blinked pathetically at his schoolfellows, who stood looking down at him. Like Rachel of old, he mourned, and would not be comforted.

"It's no use you fellows trying to cheer me up," he said. "I'm certain I shall never survive. Why, I'm at death's door already! The matron says I've got a very high temperament—a hundred and four, I think it is. How can a fellow recover, with a temperament like that? But I'm not going to whine. I hope I can face my fate with the fearless spirit of the Bunters of old."

There was a sob from Sammy. The sag was really frightened. Selfish young rascal though he was, he had a genuine affection for his brother Billy. And the thought of Billy being taken from him was quite terrifying.

"Don't cry, kid," said Harry Wharton kindly. "Billy's looking on the blackest side of things. I won't pretend that an operation isn't a serious matter; but, believe me, Billy will get through."

"Yes, rather!"

But Billy Bunter shook his head with obstinate resignation.

"I'm going under, you fellows," he said.

"You're going under chloroform, certainly," agreed Johnny Bull. "And when you wake up, you'll find yourself

in a nice, cosy room, with a nurse holding your hand, and telling you it's all serene. Your appendix will have gone, and so will your pain."

But the heartening words of his schoolfellows had no more effect upon Billy Bunter than the words of Job's comforters had upon Job. And it was not really surprising. Nobody ever feels wildly optimistic before an operation.

"I sent for you fellows," said Billy Bunter, in feeble tones, "to say good-bye. I'm not expecting to see any of you again."

"Why, you're talking out of your hat, Bunt!" said Peter Todd. "We shall refuse to say good-bye. We'll say au revoir, if you like. And we'll come and see you at the nursing home in a day or two, when you're getting over the operation."

"I sha'n't be there to see," said Bunter gloomily. "Give me your hand, Toddy, and tell me you forgive me for scoffing your tuck."

Peter's hand promptly clasped that of the fat junior.

"That's all right, old son!" he said. "There's nothing to forgive. Matter of fact, I feel that I'm to blame for all this. If I hadn't left the hamper where you could easily get at it, you wouldn't be ill now."

"Well, good-bye, Toddy! And mind you keep my memory green in Study No. 7. Good-bye, Wharton, old fellow! You've been rather a beast to me in the past—leaving me out of the footer eleven, and all that—but I forgive you!"

"Thank you!" said the captain of the Remove gravely.

In any other circumstances he would have roared with laughter.

Billy Bunter continued his farewells. "Good-bye, Bob Cherry! You've made my life a misery, by squeezing a cold sponge over me every morning, and pinching my ear, and sneering at my titled relations, and kicking me out of your study whenever I invited myself to tea; but I don't bear any malice. I can find it in my heart to forgive you. Good-bye!"

"Au revoir, Bunt!" said Bob.

"Good-bye, Nugent! I've never been overfond of you—you're too much of a milksop—but you lent me a couple of bob on the first day of term, and I never forget a kindness. Now I come to think of it I've never paid you back. I've been waiting for my postal-order to turn up—"

"Don't you bother about that, Billy," said Nugent. "We'll wipe it off the slate. We'll treat the debt as if it doesn't exist."

"That's awfully decent of you, Nugent. Good-bye, Johnny Bull! I haven't got much to thank you for. You've been a beastly bully—nearly as bad as Bolsover major—and you've given me many a billing for borrowing your bike. But I'm quite prepared to let bygones be bygones. Give me your fist. Good-bye!"

"So-long!" said Johnny Bull.

"Good-bye, Inky! It's rather beneath my dignity to shake hands with a nigger—especially a fellow who's been unkind to me, like you have. But I'm going to return good for evil. I freely forgive you for all the wrong you've done me. Farewell!"

"Good-bye for the present," said Hurree Singh. "You appear to think you are going to throw up the sponge, chuckfully, but when your esteemed appendix has been removefully taken away, the alive-and-kickfulness will be as terrific as ever!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

Having made his farewells to the Famous Five and Peter Todd, Billy Bunter turned to his whimpering minor; and there was quite a touching scene between the two brothers. This crisis revealed the astonishing fact that Billy really did care for Sammy, and that Sammy was genuinely fond of Billy. In the normal course of events they had been at daggers drawn. They had slanged each other, and quarrelled bitterly over such matters as sharing tuck; but such quarrels had been mere ripples on the ocean. The ties of brotherhood were too strong to be easily severed.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked on in silence. They felt decidedly uncomfortable.

If only Billy Bunter would face the coming ordeal in a cheerful spirit all would be well. But he seemed to have quite made up his mind that there was no chance of recovery; and that was always a dangerous attitude to take up when about to undergo an operation. The person who assured himself that he would come through all right usually did; whereas the individual who told himself he was going under, was deliberately retarding his chances of recovery.

The juniors did everything possible to cheer up their plump schoolfellow. But Bunter refused to be cheered up. He was no longer in a state of panic; he

had simply resigned himself to his fate.

"I say, you fellows, I want to borrow a writing-pad and a fountain-pen," he said. "I've got some farewell letters to write to my titled relations. And I suppose I'd better draw up my will."

"Your—your will?" stuttered Harry Wharton.

"Yes; I want to make my last bequests."

"Great Scott!"

It occurred to the juniors that Billy Bunter had nothing to bequeath. But they felt that they ought to humour him.

Peter Todd produced a pocket writing-pad, and Frank Nugent provided a fountain-pen. And Billy Bunter, breaking off every now and again, as a spasm of pain attacked him, scribbled away industriously.

He first of all wrote a number of letters to his relations, forgiving them for not having kept him well supplied with remittances and tuck-hampers. And then he drew up his last will and testament.

This latter was a laborious business. It took Bunter quite a long time; which was surprising, having regard to the fact that he was not a person of great possessions. But the document was finished at last, and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were requested to sign their names as witnesses.



"You're all right, fatty," panted one of the stretcher-bearers. "Lie still, and close your eyes." Billy Bunter obeyed. He gave a sigh of relief when the stairs had been negotiated. The Close was thronged with fellows when the fat junior was carried to the waiting ambulance. Genuine sympathy was written large on every face. "Poor old Bunter," murmured Bob Cherry. "Operations are nasty things. Let's hope he gets over it." "Hear, hear!" said the "Co." fervently. (See Chapter 5.)

would have seemed heartless; yet Harry Wharton & Co. found it terribly difficult to keep their faces straight. For Billy Bunter's will was a highly-diverting document. It was worded as follows:

**"THE LAST WILL AND
TESTAMENT**

of
ME, WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER.

WHEREAS I am about to shuffle off this mortle coil, and have only a few hours to live, I hearby make my last sollum bekwests.

(1) To my miner **SAMUEL BUNTER**, I give and bekweethe all my soots of clothes, so that he may wear them as soon as he reeches my statcher.

(2) To my study-mate, **PETER TODD**, I give and bekweethe the wrist-watch I borrowed off him some time ago without his nollidge.

(3) To **HARRY WHARTON** I hand over the edditorship of my wonderful schoolboy jernal, 'Billy Bunter's Weekly,' in the hope that he won't make a horrible hash of it.

(4) To **BOB CHERRY** I leave all my study furniture and effects which don't happen to belong to my studymates. These konsist of a cupple of pictures and a toasting-fork.

(5) To **FRANK NUGENT** I leave the impott of a hundred lines which Mr. Quelch gave me yesterday.

(6) To **JOHNNY BULL** I leave my bicycle, which really belonged to him in the first plaice.

(7) To **HURREE SINGH** I give and bestow my tame hedgehogg, in the hope that it will frighten him, and cause his complexion to change colour.

(8) To **VERNON-SMITH** I give and bekweethe all my debts, amounting to eleven pounds eleven-and-elevenpence, in the hope that he will square them up for me out of his vast resorces.

Finally, to **ALL THE FELLOWS IN THE REMOVE** I give and bekweethe **MY AFFECKSHUNATE REGARDS.**

Given under my hand and seel, this sixth day of March, in the Year of Grace One Thowsand Nine Hundred and Twenty-four,

"WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER."

It said much for the juniors' self-control that they could peruse that weird and wonderful document without going into hysterics. Bob Cherry managed to convert a chuckle into a cough in the sick of time, and Peter Todd had to pop behind the screen in order to hide his twitching lips from Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry affixed their signatures to the will, and so sooner had they done so than the matron came in. She was followed by no less a personage than the head-master of Greyfriars.

The juniors promptly quitted the room, bestowing sympathetic glances upon Billy Bunter as they went.

"Keep your pecker up, Bunt," was Bob Cherry's parting comment.

But Billy Bunter's reply was a deep groan of despair.

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Saved at the Scaffold!

THE Head advanced gravely to the bedside.

"I am indeed sorry, Bunter," he said, "that things have come to this pass. I have often counselled you as to the unwisdom of over-eating, and I have no doubt that over-eating is responsible for your present plight. However, I have not come here to reproach you, my boy. No time must be lost in getting you fit and well again. The ambulance is waiting in the Close to convey you to the nursing-home."

"Ow!"

"Your father has telegraphed his consent for the operation to be performed," the Head went on; "and Dr. Wright, who is a highly skilled surgeon, has been engaged for the occasion."

"Groo!"

"I wish you a speedy recovery, my boy. You will find the conditions at the nursing-home very cosy and comfortable. Many nursing-homes, I regret to say, are appalling places, but the Courtfield nursing-home is a most excellent institution in every way. You will be quite happy there."

Bunter groaned. How on earth, he reflected, could he find happiness in a nursing-home—a place where they fed you on thin gruel, and washed you twice a day, and dosed you with nasty medicine?

"Are you able to walk downstairs, Bunter," asked the Head, "or would you like the ambulance-men to carry you down on a stretcher?"

"I—I think I'd rather be carried, sir," said Bunter. "But tell them to be careful. I don't want to be dropped down a flight of stairs!"

The stretcher-bearers were promptly summoned. They were big, burly men, and they needed to be, for they had a burden of fourteen stone to negotiate.

The stretcher was laid on the bed, and Billy Bunter rolled over on to it. He said good-bye to the Head and to the matron, and the next moment he was borne away to meet his doom, as he thought.

It was a dizzy and terrifying experience, being carried down the stairs. Bunter's head seemed to swim, and he screamed with terror.

"You're all right, fatty," panted one of the men. "Lie still, and close your eyes."

Billy Bunter obeyed, and he gave a gasp of relief when the stairs had been successfully negotiated.

The Close was thronged with fellows when Billy Bunter was carried to the waiting ambulance. Genuine sympathy was written large on every face. Not a fellow there would have cared to be in Bunter's predicament.

"I'm sorry for the kid," remarked Wingate of the Sixth to his chum Gwynne. "He must be suffering agonies of apprehension, to say nothing of his physical pain."

Gwynne nodded.

"Faith, an' I shouldn't feel very chirpy if I was in Bunter's shoes," he said. "Operations are nasty things, be jabbers!"

"Let's hope Bunter comes through all right," said the captain of Greyfriars. "I think he will. Operations for appendicitis aren't nearly so terrible as they used to be. Surgery has made great strides during the last twenty years. At one time it used to be a case of touch-and-go with the patient, but nowadays it's generally all serene, unless any complications arise."

Gwynne looked grave.

"Bunter's so fat and unhealthy that I'm rather afraid for him," he said. "Still, he's got the whole school with him, wishing him a quick recovery."

Billy Bunter was heaved into the ambulance; and his trunk, into which all his belongings had been packed, was heaved in after him. Then the vehicle rumbled away through the school gateway.

Bunter was gone! For at least three weeks his familiar fat figure would not be seen at Greyfriars. And perhaps—there was always that dread alternative—he had gone for ever!

Lots of fellows had said, many a time and oft, that they would be glad to see the back of Bunter. He was not a popular character by any means. But now that they had actually seen the back of him the fellows were intensely sorry. Greyfriars would not be the same without Billy Bunter. He had come to be quite a landmark, as it were, at the old school, and his quaint and amusing antics would be missed. The fellows didn't mind missing them for three weeks, but they didn't want Bunter to share the fate of the lady in the song, and be "lost and gone for ever."

Everybody, from the captain of the school down to the youngest fag, wished Billy Bunter a sure and speedy recovery.

"We shall know to-night whether the operation's been a success," said Bob Cherry. "The Head has made arrangements with the matron at the nursing-home that she's to telephone if anything should go wrong. And if no telephone message comes through we may take it for granted that the operation's been a success, and that Bunter's going on all right."

"Then I sincerely hope there's no telephone message, that's all," said Harry Wharton. "Poor old Bunter! He's badly up against it; but an operation's the only remedy."

"Oh, he'll pull through all right!" said Johnny Bull confidently. "A modern surgeon removes a fellow's appendix as easily as he'd remove an appendix from a book!"

"That is so," agreed Hurree Singh. "Things look rather black for Bunter at the moment; but it's a long lane that has no silver lining, as your English proverb has it."

The juniors strolled back into the building, their thoughts centred upon Billy Bunter and his coming ordeal.

Meanwhile, the fat junior was being whirled away to the nursing-home.

Bunter's panic returned to him in full flood when he got there. As he was carried up the stairs on the stretcher an unpleasant odour of chloroform came to his nostrils. It was the sickly odour that pervades all such places; and Billy Bunter, who had been resigned to the operation, now felt that he simply couldn't face it.

He was carried into a large, airy room at the top of the building. A kind-faced nurse was there, and she instructed him to take off his clothes and get into bed.

Billy Bunter was soon tucked between the sheets, with a hot-water bottle at his feet. His internal pains had quieted down considerably, and he would have been quite comfortable, but for the haunting fears which assailed him.

Never in his life had he been so desperately miserable. It was bad enough to sit in a dentist's waiting-room, awaiting one's call to the "torture-chamber." But to lie in bed awaiting a summons to an operating-theatre was infinitely worse. It was an ordeal that would have sapped the courage of braver fellows than Bunter.

Slowly the long hours passed, each hour seeming a separate eternity.

The winter afternoon merged into dusk; but a fire burned brightly in Billy Bunter's room, and the nurse came in to light the gas.

"Not much longer to wait," she said. "Don't look so dreadfully scared. I can guess how you feel about it; but you will laugh at your foolish fears and fancies when it is all over. You will be sent to sleep, and you will feel no pain. Some people, in fact, have the most delightful dreams when they are under the anæsthetic. A young fellow next door dreamed that he was taking part in a glorious football match. He shouted about it in his sleep, and when he came round I asked him how many goals he had scored."

The nurse smiled at the recollection; but Billy Bunter didn't smile. He felt that, like the monarch in the poem, he would never smile again.

"I—I say, nurse," he faltered, "do you think they could put the operation off for a few days?"

The nurse shook her head.

"Delays are dangerous," she said. "Besides, you don't want to lie here for days, brooding over the possibilities. Why, it would wreck your nerves!"

Billy Bunter moved restlessly in his bed.

"I believe Dr. Short's all wrong," he said. "These country doctors are no good. They tell you you've got appendicitis, and it turns out to be a cold in the chest, or something like that. I've no faith in old Short's judgment."

"Indeed!" came a voice from the doorway.

And Billy Bunter gave a violent start as "old Short" himself came into the room.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't see you standing there, doctor!"

"Apparently not," said Dr. Short dryly. "So you think I have made a mistake in my diagnosis?"

"Yes, I do!" said Bunter with a burst of defiance. "I don't believe I've got appendicitis at all, so there! The eternal pains aren't nearly so bad now. They'll soon be gone altogether."

The doctor frowned.

"When I examined you at the school you showed all the symptoms of appendicitis," he said. "However, if it will give you any satisfaction, I will call in another doctor to confirm my diagnosis."

"I don't want another doctor," said Bunter. "What I want is an X-ray examination. Then we shall soon see whether I'm suffering from inflammation of the appendix or not."

"You mean inflammation, surely?" said Dr. Short. "Well, there is no objection to your having an X-ray examination, but it will be a costly proceeding."

"That's all right," said Bunter. "The pater can pay. A few quids, out of all his millions, will be a mere drop in the ocean."

It was therefore arranged that Billy Bunter should be subjected to an X-ray examination. There was a special apparatus at the nursing home, and Dr. Wright, the surgeon, was asked to make the examination.

It was a thrilling moment for Billy Bunter. His fate hung in the balance.

Would the X-ray examination prove Dr. Short to be wrong in his diagnosis? If so, all would be well, and the operation would not take place.

If, on the other hand, Dr. Short was proved to be right, then Bunter would have to go through the mill.

