

29 HANDSOME PRIZES WON BY READERS THIS WEEK!

Names and Full Particulars Inside.

No. 813. Vol. XXVIII.

Week Ending August 8th, 1925.

The Magnet 2^d

Library EVERY MONDAY
of
Complete School Stories.



THROWN OUT—BY ORDER OF BILLY BUNTER!

(Billy Bunter, as lord and master of Bunter Court, exercises his authority on an unwelcome visitor.
Read the magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, inside.)

10/- a week for a year

FAMOUS CRICKETERS COMPETITION

5/- a week for a year

AND 40 SPECIAL PRIZES &c

(WINNERS CAN CHOOSE WHAT THEY LIKE FROM THE FOLLOWING :

CRICKET BATS, SWIMMING COSTUMES, CRYSTAL SETS, FOOTBALLS, BATTING PADS, STEAM ENGINES, MECCANO SETS, STAMPS AND STAMP ALBUMS, CHEMISTRY OUTFITS, SETS OF BOXING-GLOVES, HEADPHONES, PAINT BOXES, ELECTRICAL TOY OUTFITS, CAMERAS, ELECTRIC TORCHES, AIR PISTOLS, COMBINATION POCKET KNIVES, FOUNTAIN PENS, CHEST EXPANDERS, GYM EXERCISERS, ROLLER SKATES, TENNIS RACQUETS, AIR GUNS, AUTOGRAPH ALBUMS, FRETWORK OUTFITS.)

THE good old MAGNET has had many interesting and popular competitions in the past, but this new contest, the fourth part of which we are giving you this week, is certain to outshine all its predecessors. Everybody is invited to join in—and there is no entrance fee.

Here we give you the Fourth Set of puzzle-pictures, each of which represents the name of a famous cricketer. In previous issues we have given you a full list of these cricketers' names, and every solution must be a name taken from that list.

THE WAY TO WIN.

As you make out the answer to each of the six pictures given this week write it IN INK in the space underneath, and then keep this set, together with the previous puzzles, until next week, when we shall give you the Fifth Set of puzzles to solve.

The contest is a six-week one, and with the final set we shall give you a coupon and full directions for the sending in of your entries.

You must adhere strictly to these Rules.

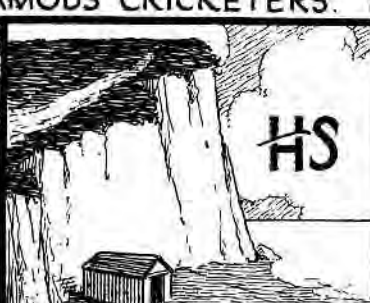
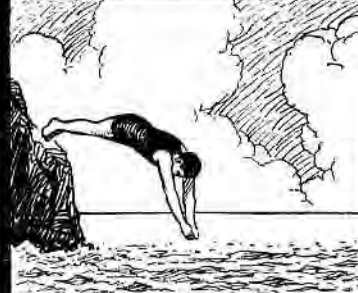
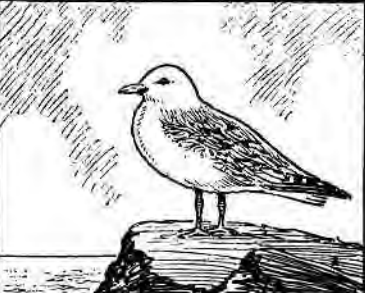
The first prize will be awarded to the reader who sends a correct, or most nearly correct, solution of the six sets of puzzle-pictures. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

You may send as many attempts as you like, but every attempt must be a complete solution of the whole series of puzzles. It must be quite distinct and separate from any other attempt, and all solutions must be written IN INK.

The Editor reserves full right to divide the prizes or their value. No competitor will receive more than one prize. It is a distinct condition of entry that the decision of the Editor be taken as final and binding.

Entries mutilated or bearing alterations or alternative names will be disqualified. No correspondence will be allowed. No responsibility can be taken for delay or loss in the post or otherwise. Employees of the proprietors of the MAGNET may not compete.

"FAMOUS CRICKETERS" No 4.

		
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KEEP YOUR EFFORTS UNTIL THE FINAL SET APPEARS.

SUSPICIOUS!—For Billy Bunter to lose any of his beauty sleep is something remarkable, as, next to eating, sleep is the most important essential to his existence. Yet Bunter doesn't roam abroad at night for the sheer joy of the thing; this sudden activity of his has a deal to do with—



The Mystery of Bunter Court!

A Magnificent, New, Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

An Alarm in the Night!

HARRY WHARTON sat up in bed and listened.

It was a hot August night. Wharton was generally a good sleeper; but the heat perhaps had made him restless. At all events, he had been awake for some little time and had heard one chime from the marble clock on the mantelpiece in his bed-room.

The great house was very still. Moonbeams fell in at the tall windows of the room, glimmering over the polished floor and the rugs. Hardly a breath of air was stirring. In the deep stillness of the summer night every faint sound was heard strangely and clearly.

And a sound had come to Wharton's ears from the corridor outside his bed-room door.

It was not the creak of a window, or the scuttles of a rat behind the ancient oaken wainscot of Combermere Lodge. It was a footfall—a soft and stealthy footfall in the silence of the night.

Wharton stared towards his door.

Someone was passing that door outside; passing it with stealthy footsteps at one in the morning!

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove felt his heart beat a little faster.

The thought of burglars flashed into his mind at once.

All the occupants of the house had long been in bed; it was two hours since Walsingham, the butler, had made his last round and seen the house fastened up for the night.

Wharton stepped quietly out of bed.

His room was the last but one in the corridor; and the last room was tenanted by Billy Bunter. If any of the Greyfriars party had turned out for any reason in the middle of the night no one but Bunter was likely to pass Wharton's door.

And Billy Bunter was the last person in the world to turn out of bed at night. He found it trouble enough to turn out in the morning.

Besides, if any of Bunter's house-party had turned out, surely he would have put on the electric light in the corridor to see his way. But there was no

glimmer of light under Wharton's door. Whoever was creeping stealthily along the broad corridor was creeping in deep gloom.

There were many valuables in Combermere Lodge that might have tempted a burglar. Indeed, the house and its appointments were so magnificent that it was a standing puzzle to Harry Wharton & Co. how Bunter could possibly have obtained possession of it for the summer vacation. That he had possession of it was indubitable, for there he was, and there were his guests. But how he had done it was a mystery.

If an enterprising burglar had penetrated into the great house to lift some of the valuables, Wharton was prepared to take a hand in the proceedings. He stepped softly towards his bed-room door and opened it without a sound.