The fat junior was on tenterhooks whilst the examination was being conducted. It seemed to him that the issue



At each side of the gate at the entrance to the football ground sat a junior. They were taking money "hand over fist," as a constant stream of humanity poured into the ground. "Looks as if Bunter's in for a big benefit," said Bob Cherry. "Yes, I fancy we shall collect fifty quid," remarked Wharton. "Look at the fellows swarming in!" (See Chapter 8.)

was one of life or death. He felt like the prisoner in the dock who feverishly awaits the verdict of the jury—a verdict which will either set him free or send him to the scaffold.

It seemed an age before the surgeon made his report. But at last he pronounced judgment. "I am happy to inform you, my boy," he said, "that Dr. Short has been mistaken in his diagnosis. You are not suffering from appendicitis!"

Never had Billy Bunter listened to such cheering words as these. The colour flooded back into his plump cheeks, and he emitted a whoop of delight.

"Hooray! Then I sha'n't have the operation after all?"

"No," said the surgeon with a smile. "I am sorry that you have suffered so much apprehension. But you must not blame Dr. Short for his error. Doctors are not infallible, and all the symptoms seemed to point to appendicitis. Even if the error had not been discovered, and you had had the operation, there would have been no harm done. A person is always better without his appendix than with it."

"I dare say," said Bunter, "but I'm sticking to mine."

Dr. Wright laughed.

"What you are really suffering from is an attack of acute indigestion," he said. "You have overloaded your system with food, and your digestive organs are protesting against the great strain you have placed upon them. I think it would be wise for you to remain in the nursing home for a week, on a special diet."

Billy Bunter made a wry face at this. He didn't relish the idea of being fed on chicken broth for a week. Already he was feeling considerably better—the surgeon's cheering news was probably responsible for this—and he anticipated

that his usual healthy appetite would return in a day or two. It would be dreadful to have to exist on chicken broth when he felt famished.

On the other hand, there was something to be said in favour of a week in the nursing home. It meant immunity from lessons and a welcome change of routine. He could pose as an unhappy invalid, and get people to bring him books, and possibly grub.

"I will write a note to your headmaster," said Dr. Wright, "telling him that an operation is not necessary, and that I propose to keep you here for a week, in order to cure your digestive trouble."

The surgeon sat down and scribbled the letter. Having sealed the envelope, he left it on the table.

"When the nurse comes in," he said, "you might ask her to see that this letter is sent up to Dr. Locke."

"Oh, certainly!" said Billy Bunter.

Dr. Wright took his departure, and Billy Bunter was alone in the room. His brain was working swiftly.

Supposing he destroyed the surgeon's letter, and it was never delivered to Dr. Locke? Then everybody at Greyfriars would think that he had had his operation, and he would be an object of pity and sympathy.

Billy Bunter did not stop to reflect upon the caddishness of such an action, or to weigh the possible consequences. As a matter of fact, he was given no time for reflection, for he heard the nurse's footsteps coming along the corridor.

Instantly he leapt out of bed and pounced upon the letter. He screwed it into a little round ball, which he tossed into the blazing fire. Then he scrambled back into bed, and there was a look of blissful innocence on his face as the door opened and the nurse rustled in.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Visitors for Bunter!

"CONGRATULATE me, nurse!" said Billy Bunter rather breathlessly. "I'm not having the operation after all!"

"I am very pleased to hear it," said the nurse with a smile. "I understand, though, that you will remain here for a week on special diet?"

"That's so," said Bunter.

"How are you feeling now?"

"Crowds better!" was the cheerful reply. "Isn't it ripping to know that I'm not going under the beastly knife? I should have been awfully cut up."

"In more senses than one," laughed the nurse.

Billy Bunter was sitting up in bed, his face beaming like a full moon. Gone were all his fears and nervous tremors. The dark clouds had rolled by, and all was merry and bright. The fat junior's relief at escaping the fate which had threatened him was deep and fervent.

At Greyfriars everybody was in ignorance of the turn events had taken. There had been no telephone message from the nursing home, and it was therefore assumed that Bunter had had the operation, and that it had been successful.

The Head, and the masters, and the fellows, all believed that Bunter was progressing satisfactorily, as indeed he was. And it was not deemed necessary to send anybody to the nursing home to make inquiries. If anything was wrong the matron would have telephoned. She had not done so, therefore it was universally concluded that all was well with the Owl of the Remove.

The nurse made Billy Bunter comfortable for the night and left him. He was soon fast asleep. His sufferings—for Bunter had really been through the mill that day—had exhausted him. The pain was practically gone now, and Bunter had no difficulty in getting to sleep. His last waking thoughts were very blissful ones. There would be no rising-bell in the morning to rouse him from his slumbers. There would be no wet sponge squeezed over his flabby features. He was in a place where the japers ceased from japing and the weary were at rest.

Bunter was aroused at seven o'clock next morning by the entry of his nurse. She carried a tray on which was a basin of thin gruel.

"Good-morning!" she said genially. "And how does my patient feel this morning?"

Bunter rubbed his eyes and blinked drowsily at the nurse.

"Well, between you and me and the gate-post, nurse, I feel as fit as a fiddle!" he said. "But I shouldn't like everybody to know that, for private reasons. So I hope you won't gossip."

The nurse frowned. Her manner became frigid.

"I am not in the habit of gossiping," she said. "Should anybody call to see you I shall give them no information whatever as to your condition. I shall simply show them up to your room."

"Oh, good!" murmured Bunter.

This was exactly what he wanted. His nurse would keep her own counsel, for she evidently did not believe in discussing her patients with visitors. Consequently, no one would learn from her lips that the operation had not taken place.

"I'm expecting some pals of mine to call," said Bunter. "P'raps to-day, p'raps to-morrow. If they should ask

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you any questions you'll keep as mum as a mouse, won't you?"

"I shall keep my own counsel, if that is what you mean?" said the nurse stiffly.

She set the tray on the small table which stood beside the bed.

"Here, what's this?" asked the patient, eyeing the steaming basin with suspicion.

"Your breakfast," said the nurse.

"Eh?"

"It is delicious gruel, specially prepared for you."

"Groo! I hate gruel!" groaned Bunter. "I prefer tea or coffee for the liquid part of my brekker. But where's the solid part?"

"You are not to have solid food," said the nurse. "This is your complete breakfast."

"Oh, my hat!"

Billy Bunter stared at the gruel in deep disgust. His pains had gone now, and with their departure his appetite had returned. He longed for a repetition of the breakfast he had consumed twenty-four hours before—six rashers of bacon, and some fried eggs, and plenty of toast and marmalade.

"How can a fellow keep going on a basin of thin gruel?" he grumbled.

"Why, I shall get really ill! And a fellow doesn't come to a nursing home to get ill. His object is to get better. You wouldn't like me to waste away to a shadow, would you?"

The nurse recovered her good humour. "There is no danger of that!" she said with a glance at Billy Bunter's ample form.

"Oh, really, nurse—"

"Now, drink up your gruel like a good boy. I must be off now. I have other patients to attend to."

The nurse bustled out of the room, and Billy Bunter, rather than go empty away, started on the gruel, spooning it up savagely, as if he owed it a grudge.

If gruel was to be his staple diet during the coming week, he reflected, life in the nursing home would be anything but "one grand, sweet song."

The morning passed drearily for Billy Bunter. The nurse brought him a basin of hot water, so that he could perform his ablutions; and she popped in once or twice during the morning to see if he wanted anything. Bunter did want something. He wanted a substantial feed. But this luxury was denied him.

Bunter's dinner consisted of a portion of milk pudding. The nurse described this meal as nourishing and satisfying. It might have nourished Bunter, but it didn't satisfy him. Instead of pains in his interior, he now felt an aching void.

The fat junior was lying in bed, mumbling and grumbling to himself, when the nurse opened the door and announced visitors.

"Some of your friends from the school have called to see you," she said.

Instantly Billy Bunter put his finger to his lips, as a signal to the nurse to preserve silence.

The signal was not necessary, for the nurse had not told the callers anything about Bunter's condition.

Six Greyfriars juniors trooped into the sick-room. The nurse ushered them in, and then ushered herself out.

The Famous Five and Peter Todd were the visitors. And they were looking somewhat grave and anxious. They had heard no news of Billy Bunter since he had been taken from Greyfriars on the ambulance; and, although they knew he was still in the land of the living, they guessed he must be feeling pretty "groggy" after his operation.

Bunter certainly looked ill. He lay

back on the pillows, his eyes half-closed, and his teeth clenched as if he was trying not to cry out.

"Bunty, old fellow," murmured Bob Cherry, advancing to the bedside.

Groan!

"How are you feeling?" asked Bob.

"Awful! I—I was just sinking into unconsciousness again when you fellows came in. It's a wonder they let you see me. I'm not yet out of danger—"

"We won't stay long," said Harry Wharton. "Awfully sorry to find you like this, old chap! We were hoping you'd be getting over the operation nicely by now."

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

"Anyway, you've got through the operation, and that's something to be thankful for," said Johnny Bull.

Bunter groaned.

"Yes, but confiscations have set in," he said.

"Eh?"

"Horrible confiscations!"

For a moment the juniors stared blankly at Bunter. Then they tumbled to what he meant. Complications had set in.

"I'm still running a high temperament," Bunter went on. "It was a hundred and four last night, and it's about a hundred and twelve now."

The juniors accepted that statement with a grain of salt. They knew perfectly well that if Bunter's "temperament" had soared to a hundred and twelve he wouldn't be talking to them now.

"What did it feel like, going under the operation?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, it was awful!" said Bunter, with a shudder. "Of course, I faced it without flinching. I walked into the operating-theatre without assistance and said good-morning to the surgeon."

"But it was in the afternoon when you had your operation!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, yes, so it was! I'd forgotten. Well, I said good-evening to the surgeon—I mean good-afternoon—and told him to get the job over quick. Then I lay on the operating-table, and old Short started to administer the Annie what's-her-name."

"Anæsthetic?" suggested Wharton.

"That's it! They gave me chloroform, and then ether, and then some other concoction. But it didn't send me to sleep. It just gave me an awful choking feeling. But the surgeon thought I was well under, and he started hacking me about while I was still conscious. Oh, it was terrible! Brave fellow though I am, I jolly nearly yelled, I can tell you!"

The juniors stared at Bunter in amazement.

"You—you mean to say you had the operation while you were still conscious?" gasped Peter Todd.

Bunter nodded.

"It wasn't until they finished stitching me up that I lost consciousness," he said. "In fact, to show you how wide-awake I was, I gave the surgeon a hand with the stitches."

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged smiling glances. They were not prepared to swallow such a tall story as that. They recollected that Billy Bunter as a fabricator put Ananias and Baron Munchausen completely in the shade.

But, although they did not credit the story of Billy Bunter's harrowing experiences, the juniors quite thought he had had the operation, and was feeling very weak in consequence. Bunter played the part of a chronic invalid to perfection. He would have deceived the shrewdest onlooker at that moment.

"I say, you fellows," he said, "I hope you've brought me something. They

never give a fellow anything to eat in this place."

"Shouldn't have thought you wanted to eat with the taste of chloroform in your mouth," said Bob Cherry. "But we've brought you a few grapes."

So saying, Bob handed over to the patient a brown-paper bag containing a bunch of big black grapes.

Billy Bunter pitched into those grapes with great gusto. He popped them into his mouth with amazing rapidity, and said no word until the bag was empty.

Whatever Bunter's sufferings might have been, they had not robbed him of his appetite. He gazed wistfully at the empty bag.

"Brought anything else?" he asked.

"No," said Harry Wharton. "We didn't think you'd feel up to eating anything."

"Well, a jolly good feed's the only thing that can save me," said Bunter. "I'm simply wasting away owing to lack of nourishment. After an operation for appendicitis a fellow ought to stuff as much as he can so as to build up his system again. I wish you fellows could smuggle a hamper of tuck up to me."

"Are you sure it would be wise?" asked Wharton.

"Eh? Of course! A first-class feed would be my salvation. Don't leave me here to starve, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter spoke in tones of earnest pleading, and he forced crocodile's tears to his eyes.

How could the juniors resist that pathetic appeal? Here was Billy Bunter languishing on a sick-bed, craving for the delights of "grub, glorious grub." To have ignored that appeal the juniors would have needed hearts of stone.

"Well, we'll try and work the oracle, Buntie," said Peter Todd. "But I don't quite see how we can smuggle the grub in without the nurses seeing it."

"Send it in a hatbox!" said Bunter, with a flash of inspiration. "If a big hatbox arrives for me, marked 'Silk toppers—with care,' nobody will dream that it contains grub. I'll keep it under the bed, and help myself when I feel disposed."

"All serene!" said Bob Cherry. "We'll see what we can do for you, Buntie."

"But we won't buy anything that is likely to upsetfully injure your digestive organs," said Hurree Singh.

"Good, nourishing food is what I want," said Bunter. "Pies and pastries, and all that sort of thing. And plenty of doughnuts and jam-tarts."

The juniors grinned. Billy Bunter's idea of good, nourishing food was rather comical. But they decided to do their best for him, and they told him to expect the smuggled supplies in about an hour.

"We'll be going now," said Wharton. "Buck up and get fit, Bunter. All the fellows up at the school send you their best wishes for a quick recovery."

Billy Bunter closed his eyes.

"Yes, you'd better be going now," he murmured faintly. "I'm beginning to sink into unconsciousness again."

"Shall we call the nurse?" asked Nugent, looking a little startled.

"Nunno! I shall soon come round again, I expect. Good-bye, you fellows! And whatever you do, don't forget the tuck!"

Billy Bunter breathed heavily and lay still, with his eyes tightly closed. And his visitors, like the Arabs in the poem, silently stole away.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Good Samaritans!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were true to their word.

About an hour after their departure, a large hat-box, tightly corded, arrived at the nursing-home for Billy Bunter. It was addressed to the fat junior, and it bore the inscription:

"GENTLEMAN'S SILK HATS—
WITH CARE!"

The nurse bore the hat-box into Billy Bunter's room. Her face was flushed, and she was panting as she set down her burden.

"Goodness! What a weight! I've never handled such a heavy hat-box before!"

"It must be the packing that makes it so heavy, nurse," said Bunter. "Push the box under the bed, if you don't mind. I've asked the hatters to send up a dozen toppers for me to select one from. And I don't want to try them on just yet."

The nurse pushed the box under the bed, and rose, gasping, from her exertions.

"If you hadn't said they were top-hats in that box I should have imagined they were——"

"What?" asked Bunter in alarm, "Steel helmets?"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter was mightily relieved. He thought the nurse had been about to say "rabbit-pies." But apparently she had not the slightest suspicion that the box contained anything but hats.

"I'm going to sleep now, nurse," said Bunter. "I don't want to be disturbed. Tell the night-nurse there will be no need for her to look in during her rounds."

"Very well," said the nurse.

And, after making up the fire, she withdrew.

Billy Bunter waited five minutes. He was so hungry that he couldn't have held out longer than that. Then he slipped out of bed, and dragged forth the box. Clumsily but eagerly he unlocked it, and an array of good things greeted his gaze.

Harry Wharton & Co. had shown good judgment. They had not included anything that was likely to upset Bunter, and cause a repetition of the "eternal" pains.

The fat junior spent a blissful night, dozing and gorging alternately. He would slumber for an hour or so, and then treat himself to a little snack. Then he would sink back again on to the pillows.



Bob Cherry took a powerful shot from a long way out. Fatty Wynn's vision of the ball was interrupted by a group of players in front of him. He misjudged the flight of the sphere, which passed over his shoulder and crashed into the net. "Goal!" "Hurrah!" The Friars were on top now. (See Chapter 8.)

By the morning the hat-box was empty. And the nurse, when she brought in Bunter's breakfast—the usual basin of thin gruel—found her patient in a very cheerful humour. For once in a way, he quite forgot to grumble at his meagre fare.

There were more visitors for Bunter that day. They came after dinner, having been excused lessons. Sammy Bunter was one of the party; the others were Vernon-Smith and Tom Brown and Mark Linley, of the Remove. When they were shown into Bunter's room they found him lying limply in bed, looking like the Dying Gladiator.

Sammy Bunter rolled to the bedside, and gave his major an affectionate "peck" on the forehead.

"Hallo, Billy, old chap!" said the fat fag. "You're still alive, then?"

"Only just!" groaned Billy.

"Have they been doing lots of dreadful things to you?"

"Yes, rather! They took me to pieces, and then put me together again. And it was jolly painful, I can tell you! Marvellous how I managed to pull through, with such a frail and delicate constitution as I've got. Sit down, Smithy. Sorry there's only one chair. The rest of you will have to perch yourselves on the bed. But mind you don't sit on my tummy. That would just about cause it!"

"Feeling much pain?" asked Mark Linley sympathetically.

"Pain?" echoed Bunter. "Pain would be sheer rapture compared with the awful agonies I'm suffering! But I'm not the chap to make a fuss. I suffer in silence. Another chap—a softer sort of fellow, like you or Smithy—would be yelling the roof off!"

In the ordinary way Mark Linley and Vernon-Smith would have resented that insult. But they felt so sorry for Billy Bunter that they were prepared to be magnanimous.

"I hope you fellows have brought me something," said Bunter, blinking at his visitors. "You don't seem to be loaded up with parcels."

"We didn't bring anything along," said Tom Brown, "because we understood from Wharton that he and his pals brought you a hamper yesterday."

"Oh, that's ancient history!" said Bunter impatiently.

"You mean to say you've finished the hamper already?" gasped Vernon-Smith.

"Of course! I've got to keep up my strength somehow. They never give me a scrap of food in this place, and I should have starved by now if that hamper hadn't turned up. I'm beginning to starve again now, so for goodness' sake get me some grub, you fellows!"

Bunter's visitors exchanged glances and smiles. There was nothing very wrong with the fat junior, they reflected. His appetite was normal; and Bunter's normal appetite equalled the appetites of three or four fellows combined.

"You shall have a hamper, old chap," said Vernon-Smith. "It's against the rules of the nursing-home to smuggle grub into the merry establishment. But we'll manage it somehow."

"Good!" said Billy Bunter, brightening up. "There's an empty hat-box under the bed. You can fetch the tuck in that, if you don't mind. Pop off and get it now, there's good chaps!"

"But we haven't had five minutes' chat with you yet!" protested Tom Brown.

Bunter gave a snort of impatience. "Eh? What does that matter? The best way you can entertain me is to THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 838.

bring me plenty of good, nourishing grub. That's what I thrive on—not gossip. You can stay, if you like, Sammy, while the others fetch the tuck."

So Sammy stayed. And the others, who were anxious to do their bit for the invalid, in spite of his rudeness, set off on their mission, Vernon-Smith carrying the hat-box.

Within half an hour they were back again, and the hat-box was filled once more—not with gentlemen's silk hats, but with a choice assortment of tuck.

Billy Bunter accepted it without pouring forth a torrent of effusive thanks. In fact, he grumbled because the hat-box wasn't several sizes bigger!

"Now you'll be happy, Bunter," said Mark Linley. "You ought to be, at any rate. Going to make a start now?"

"Yes, rather. But if you happen to hear the nurse coming give me the tip."

Billy Bunter started on the good things, and his visitors watched him in amazed silence.

It seemed extraordinary to them that a fellow who had recently undergone an operation for appendicitis should be able to eat so heartily, and with such obvious enjoyment.

After he had partaken of what he called a "modest snack," Billy Bunter gave instructions for the hat-box to be pushed under the bed, so that he could return to it during the night-watches.

"Well, you're simply wonderful!" said Tom Brown, with a stare. "Fancy being able to stuff like that, so soon after a giddy operation! Didn't the grub seem to taste of chloroform?"

"Yes, it did a bit," assented Bunter. "But I feel heaps better for having had it—the grub, I mean, not the operation. If a fresh lot of visitors intend to come and see me to-morrow, you might ask them to bring me some tuck. I can't go on from day to day unless I'm well fortified."

The juniors undertook to see that Bunter was kept well supplied with his heart's desire, and then they left him.

Vernon-Smith looked very thoughtful as he tramped back to Greyfriars with his companions.

"This operation is going to be a jolly big expense for Bunter," he said presently.

"For Bunter's pater, you mean," interposed Tom Brown.

"Exactly. And Bunter's pater—in spite of all the yarns we've heard to the contrary—isn't a millionaire, by any means. This will hit him pretty hard. The surgeon's fee, according to Bunter, is fifty guineas. And on top of that there will be the nursing-home expenses, the doctor's bill, and goodness knows what! I'm seriously thinking, you fellows, that we ought to—"

"Raise some money to pay the surgeon's fee?" suggested Tom Brown.

"Right first time!" said Vernon-Smith. "Fifty guineas will take some raising, but I fancy the fellows will rally round quickly enough. They're really sorry for poor old Bunter."

Mark Linley nodded.

"The question is, how are we going to work this stunt?" he said. "Simply go round with a subscription-list?"

"No; that's rather a tame way of raising funds," said Vernon-Smith. "Look here, we're playing St. Jim's to-morrow afternoon at footer. What about having

a 'gate'? No fixed charge for admission, but let every fellow pay what he likes, according to his means—or his meanness. If we don't succeed in raising fifty guineas that way, I'll eat my Sunday topper!"

Tom Brown clapped the speaker on the back.

"Quite a ripping wheeze, Smithy," he said, with enthusiasm. "We'll turn it into a sort of charity match, for Bunter's benefit."

"That's the idea!"

On reaching Greyfriars, the juniors confided their scheme to Harry Wharton & Co., who not only lent a willing ear, but gave the proposal their warm support.

There was great enthusiasm at Greyfriars when the scheme was made public.

Everybody—including the Head and the masters—decided to patronise the match on the morrow. And all the pounds, shillings, and pence that were collected in gate-money would go towards paying for Billy Bunter's operation.

But what Greyfriars would have said had they known that Bunter had never come into contact with surgeon's knife is best left to the imagination!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Benefit!

"THE turnstiles are clicking merrily!" said Bob Cherry.

That was merely a figure of speech. There were no turnstiles at the entrance to Little Side. There was simply a gate, and at each side of this gate sat a junior at the receipt of custom. They were taking money "hand over fist," as a constant stream of humanity poured through into the ground.

Dick Rake and William Wibley were the collectors. Each had a little table in front of him, and piles of money appeared on those tables as if by magic.

There was a big placard exhibited, bearing the announcement:

"GREYFRIARS v. ST. JIM'S!

A GRAND FOOTBALL MATCH!

Kick-off 2.30 p.m.

FOR BILLY BUNTER'S BENEFIT!

All must pay for admission, but the amount is optional. Whether it's a penny or a pound, it will go towards this worthy object.

Roll up, kids, with dollars and quids! Fork out your 'Fishers,' Bunter's well-wishers!"

Not many people went so far as to "fork out" Fishers. But there were some who did.

The Head, doubtless in order to set a shining example, actually paid the sum of five pounds for admission to the ground.

Several of the masters paid a pound; but for the most part it was a silver collection. Half-crowns and florins and shillings and sixpenny-pieces and threepenny-pieces rained upon the little tables in a silver shower. And Rake and Wibley had hard work to keep pace with the influx.

"Looks as if Bunter's in for a big benefit," said Bob Cherry. "Think we shall raise fifty guineas, Harry?"

"Well, it's a tall order," said Wharton, "but I fancy we shall do it. Just look at the fellows swarming in! Talk about flies round a honeypot."

(Continued on page 10.)

ANSWERS
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HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week Ending March 1st, 1924.



The Ideal Headmaster!

We have asked a number of people to choose their Ideal Headmaster. Some amazing choices are made below. —

BOB CHERRY:

I vote with both hands—and both feet—for Mr. Larry Lascelles as the ideal headmaster. I've nothing but respect for the present Head, but he is beginning to feel the strain of "Anno Domini," and he hasn't the vigour and freshness of good old "Larry." The latter is such a keen sportsman that, if he became headmaster, life would consist of punting footballs and wielding the willow. Only about an hour a day would be devoted to lessons. And that would suit everybody down to the ground, barring the "swots"!

ALONZO TODD:

Were I in the happy position of being able to appoint a new headmaster, I should have great pleasure in asking my Uncle Benjamin to fill the post. Uncle Benjamin is the wisest man the world has ever known since Solomon, and the management of Greyfriars School would be mere child's play to him. He would be kindness itself, and he would at once abolish the brutal birch and the cruel cane, and govern solely by kindness. His favourite saying would be: "My poor wayward youth, I beg and beseech of you not to do it again!" How nice it would be if the severest punishment one could possibly receive was a gentle rebuke from Uncle Benjamin!

MICKY DESMOND:

I think it's about time we had a comedian as headmaster. The present Head is too stern and solemn for words. I venture to propose Gosling, the porter, as his successor. Gosling would look a perfect scream in a gown and mortar-board; and can't you imagine him dealing with an offender in this fashion?

"Wot I says is this 'ere, I ain't a-goin' to 'ave it, so there! 'Ow many times have I warned you not to rig up a booby-trap on my study door? Bring me that there birch-rod, and I'll tan yer 'ide for yer, as ever was!"

HORACE COKER:

There's only one person at Greyfriars who would make a really capable and efficient headmaster, and that's me, the mity man of the Fifth. I should come down pretty heavily on the fags; but then the chetky young cubs thoroughly deserve it. There would be about a duzzen public floggings per day, if I held the high offfis of headmaster.

(Did you say you would make an efficient headmaster, Coker, or a "deficient" one?—Ed.)

DICKY NUGENT:

i think the best plan would be to have no headmaster at all, & then we could all do as we jolly well liked. i'm fed-up with soopervision & dissiplin & all the rest of it; & i think we ought to rise in arms against the head, and make him clear out as fast as his legs would carry him. He'd never come back to shoulder his responsibilities, & it would be a great feat! i wonder how the head would face it. Goodness nose! Well, chin-chin!

Being Killed by Kindness!

"Yow-how!" roared little Johnny. "Yow-how! I'm a-goin' to stop bein' kind an' helpful to people."

"Why, Johnny, that's a very unmanly resolve!" remonstrated his mother. "I'm sure you don't mean it. What's the matter?"

"Yes; I do mean it!" screamed Johnny. "To-day at school I saw Tommy Jones putting a pin on the headmaster's chair, so just as the Head sat down I pulled away the chair. The Head sat down on the floor, and when he got up he licked me for pullin' away the chair, and then Tommy Jones licked me for interferin'! So now—yow-how!—I'm never going to help anybody no more!"

EDITORIAL!

By
HARRY
WHARTON.

H EADMASTERS, from the point of view of the schoolboy, are necessary evils. We can't do without them, unfortunately, some may feel inclined to add. A school without a headmaster would be like a ship without a steersman.

Greyfriars has no cause to grumble. The Rev. Herbert Henry Locke, D.D., who presides over the destinies of our famous school, is not merely "one of the best," but THE best! I suppose no man is perfect, but our Head comes as near to perfection as mortal conditions will allow. He is just, which is one of the chief essentials of a headmaster; he has the welfare of the school at heart, he tempers justice with mercy, and he is not a tyrant.

Of course, we feel a little bit "shivery-shaky" when we are summoned to appear before the Head; for although he is kind and human, yet there is something awe-inspiring and majestic about him from a junior's point of view. He carries with him the dignity of his high office, which is perhaps as well, for can you imagine an undignified headmaster, of the kind portrayed in Dicky Nugent's weird and wonderful stories of school life? Can you picture a Head saying "Rats!" or "Go and eat coke!" to a refractory junior, as Dicky Nugent makes him do?

As I say, our own Head is the best you could find in a day's march. But there is another type of headmaster—the tyrannical type—who rules with a rod of iron, and who wields the birch-rod on every possible occasion, so that his muscles shall not get flabby.

Greyfriars has had some of these tyrants in the past, and Wingate of the Sixth describes some of them in an interesting article in this issue.

A special number dealing with headmasters will not come amiss, for there must be hundreds of letters in my file containing requests for such a supplement. Dr. Locke offered to contribute to it, but I am very much afraid that his article will not be penned in time for the printers. When it does come to hand, however, I will publish it in another supplement.

HARRY WHARTON.

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By Peter Todd.

"MASTER BUNTER! Which the 'Ead wants to see you himmediate!"

Trotter, the page, poked his head round the door of Study No. 7 and made that announcement.

I expected to see Billy Bunter's face turn the colour of chalk. I expected to see him tremble at the knees, and shudder with apprehension. For I knew why he was wanted—and so did Bunter. He had raided a pie from Mr. Prout's study, and the master of the Fifth had found him out and reported him to the Head.

A severe flogging was in store for Bunter. Perhaps a public flogging—perhaps a private one. But there could be no doubt that he would be flogged.

But instead of collapsing on the study carpet, or groaning in apprehension of the painful ordeal, Billy Bunter gave a chuckle.

"All serene, Trotter!" he said cheerfully. "I'm just coming."

I blinked at Bunter in amazement.

"Don't you realise what this means, porpoise?" I said. "You're going to be flogged!"

"I know that, Toddy."

"Well, why are you looking so cheerful about it?"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "I can face a flogging without turning a hair. You see, I'm prepared for it. I've rubbed some resin into my hands, so that the cane won't hurt a scrap."

"That's all very well," I said. "But supposing the Head orders you to touch your toes, instead of holding out your hand?"

"I'm quite prepared for that emergency, and I've barricaded my bags with a small cushion," said Bunter. "Whatever happens, I shall be safe. Whether I have to hold out my hands or touch my toes, I sha'n't feel any pain."

"Unless the Head tumbles to the fact that you've taken precautions," I said.

But this possibility didn't seem to alarm Bunter. He trotted off quite cheerfully to meet his fate.

"Come in!"

The stern tones of the Head answered Bunter's tap on the door. The fat junior rolled into the sacred apartment without the slightest trepidation.

"Bunter," said the Head grimly, "Mr. Prout has reported to me the fact that you purloined a pie belonging to him. Although not a thief in the worst sense of the term, you seem to labour under the delusion that it is quite legitimate to appropriate foodstuffs. I will endeavour to remove that delusion!"

So saying, the Head picked up a formidable-looking birch.

Billy Bunter did not falter. He calmly held out his hand.

"No, no!" said the Head.

Bunter withdrew his hand.

"Would you prefer me to touch my toes, sir?" he asked.

"Not at all! You will remove your jacket, Bunter, that I may apply the birch-rod to your back!"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter uttered a deep groan of dismay. He had left this method of punishment out of his calculations. He had rubbed resin into his palms, and he had barricaded his "bags," but his back was unprotected. And it was upon his back that the birch fell, with strong, sweeping strokes.

I heard Bunter's yells of anguish, even in Study No. 7, and I knew at once that there had been a hitch in Bunter's deep-laid scheme.

Verily, the best-laid schemes of mice and men—and porpoises—are apt to come unstuck!

Headmasters of the Past!

By George Wingate
(Captain of Greyfriars)



GREYFRIARS SCHOOL has had a long succession of headmasters. Some have been good sports, others very much the reverse. Some have been stern and tyrannical, others weak and foolish. Some have been young and energetic, others old and doddering.

The first headmaster on the School records is Josiah Oldacre. He ruled the **THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 838.**

roost in the days of "Good Queen Bess." Whether his rule was wise or otherwise history does not tell us. But we may picture him as an ancient and venerable patriarch, with a flowing white beard and a doddering gait, and we can imagine the young rascals of that period exclaiming, "Mind thine eye! Here cometh old Greybeard!"

Next on the list of headmasters comes Dr. Grimm. As you will gather from his name, he was not a jovial soul. He ruled with a rod of iron, and it was during his term of office that the first great rebellion broke out. But Dr. Grimm succeeded in bringing the rebels to heel, and the ringleaders were flogged and expelled. A flogging in those days was a thing to be feared. It struck terror into the hearts of the boldest.

The Reverend Thomas Sawney, who followed in the footsteps of Dr. Grimm, belonged to the scholarly and studious type of headmaster. He buried himself in his study, deep in his books all day, and letting the school "go to pot," to use a vulgarity.

Those were lean years for Greyfriars, and the school dropped sadly behind its rivals. But in the year 1624 came a great revival, for Dr. Garnett was appointed headmaster. He saw what an appalling state the school had sunk into, and he threw himself heart and soul into the task of reforming it. He weeded out all the undesirable pupils, and trained the others into a state of efficiency.

The school prospered exceedingly during Dr. Garnett's long reign. Then came the Civil War, which threw the country into a state of chaos, and Greyfriars suffered with the rest.