At the end of the great corridor was a tall window of stained glass, through which the moonlight glimmered dimly. It was not light enough for Wharton to make out anything with certainty; but in the distance, in the gloom, he thought he saw a moving shadow. Faintly there came back to his ears the stealthy footfalls of the unknown who was creeping farther and farther away from him.

Wharton did not hesitate.

He hurried quickly but silently along to the next room, which was occupied by Bob Cherry.

Bob was sleeping the sleep of the just when he was awakened by a light shake.

"Shush!" breathed Wharton. "Not a word!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Shush!"

Bob sat up and blinked at him.

"Is that you, Harry?"

"Yes. There's somebody sneaking along the passage, and I fancy it's a burglar. Will you come along?"

"Oh, my hat! Yes, rather!"

Bob was out of bed with a jump.

"Shall we call the other chaps?" he asked.

"No time—they'll wake fast enough if we collar the chap and there's a row. Come on!"

"Right—ho!"

Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh were fast asleep in their rooms; no sound came from them. Bob Cherry stopped only to annex a heavy brass poker from the fender, and then he followed Harry Wharton into the corridor.

"Listen!" breathed the captain of the Remove.

"I can hear him!" whispered Bob.

They hurried in the direction of the sound.

Dimly, in the deep gloom, they made out a shadowy figure ahead.

The figure seemed to be groping its way along in the dark as if seeking a particular door, and puzzled to find it in the darkness.

The chums of the Remove trod silently, with bare feet, and drew quickly nearer to the strange shadowy form.

It had stopped now.

"He's going into Sammy Bunter's room," whispered Bob. "Better collar him before he goes in; that fat young ass would be scared out of his wits by a giddy burglar."

"Right! I'll turn on the light. There's a switch about here," breathed the captain of the Remove.

Wharton felt along the wall for the electric light switch.

The shadowy figure had stopped at the door of the room occupied by Sammy Bunter, the minor of the great William George.

He had groped for the doorknob and found it, when all of a sudden Wharton pressed the switch and the corridor was flooded with light.

"Collar him!" panted Bob.

The figure swung round with a startled gasp. The next second he was on the floor in the grasp of the two Removites of Greyfriars.

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**GIVEN AWAY WITH THIS
PAPER NEXT WEEK—
FOUR
BEAUTIFUL FREE GIFTS!**

"Got him!" panted Wharton, as he sprawled over the gasping, struggling intruder.

"Give in, you villain!" shouted Bob. "I'll brain you—let me get at him with this poker, Harry—"

"Yaroooh!"

It was a wild yell from the sprawling prisoner.

"Why—what— My hat!"

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Help! Fire! Burglars! Thieves! Murder! Help!" shrieked Billy Bunter. "Keep off! Help! Yoooh!"

"Bunter!" roared Bob.

"Billy Bunter!" gasped Wharton.

And the two Removites released their prisoner as suddenly as if he had become red-hot to the touch and jumped up.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Very Mysterious I

BILLY BUNTER sat up.

He gasped and spluttered and spluttered. In the glare of the electric light he recognised Wharton and Bob Cherry, and realised that they were not burglars, as he had supposed at first. It had been a mutual mistake.

"Ow! Wow! Groogh! Ooooooh!" spluttered Bunter. "You silly asses! Ow! You footling chumps! Groogh! What do you mean by playing your silly practical jokes on a fellow—ow!—ow!—in the middle of the night! Ooooh!"

"Bunter!" stuttered Bob.

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

"You fat duffer!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Ow! Beast! Ow! What do you mean by jumping on a chap?" howled Bunter.

"What do you mean by wandering about in the middle of the night, in the dark, and making a fellow think that burglars were in the house?" demanded Harry Wharton indignantly.

"Ow! You silly chump!" gasped Bunter. "I suppose I can walk about my own house if I like, any time I choose? Ow!"

"Yes; but—"

"Mind your own business, blow you! Ow! I thought it was burglars when you collared me! Oh dear!"

"Well, we thought you were a burglar, creeping about like that in the dark—"

"You silly chump!"

"Well, why didn't you turn on the light?" demanded Bob. "Do you see better in the dark, like a silly owl?"

"Yes—I mean, no—I mean, it's no bizney of yours!" growled Bunter. "I suppose I can do as I like in my own house. Who's master of Bunter Court, I'd like to know!"

The Greyfriars juniors grinned.

Bunter still referred to Combermere Lodge as "Bunter Court," though his guests were aware, by this time, that the house was only "let furnished," and that its change of name was only pure, unadulterated "cheek" on the part of Billy Bunter.

Bunter picked himself up, evidently very much annoyed. He jammed his spectacles on his fat little nose, and blinked angrily at the two Removites.

Three doors had opened along the corridor. Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked out in surprised inquiry. The bump of Bunter on the floor had awakened them.

"What's the row, you fellows?" asked Nugent.

"Only Bunter," said Bob. "He was wandering around in the dark, and we took him for a giddy burglar."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Spying on a chap!" hooted Bunter.

"What?" roared Bob.

"Can't you mind your own business?" exclaimed Bunter.

"You silly, cheeky owl!" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "I've a jolly good mind to bang your cheeky head on the wall."

Bunter jumped back.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"What is there to spy on, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton quietly, and regarding the Owl of the Remove with a very curious look.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all! I—I couldn't sleep, you know, and I—I was just taking a stroll down the corridor!" stammered Bunter. "If you think I was going to speak to Sammy, you're mistaken!"

"What?"

"As for being nervous about going downstairs alone, that's all rot! You know I'm as brave as a lion!" said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Besides, why should I want to go down to the cellars?" argued Bunter. "Nothing of the kind, of course!"

The chums of the Remove stared blankly at William George Bunter. It was Bunter's way to exculpate himself by piling one "whopper" on another, and to give himself away thoroughly in the process.

"You were going down to the cellars?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Of course not! I've just said I wasn't."

"What on earth were you going down to the cellars for?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"I—I wasn't! I wouldn't, you know. Besides, the key of the wine-cellars is lost, and I couldn't, could I? You fellows heard Walsingham tell me to-day that the key had been taken from his room, and couldn't be found. Nobody can get down to the wine-cellars now."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Is the esteemed and ludicrous Bunter balmy in his honourable crumple?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in wonder.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"It beats me!" said Harry Wharton blankly. "But I suppose it's no business of ours. If you've got anything to go downstairs for, Bunter, and you're funky, we'll come with you, if you like."

"I haven't!" snapped Bunter.

"But you said—"

"Look here, you fellows, get back to bed!" interrupted Bunter. "You're losing your sleep, and that's bad for you. Go back to bed at once!"

The Famous Five of Greyfriars exchanged wondering glances.

From Bunter's remarks they gathered that the Owl of the Remove was the unknown person who had abstracted the key to the wine-cellars from the butler's room; and that it had been his intention to visit that remote quarter in the middle of the night.