Dr. Jameson, Dr. Stoddart, and Dr. MacAndrew were all fairly decent "Heads." And then came that unspeakable tyrant, Dr. Ezekiel Stubbs. He was an inhuman monster, who delighted to terrorise small boys. Birchings in Big Hall were the order of the day, and in nearly every case the punishment was far in excess of the crime. It is actually recorded that one unfortunate youth received a dozen strokes with the birch for failing to raise his hat to the Head in Friardale. The boy stated in his defence that he failed to recognise Dr. Stubbs, who was muffled up in an ulster. But the explanation was of no avail, and the birching was duly awarded.

On another occasion a junior of the Remove caught it hot and strong for smashing the Head's study window. It was purely an accident, but Dr. Ezekiel Stubbs did not believe in accidents. The unfortunate junior was flogged unmercifully, gated for a month, and given an impot of enormous proportions to fulfil. Greyfriars fellows ought to feel thankful that they did not live in the time of Dr. Stubbs.

I could fill columns with instances of this tyrant's savage treatment of his pupils, but it would make melancholy reading. So I will conclude my article with the remark that our present Head—Dr. Herbert Henry Locke—is one of the best the old school has ever had. Under his impartial rule Greyfriars flourishes as it never flourished before. And we hope the day is far distant when Dr. Locke will be compelled to discard the robes of office.

[Supplement ii.]



A Thrilling Story
of School Life,
with the true
Dramatic Touch,

In a Boy's Power!

By Dicky Nugent.

TROT right in!"

The headmaster of St. Sam's uttered that cheery invitation, as a sharp rap sounded on the door of his study.

In came Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, dragging a junior by the ear. The junior in question was young Luker, the son of a millionaire, and he was squirming and squealing as he was dragged into the Head's presence.

The Head raised his eyebrows.

"Bless my sole!" he ejaculated. "What is the meaning of this introduction, Lickham?"

"This young rascal, sir," replied the Form master, "has been guilty of several misdemeanors. In the first place, he broke bounds in the middle of the night, in order to visit a disreputable establishment known as the Jolly Sailer."

"My hat!" gasped the Head.

"In the second place, sir," went on Mr. Lickham, "he was caught out of bounds by a prefect, who tried to reason with him and bring him back to the school; but the young rascal savvidgely attacked the prefect—with a ferossity which no words can describe—and knocked him into a ditch."

"Split me!" gasped the Head.

"Furthermore and moreover," said Mr. Lickham, "he escaped from the punishment-room—in which I locked him on his return to the school—and he broke into my study, and wrecked it from floor to ceiling. The place, sir, is in a perfect pickle! It will take hours and hours to get it straight again. Everything is upside-down, inside-out, and Topsy Turvey, whoever she might be. I am distracted, sir—I am undone!"

"Yes, Lickham, I've noticed that," said the Head, glancing at the Form master's wastecost from which a couple of buttons were missing.

Mr. Lickham gave a snort.

"I have brought this young rascal to you, sir, in order that you may administer condign punishment," he said. "Of course, you will see that he is publicly impelled from the school?"

At that moment the Head's eyes happened to meet those of the culprit. Luker was staring at him coolly, with a sardonic smile playing about his lips.

"You dare not impel me!" he said defiantly. "You dare not even lick me, for that matter. Doctor Birchmell, you are in my power! I hold you in the hollow of my hand!"

"Shush!" muttered the Head, turning pale. "You mustn't say these things in front of Mr. Lickham."

So saying, the Head made a signal to the master of the Fourth, who hurriedly took his departure.

"Now, Luker," said the Head, "my duty is clear. You have been brought before me on several grave charges—breaking bounds, assaulting a prefect, Supplement iii.]

and wrecking a Form master's study. It would be criminal of me to overlook these offences. Luker, you will be impelled in disgrace from this school!"

How did Luker receive this sentence? Did he shiver and shake and squirm? Did he tremble at the neeze? Did he fall upon those neeze-and wine for mercy? No! He actually laughed! And his mocking laugh ran through the Head's study.

"Ha, ha! You dare not impel me, Doctor Birchmell, and you know it! Have you forgotten, sir, that you are in my father's clutches?"

The Head gave a groan, and buried his face in his hands. His frame shook with sobs.

What Luker had said was only too true. The Head was in the clutches of Luker's father, who was a millionaire munnylender.

In a moment of hard-upness, the Head had so far forgotten his dignity as to borrow five bob from Luker senior. A few weeks later he had borrowed a further five bob. Then he had borrowed another ten, making a quid in all.

Mr. Luker had charged his victim 200 per cent interest, which the head was still paying off.

If these facts became generally known at St. Sam's, there would be a scandal. And if the Governors got to know of the affair, Dr. Birchmell would be sent packing.

The Head realised this only too well. But he realised, too, that he had a duty to do.

A grate struggle went on in the Head's mind. Should he give in to the blackmailing Luker, or should he do his duty, and impel the young rascal from St. Sam's?

It was a dreadful dilemma. Put yourself in the Head's place, dear reader, and you will see what a frightful fix he was in. His curridge began to fail, and no wonder.

Luker gazed scornfully at the cowering figger in cap and gown.



"If you give me the sack," said Luker scornfully, "I'll get you the order of the boot as well!"

"Better make up your mind quickly," he said. "If you give me the sack, I'll get you the order of the boot as well!"

"No, no!" pleaded the Head. "Have pity! I dare not have it made known that I have borrowed munny from your father. If so much as a wisper reaches the ears of the Governors—"

"Agree to my terms, then," said Luker. "Prommis not to impel me!"

The Head groaned. And he was on the very verge of yeelding, when the door of his study burst open, and Mr. Lickham rushed in, brandishing a copy of the morning paper.

"Heard the latest?" he cried. "Old Luker—the father of this wretched boy—has been sentenced to seven years' disprisonment for frawd!"

The Head jumped to his feet, and danced around in high glee. He was free from the clutches of the munnylender!

As for young Luker, his face turned as white as invisible ink, and his neeze began to nock together.

"It isn't true!" he cried horsely.

"Rats! It's true enuff!" said Mr. Lickham. "Here it is, in black-and-white!"

Luker could not doubt the evidense of his own eyes. There was a picture of his father standing in the dock, and underneath was written.

"SEVEN YEARS FOR A FRAUDULENT MUNNYLENDER!"

The room seemed to reel round the unhappy Luker. And the next thing he realised was that he was being drummed out of St. Sam's by a hoard of angry schoolfellows. They pelted him through the quad and out of gates, and he was kompelled to take to his heels, and run like Billy-o to the railway station.

The wretched Luker had looked his last upon St. Sam's!

THE END.

IF!

By DICK PENFOLD.

I'd never rise till ten o'clock,
I'd simply lay and snore in bed
(With all respect to Doctor Locke)
If I were Head!

I'd be an easy-going sort,
I'd never rule by fear and dread;
They'd all say: "What a decent sport!"
If I were Head!

At Bunter I would never growl,
Because the porpoise over-fed;
Nor should I make him squirm and howl,
If I were Head!

The term would be all holidays,
Lessons, I fear, would soon be dead;
There'd be no melancholy days,
If I were Head!

I'd let the fellows call me "Dick,"
Or anything they liked, instead;
I'd never wield the birch or stick
If I were Head!

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THE YOUNG PRETENDER!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Biggest crowd we've ever had for a junior match," said Frank Nugent, watching the hustle and bustle at the gate. "Hope we whack St. Jim's, that's all."

"We shall whackfully, whopfully, lickfully pulverise them!" was Hurrec Singh's cheerful comment.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "They're here!"

The St. Jim's footballers came strolling on the scene armed with their bags. They halted outside the gate and stared in some surprise at the big placard.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the elegant swell of the St. Jim's Fourth. "What does this mean, deah boys? Why is that fat boundah Buntah havin' a benefit?"

"He's just had an operation," explained Wibley.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "What's the trouble? Have they taken out his digestive organs and fitted him with a new set?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The poor old Owl got appendicitis," said Dick Rake. "Had to be shunted off to a nursing-home to have his appendix removed. He's going on well, I'm glad to say. But, of course, the surgeon's bill will be a hefty item, so we thought we'd arrange a 'gate' for this match to help Bunter out."

"What a perfectly wippin' ideah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I considah, deah boys, that we ought to wally wound for the good of the cause."

So saying, the noble Gussy produced his wallet, and took therefrom a Treasury note, which he handed to one of the collectors.

The rest of the St. Jim's footballers followed Gussy's illustrious example. They did not give to the same extent, for, as Monty Lowther explained, they weren't all bloated capitalists like Gussy!

The visiting team passed through on to the ground, and made their way to the dressing-room to change.

Still the money kept pouring in, and Billy Bunter's eyes would have glistened behind his spectacles had he been present to see the takings.

At last the rush was over, and all Greyfriars was present on the ground. There wasn't a single absentee. Even people like Gosling the porter, and Trotter the page, had rallied round for the good of the cause.

There was only one instance of meanness. Skinner of the Remove had tossed a shilling on to one of the tables and hurriedly passed through the gateway. It was afterwards discovered that the shilling was a bad one. It didn't ring true. Wibley made the discovery, and he gave a snort of fury.

"I'll settle with Skinner afterwards!" he said grimly. "The rotten cad! Fancy paying for admission with a bad shilling!"

"Don't be too hard on him," said Dick Rake. "He might have been broke, and the only way he could get in was by passing off a dud shilling. I know he's awfully sorry about Bunter, and he'd help him if he could. The spirit is willing, but the funds weak. Hallo! They're lining up for the fray."

A mighty roar arose as the rival teams sprinted into their positions.

Matches between Greyfriars and St. Jim's were always red-letter affairs.

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Great was the rivalry which existed between the two schools, and Harry Wharton & Co. were desperately anxious to win this match, for they were playing before Crowned Heads, so to speak. It wasn't often that the Head and the masters condescended to come and watch a junior fixture.

Wingate of the Sixth was the "knight of the whistle," and he set the game in motion.

"Play up, the 'Friars!"

"On the ball!"

"Pile up the merry goals, for Bunter's benefit!"

But there seemed little prospect of a glut of goals. The St. Jim's defence was founded as upon a rock. Fatty Wynn, their plump goalkeeper, was equal to every emergency, and Figgins and Kerr, in front of him, were a pair of powerful backs. They tackled and volleyed with rare judgment.

For a long time it was a duel between the Greyfriars attack and the St. Jim's defence—a duel which looked as if it would end in stalemate, for, try as they would, Harry Wharton & Co. could not get the ball into the net. On the rare occasions when they managed to beat the backs, they found Fatty Wynn cool and resourceful. He caught a "pile-driver" from Harry Wharton with as much ease and unconcern as a cricketer takes a "sitter." And he punched away a shot from Nugent with a look almost of contempt on his face, as much as to say, "Fancy sending in a soft shot like that! Wish you'd give me something with a bit of sting in it!"

Play had actually been in progress forty minutes before a goal came. And then it came at the wrong end—so far as the Greyfriars folk were concerned.

The St. Jim's forwards, who seemed to have faded right out of the picture, now broke away with startling suddenness. Clever passing and tricky footwork took them to within shooting distance, and then Tom Merry fired in a shot which had Bulstrode beaten all the way.

"Goal!"

Shouts of applause were mingled with gasps of dismay. Goals scored by opponents were always cheered on the Greyfriars ground, but those who cheered were looking anything but happy.

The 'Friars had been pressing all through the first half. Yet the "Saints" had drawn first blood!

Soon the whistle sounded for half-time, and the players congregated in the middle of the field and partook of lemons. Harry Wharton's wry face was not altogether due to the lemon he was sucking. He was reflecting grimly that there would have to be a big Greyfriars revival in the second half.

And there was!

Vernon-Smith put the crowd in a happy humour by racing through and scoring a grand goal. His shot was of the unstoppable variety, though Fatty Wynn made an heroic effort to save his charge.

That goal seemed to put new life into the Greyfriars forwards. They played sparkling football, and quite overwhelmed their opponents for a time. But it was not until twenty minutes from the finish that another goal came.

Bob Cherry was the successful marksman this time. He took a powerful shot from a long way out. Fatty Wynn's vision of the ball was interrupted by a group of players in front of him. He misjudged the flight of the sphere, which passed over his shoulder and crashed into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

The 'Friars were on top now. And on top they remained, despite the plucky and persistent efforts of Tom Merry & Co. to save the game.

Bulstrode's charge was in danger more than once, and there were some anxious moments for the onlookers. But at last the final whistle rang out, and they gave vent to their feelings of joy and relief with a mighty shout, which might have been heard in Friardale.

The match was over and won, and the great crowd melted away.

Rake and Wibley had totalled up the takings, and found that they amounted to forty-seven pounds. When Lord Mauleverer, the richest fellow in the Remove, heard of this, he insisted on making up the amount to fifty guineas.

The whole of the money was handed in to the Head, who undertook to send Dr. Wright, the surgeon, a cheque for fifty guineas, in payment for Billy Bunter's operation.

What would happen when Dr. Wright received the cheque? That remained to be seen. But whatever happened, it would not be favourable to William George Bunter.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Unwelcome Visitors!

BILLY BUNTER was having the time of his life in the nursing home.

Every day brought its quota of visitors, and every visitor brought his quota of tuck. At any rate, if he omitted to do so, he was soon persuaded by Bunter to repair the omission.

There were only one or two unwelcome visitors. One was Alonzo Todd.

The Duffer of the Remove called at the nursing home after the match with St. Jim's, and he was shown up to Bunter's room.

"My poor, dear fellow!" murmured Alonzo, advancing to the bedside. "It is dreadful to see you like this. Are you suffering much?"

"Untold agonies!" groaned Bunter.

"Dear me, how very distressing!" said Alonzo, wringing his hands. "I am most intensely sorry!"

"Your sorrow won't cure my sufferings!" growled Bunter. "Hallo, what's this?" he added. For Alonzo had deposited a parcel on the bed.

"Open it and see, my dear fellow," said Alonzo.

Bunter made short work of undoing the parcel. The string snapped asunder as he tugged at it, and the paper and wrappings were scattered right and left.

If Billy Bunter had expected to find a plum cake in the parcel he was doomed to disappointment.

"What on earth—" he muttered, blinking at the contents of the parcel.

It really seemed as if Alonzo Todd had brought a medicine chest with him. There were various bottles, containing odious-looking mixtures, some white, some green, and others brown. Each bore a label, instructing Bunter to take a teaspoonful of the "mixture" after each meal.

There was also a tin of beef cubes, which, as Alonzo Todd pointed out, were nourishing, sustaining, invigorating, and refreshing. But Billy Bunter would have preferred to take his nourishment in a more palatable form. He would rather have had a joint of roast beef than a tin of cubes.

Bunter gave a snort which almost made the bed shake.

"What's all this muck?" he demanded.

"Muck?" echoed Alonzo in shocked

tones. "You should not apply such an opprobrious epithet to these health-giving mixtures. I have had them specially made up for you at the chemist's."

"Groo!"

"Surely you appreciate my act of thoughtfulness, Bunter? These mixtures, if taken regularly in the prescribed doses, will soon set you on your feet again."

"Ugh! Sling them out of the window, and go and get me something to eat!" growled Bunter.

Alonzo shook his head sadly.

"I much regret that I cannot accede to your wishes," he said. "I have squandered all my substance in getting you these medicines."

"More fool you!" said Bunter. "Who ever heard of a fellow getting better by dopping himself with medicines? 'Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it!' That's what old Byron said, and he was quite right."

"But it was Shakespeare who said that!"

"Well, whoever it was, I echo his sentiment," said Bunter. "Well, if you've blued all your cash, Lonzy, I can't expect you to go and get me some grub. So good-bye!"

Alonzo gave a start.

"I am not going yet, my dear fellow," he said. "I propose to sit beside the bed, and read you some of the select sayings of my Uncle Benjamin."

"Bless your Uncle Ben!"

"Bless him by all means, but—"

"Do buzz off, Lonzy, there's a good fellow. I don't want to seem heartless, but I'm not in the mood for visitors just now. I never am unless they come well armed with tuck."

Alonzo looked quite grieved.

"Do you really wish me to take my departure?" he asked.

"Yes. And when you take your departure, you can take these horrible concoctions at the same time. Take them away and bury them!"

Alonzo collected up the medicine bottles and the tin of beef cubes, and moved to the door.

"Alas, how black is man's ingratitude!" he murmured, as he passed out into the corridor.

Now it so happened that Alonzo passed out just as someone else passed in.

The laws of gravity do not permit of two persons occupying the same space at the same time. Therefore, the passer-in and the passer-out collided in the doorway.

Crash!

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

The medicine bottles crashed to the floor, and several miniature rivers of liquid trickled down the corridor.

"Todd! Boy! Why do you not look where you are going?"

Alonzo gave a gasp. For the person with whom he had collided was Mr. Quelch, his Form master.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I am extremely sorry, sir, that I made such a precipitous exit, and—er—obstructed your ingress."

"Very well, Todd. But pray be more careful in future. You had better find a nurse and call her attention to this dreadful mess you have made."

So saying, Mr. Quelch passed into Billy Bunter's room. His expression softened a little as he entered. Although a stern martinet in the Remove Form-room, Mr. Quelch was a very human person when he was off duty.

"Well, Bunter," he said quite genially,

"and how are you progressing, my boy?"

"As well as can be expected, sir," murmured Bunter in faint and feeble tones. "There's just the barest chance that I may not die after all."

"What! You surely do not imagine that you are in danger of dying?"

Billy Bunter nodded.

"I've had a temperament of a hundred and four every day since I was admitted, sir," he said.

"Do you mean a 'temperature'?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Yessir. That's what I said."

"And your temperature has remained at a hundred and four degrees?"

"Yes. That's putting it at the very lowest, sir. It was a hundred and twelve one day."

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Quelch crossed over to the mantelpiece, on which Billy Bunter's medical chart was standing. He glanced at the temperature column, then he frowned.

"You have told me a falsehood, Bunter. Your temperature has been normal since the day you came!"

"Oh crumbs! I—I wish they'd sack that nurse of mine, sir. She's frightfully incompetent. She doesn't know her job."

She knows jolly well that I've been running a high temperament, and yet she goes and puts me down as normal. Don't take any notice of that chart, sir. It's all wrong!"

Mr. Quelch turned away from the chart. It was very fortunate for Bunter that he did so, or he might have seen the following tell-tale sentence in the top left-hand corner:

"Nature of complaint—

"INDIGESTION."

The Remove master regarded Billy Bunter with a thoughtful frown.

"You look none the worse for your operation, Bunter," he said at length. "I imagined that you would lose flesh, but you appear to be as plump as ever."

"Only in the face, sir. You ought to see my legs. Why, they're like matchsticks! As for my body, it's got painfully thin. My ribs are sticking out through the flesh!"

"Pray do not exaggerate, Bunter. To my mind, you have made a wonderfully rapid recovery from the operation. Of course, you have not had the stitches taken out yet?"

"Nunno, sir! I believe they're going to be taken out on Saturday."



The passer-in and the passer-out collided in the doorway. Crash! "Ow!" "Wow!" The medicine bottles crashed to the floor, and several miniature rivers of liquid trickled down the corridor. "Todd! Boy! Why do you not look where you are going?" roared Mr. Quelch. "Dear me," murmured Alonzo. "I am extremely sorry, sir, that I made such a precipitous exit and—er—obstructed your ingress!" (See Chapter 9.)

Mr. Quelch nodded.

"That means you will have to remain in the nursing home for at least another fortnight," he said. "It will not be very pleasant for you, my boy. But I have brought you something to read, to relieve the tedium of your enforced captivity."

"Thank you, sir!" said Bunter. But he looked anything but thankful. He loved devouring tuck; he loathed devouring books.

And the books that Mr. Quelch had brought were not in the nature of light fiction. They were ponderous tomes, dealing with very dry topics, and calculated to give the reader an attack of literary indigestion.

"Have you brought me anything else, sir?" asked Billy Bunter, scarcely able to conceal his disappointment.

"Yes, Bunter. I have brought you some very cheering news."

"Oh!"

"This afternoon a large sum of money—fifty guineas, to be precise—was collected on your behalf. A football match was played, and a charge was levied for admission to the ground."

"Oh, good!" said Billy Bunter, his face beaming. And then he held out his hand.

"I'll have the money now, sir, if you don't mind. Is it in notes?"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"The money is not actually for you, Bunter. It is to pay the operation fee, and a cheque is being sent to Dr. Wright, the surgeon who, I understand, performed the operation."

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter's jaw dropped. And he looked decidedly uneasy. He could guess what would happen if the cheque was sent to Dr. Wright. The surgeon would return it to the sender, and point out that there had been no operation. And then the fat would indeed be in the fire!

"Why are you looking so startled, Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"W-w-was I looking startled, sir?"

"You certainly were!"

"I expect it was a spasm of pain that ran right through me, sir," said Bunter. "I get them whenever I try to move my legs."

Mr. Quelch nodded sympathetically.

"The stitches are no doubt troubling you," he said. "When you have had them taken out you will be able to move without hurting yourself."

After further conversation, Mr. Quelch prepared to take his leave. He shook hands with the patient and bade him be of good cheer, and he had actually got to the door, when Billy Bunter called him back.

"One minute, sir!"

"Well, Bunter?"

"About that cheque for fifty guineas, sir—"

"Yes?"

"If you'd like to leave it with me, I'll see that Dr. Wright gets it."

"I am afraid I cannot do that, Bunter. The cheque is not in my possession. Dr. Locke has it, and he is posting it to-day to Dr. Wright."

Billy Bunter gave a hollow groan. Mr. Quelch thought it was a groan of pain; but Bunter knew that it was a groan of mental uneasiness. He was wondering what would happen when Dr. Wright got that cheque.

"Good-bye, my boy!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Good-bye, sir!"

Mr. Quelch passed out, and the door closed behind him.

Billy Bunter was left alone with his

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thoughts. And those thoughts were far from pleasant.

There was just one glimmer of hope on the horizon. If Dr. Wright happened to be an unscrupulous man he would pocket the cheque and say nothing about it. Again, if he happened to be an absent-minded man he might forget that the operation had never been performed.

This hope grew and grew in Billy Bunter's breast, like the little apple in the orchard. And Bunter's alarm and anxiety diminished.

But if Dr. Wright happened to be neither an unscrupulous nor an absent-minded man the outlook would be stormy indeed for the fellow who had spoofed all Greyfriars.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Back to Greyfriars!

"A NY news this morning, nurse?" It was Saturday—the day on which Billy Bunter's stitches were to have been removed.

As a matter of fact, there were no stitches to remove, but nobody at Greyfriars knew that.

"Yes," said the nurse, in reply to Bunter's question. "You are to be discharged to-day."

"Eh?"

"You will dress, and pack your belongings, and prepare to leave directly after dinner. You may have a vehicle if you wish, but there is nothing to prevent your walking. We will have your luggage sent up to Greyfriars by carrier."

Billy Bunter looked quite alarmed, not to say panic-stricken.

"But I—I don't want to leave the nursing-home!" he protested. "You see, nurse, I've come to love the place. You are all so charming and kind to me. It—it will break my heart to go away!"

The nurse smiled.

"Then we shall have to transfer you to another nursing-home that specialises in mending broken hearts," she said.

"You will certainly have to leave here, for this room is engaged. An appendicitis case is coming in this evening, and this is the only room available."

"But—but I'm not fit enough to go!" wailed Bunter. "I've got terrible shooting, stabbing pains—"

"Nonsense! You are wonderfully fit—in fact, there was no reason why you should have stayed in the nursing-home, in my opinion. The doctor thought it

would give your digestive organs a rest; but you could have done that at Greyfriars. However, it is not my place to criticise the prescription of a doctor. You will pack your belongings this morning. You understand?"

"Oh, all right!" groaned Bunter.

He had only been a week in the nursing-home, and he would gladly have obtained an extension.

What would the Greyfriars fellows say when they saw him turn up so soon? It would give the lie at once to his story of an operation for appendicitis.

It was a well-known fact that an appendicitis patient needed three weeks to recuperate—in fact, three weeks was the minimum period. What, then, would the Greyfriars folk think when Billy Bunter bobbed up at the school within a week of his admission to the nursing-home?

The situation was serious for Bunter. He hardly knew how to act. But at length an inspiration came to him, and he chuckled softly to himself as he started to pack his belongings.

The morning passed swiftly. Dinner was served—a substantial dinner, for the nursing-home authorities never served thin gruel to a patient on the day of his discharge. Then Billy Bunter was obliged to bid farewell to his nurse, and to shake the dust of the nursing-home—if dust was ever allowed to collect in such places—from his feet.

Arrangements had been made for Bunter's luggage to be sent up to the school by carrier. His own method of transport was already mapped out in his mind. He would not go on foot; he would not take a taxi; he would not hire a coach-and-four. He would continue to play the chronic invalid, by turning up at Greyfriars in a bath-chair!

There was a place in Courtfield where bath-chairs were let out on hire. Billy Bunter made his way thither, and as he approached the place he developed a sudden limp, and looked as if he could scarcely drag one foot after the other.

"Bath-chair, sir?" inquired the proprietor of the establishment.

"Yes, please," panted Bunter, hobbling up. "I want to hire a bath-chair for a week—p'raps more. And I shall want an attendant to push me about."

"You'll want a couple, by the look of you!" said the proprietor, gazing at Bunter's vast bulk. "No offence meant, sir, but it would take a mighty strong attendant to push you about single-handed. I ain't got no Samsons or 'Erculeses in this establishment."

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter. "I'll have a couple of attendants."

Whereupon, the proprietor bellowed for "Enery, and 'Erbert," and a couple of rather ancient-looking men, of the type of Gosling, the porter, shuffled on the scene.

"This young gent wants to 'ire a chair," said the proprietor.

"Lummy!" gasped 'Enery, glancing at Bunter's ample form. "Wot 'e wants is a steam-tractor, not a bath-chair!"

"Ear, 'ear!" said 'Erbert.

Billy Bunter shook a fat forefinger at the two attendants.

"Here, don't you be rude!" he said wrathfully. "I want you to help me into one of these chairs and wrap me up well with rugs and trundle me up to Greyfriars."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said 'Enery.

Billy Bunter was assisted—with much gasping and grunting—into one of the bath-chairs. And then he was practically obliterated with rugs, only his face being visible.

"Ah, that's fine!" he murmured.

"All ready, sir?" inquired 'Erbert.

"Yes, rather!"

"Eave-ho, mo 'carties!"

The WINNING STREAK!



Here's a stirring, thrilling boxing yarn no boy should miss! You can begin it TO-DAY in this week's BOYS' FRIEND. It tells how a youngster proved equal to the task of regaining for his country its lost boxing prestige. Ask TO-DAY for

The BOYS' FRIEND

NOW ON SALE.



"I shall want an attendant to push me about," said Bunter. "You'll want a couple by the look of you," said the proprietor, gazing at Bunter's vast bulk. "'Ere, 'Enery, and 'Erbert—this young gent wants to 'ire a chair!" "Lummy," gasped 'Enery. "Wot 'e wants is a steam-tractor, not a bath-chair." "'Ear, 'ear," said 'Erbert. (See Chapter 10.)

The two beasts of burden started on their task. 'Enery pulled in front, and 'Erbert pushed behind; and in this manner Billy Bunter was taken through the streets of Courtfield.

It was a novel experience for the fat junior, and he thoroughly enjoyed it.

The passers-by directed sympathetic glances at the invalid, and Billy Bunter put such a woebegone expression on his face that some of the lady onlookers were moved to tears.

"Poor boy!" murmured one stout dame. "Fancy being a cripple at his time of life!"

"Yes, it's awful, isn't it, ma'am?" groaned Bunter. "One half of the world never knows what the other half suffers. I've been transformed from birth."

"Deformed, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"How terrible! How shocking! And you are doomed to spend the rest of your days in a bathchair? Dear, dear! I wish I could do something for you, my poor lad."

The bathchair attendants had halted outside a pastrycook's.

"I'm rather fond of doughnuts, ma'am," hinted Billy Bunter.

The stout lady took the hint. She hurried into the shop, and came out a moment later with a large bag of doughnuts. These she handed to Billy Bunter, who tendered his thanks, and then the procession passed on.

Bunter struggled to get his arms free, so that he could start on the doughnuts. Being in a generous mood, he gave one apiece to his attendants. 'Enery and 'Erbert were both toothless, but they munched at the doughnuts contentedly.

Progress was far from swift. A tortoise could have kept pace with the bath-chair. But at last the gates of Greyfriars came in sight.

Billy Bunter had demolished the doughnuts by this time. He screwed up the empty bag and flung it away, then he buried his arms under the rugs once more.

The school gates stood open, and the procession passed through.

Gosling, the porter, came shuffling out of his lodge, and he surveyed the strange spectacle in astonishment.

"My heye!" he murmured. "Master Bunter back already! An' ridin' in a bathchair, too!"

"Well, you didn't expect me to come prancing in like a two-year-old, did you, Gossy?" growled Bunter. "You forget that I've been cut open and pulled to pieces and turned inside-out!"

Suddenly there was a great shout, followed by a stampede on the part of the juniors in the Close. They came running up from all sides and fairly swarmed round the bathchair.

"Why, here's Bunter!"

"Back already, by Jove!"

"And in a bathchair, too!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the excited throng.

"I say, you fellows, I don't call this much of a reception!" he grumbled. "Aren't you glad to see me back again?"

"We'd be glad to see you back if you were sound in wind and limb, and walking about," said Wharton. "But we didn't want you to come back in a blessed bath-chair, looking like a life-long invalid!"

"No, rather not!" said Peter Todd. "I say, you're out of the nursing-home about a fortnight too soon, Bunt! What on earth were they thinking about, to let you come out so early?"

"Abew! The fact is, Toddy, I've done a very gallant thing—quite a heroic action, you know."

"Oh! Tell us all about it."

"Well, a certain young lady in Courtfield—the mayor's daughter, I believe—was out shopping, when she was suddenly struck down with appendicitis."

"My hat!"

"She collapsed in the street," Bunter went on, "and they took her round to the nursing-home for an immediate operation. But when they got her there

they found there was no accommodation. Every room was full up. And there isn't another nursing-home in Courtfield. It was an appalling situation. What was to be done? Nurses were wringing their hands—doctors were wringing—"

"Their necks?" suggested Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up, Skinner! Doctors were wringing their hands as well. What was to be done for the poor girl? If they shunted her off to hospital, she might have died on the way. You see, it was a bad case, and the operation had to be performed right away. I happened to look out of my window, and I saw what was going on, and I gallantly offered to give up my room to the young lady."

"But you weren't fit to leave it," said Nugent.

"That's true enough," said Bunter. "Still, being a chivalrous sort of chap, I couldn't have stood by and seen that poor girl turned away. So she came in, and I went out."

The juniors were looking quite startled.

"Wonder you didn't do yourself an injury, coming out so soon," said Harry Wharton. "The matron must have been mad to permit it. Do you know it takes three weeks to get over an operation for appendicitis?"

"Of course I know it! But if I spend the next fortnight or so in a bath-chair, without any exertion, there's just a chance that I shall pull through."

Bunter signalled to his attendants.

"Wheel me round the Close," he commanded.

'Enery and 'Erbert touched their respective forelocks, and bent their shoulders to their task.

Billy Bunter rode through the Close, with all the dignity of Boadicea in her chariot.

Fellows simply swarmed round the bath-chair, eager to converse with the

invalid; and Billy Bunter described, in gruesome detail, his harrowing experiences in the nursing-home. He let his imagination run riot, and he told such appalling tales of torture and horror that he made his hearers' flesh creep.

"They performed the operation while I was still conscious," he was saying. "I saw the knife flash through the air, and the next thing I realised was that I was lying in little pieces on the operating-table!"

"My hat!"

"Draw it mild, Bunter!"

"Some of you don't seem to believe me," said Bunter. "But you wait till you get appendicitis yourselves, and then you'll go through the mill, just as I've done. Hallo! I thought I heard somebody call my name."

Bunter turned his head, and saw that a window had been opened. It was the window of the Head's study, and the somewhat startled face of Dr. Locke appeared at the aperture.

"Bunter," he called, "kindly ask your attendants to bring you over here. I wish to speak with you."

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter felt very apprehensive as he was wheeled towards the Head.

Had Dr. Locke discovered the truth? Did he know that the operation had never taken place?

It was a terrifying thought. But Bunter's apprehensions were soon set at rest; for when the Head addressed him his tone was one of amazement, and not of anger. For which Billy Bunter was truly thankful.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. The Way of the Transgressor.

"I AM astonished, Bunter, to see you back so soon!"

The Head certainly looked his astonishment. His eyes seemed to protrude from their sockets as he surveyed the plump figure in the bath-chair.

"Yes, it's rather early for me to be out and about, sir," said Billy Bunter. "I ought to have stayed in the nursing-home another fortnight. But circumstances prevented it."

"What circumstances?" asked the Head.