Being "funky" of going down through the great house alone, he had intended to call his minor, Sammy, to go with him. That much seemed to be clear, in spite of Bunter's denials; or, rather, because of his denials.

But what it could possibly mean was a deep mystery. Bunter had many failings—indeed, their name was legion. But he could not be suspected of intending to visit the wine-cellars for an orgy of intoxication. That really was unthinkable. Nobody would have been surprised if he had raided the pantry; but there was nothing in the wine-cellars to tempt even Bunter. So the whole thing was inexplicable; unless Billy Bunter was, as the Nabob of Bhanipur suggested, balmy in the crumple.

But he did not look "balmy"; he looked angry and annoyed and irritated, but that was all.

"Are you going back to bed?" he snapped. "Look here, a chap doesn't expect his guests to spy on him."

"You fat idiot—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Let's get back to bed!" said Bob Cherry. "I shall kick Bunter if he says any more; and a fellow mustn't really kick his host when he's on a visit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton & Co. returned to their rooms. They were puzzled and perplexed; but they realised that Bunter's mysterious proceedings were his own business; he had a right to do as he liked in Lord Combermere's house so long as he was the "furnished tenant."

Bunter blinked after them frowningly; and he seemed greatly relieved when five bed-room doors had closed, and he was left alone in the great corridor. He stepped cautiously towards the staircase, and listened, and was further relieved to find that the noise had not been heard in the servants' quarters. He would have been extremely disconcerted to see Walsingham, or Thomas, the footman, in the offing.

"Silly owls!" murmured Bunter.

"Spying on a chap! Lucky I pulled the wool over their eyes all right! He, he, he!"

Bunter turned off the electric light in the corridor, and opened the door of Sammy Bunter's room.

A deep and unmusical snore greeted him. The noise in the corridor had not awakened Sammy Bunter.

William George grinned, and stepped into the room, closing the door softly after him. Then he turned on Sammy's electric light.

"Sammy?"

Snore!

Bunter approached the bed where Sammy lay in happy slumber, dreaming of the unlimited supper he had lately disposed of.

"I say, Sammy—"

Snore!

Billy Bunter bent over his minor and shook him forcibly.

"Sammy— Ow!"

"Oh!"

Sammy awakened suddenly, and started up. There was a loud crack, as his head came in contact with the fat chin that was bending over him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Sammy Is Not Taking Any!

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

"Sammy, you ass—"

"Billy, you idiot—"

With that exchange of compliments the two Bunters glared at one another. Billy Bunter rubbing his fat chin, and Sammy rubbing his bullet head. The

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collision had been a sudden and rather violent one.

"What the thump are you waking me up for in the middle of the night?" demanded Sammy Bunter indignantly. "I was just dreaming such a lovely dream, all about a game-pie—"

"You fat duffer!" growled Bunter. "Don't shut your eyes, Sammy; you're not going to sleep again yet."

Sammy's eyes had closed, perhaps because he was sleepy, perhaps in an effort to recapture the vanished beatific vision of the game-pie of his dreams.

Bunter shook him.

"Keep awake, Sammy, you dummy!"

"Look here, I'm jolly well going to sleep!" growled Bunter minor. "What's the matter with you? Can't you sleep? You shouldn't have bolted enough supper for six chaps, then! Your own fault! I can sleep all right. Leave me to it, and go back to bed, or go and eat coke!"

Samuel Bunter laid his head on the pillow again.

"Oh, really, Sammy—"

"Shurrup!"

"Look here—"

"You're keeping me awake with your chin-wag, Billy. Do get out, there's a good chap!"

"It's important, Sammy—"

"Rot!"

Bunter shook his minor again, and Sammy sat up with a ferocious growl. But William George was determined.

"Look here, you young ass!" he said. "It's jolly important. I suppose you don't want to have to clear out of this show, do you, and go home for the rest of the vacation?"

Sammy sniffed.

"You can't keep it up for ever!" he grunted. "You've got hold of the house somehow by diddling the agent—goodness knows how! You're running the whole show on tick, and fooling Walsingham. He's running up bills with the tradesmen, and you'll never pay them. You're stuffin' him that you're rich by giving him tips, and you've done it with money you've borrowed from your visitors. That game can't go on all through the vac. It's bound to come to a crash, and, as your brother, I hope you won't end up in chokey. I can tell you that I shall clear at once if I see a policeman coming."

"You—you—you—" gasped Bunter.

"Now let a chap go to sleep."

"Listen to me, Sammy! I've got to tell you—"

"Tell me to-morrow, then!" snorted Sammy. "Can't you let a chap sleep at midnight?"

"How can I tell you to-morrow, fat-head, when the man's got to be fed to-night?"

"Eh—what?"

Sammy Bunter sat bolt upright. His major had succeeded in effectually awakening him now.

"Are you potty?" he ejaculated. "What man? Who? Which?"

"Pilkins, the agent. I can't let him starve. He's a meddling fool, but he can't starve."

"Eh? Where is he?"

"In the wine-cellars," breathed Bunter.

"Wha-a-at!"

"That's why I cleared all the fellows and the servants out of the house. Pilkins was coming here to see me. You see, he was in the nursing-home, and I thought he was laid up for the whole vac. I hoped he was, at any rate. But he got well and went back to his office, and found that Combermere Lodge was let—to me. Of course, he was frightfully upset, as there had been no papers



"Yaroooh!" It was a wild yell from the sprawling prisoner. "Why, what—my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Bunter!" "Help! Murder! Fire! Thieves! Help!" shrieked the Owl. Wharton and Bob Cherry released their prisoner as suddenly as if he had become red-hot to the touch. (See Chapter 1.)

signed, or anything, or any money paid. He thought he was being bilked by a swindling tenant, you know," said Billy Bunter indignantly.

"So he was," said Sammy.

"What!"

"But what's happened?" demanded Bunter minor. "If the agent got well and found you out, why hasn't he come on to you?"

"He has," whispered Bunter. "He came here by appointment to see me, and I had the place empty, ready for him. I made him think that Walsingham was in the wine-cellars, and we went down to see the butler there, and I put on Walsingham's voice. You know what a clever ventriloquist I am, Sammy."

"I know what a silly ass you are!"

"Well, I got him into the wine-cellars and talked to him, but he wouldn't see reason. He actually refused to agree to my keeping in the house unless I paid the rent—"

"Not really?" said Sammy sarcastically.

"Yes, really. A distrustful black-guard, you know. I told him that I should pay everything—ultimately. He didn't seem to trust me."

"Go hon!"

"He didn't, Sammy. Of course, these house agents are a downy lot. They're always diddling somebody, so naturally

they're distrustful. He actually refused to take my word for it that the money was all right."

Sammy blinked at his major.

"So there it was," said Bunter. "I couldn't give up the house. Why, I've asked D'Arcy of St. Jim's to come here for part of the vac. I've named it Bunter Court, to keep up appearances to Greyfriars chaps. I've made all my arrangements to stay on here till we go back to school. And that footling ass thought I was going to give it all up, simply because I'd got hold of the house while he was ill without any papers being signed, and he was alarmed about his money. I can tell you I wasn't taking any of his cheeky nonsense!"

"What did you do?"

"Locked him in the wine-cellars."

"What!" howled Sammy.

"I locked him in, and locked the upper door, too, and I'm keeping the key. See?"

"Is—is—is he there now?" gasped Sammy.

"Of course."

"Pilkins, the estate agent, in—in—in the wine-cellars!" babbled Sammy Bunter.

"Yes. There's no way out, excepting up the staircase, and I've got the key, and the doors are locked."

"You awful idiot!"

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"Oh, really, Sammy—" gasped Sammy Bunter.

"Rubbish! He walked down to the cellars of his own free will," said Bunter. "He's staying there of his own accord, really. It's not my business to unlock doors for cheeky, meddling fellows who butt into my house."

"Your house! Oh crumbs!"

"As tenant of the house I'm entitled to charge him for board and lodging, really, so long as he stays there," said Bunter. "I won't. I'm an easy-going chap. But I'm entitled to. But you see how it is, Sammy. I put those things in the wine-cellars for him—some rugs and blankets and some grub and a jug of water. There's a tap down there, so he will have plenty to drink. And cold water is very healthy. Much better for a man really than tea or coffee, and, of course, ever so much better than spirits. Most likely it will do him good, so far as that goes. But he must have some grub."

"Oh crumbs!" said Sammy faintly. Sammy's desire to return to balmy slumber seemed to have left him now. He sat up in bed, blinking at his major in something like consternation. Billy Bunter seemed quite satisfied with the measures he had taken to dispose of the troublesome estate agent, who had, involuntarily, let him the house. Sammy appeared anything but satisfied.

"That's why I've woke you up," said Bunter. "You see, I can't go down to the wine-cellars in the daytime. I can't let Walsingham know that it was I who bagged the key from his room. Besides, the servants would wonder what I went down for. There's no wine kept there now; and, besides, we don't drink wine, even if there was any. And if I went down, Walsingham would be sure to butt in, too. You know how fussy he is. So I can only go down after they're all in bed."

"Oh dear!"

"I'm not funky at going down alone, of course," said Bunter. "But—but I want a chap with me. That fellow Pilkins might spring at me as soon as I opened the door. He's brute enough for anything—a regular ruffian! It's really not safe for me to deal with him alone. I want you to come."

"You want me—"

"That's it! I can't ask Wharton, or any of those chaps. They don't know anything about Pilkins being shut up there. Of course, it would be all up if they knew. They'd get him out at once. You're the only fellow here that I can trust, Sammy," said Bunter flatteringly. Sammy Bunter gasped.

"You can trust me—yes, rather! You can trust me not to get mixed up in this! I'm jolly well not taking a hand in it!"

"Now, look here, Sammy—"

"You silly ass!" gasped Sammy. "Why, you may be sent to choko for this! I'm jolly well not going on the treadmill along with you, I know that! I'm jolly well getting out of the house before the crash comes. I'm clearing off first thing in the morning—well, after breakfast, anyhow."

Bunter glared at him.

"Won't you back me up, Sammy?"

"No jolly fear!" said Sammy promptly.

"Ain't I standing you a jolly ripping holiday here for nothing?" demanded Bunter indignantly.

"Standing me a chance of getting a peeler's hand dropped on my shoulder, you mean!" snorted Sammy. "I'm jolly well going!"

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"Look here, I don't want to go down-stairs by myself; the place is so jolly big and dark," said Bunter. "You come along with me."

"Rats!"

"You young rotter!"

"Yah!"

"Are you coming?" howled Bunter.

"No, I'm not!" snapped Sammy.

Billy Bunter gave him a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. It was clear that Sammy Bunter was determined. Perhaps he was not quite so obtuse as his brother William George. At all events, evidently he had made up his fat mind that he would have no hand in Bunter's remarkable proceedings.

"You mean that, Sammy?" hissed Bunter.

"Yes, you ass!"

"Then take that!"

Bunter clutched up the pillow from Sammy's bed. He swept it into the air in both hands and brought it down with a terrific swipe.

"Yooop!" roared Sammy.

"Take that, and that, and that!" gasped Bunter.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Sammy Bunter rolled and squirmed and yelled as the pillow swiped down with vigour and rapidity. He rolled off the bed and came with a bump to the floor.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Yooop! Whoop! Help! Yaroooooh!" roared the hapless Sammy.

Swipe, swipe!

"Yooooop!"

Billy Bunter delivered a final swipe, and then hurled the pillow at Sammy, and stalked indignantly out of the room.

The door closed on him, and Sammy was left to gasp and splutter alone. He crawled back gasping into bed.

But it was quite a long time before Sammy Bunter settled down to balmy slumber again. And even then he dreamed of house-agents imprisoned in cellars, and policemen tapping the Bunters on the shoulder and requesting their company for a walk to the police-station: the beatific vision of the game-pie was gone for ever.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Pilkins, the Prisoner!

BILLY BUNTER granted discontentedly.

With a little electric torch in his fat hand, he was creeping down the great staircase of Combermere Lodge.

He grunted. And then he started and shivered as the echo of his grunt came back to him from vast shadowy spaces. The Owl of the Remove blinked over his shoulder uneasily.

There was nothing, really, to be afraid of within the walls of Combermere Lodge. But the house was vast, it was dark, it was silent. And at two o'clock in the morning there was something eerie and unnerving in creeping about the great house alone.

Bunter did not like it at all. At Greyfriars he had never cared for his minor's company. The Bunters, at school, always saw as little of one another as they could. But William George would have been very glad of Sammy Bunter's company now. He would have been glad of any company to help to keep off the horrid feeling that shadowy figures were lurking in every dark corner, ready to spring on him as he passed.

A dozen times before he reached the bottom of the great staircase of Combermere Lodge, Bunter was tempted to

give it up and return to his room. But he kept desperately on.

His masterly strategy in dealing with Mr. Pilkins had its drawbacks. The man simply could not be left without food. Water he had in plenty. And as Billy Bunter had told his minor, water was a very healthy drink, much better for Mr. Pilkins without the whisky he was accustomed to mix with it. But there was no food in the wine-cellars, and it was pretty certain that Mr. Pilkins had already disposed of the loaf of bread and the cheese that Bunter had left for him on the day of his capture.