Billy Bunter then recounted the story of his chivalry and great gallantry. He had nobly given up his room in the nursing-home, so that the mayor's daughter might have it. He knew that in doing so he was risking his life, but he had been quite willing to take the risk. The Bunters had always been brave fellows right through the generations, and he—Billy Bunter—was merely keeping up the family traditions.

The Head listened to Bunter's narrative in growing amazement. He knew Bunter, and he had never suspected the fat junior of being of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"Really, Bunter, you amaze me beyond measure!" he exclaimed. "I hesitate to give you pain, when you have already suffered so much, but I really must say that I cannot credit your story."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"If you actually did give up your room to a young lady, then it was a very

splendid sacrifice," the Head went on. "But you are not the sort of boy who would make sacrifices of that description."

"Oh!"

"The thing that baffles me most," said the Head, "is why they allowed you to leave the nursing-home at this juncture. It was madness to let you leave so soon after the operation! I must telephone to the matron at once, and ask for an explanation."

"Nunno, sir!" stuttered Bunter, turning quite pale.

"What?"

"I'd rather you didn't telephone to the matron, sir. She's a hateful old hussy! She's got a spite against me, and I expect she'd tell you a pack of lies, sir!"

The Head frowned.

"How dare you speak of the matron in that manner?" he thundered. "I know the good lady very well, and have not the slightest reason to doubt her integrity. I will telephone to her at once."

Billy Bunter turned quite faint. He knew only too well what would happen if the Head got into touch with the matron at the nursing-home. The awful truth would be revealed—that there had been no operation, and that Bunter had merely been kept in the nursing-home for a week for digestive trouble.

The Head's face was withdrawn from the window, and Billy Bunter, and the juniors who were gathered round the bath-chair, could hear Dr. Locke trying to get through on the telephone. But there was a hitch of some sort. Either the line was engaged, or something had gone wrong with the wires. At all events, the Head found it impossible to get through.

Billy Bunter drew a deep breath of relief. He had secured a temporary respite, at any rate.

But the respite proved to be very temporary—a matter of seconds, in fact. For just then a two-seater car swung into the school gateway, and was driven through the Close. It came to a halt outside the Head's window.

Billy Bunter recognised the driver of the car in an instant. It was Dr. Wright, the surgeon!

The fat junior nearly sank through the bath-chair in his alarm and dismay. He shouted to his attendants to take him away at once from that danger-spot; but before Enery and Erbert could obey, the Head's face appeared again at the open window.

"One moment, Bunter! I have not yet finished speaking to you. Good-afternoon, Dr. Wright!"

The surgeon returned the salutation, and stepped out of his car.

"I have called to see you, sir, on the matter of a cheque," he began. "Shall I step into your study?"

"It is not necessary, if you merely called to acknowledge the receipt of the cheque," said the Head.

"But I am not entitled to the cheque, Dr. Locke."

"W-w-what?"

"You said, in the accompanying letter, that it was for an operation I performed on Bunter. Permit me to say that no such operation was performed!"

A silence followed Dr. Wright's words—a silence of sheer stupefaction. It was broken only by a deep groan from the occupant of the bath-chair.

The Head looked thunderstruck. It was some moments before he found his voice.

"No—no operation was performed?" he stuttered at last.

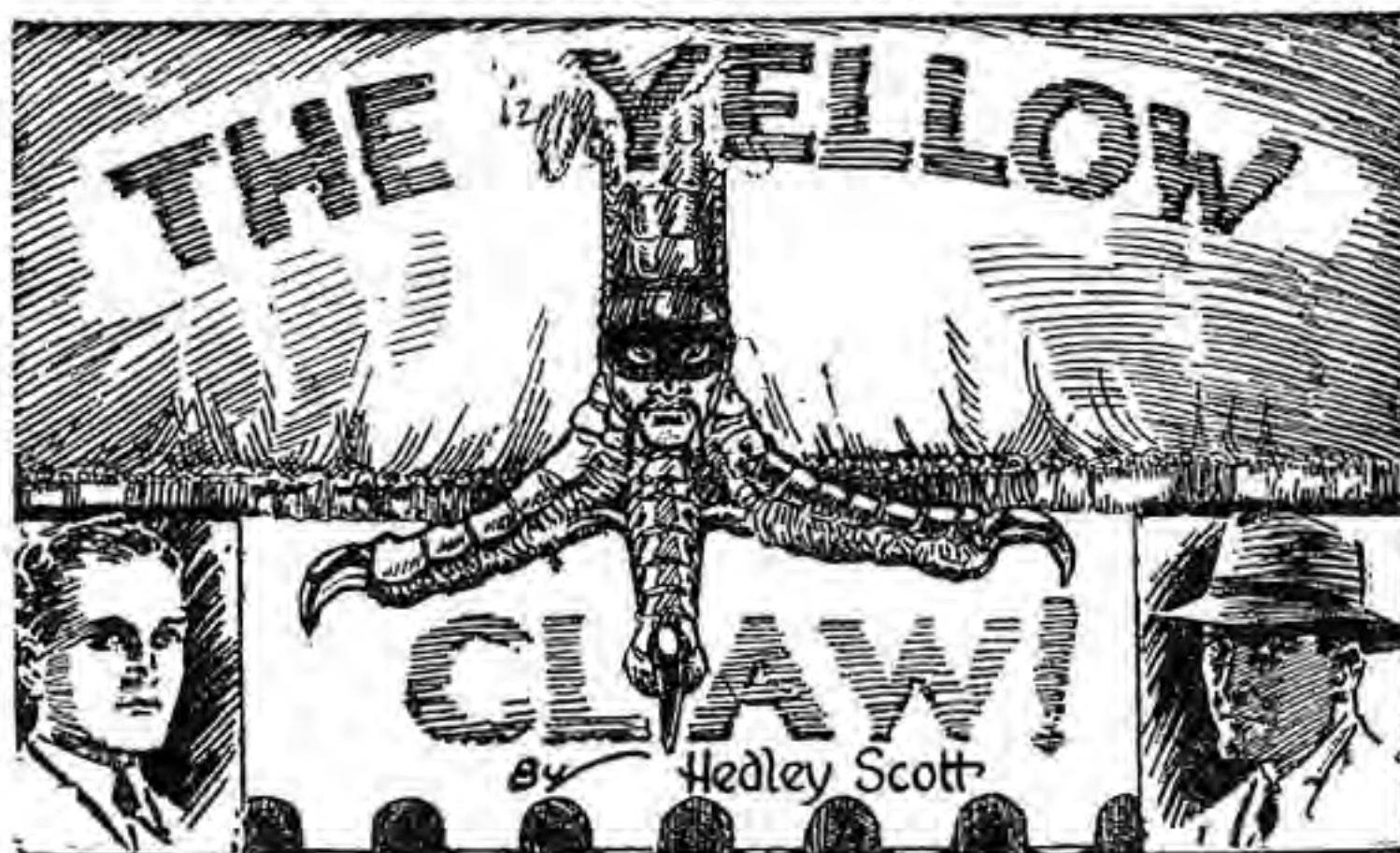
"Certainly not," said the surgeon. "As I explained to you in my letter, the

(Continued on page 27.)



In a couple of strides Dr. Wright reached the bath-chair. His iron grip fell upon Billy Bunter's collar, and the fat junior was hauled out of his comfortable seat. "I will now prove to you that Bunter is no invalid," panted the surgeon. He raised his foot, as if to implant a kick upon the rear of Bunter's person, and the fat junior sprinted away with a yell of alarm. (See Chapter II.)

A Magnificent Stage and Detective Serial, introducing Ferrers Locke, the wizard detective of Baker Street, and his no less redoubtable assistant, Jack Drake.



The Clue of the Pencil Marks!

THE four Chinamen busied themselves around him for a few moments, and then departed as swiftly as they had come.

And the constable, doing his beat half an hour later, all but stumbled over the grim figure stretched across the pavement. He blew his whistle, and in response two other policemen hastened to the scene.

Their three lanterns combined revealed a scene that was as grotesque as it was horrifying. For, on the forehead of the man in the greatcoat was the dreaded symbol of the Yellow Claw, the paint yet damp and sticky; on his breast was pinned a sheet of note-paper that also bore the sign of the society, and gripped tightly in his hand was the actual claw that had caused his death, the light from the lanterns playing upon the freshly-painted gilt and giving to the hand a weird effect.

"Good heavens, Bill!" exclaimed one of the constables. "This Yellow Claw gang gives me the creeps! What's that note say?"

The three constables eagerly scanned the missive pinned to the unfortunate man's coat. It ran:

"TAKE WARNING.—The Yellow Claw permits no one to seek shelter behind their symbol unless he is an accredited member of the society.

"He sought to avoid the consequence of his act by using the sign of the Yellow Claw. He has died by that sign!"

"THE YELLOW CLAW."

Beneath the strange note was the usual symbol of the gang.

"Ugh!" grunted the policeman who had first discovered this latest victim of the Yellow Claw. "S'pose we'd better shift him to the mortuary. 'Ere, don't touch that blooming gold thing in the chap's hand, Bill—it says in this note that he died by the sign. You never know what this Claw Union crush are up to. They're like a wagonload of monkeys for artfulness."

"That's so, old man," replied the second constable. "Let's 'phone up for the ambulance and get him out of the way. Wonder who he is?"

"Chap named Costello," said the other, reading aloud from an addressed envelope he had found in the deceased man's pockets. "'Ere you are—Angelo Costello, Thespian Hall, Shaftesbury Avenue.' Why, that's the chap 'ead-

quarters is ringing up about! Wanted for the murder of Anthony Woodstock. Well I'm blowed!"

The constable was right. The man in the greatcoat was none other than the assassin of Anthony Woodstock!

One of the constables hurried away to summon the local ambulance, leaving his two comrades staring down at that grim, silent figure in awe and horror. Both started slightly as the sound of footsteps echoed along the dirty pavement, and stiffened sharply. It was early yet to expect the return of their fellow constable. Two pairs of eyes pierced the gloom ahead to fix on a tall shape that moved in their direction.

The figure became more distinct at each approaching step, and then came recognition.

"Inspector Pycroft!" breathed one of the two constables sharply, drawing himself up to attention. "Here's a bit of luck, Bill."

The constable was right. The figure moving towards them was none other than Inspector Pycroft, of Scotland Yard. He halted in amazement a few feet in front of the constables, and failed to take note of their smart salute. His eyes were fixed on the body of the man sprawled across the pavement in fascinated horror. For one glance was sufficient to tell him that it was Angelo Costello, the man he had been tracking from early afternoon.

"Dead as a doornail," volunteered one of the policemen. "I found him here about five minutes ago, sir!"

Inspector Pycroft seemed to recover his power of action as the words of his subordinate reached him. He advanced a few paces and knelt beside the deceased man.

"Don't touch his hand, sir!" exclaimed one of the policemen hastily, as his superior officer was about to examine the peculiar-looking object clutched tightly in the victim's hand. "It's dangerous, sir!"

The inspector straightened himself and began to interrogate the two constables. He was shown the missive that had been found pinned to the breast of Costello, and as he perused the contents his brow darkened.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed at length. "This cursed Yellow Claw will be the death of me."

He chewed the ends of his moustache viciously, to the secret amusement of his subordinates, and then commenced to

IN THE LIMELIGHT.

THE YELLOW CLAW, a mysterious and powerful organisation that preys upon wealthy Englishmen. SIR MALCOLM DUNDERFIELD, a successful City financier whose family the Yellow Claw has threatened to wipe out.

JOHN HUNTINGDON, his nephew. FERRERS LOCKE, the famous detective, of Baker Street, who has been engaged by Sir Malcolm to bring the dreaded society to book.

JACK DRAKE, the sleuth's clever boy assistant.

MARK CHAERTON, a successful playwright, who has also been threatened by the Yellow Claw. He, too, seeks Ferrers Locke's services.

On the opening night of Mark Chaerton's new play one of the actors is shot. Despite the many circumstances pointing to the crime being the work of the Yellow Claw, Locke deduces that the man operating the spot light in the theatre is responsible. Whilst the police are hunting for this man a certain individual clad in a great coat is fleeing from four Chinamen who have pursued him to Limehouse. The man in the greatcoat meets with a sudden end; he pitches to the pavement in a lifeless heap. (Now read on.)

explore the near vicinity of the tragedy. But it was obvious by the nettled expression on his face that he had failed to discover anything of importance. By the time he had completed his investigation the local ambulance put in an appearance.

The body of Angelo Costello was taken to the mortuary on its being found that life was extinct, and the C.I.D. man accompanied the uniformed attendant in the ambulance. Once at the mortuary Pycroft lost no time in extracting the peculiar claw that had caused Costello's tragic end, taking care, however, to see that his hands did not come in contact with it. The doctor in attendance volunteered the information that the man had been poisoned, and that his death had been almost instantaneous. On examination of the deceased man's hand it was discovered that there were several tiny needle pricks in the palm, around which a slight inflammation had set in.

"Very ingenious," muttered Pycroft, taking up the claw in a pair of tweezers and depositing it carefully in a metal-lined box. "Ferrers Locke will be interested to see this, I'll wager."

Without undue loss of time Inspector Pycroft phoned up the Yard and notified his chief of the tragedy, and then took a taxi to Ferrers Locke's quarters in Baker Street. The world-famous sleuth was in earnest conversation with Mark Chaerton when the C.I.D. man made his arrival, and to say that he was astonished to learn of the latest development in his campaign against the Yellow Claw would be to put it mildly. His spasm of amazement, however, was speedily submerged by his curiosity to examine the inspector's trophy—a curiosity that was not shared by Mark Chaerton, for the playwright uttered something like a scream as the hideous-looking claw came into view and hid his face in his hands.

"I think I had better get back to the theatre, Mr. Locke," he said hastily. "That claw gives me the creeps. I will look you up in the morning. You will excuse me?"

"Certainly!" replied the sleuth, who was more than pleased to think that he

would be able now to examine the trophy at his leisure. "Good-night, Mr. Chaerton!"

The playwright speedily withdrew, leaving Ferrers Locke and Inspector Pyecroft poring over the gleaming yellow claw.

"Why," said Locke at length, "there are dozens of finely pointed needles cunningly concealed all over this claw. A prick from any one of them would cause instant death, for the points have been steeped in poison. There's one thing, though," he added, with a grin, "you know who's responsible for the crime."

"But that doesn't help me any," grunted the C.I.D. man peevishly. "It will give the newspapers something more to chew the fat over—that's all."

"Patience, my dear fellow," remonstrated Locke. "Rome wasn't built in a day."

"But this ain't Rome," grunted Pyecroft. "It's more like heathen China, if you ask me."

"But have you not discovered anything to assist you from this claw?" asked the private detective. "Have you not examined it carefully?"

"As much as you have, I expect," said Pyecroft. "But it's like a dark-room to me; I can't see an inch of my way!"

"Come closer, then," smiled Ferrers Locke, "and take a squint through this lens."

He handed his powerful pocket lens to the C.I.D. man and waited expectantly.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Pyecroft at last, almost dropping the lens in his excitement. "This claw originally came from an auction-room!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Ferrers Locke, with equal warmth. "That's what I think myself!"

"I'd wager my month's salary on it!" continued Pyecroft eagerly. "I can plainly see with the aid of this magnificent lens of yours the inscription 'Lot 69.'"

"It's only a faint pencilled outline," remarked Locke, "but I think I can account for its presence there. Is there anything about this claw, Pyecroft, that strikes you as being peculiar?"

"Yes," replied the C.I.D. man; "the freshness of the gold paint!"

"Exactly. Now, my theory is that this claw was put aside in the sale-room for a coat of gold paint—it would enhance its value—and that to help the johnny whose job it was to paste on the labels in accordance with the numbers on the catalogue, the lot number was first scrawled on in pencil. Secondly, that the claw was given its new coat of paint, and that the gilt failed to conceal entirely the marks of the pencil, although they are not visible to the naked eye."

"Those are the lines I'm theorising on," grunted Pyecroft. "It's a lucky stroke of business for us, Mr. Locke, for we should have no great difficulty in tracing the purchaser of this claw on account of its being so—"

"Uncommon an article to be put up for sale," finished Ferrers Locke. "I think you're right, Pyecroft."

The two detectives examined the curious trophy for another half an hour or more, but beyond the clue of the pencil marks nothing further came to light.

"We have no idea, Mr. Locke, how long ago this claw might have been purchased," said Inspector Pyecroft at length. "Or what part of the country it came from."