Indeed, it was pretty certain that the hapless estate-agent was very hungry by this time, and probably haunted by fears of famine. It did not matter how loudly he yelled, because no sound could be heard from the deep cellars through two thick oaken doors. But it would never do for the man to perish of starvation.

Bunter was humane. Even the meddling estate-agent, who wanted to turn his undesired tenant out of Combermere Lodge, was entitled to live, and Bunter acknowledged it. Besides, if such a calamity happened, there was bound to be an inquest, and Bunter had no faith in the intelligence of a coroner and his jury. It was as likely as not that the coroner would take the view that Bunter was to blame in some way. From every point of view, in fact, it was desirable that Mr. Pilkins should survive his imprisonment in Lord-Combermere's wine-cellars.

This meant that he had to be visited periodically with supplies of provender, and there was no one but Bunter to perform this necessary duty.

It was hard cheese for a fellow to have to get out of his comfortable bed at midnight and wander about a dark and lonely house. Bunter felt that. But it could not be helped.

Palpitating, and blinking uneasily round him at every step, Billy Bunter reached the staircase that led down to the wine-cellars.

He unlocked the door and descended, and put the key into the lock of the lower door, which opened into the main cellar.

He hesitated before he turned it.

At that hour, doubtless, Mr. Pilkins was fast asleep on the rugs with which Bunter had thoughtfully provided him. But through the keyhole came a glimmer showing that the electric-light was burning in the cellar. Doubtless, in that solitary and remote quarter, far from the sound of human voices, the imprisoned estate-agent preferred to keep the light on permanently—no gleam of daylight ever penetrated to Mr. Pilkins' prison. Still, it was possible that the man was awake, and in that case it was scarcely safe to open the door. He might be ruffian enough—unscrupulous enough—to spring on Bunter. And in a "scrap" with Mr. Pilkins the Owl of the Remove would not have been of much use.

It would have been a ghastly finale to Bunter's masterly strategy had Mr. Pilkins collared him and pitched him out of the way and ascended a free man from his prison in the cellars.

Bunter hesitated, and listened. He could hear no sound. But the oaken door was thick. Mr. Pilkins might have been shouting, and still Bunter would not have heard him.

He turned the key softly at last without a sound.

Then, slowly and cautiously, he pushed the door open about an inch, holding it ready to jam shut suddenly at a sign of danger. If Mr. Pilkins was

awake, and disposed to cut up rusty, he could go without supplies for another twenty-four hours. That would serve him right.

Bunter blinked in at the opening. At a distance from the door, under the electric-light bulb in the main cellar, he discerned a figure stretched on a rug with another rug over it. A sound of snoring came to his ears.

Bunter grinned. It was all safe. He pushed the door farther open and stepped in. Then he unslung a rucksack from his shoulder. The rucksack belonged to Bob Cherry; Bunter had borrowed it without mentioning the circumstance as useful for his purpose. It was stacked with food of various kinds. Bunter had had extra meals sent up to his room that day, and had stacked away a good portion in the rucksack.

In the case of any other fellow two or three extra substantial lunches sent to his room would have occasioned surprise and comment in the servants' hall. But in the case of Billy Bunter there was no cause for surprise. Walsingham and his minions were already accustomed to Bunter's Gargantuan appetite, and they would not really have been surprised had the fat tenant of Combermere Lodge ordered a ten-course dinner between lunch and tea.

Billy Bunter unslung the rucksack and began to unpack it. He moved very cautiously, so as not to awaken Mr. Pilkins. But Billy Bunter's movements, even when he was being very cautious, were not unlike those of an elephant. The snoring from the rugs ceased, and there was a stir. Bunter suddenly became aware of the fact that Mr. Pilkins was sitting up and staring at him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.
"Oh!" gasped Mr. Pilkins.
He threw aside the rugs and jumped up.

Bunter made a backward jump to the door as the estate agent rushed on him. Mr. Pilkins was not neglecting that opportunity of recovering his liberty.

Bunter jumped back through the door, with the estate agent springing after him.

The half-packed rucksack was still in his hand. With wonderful presence of mind the Owl of the Remove hurled it at Mr. Pilkins.

It landed fairly on Mr. Pilkins' aquiline nose and bowled him over like a skittle.
Bump!
"Ow!"

Mr. Pilkins sprawled on the flags. Before he could spring up again Bunter had slammed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Click!
Bunter was safe!
He leaned on the door, gasping for breath. On the inner side Mr. Pilkins was on his feet, savagely hammering at the oak.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.
Thump, thump, thump!
Mr. Pilkins was hammering with all his strength, but only a faint sound of thumping came through the thick oak.
"Ungrateful rotter!" gasped Bunter.
"Attacking a chap for bringing him food. Like a dog biting the hand that feeds it! I jolly well sha'n't come down here again in a hurry."

Thump, thump, thump!
Bunter groped his way up the staircase and emerged at the top, and closed and locked the upper door. Then not the faintest sound could be heard from the cellars below.

Billy Bunter scuttled up the great staircase, and hurried back to his room. His troublesome duty was done. Mr. Pilkins could be left to himself for another twenty-four hours at least.

Bunter's conscience was clear.
He turned into bed, and in a couple of minutes was fast asleep. His deep and unmusical snore echoed through the room, and it was still echoing there for many hours after the summer sun had risen.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Going while the Going's Good!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
Bob Cherry greeted the Owl of the Remove cheerily when Bunter came down in the sunny August morning.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and Bunter had breakfasted in bed, as was his usual custom. As he had slept till ten he had really made up for the loss of sleep caused by his nocturnal visit to the wine-cellars. But Billy Bunter could do with any amount of sleep, and he was looking drowsy now and blinking sleepily through his big spectacles.

"Where's Sammy?" he grunted.
"Sammy! Haven't seen the dear lad," answered Bob. "I've been out

since daylight. Perhaps he's not down yet."

"You're down rather early, Bunter, said Frank Nugent, with a grin.

Bunter snorted.
"I shouldn't be up yet, only I've got to see Sammy. If he's going, I must speak to him first."
"Sammy going?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes, he says so."
"Oh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were not disposed to ask questions, but they could not help wondering what it meant. They had not forgotten Billy Bunter's mysterious proceedings of the night before. They had left him at Sammy Bunter's door, and knew nothing further of his movements. Certainly, if they had known the facts, the game would have been up for William George Bunter, and his amazing tenancy of "Bunter Court" would have come to a sudden termination.

The evening before there had been no hint of Sammy Bunter taking his departure. Evidently that decision had been come to during the night, and it was fairly clear that it had something to do with Billy Bunter's nocturnal prowlings.

Bunter blinked at the Famous Five, who had come in from a swim in the river, looking very cheery and bright.



"You mean that, Sammy?" hissed Bunter major. "Yes, you ass!"
"Then take that!" roared Bunter, clutching up a pillow from Sammy's bed, and bringing it down with a swipe on Sammy's head. "Yoooop!" howled Sammy. "Take that—and that—and that!" gasped Bunter, swiping away with the pillow. (See Chapter 3.)

"Nothing for you fellows to worry about, of course," he said.

"My dear chap, we're not worrying," said Johnny Bull. "No business of ours if your minor clears, is it?"

"We shall miss him, of course," said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"The missfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We didn't have a row last night," Bunter hastened to explain. "I didn't go into Sammy's room at all, as it happened."

"Eh?"

"I never asked him to come downstairs with me, and, of course, he didn't think of refusing," further explained Bunter. "As for swiping him with a pillow, I wouldn't! I've too much brotherly affection."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Sammy's going, because he's got a pressing invitation to stay with one of our titled relations, you know."

"Oh?"

"Can't blame him, really," said Bunter, blinking at the chums of the Remove. "He will be in good company—quite aristocratic company. I've been doing him well here, so far as the quarters go, and the grub; but, of course, the company isn't much to speak of, is it?"

"Isn't it?" gasped Bob.

"Oh, no!"

Billy Bunter turned away, leaving his guests blinking after him. Really, Bunter's manners and customs, as host and entertainer, were scarcely worthy of Combermere Lodge.

"Walsingham!" called out Bunter, as the Combermere butler hovered in the great hall.

"Sir?"

"Where is Master Samuel?"

"In his room, sir—packing, sir," said Walsingham. "Master Samuel has ordered the car, sir, for the eleven-thirty at Combermere."

"Oh! All right!"

"By the way, sir, I have not yet succeeded in finding the key of the wine-cellar staircase, sir," said Walsingham.

Bunter frowned.

The missing key was reposing in his pocket, but he did not think fit to mention that little circumstance to Walsingham.

"That won't do," he said. "You must be more careful, Walsingham. As tenant, I am responsible to Lord Combermere for everything in the house. In fact, that is agreed upon with Mr. Pilkins, as you understand."

"Quite so, sir. But—"

"What can have become of the key, Walsingham?" demanded Billy Bunter sternly.

"I cannot say, sir. I know that it was in my room the day you sent me to Canterbury, sir. It disappeared while I was gone."

"You must have dropped it somewhere, Walsingham."

"I think not, sir. I cannot account for it," said the butler. "But if you choose, sir, I will send for a locksmith at Combermere, and have a new key made."

Bunter felt a qualm.

"Nothing of the kind!" he exclaimed hastily. "No need for that—the key will turn up all right. I'm sure it's not far off!"

"Very good, sir! I thought I would mention it to you before sending for the locksmith, sir."

"I should jolly well think so!" exclaimed Bunter hotly. He felt quite faint at the thought of the discovery the

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locksmith would have made had Walsingham sent for him. "Don't you jolly well do anything of the kind without consulting me first, Walsingham! There's no need to go down to the wine-cellar."

"None at all, sir."

"If the key does not turn up, I shall arrange the matter with Mr. Pilkins when I give up the tenancy," said Bunter. "I am responsible, of course, for everything mentioned in the inventory. By the way, Walsingham, I suppose you have the room ready for Master D'Arcy, as I instructed you?"

"Yes, sir; perfectly prepared."

"Order the car for twelve; I'm going to meet Master D'Arcy at the station. He will be here for lunch."

"Very good, sir!"

"And mind, Walsingham, my old friend D'Arcy is to be treated with every distinction. He is the son of Lord Eastwood, of whom you've heard, I've no doubt."

"Quite so, sir. Lord Eastwood was an acquaintance of my master, Lord Combermere," said Walsingham. "I have never had the honour, sir, of seeing his son. It will be a pleasure, sir, if I may say so with respect, sir."

"That's all right, Walsingham. You may go!" said Bunter, with a magnificent wave of a fat and rather grubby hand.

"Thank you, sir!"

Billy Bunter rolled away to Sammy's room.

He found his minor there. Sammy had finished his packing—there was not much of it. He was instructing Thomas, the footman, to carry his bag down to the car when Bunter rolled in.

"You may go, Thomas!" said Bunter.

Thomas was going, so there really was no need to tell him that he might go. But Bunter rejoiced in giving orders.

Thomas went.

"So you're really clearing, Sammy?" said the Owl of the Remove, blinking at his minor.

"Yes, rather!" said Sammy emphatically. "You won't catch me hanging on here. I'm not keen on skilly!"

"You silly ass, there's nothing to be afraid of!"

"Isn't there?" said Sammy. "I'm not chancing it, anyhow. I'm jolly well going while the going's good!"

"Can't say I'm sorry to lose you!" said Bunter, sarcastically. "You're no use, and I suppose your best pal, if you had one, wouldn't call you ornamental. But look here, Sammy, not a word at home. The pater doesn't know anything about this stunt; he would have a fit if he heard that I was the tenant of this whacking place. He would be afraid that somebody would come on to him for the money."

"I'm not going home!" grunted Sammy. "What's the good of going home? The pater grousing about stocks and shares rising and falling, and Bessie always ragging a chap. I had a jolly day at Margate the other day, and I'm going there again."

"Margate costs money!" said Bunter.

"You're going to lend me some!" said Sammy.

"I'm jolly well not!"

"You jolly well are!"

"Jolly more likely to boot you out of this on your neck, you fat sweep!" exclaimed Bunter wrathfully.

Sammy grinned.

"If I don't go to Margate, I shall have to go home. The pater will kick up no end of a dust if he hears about this stunt of yours!"

Billy Bunter breathed hard. He understood that Sammy's silence as to his proceedings was, so to speak, a

marketable commodity, and had to be bought and paid for.

"I'm short of tin!" he growled.

"You've done pretty well out of your guests, I believe," grinned Sammy.

"That goes in tips. The servants are having to wait for their wages, and I keep 'em civil by tippin' 'em!" grunted Bunter. "Perhaps I could let you have a pound."

"Perhaps you could let me have five!" chuckled Sammy Bunter. "I saw you squeeze a fiver out of Hurree Singh yesterday; fools and their money are soon parted!"

"That's for Walsingham, as soon as he gets restive—"

"Your mistake—it's for me!"

Billy Bunter breathed harder.

"You're a mercenary little beast, Sammy," he said. "This is simply black ingratitude, after all I've done for you. But I always was a generous chap; it's always been one of my failings. Here's the fiver."

Sammy Bunter chuckled and pocketed the fiver. Ten minutes later he was in the car rolling away for the station. Walsingham and all the footmen stood round respectfully to see him off; but they made the painful discovery that Bunter minor did not share Bunter major's tipping proclivities. There was not a solitary half-crown for the numerous staff of Combermere Lodge when Sammy Bunter took his unlamented departure.