"That is true," agreed Locke quietly; "but I am prepared to assume that this claw was bought quite recently, for it is the first time in the campaign of the society that the symbol of the gang has appeared in any other form but that of a yellow transfer. The earlier victims of the society were never put out of the way by the same means employed against Costello, and surely they were more important and more deserving victims to die in such a theatrical manner than the miserable wretch who was killed for petty revenge?"

"I follow your line of argument, Mr. Locke," said Pyecroft thoughtfully. "You have an idea that the master mind behind this Yellow Claw Society is rather given to cheap dramatic effect when dealing with his victims, and that he wouldn't have used such a splendid

theatrical 'prop,' as it were, for such an insignificant victim as Angelo Costello had it been in his possession when Alec Muldane was killed, for instance?"

"Exactly. And by this peculiarity and thirst for dramatic effect the master-mind behind the organisation will surely leave himself open some time or another. It's the old saying, Pyecroft—give a man enough rope, and he'll hang himself."

"I hope you prove a prophet, Mr. Locke," said Pyecroft, rising to his feet. "I'll get busy up at the Yard; shall put half the plain-clothes Force in London to scour every auctioneer's in town for news of this yellow claw. We ought to find out something before twenty-four hours elapse."

"Sure thing!" returned Ferrers Locke. "You had better take the claw with you, Pyecroft, for formality's sake. It's the Yard's property, you know, and will be wanted at the inquest."

"Which reminds me, Mr. Locke," remarked Pyecroft, with a frown, "that we haven't discovered the motive for the murder of that poor fellow Anthony Woodstock."

"I don't think we shall have to look far for that," returned the private detective, "for Drake phoned me up an hour ago and informed me that there was a woman in the case. He has learnt that Woodstock was indifferent to the attentions of a certain Italian lady of high birth who had set her heart upon making Woodstock her husband. According to the members of the 'Man and His Money' company Woodstock had more or less severed his acquaintance with the lady, and that she left the theatre at the dress rehearsal in a royal rage. By looking up my old newspaper cuttings I discovered that the lady in question was one of the central figures in a case of attempted assassination in Italy about four years ago, and that her servant, one named Angelo Morenni, who, gossip said, was very devoted to her, received three years' hard labour as a consequence of his share in the plot."

"Then you think that Angelo Morenni and Angelo Costello were one and the same person," interrupted Pyecroft intuitively, "and that he killed Woodstock out of revenge for having slighted his mistress?"

"I am prepared to accept that theory," said Ferrers Locke. "But Morrison will be able to sift the matter, for he has set out to interview the good lady himself. And his men are tracing the movements of Costello, alias Morenni, since he was released from gaol a year ago."

"Well, that's a relief, anyway," said Pyecroft. "If we can get to the bottom of that the newspapers will have something to put us on the back for. Cheerio, Mr. Locke! Will let you know of any developments that may arise from the clue of this beastly-looking claw?"

"Good-bye and good luck!" returned Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "I'm going to turn in. There will be plenty to do to-morrow, I'll wager."

"Not much peace for us these days," grinned Pyecroft, as he reached for his hat. "So-long!"

Caught Napping!

"WELL, Drake, my lad," said Ferrers Locke, early the next morning, as his young assistant burst into the sitting-room, "and what have you to report?"

"A clean bill, guv'nor," returned the lad, with a smile that was cheerfulness personified. "I've literally shadowed Mr. Huntingdon all over the place since



"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Drake, staring in open-mouthed astonishment at the masked Ethiopian who barred his passage. "Is this a panto? Hi, young man, you'll get run in if you walk about like that in London." The burly sentinel made no reply. Instead, his massive arms unfolded, and before Drake was aware of what was happening he was being pushed back into the room. (See page 24.)



I took up the job, and it's as exciting as a game of snakes and ladders—ugh!”

He forced a shudder, and then seated himself in a chair opposite his beloved chief.

“And what's the news this end, sir?” he inquired.

Ferrers Locke briefly outlined the events of the last forty-eight hours, to which Drake listened in rapt attention.

“Things are moving more with you than with me,” he grumbled. “I thought I was in for something exciting. Life behind the scenes isn't such a bed of roses, though, as I've been led to believe,” he added. “But there's nothing doing with Mr. Yellow Claw yet awhile.”

“Which is just as well, my lad,” admonished Ferrers Locke. “When you remember that perhaps a man's life is at stake.”

“You're right there, guv'nor,” admitted Drake. “I was waxing selfish. Expect you are wondering why it is I'm here instead of following Huntingdon about like a dog—eh?”

The sleuth nodded.

“Well, I've just left Mr. Huntingdon at his heart-specialist's place in Harley Street—told me to come back in an hour's time,” continued Drake. “Fine chap, Huntingdon, sir. I told him the circumstances of my presence in the company as per your phoned instructions, and he took it without a murmur. I believe, though, he was laughing up his sleeve at the thought that I could prevent any sudden attack on his life, and that he decided to humour me.”

“But surely his uncle Sir Malcolm Dunderfield, has acquainted him with the details of the case?” protested Ferrers Locke.

“Sure thing,” replied Drake. “And that rather took the smile off Huntingdon's face, for he could see that the old chap was in earnest. But he's a plucked 'un, though. He doesn't lose any sleep over this Yellow Claw business, I can tell you.”

“No threatening letters—nothing out of the beaten track has happened up at his rooms in Mayfair?” asked the sleuth.

“Nothing at all!” grinned Jack Drake. “We're both beginning to get a bit bored, guv'nor!”

“There's trouble ahead, anyway, my lad,” said the sleuth seriously. “Once

the company leaves London on its tour the fur will begin to fly, I'll wager!”

“I'm ready for it!” exclaimed Drake grimly. “I'll watch Huntingdon like a cat watches a mouse. But you will be coming with us, won't you, guv'nor?”

“Yes, my lad,” said the sleuth; “but not as Ferrers Locke, you understand. I shall give it out in London that I have received an urgent summons to America, and that I shall be away from town for about three months. That perhaps will serve to make this Yellow Claw society less cautious of their movements.”

“Rather tough luck that Mark Chaerton should be singled out as the next victim,” remarked Drake thoughtfully. “He's frightfully rich, though, I should imagine. Funny fellow, isn't he?”

“Very,” agreed Locke, with a smile. “One of the most eccentric figures in London. I reckon—”

He broke off abruptly as the telephone-bell at his elbow shrilled out its note.

“Hallo! Yes, yes; this is Ferrers Locke. Will come at once, Mr. Chaerton!”

The great detective replaced the receiver on the hook and swung round on his assistant.

“Another pretty letter from the Yellow Claw!” he rapped, reaching for his hat. “Chaerton is in a blue funk. Wants me to go round to his place at once. Sha'n't be more than half an hour, my lad. Will you be here when I come back?”

“Sure thing,” smiled Drake. “I've got one or two cuttings to paste up that will keep me busy.”

He watched his chief descend the stairs until he was lost to sight in the street beyond, and then Drake entered the library. The sleuth's assistant took more than a casual interest in famous law cases, and one of his tasks was to paste up in the “record” book the newspaper cuttings from the various papers, English and foreign.

For ten minutes or so he was far too preoccupied with his work to take much notice of his surroundings; but, chancing to pause in his labours, he was surprised to hear the sounds of moving feet in the sitting-room beyond.

With a muttered ejaculation of astonishment, Drake stole towards the door on tiptoe, and listened intently. His

startled eyes took in the fact that the door of the sitting-room, which he had closed a few moments before, was now half-open. Feeling in his hip-pocket for his automatic, Drake moved silently forward towards the open door and peered into the room.

The scene that met his gaze brought a semi-stifled exclamation to his lips. For three men, each wearing black crepe masks, were frantically searching the drawers of the two cabinets, the mantelpiece, the shelves—everything in the nature of a receptacle that the room boasted. On the carpeted floor, scattered haphazard, was a pile of papers and documents. Two boxes, the locks of which had been forced, and their contents strewn the floor. But apparently the intruders had not found what they sought, for they continued their search with redoubled energy.

“Hands up!”

Jack Drake, moving forward swiftly, rapped out the command, and levelled his automatic at the foremost member of the masked trio. Three exclamations of astonishment, sprinkled with a liberal number of adjectives, greeted his appearance. The masked figures spun round from their tasks as though they had already been shot, their hands went aloft, and Drake could see their glittering eyes through the slits in the masks.

“A very nice crew!” muttered the lad, keeping his weapon levelled, a bulldog expression on his usually cheery features. “Put 'em up! What's the little game—eh?”

The trio of intruders were strangely silent, and, to Drake's uneasiness, he saw that one of the party was making frantic signs with his head in the direction of the door, which was situated at Drake's back.

Still keeping the automatic levelled at one of the party, Jack Drake, fearing that he had yet another member of the gang to deal with, swiftly turned his head in the direction of the door through which he had just entered. That one movement, brief though it was, gave the rascally trio the opportunity for which their leader had played.

As Drake's head swung round on his shoulders the trio sprang forward, and Locke's young assistant knew that he had fallen into a trap. He turned again

swiftly, but the masked intruders were surging round him. His revolver spat fire, but it was knocked upwards at the critical moment, and the bullet did nothing more harmful than to splinter the ceiling. A doubled fist took him full on the chin. The blow was repeated even as his senses were failing him, and the second punch did the trick. He sank to the floor, his last flickering thoughts being devoted to a censure of his blindness for falling into such an easy trap. And then all was a blank.

The Room of a Hundred Lights!

AT about the same time as Ferrers Locke was taking his leave of Mark Chaerton, who appeared to be in a state of mortal terror on account of his having received another threatening letter from the Yellow Claw society, Jack Drake came to.

His first thoughts turned to the ache in his jaw that spoke eloquently of the force his assailants had employed to render him unconscious. But as his head cleared and his eyes took in his new surroundings a gasp of amazement left his lips.

He was lying on a couch in a large, sumptuously-furnished apartment; the weird colourings of the heavy velvet draperies and the wondrous pieces of old Chinese cabinet work inlaid with gold formed part of a picture, the like of which he had never before seen or even dreamed of. To his astonishment, he found that he was not bound; and, sitting upright the better to take stock of his strange surroundings, Locke's plucky young assistant now became aware of the heavy exotic perfume that pervaded the room—a perfume that was as attractive as it was overpowering. His astonished eyes fastened on a fine old piece of Chinese ironwork that took the form of a cauldron, and it was from this direction that the heavy perfume seemed to emanate. Through the bars of the cauldron Drake could see the live red coals, giving a relieving touch of colour to the black-and-gold draperies that formed each wall of the apartment. Beyond the cauldron were a number of luxurious divans and heavy cushions. On the floor itself was a thick pile Turkey carpet, that must, Drake reckoned, be worth a small fortune.

"Well, this is a go, and no mistake!" exclaimed Drake, passing a bewildered hand over his eyes. "Have I been transported to China?"

He slid off the couch as he spoke and walked unsteadily towards the nearest wall—or, rather, where he imagined the wall would be. But as his hands moved against the heavy draperies they swayed backwards into space, and the lad almost lost his balance.

"No blessed wall!" he grunted. "Where the deuce am I? What's behind these blessed curtains? And—Hullo!"

His hand had drawn aside one of the heavy curtains, and in the aperture thus created, like some grim sentinel, appeared a dark-skinned Ethiopian of massive proportions, whose face was practically covered by a black velvet mask. For some few seconds Drake and the masked individual eyed each other face to face, and then the former allowed his gaze to fasten on the scantiness of the man's attire. For he was practically bare of any covering, save a white silk turban that bound his head, a richly-woven and bejewelled loin-cloth that encircled his waist and thighs, and a pair of sandals that encased his large feet.

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Drake. "Is this a panto? Hi, young man, you'll

get run in if you walk about like that in London!"

For one moment the eyes of the burly individual glimmered evilly through the mask, but he spoke no word. Instead, his massive arms unfolded, and before Drake was fully aware of the fact he was being pushed back into the room, whilst the heavy black-and-gold curtain swung back into its accustomed place.

"Jumping snakes!" ejaculated Drake, rubbing his chin tenderly. "Well, if this doesn't take the whole giddy biscuit factory I'll eat my hat!"

He crossed to the farther side of the room, and, as he had done before, drew back one of the draperies. To his astonishment and growing uneasiness, he found himself confronted by another dusky sentinel, clad in practically the same garments as had been his predecessor. The same ghastly silence followed his exclamation, and again an arm shot out. For the second time in almost as many minutes, Jack Drake was gently but firmly pushed back into the room, what time the curtain swung to, obscuring the dark, masked face of the silent sentinel.

For some minutes Drake paused in the centre of the room, undecided what to do. It was obvious that the room was well guarded and that his chances of escape were practically nil, for his captors had not taken the trouble to secure his arms or legs. To make certain that he was not taking too much for granted, Drake tried to find an exit from three other positions, but in each case he was confronted with the silent, massive figure of a masked sentinel; and at length he returned to the couch to await developments.

"If someone doesn't come along and do something or say something," muttered Drake, who was now beginning to feel like a caged rat in a trap, "I shall go potty!"

Even as he spoke one of the curtains at the farther end of the spacious apartment was drawn aside, and a tall figure came into view. From the description given him by Ferrers Locke, Jack Drake knew instinctively that the newcomer was none other than the leader of the Yellow Claw.

He waited expectantly, every nerve strung to a high pitch, as he gazed, with a feeling of awe, on the impressive and rather grotesque shape that moved towards him with scarcely a sound. He shuddered as his eyes encountered the sheathed finger-nails of the dreaded personality that was known to the world as the Yellow Claw, and he fancied he saw a mocking light in the eyes that glittered strangely through the almond-shaped slits in the black velvet mask.

"So, whelp—miserable whelp," commenced the Oriental-clad figure in a sibilant voice that Drake mentally compared with the hissing of a snake—"you have had the audacity, the effrontery to pick up cudgels against the Yellow Claw—eh?"

"Call it what you like, gov'nor," returned Drake, with a smile that he felt far from assuming. "Only be brief about it; for I want to get home. Can't say I'm taken with these futurist quarters."

"Enough!" rapped the sinister figure before him. "This is no case for levity, I assure you. Talk not of home, for you have seen the last of Baker Street. My agents did not reckon on finding you at your accursed master's rooms when they ransacked the place for the claw. But a still tongue makes a wise head, we are told," he added significantly.

"Pleasant kind of 'Erb, aren't you?" returned Drake, with a curl of the lip.

"I'd like to take that mask off your face and dot you one between the eyes! You talk mighty good English for a bloomin' Chink, anyway!"

The tall figure in the flowing, embroidered robe straightened itself.

"Cease, you insolent dog!"

He clapped his hands as he spoke, and in response to his signal two of the masked Ethiopians pushed aside the heavy curtaining, and, bowing low before that sinister figure, stood at attention.

"Take him away!" hissed the Yellow Claw. "Take him below to the room of a hundred lights for a course of treatment! Hurry!"

The two sentinels sprang forward, spurred on by the lash in their master's cutting voice. Despite Drake's frantic struggles, he was soon held fast between them, for his strength was but puny in comparison with the broad-backed Ethiopians, whose muscles were like hardened steel.

"Go!"

The sheathed figure of the chief of the dreaded society spread fanwise, and, resembling the cruel talons of a bird of prey, indicated the way. The two muscular guards dragged the detective's young assistant as though he were a parcel of straw through one of the slits between the curtains that lined the room. Before he was aware of what was passing, Drake found a black scarf tied round his forehead, blotting out his vision. But even then he endeavoured to remember the many twists and turns in the short journey that ensued. He found himself eventually descending some stone steps, and he knew that he was below the level of the street by reason of the dank atmosphere that assailed his nostrils. He knew, too, that he was somewhere in the region of a river, a wharf, or a dock-yard, for he could smell the heavy odour of tar, of rope, and the hundred and one unpleasant odours usually to be found in such places.

He suddenly felt his escort come to a halt, and found himself following suit. The scarf was torn from his eyes. He blinked about him for a few seconds before his normal sight returned, and then he gazed about him with interest.

The two sentinels released their hold on his arms, and one of them retreated to the door, which he held open for the approach of the chief of the Yellow Claw. As he heard the pattering footsteps of the latter echoing along the stone-flagged passage that evidently lay without, Drake suddenly became aware of several coloured discs mounted at frequent intervals high up in the wall of his peculiar prison. And by the side of each series of discs he noticed a small box-like arrangement similar to the ordinary limelight used in theatrical work.