Harry Wharton & Co. felt it incumbent on them to say good-bye to Sammy. He was only a fag of the Second Form at Greyfriars; in fact, nobody at all, from the point of view of Remove fellows. Still, he had been their fellow-guest at Bunter Court, and he was brother to their host. So they came down to the car to bid him farewell.

Sammy grinned at them.

"Off, old kid?" asked Bob Cherry, manfully disguising the satisfaction it gave him to see the fat fag go.

"What ho!" said Sammy. "You fellows hanging on?"

"Eh? Yes, we're staying on."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at?" asked Frank Nugent.

"He, he, he!" chortled Sammy.

"Well, what's the joke?" demanded Wharton.

"You are!" chuckled Sammy. "Just you wait till the rumpus happens! Oh, my eye! Won't there be a shindy? He, he, he!"

And Sammy rolled away in the car, still chortling, with the happy satisfaction of a rat who has deserted a sinking ship in good time.

"What did the fat young duffer mean, you fellows?" asked Bob Cherry. "What rumpus is there going to be?"

"Goodness knows!" said Nugent.

Wharton knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I can make it all out!" he said. "It seems to me that something or other is going on here—something we haven't caught on to."

"But what?" asked Bob.

"Oh, ask me another; I give that one up," said the captain of the Remove. "That fat idiot seemed to think we were silly asses to stay on!" said Johnny Bull. "He's got his reasons for going, too. There's something jolly queer about the whole bizney. And I fancy we should do jolly well to clear off ourselves!"

"Well, we can't very well," said Bob Cherry. "I dare say Sammy was only talking out of the back of his neck! He's a fat duffer, anyhow! And we're



With wonderful presence of mind Bunter hurled the rucksack at Mr. Pilkins. It caught the estate-agent fairly on his aquiline nose, and bowled him over like a skittle. Bump! "Ow!" Mr. Pilkins sprawled on the flags. "Ungrateful rotter!" gasped Bunter. (See Chapter 4.)

having a good time here, Bunter, and all—and it will be a better time still with only half as much Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, that St. Jim's chap is coming to-day," said Harry Wharton. "I want to see D'Arcy. He's a decent chap, and I like him!"

"Yes, rather."

"The rutherfordness is terrific!"

Sammy Bunter was gone, and the chums of the Remove went back into the house with rather thoughtful expressions. Sammy's mysterious remarks, and his evident derision of the fellows who were staying on at Bunter Court, had given them food for reflection, though they could not make out at all what it all meant.

Billy Bunter watched the car vanish from a window. And though he regretted the loss of the fiver, he did not regret the loss of Sammy. Sammy, evidently, was not going to be an ally in his remarkable stunt; there was no help to be expected from him. So, really, the sooner he disappeared, the better, from William George's affectionate brotherly point of view.

Upon the whole, it was worth the fiver to see the last of Sammy—especially as it was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's fiver.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Parker Wants to Know!

HARRY WHARTON sat in the old library at Combermere Lodge, in a mood of lazy and pleasant comfort. After a long swim in the river, he was prepared to take his ease in an armchair and laze till lunch. Billy Bunter had just rolled off in a car to meet Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, at the railway-station in Combermere—without offering to take any of the Co. with him.

Any member of the Famous Five would have been glad to give D'Arcy of St. Jim's a greeting; but Bunter evidently wanted to keep the noble youth to himself, and Harry Wharton & Co. could not follow Bunter's system

of "butting in." So the Owl of the Remove went off alone to the station. And Harry Wharton strolled into the library to rest and look at a book till lunch.

Bob Cherry, more energetic, had taken out a boat for a pull on the river, Bob being absolutely tireless. He had pressed Nugent into the service to steer for him. Johnny Bull had walked away to the putting-green to practise his putting, Johnny being given to golf. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had walked off with Johnny, and Wharton preferred the cool, shady quiet of the great library on that blazing August morning.

So now the captain of the Remove was alone in the immense apartment lined with book-cases between the tall windows and adorned with statuary. Having selected a book, he sank into the depths of a huge leather chair, which, doubtless, had accommodated the noble limbs of Lord Combermere in the days when that gentleman could afford to live in his own house. But Wharton was not reading; he just "lazed" for once, resting in the deep, comfortable chair, and gazing idly at the sweeping park through one of the tall windows. He was thinking, too, of the querness of that vacation at Combermere Lodge and the strangeness of being there with Billy Bunter at all.

It had been simply as a jest that the Famous Five had accepted Bunter's invitation for the holidays; they had been astounded when it turned out that Bunter really had a place to ask them to. For days after their arrival the chums of the Remove had had to believe that Bunter Court really did exist—for there it was.

Then they had learned that Bunter had the place furnished from the owner, and had coolly and cheekily re-named it Bunter Court. Then they had met Mr. Pilkins in Combermere, and learned that Bunter had secured the place while the agent was ill in a nursing-home. They had witnessed Mr. Pilkins' rage and dismay at finding that Bunter was tenant of the lodge. Yet, somehow, Mr. Pilkins seemed to be satisfied now;

at all events, he did not seem to have disturbed Bunter in his possession. That looked as if it was all right; and yet—

Wharton was thinking; but, really, he did not quite know what to think. There was something odd, something hidden, something he could not understand, about this extraordinary vacation with Bunter. Certainly the chums of the Remove were enjoying their holiday; Bunter Court offered every kind of resource, and their own company sufficed for them. And the coming of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's was going to be an improvement, too. Still, Harry did not feel quite at ease in his mind; and he was still less at ease since Bunter's peculiar nocturnal proceedings of the night before and the sudden and unexplained departure of Sammy in the morning.

But he was not worrying about it. He was feeling just now very cheerful and comfortable in the shady old library, looking out on the magnificent park of Combermere. Really, it was amazing that Billy Bunter should be in possession of such an establishment. Lord Combermere had once held high state within those lofty walls; now he was one of the "new poor," and could not afford to live in his own magnificent establishment. He was in a Swiss hotel while a stockbroker's son enjoyed the magnificence of his home. Sic transit gloria mundi—thus were the mighty fallen.

From Lord Combermere to Billy Bunter was undoubtedly a drop from the sublime to the ridiculous. "The stately homes of England," celebrated by the poetaster, were in the melting-pot. Sooner or later the magnificent lodge would have to be sold, probably, to some bloated profiteer; meanwhile, it was "let furnished," and Billy Bunter was its unexpected and remarkable tenant.

"Excuse me, sir!"

It was Walsingham's deferential voice.

Wharton glanced round. The Combermere butler had appeared with his silent tread.