Above the box-like arrangement was an aperture about a foot square; and, looking intently at one of these openings in the wall, Drake suddenly became aware of a masked face that glimmered down at him. He turned his eyes to study the remaining "limelight" contrivances, and at each aperture above the discs he saw the same sight now—a masked face peering down at him.

Whilst he was turning over in his mind the use of these coloured discs the sibilant voice of the Yellow Claw broke in upon his reflections.

"Now, you insolent young puppy!" he hissed, "you are to sample the room of a hundred lights before you are despatched. I had intended that your fate should be merciful—that you should die a quick and not unpleasant death, but your insolent remarks of a few moments ago merit a lesson—a lesson from which

I hope your master will profit. Prepare, then, for an experience that it has never been your lot to sample before. It is pleasant and novel at first, but after ten minutes of treatment you will give anything to be set free—to die quickly, in fact!"

"Really!" retorted Drake, with heavy sarcasm, although a shiver ran down his spine at his captor's words. "You've missed your vocation. You'd make a jolly fine villain on the pictures!"

The masked leader of the society raised his clawlike hand as though to strike the plucky lad before him; but he conquered the impulse, and laughed harshly.

"Still full of spirits!" he hissed. "Ah, my young friend, we shall see—we shall see!"

"Talking politics now," grinned Drake, glancing round him for an avenue of escape, and playing for time. "You don't know how funny you look!"

"Dog!"

The Yellow Claw signalled to the two Ethiopians to switch out the light of that underground room as he backed towards the door.

And as the heavy metal portal swung to, leaving Drake a prisoner in that blackened room, he guessed the "course of treatment" he was doomed to undergo.

Suddenly a light glimmered out from one of the limes above his head, illuminating the eerie, masked face of the man operating the machine. And then lights sprang up from every part of the walls of that underground room. The discs of the limelights began to revolve, throwing off beams of multi-coloured hue that almost blinded Locke's assistant as he gazed at them, fascinated. The lights became more intense in their glare, more dazzling in their colour, as the discs revolved at a faster pace.

"Great heavens, this is awful!" gasped Drake, covering his face with his hands. "Enough to drive anyone insane!"

He took his hands away from his face, and staggered back as the blinding glares from the limes temporarily robbed him of his sight. He closed his eyes, but even then the brilliant coloured glare, twirling at a rapid rate, pierced the thickness of his eyelids and dazed his brain.

His sight was so dimmed now that he began to stagger about like a man suddenly afflicted with blindness. The only relief he obtained was when he covered his face with his hands. But there was something worse in store for him. Suddenly he felt a sharp stab of pain, similar to that experienced from an electric shock, shoot through his feet and legs. With the pain his hands came away involuntarily from his face, and once again that blinding glare of coloured lights, ever increasing in speed, caused him to reel.

"This is awful!" The words came through clenched teeth. "Fiendish!"

Once again Drake sought relief by covering his eyes with his hands, and once again the sharp stab of pain, apparently coming from the floor, caused him to lower them again as quickly.

Even in that terrible moment the plucky lad's brain sought a reason for the strange occurrence. He moved again to a different part of the room, but he had scarcely taken three steps forward when that excruciating pain again shot through his body.

"The floor!" muttered Drake. "Metal floor—live current running through it. The fiendish hounds!"

He winced as another electric shock caused him to lower his hands from his



The lights became more intense in their glare, more dazzling in their colour as the discs revolved at a faster pace. "Great heavens, this is awful!" gasped Drake. "Enough to drive anyone insane." (See this page.)

face. His eyes were watering now; his head was singing; his nervous system was becoming exhausted.

For half an hour this cruel treatment went on, until at length Nature asserted itself, and Jack Drake, who had stood his "treatment" without showing a trace of cowardice, sank to the metal floor in a dead faint. Then, and then only, did that dazzling glare of multi-coloured light cease to flick across the room. The faces in the apertures behind the limes disappeared, the door of the underground room opened, and the Yellow Claw, a fiendish expression distorting what remained visible of his masked face, entered the room, with the two Ethiopian sentinels at his heels.

"Take him up!"

The command was hissed out by the Yellow Claw, and the two guards hastened to do his bidding.

"Keep him under your surveillance until he comes to, and then report to me."

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An Unexpected Development!

THE two guards bowed low and retired, carrying their limp burden with them. Drake was taken back to the room in which he had first found himself, and placed on the couch.

And like two massive statues sat the muscular Ethiopians on each side of him, never allowing their gaze to wander from his slightly flushed face. For over an hour Drake remained in a state of torpor, and then his senses returned. Involuntarily his hands went up to his face to hide those maddening stabs of light, and then he became conscious of the fact that he was no longer in the underground room—that he was now in the sumptuously appointed apartment, with its oppressive stench of perfume that still burned slowly in the peculiarly shaped cauldron.

He opened his eyes wider, and sat half-upright, to fall back again as his dazed orbs pictured the two silent guards that sat either side of him. And in that recumbent position he stared up at the ceiling for an hour or more, trying to cast into oblivion his experiences in the room of a hundred lights.

He closed his weary eyes for five minutes or so in an endeavour to concentrate upon his position, upon the possibility of his escape. And when he opened them again he blinked in amazement. The two guards had disappeared from his couch, and in their place sat a girl—a beautiful girl, whose age could not have been more than twelve years at the most. Drake rubbed his eyes and sat bolt upright—rubbed his eyes, and peered again. But this was no hallucination. The guards had gone, and by his couch was a girl. And the girl smiled—a smile of kindness and pity strangely out of place amidst such cruel surroundings.

(Don't miss the next instalment of this amazing serial, boys! Who is the young girl who has appeared so suddenly upon the scene? Next Monday's instalment will tell you.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 223.

THE NEW RECRUIT!

(Continued from page 2.)



Ruthven had no choice but to climb up, and up, until at last he found himself forty feet above the ground, clinging among branches almost too slight to bear his weight. Growling significantly, Bruin settled himself on a good-sized branch. "Faith, 'tis as good as a play," jeered Kelly from below.

the thicket in which the still had been hidden, he found that he was not mistaken.

The deep footprints of a heavily-laden man showed plainly in the clay, and though the rain had filled, and, in some places, hidden them, yet Ruthven, one of the best woodsmen in the corps, had little difficulty in following them. They led almost straight up the hill for some distance, then turned in a wide sweep to the left, following a natural terrace in the hillside.

"Rum thing that a cute chap like Kelly didn't hide his tracks better!" was the idea which had just occurred to Ruthven, when suddenly the now-broadening daylight revealed a dark blot on the hillside, some distance above him.

"That's his cache, for a dollar!" muttered Ruthven, and up he went, hand-over-fist, swinging along by the help of the rocks and pine-trunks.

It was a gloomy-looking place, this cave-mouth. Great beetling crags overhung it, and the dark pines grew thick around its mouth. Ruthven, hoping against hope that the moonshiner might be still in his refuge, hurried with all his might, and next minute was inside the cave.

A slight sound made him pause. Ah, there was light at last! Two small red points of fire, that glared fixedly like the head-lamps of a distant engine.

Ruthven paused, and drew his pistol. But what was that? A deep whuff, exactly like an escape of exhausted steam. The two red lamps dropped a little, and suddenly moved rapidly towards him. There was a heavy shuffle of feet.

With a horrified gasp the trooper spun round, and went out of that cave like lightning. After him, at a speed amazing for so heavy a brute, galloped a monstrous cinnamon bear!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Fight with the Bear.

THE beast was hardly a length behind him as Mel emerged into daylight. Springing behind the nearest tree-trunk, he whipped out his heavy pistol, and, levelling it straight at the bear's head, pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked harmlessly on the cap. A second attempt gave the same result.

Ruthven had just time to make a bound behind another tree as a monstrous paw, armed with five chisel-like claws, ripped a square yard of bark from the trunk. Dropping his useless weapon, the trooper sprang into the next tree, and pulled his legs up just in time to escape a mouthful of long yellow tusks that snapped like a steel trap beneath.

But Master Ephraim is, as the Americans say, no slouch of a climber himself, and, rearing his ponderous body against the trunk, he came slowly but steadily in pursuit. The slim tree quivered beneath his enormous weight, and things looked black for Mel.

He had no choice but to go up, and up, until at last he found himself forty feet above ground, clinging among branches almost too slight to bear his weight.

"Faith, 'tis as good as a play I wunst saw in dear, dirty ould Dublin!" came a jeering voice to Ruthven's ears, and there, high on the hillside, stood the lanky cause of all his trouble, his red hair flaming in the morning sun and his lean, freckled face seamed and wrinkled with mirth.

Ruthven was very angry, but he tried not to show it.

Kelly had no mercy, he went on: "Young Adams is slaping peaceful as a babby, Misther Ruthven. 'Tis a sad soight to see a young man that fond of mountain dew! An' I'm thinkin' yourself had a taste, too! When I changed thim cartridges in your gun ye niver moved at all!"

Ruthven said nothing. He felt for his pipe, determined to show that he could stay where he was until both Kelly and the bear got tired.

Instead of his tobacco-pouch his fingers closed on a flask, and in an instant a brilliant idea flashed through his head.

The flask was full of that strong spirit which every man carries in the West in case of snake-bite. Putting the flask to his lips in order to deceive Kelly, Ruthven contrived, unseen by the Irishman, to pour the whole contents on to the back of his furry gaoler. Then, before it could evaporate, a lighted match had followed the spirit.

There was a flash of flame, a frightful roar, a crash of branches, and the next instant a tornado of blazing bear had dropped out of the tree, and charging madly up the hillside.

Kelly, who was standing out on a bare ridge of rock, saw the awful apparition, gave one howl, turned, and ran for dear life.

Ruthven saw his long legs twinkling like the spokes of a wheel. Another moment and the trooper had reached the ground, and, snatching up his pistol, joined in the pursuit.

Kelly first, bear second, Ruthven third, the procession passed up the side of Elk Hill at a pace which must have amazed the squirrels and crows. As he ran, Ruthven contrived to shed the useless cartridges and reload the revolver.

The chase disappeared from his eyes in a fold of the rocks. Then came a crash, followed by a lamentable yell from Kelly!

Up raced Ruthven, and found the bear, looking like a monstrous, ready-singed pig, tearing round and round a deep crevice in the bottom of a sort of rocky ravine. Evidently Kelly was down below, and for a moment the trooper was strongly inclined to take cover, and wait, and let the red-headed scamp taste the joys of being "treed," or, rather, "run to earth."

But bethinking him that the man might be hurt from his fall, or that the bear might plunge down on top of him, Ruthven quickly drew closer, took cover, and, with steady hand, sent a bullet crashing in behind Bruin's shoulder. The monster gave a coughing grunt, turned and stared in the direction of the shot. Ruthven fired again, and the bear, with a bullet in its brain, rolled over, quivered, and was still.

"Having a good time, Kelly?" inquired Ruthven dryly, peering over the edge of the hole.

"Faith, it's kilt I am entoirely!" came back the dismal reply out of the darkness. "I've sprained me angle and bruk me nose!"

Ruthven helped him down the hillside to the dug-out, and doctored him up. Then he ducked Adams in cold water till he woke him, and, giving him some strong coffee, sent him out in search of the horses, which were hidden in a canon at some distance.

While he was away, Ruthven cooked breakfast and fed Kelly. The latter was very silent for a long time.

"It's haping coals of fire on me head ye are, sorr," he remarked at last. "Sure, I'm sorry I laughed at ye whin ye were up the tree."

"That's all right, Kelly: I'll forgive you. But, look here, why not chuck this business and run straight?"

"What else could I do, thin?" inquired Kelly wonderingly.

"Join the corps," was the prompt reply.

"Dade, an' I'll think of it!" said Kelly. He did, and is now one of the most popular men in F Troop.

THE END.

THE YOUNG PRETENDER!

(Continued from Page 20.)

X-ray examination revealed the fact that Bunter was not suffering from appendicitis. But I decided to keep him in the nursing-home for a week, in order to cure his digestive trouble."

The Head gasped.

"Pardon me, Dr. Wright, but I received no such letter from you."

"Indeed! Then I fancy I know what happened," said the surgeon, with a grim glance in Billy Bunter's direction. "I left that letter in Bunter's room in the nursing-home, and asked him to hand it to the nurse for despatch. The young rascal evidently destroyed it. You never got it, and you therefore supposed that he had his operation, as was originally intended."

"I certainly did. And he never had the operation at all! He has practised a most monstrous deception—"

"And is practising it still," said Dr. Wright, with another glance at the bath-chair. "There is no need whatever for him to be wheeled about in a bath-chair. He is perfectly fit and well."

"Good gracious!"

"Have I your permission to eject him from the bath-chair, sir?"

"Certainly!"

In a couple of strides Dr. Wright reached the bath-chair. His iron grip fell upon Billy Bunter's collar, and the

fat junior was hauled out of his comfortable seat.

"I will now prove to you that Bunter is no invalid, sir," panted the surgeon.

He raised his foot, as if to implant a kick upon the rear of Bunter's person, and the fat junior sprinted away with a yell of alarm.

"There!" said the surgeon, with a grim smile. "No appendicitis patient would be able to run like that within a week of his operation. He would not be able to run at all, or even walk."

"The wretched boy has behaved abominably," said the Head. "I hardly know how to deal with him. He has obtained sympathy and gifts, and so forth, by false pretences."

The Head then turned to Enery and Herbert.

"You may remove that bath-chair, my men," he said. "It will not be wanted again."

"Werry good, sir."

The bath-chair attendants shuffled away with the empty chair. They were probably glad to be relieved of Billy Bunter's weight.

As for Bunter himself, he would have had a very rough passage had not the Head been present to prevent any rowdyism. Bolsover major declared aloud that Bunter deserved to be lynched for having spoofed Greyfriars in

such a despicable manner. And there were plenty of fellows who cordially agreed with Bolsover.

Dr. Wright handed back the cheque for fifty guineas to the Head, and in due course the money was returned to the original donors.

Billy Bunter was marched away to the punishment-room to await his fate. And there was a strong rumour going the rounds that evening to the effect that he would be expelled for his amazing imposture.

But the Head probably took into account the fact that Bunter was more fool than rogue, and that he did not realise the enormity of his conduct. Possibly, also, he took into consideration the fact that Bunter had already suffered. He had been in real pain when he was admitted to the nursing-home. He had also endured the apprehension—though not the reality—of an operation.

All things considered, the Head decided that a public flogging would meet the case. The tragedy, or the drama, or the comedy—according to how the various fellows viewed it—was enacted in Big Hall on Monday morning. Bunter had never liked Monday mornings, and he liked this one least of all. The Head did not spare the rod, and for five painful minutes there was a steady, swishing sound, and the hall echoed with the shrill screams of William George Bunter, or, as Bob Cherry christened him, the Young Pretender!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Monday's magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled, "Duffer and Hero!" featuring Alonzo Todd, of the Remove.)

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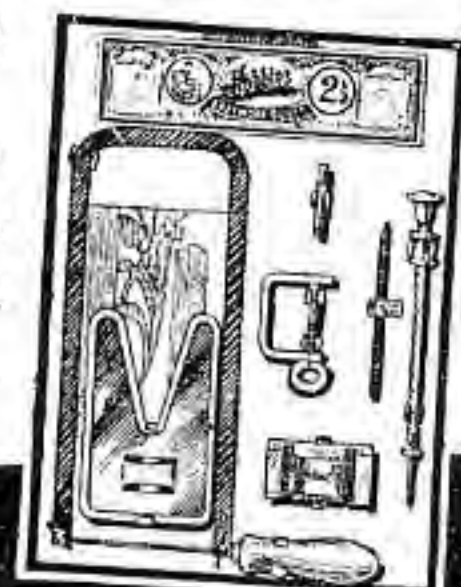
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NEXT MONDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"DUFFER AND HERO!"

By Frank Richards,

is the title of the next extra-long Greyfriars story—a title that at once throws light upon the identity of the hero. Most of you have made the acquaintance of the guileless Alonzo Todd, but there remains a hitherto undiscovered side to his simple nature for you to explore. We see Alonzo as a strong character, morally and physically, and when I say that you can rest assured of next week's story being well up to the MAGNET's standard.

"THE YELLOW CLAW!"

By Hedley Scott.

There are some startling developments in the next long instalment of this popular stage and detective serial. Ferrers Locke and Inspector Pycroft, of the C.I.D., are well to the fore, as also are certain members of the dreaded society. Don't miss a word of this coming treat, boys—it's great!

"THE SCOURGE OF QUEENSLAND!"

In next Monday's bumper issue of the MAGNET there is a special, thrilling com-

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