Harry Wharton & Co. were not aware of it, but their presence at the lodge had considerably helped Billy Bunter in imposing on Walsingham. Bunter himself the butler took for some rich profiteur's son; but the chums of the Remove, he could see, were of a different sort. More than once, when the butler had entertained doubts concerning Bunter, he had reflected that Bunter's friends were obviously fellows with decent connections, and this had very greatly helped Bunter in lulling his doubts to rest.

Walsingham knew that Harry was the nephew of Colonel Wharton, a gentleman distinguished in the War; obviously not a fellow who could be a party to any "bilkings." And he did not, of course, know how Billy Bunter had bamboozled Wharton and his chums. And the news that Lord Eastwood's son was coming to visit Master Bunter had a soothing effect on Walsingham, too, as the astute Owl of the Remove was very well aware.

"Yes, what is it, Walsingham?" asked Harry.

"Parker has just called, sir."

"Parker?" repeated Harry.

"Mr. Pilkins' clerk, sir."

"Oh," said Harry, "I remember—I saw him at Mr. Pilkins' office when I called there with Lord Mauleverer the other day. He has called to see Bunter, I suppose."

"Yes, sir, but as Master Bunter has gone out—" Walsingham hesitated; and coughed.

"Well?" said Harry.

"It's very odd, sir," said Walsingham, "Parker tells me that Mr. Pilkins called to see Master Bunter here on Tuesday, and did not return to his office. Master Bunter informed me that Mr. Pilkins had gone up to London to see his father, Mr. Bunter, to settle the business details of the tenancy."

"No doubt," assented Harry.

"But Parker says that Mr. Pilkins has not been at his office since, and has not been at his home," said Walsingham. "Neither had he mentioned to Parker his intention of going to London. Parker thinks that something must have happened to him."

Wharton stared.

"What could have happened to him?" he asked.

"I cannot say, sir; but Parker seems alarmed about him. As Master Bunter is not here, perhaps you would see him? He wishes to see you."

"Certainly," said Harry, "I'll see him if he wishes. Show him in, by all means."

"Very good, sir."

Walsingham retired, and Parker was shown into the library. Harry Wharton greeted him politely; remembered the rather shiny and pimply young man he had seen in Mr. Pilkins' office, killing flies. Parker was evidently in a perturbed frame of mind. The expression on his face was suspicious, as he scanned Wharton in a sidelong way.

"You wanted to speak to me, Parker?" asked Harry. "Sit down."

Parker sat down on the edge of a chair.

"I want to speak to Master Bunter, sir," he said. "But as he is absent, I think I had better speak to one of his friends. I am very uneasy about Mr. Pilkins."

"But why?" asked Harry.

"I have not seen him for three days, sir. There is an accumulation of business at the office, which Mr. Pilkins intended to deal with—and which it is necessary for him to deal with. I dare say you know, sir, that he was away for some time, as the result of a motor

accident on the day he showed Master Bunter over this house. Well, sir, on Tuesday he came up here to see Master Bunter, intending to return to the office after seeing him. He did not come back, and I have not seen him since."

"It seems that he went to London to see Bunter's father," said Harry.

"If you are sure of that, sir—"

"As it happens, I was away that day," said Harry. "I went on a motor trip with my friends, and did not see Mr. Pilkins. But Bunter mentioned it to the butler."

"It's very odd, sir," said Parker, shaking his head. "Why has Mr. Pilkins not written a line, if he is staying on in London? I am awaiting his instructions with regard to a good many business matters."

Wharton smiled.

"I really don't know," he answered. "I can't account for what Mr. Pilkins has or has not done, Parker."

"Very well, sir; I must communicate with him," said Parker. "You can give me Mr. Bunter's address?"

"Mr. Bunter's address?" repeated Harry.

"Yes; as he went up to London, it seems, to see Mr. Bunter, that is where an inquiry must be made."

Wharton paused.

"As a matter of fact, I don't know Mr. Bunter's exact address," he answered, "Bunter's never happened to mention it."

It was useless to give Bunter Court as Mr. William Samuel Bunter's address. Excepting as a new name for Combermere Lodge, it was certain that Bunter Court was only a figment of Billy Bunter's fertile fancy.

Parker raised his eyebrows.

"The young gentleman is a friend of yours, and you are staying with him, and you do not know his home address?" he said, in a very marked tone.

Wharton coloured a little. It was not difficult to see that there lurked in the estate-agent clerk's mind a suspicion that he had to deal with a party of bilkers.

"No, I don't," said Harry sharply. "I've never been home with Bunter, till now, I mean. I've never asked him. I suppose you can ask him, if you want to know about it."

"Master Bunter belongs to Greyfriars School, I understand," said Parker.

"That is correct."

"You and your friends also, I think—"

"Yes, yes," said Harry impatiently.

"Then I suppose I could obtain Mr. Bunter's address by applying to the headmaster of your school?"

"Certainly, you could," said Harry; "but it would be easier to ask Bunter himself, I suppose. I suppose you know that Greyfriars is closed during the summer vacation; and the Headmaster has gone abroad with his family; to Norway, I think."

Parker pursed his lips.

"I had better wait and see Master Bunter, then," he said.

"You had better do as you think best," said Harry curtly. The captain of the Remove did not like the young man's manner at all.

"The fact is, I am alarmed about Mr. Pilkins," said Parker. "It is very strange, indeed, that he has not returned to the office, or communicated with me. He has sent no word to the boarding-house in Combermere, where he resides: I have inquired there, and they know nothing of his movements. All I know is that he came here and was not seen afterwards."

Wharton stared at the man.

"You don't think that anything happened to him here, I suppose?" he exclaimed.

"Well, I know it sounds rather thick," admitted Parker. "Still, facts are facts; and I know Mr. Pilkins was very surprised and angry when he learned that Bunter had got hold of the house. Then he comes here to see Bunter, and is not seen again. It's very odd."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I suppose nothing could have happened to him here, without becoming known, in a house full of servants," he said.

"That's the odd thing," said Parker.

"I learn that on the day Mr. Pilkins called here, all the servants were sent away, for one reason or another. Master Bunter's guests were also absent."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"You know nothing of the matter, sir?"

"Of course not! What the thump do you mean?"

"Well, I know that schoolboys are generally rather larkish," said Parker, eyeing the captain of the Remove, "I've wondered whether some trick was played on Mr. Pilkins."

"What rot!"

"Well, you see, it's very queer his not coming back to Combermere—"

"You'd better see Bunter," said Harry abruptly. "It's no affair of mine, and I think you're talking rot."

Parker shrugged his shoulders, and rose.

"Very well; I'll wait and see Bunter," he said, and there was an impudent expression on his shiny face as he withdrew.

Wharton knitted his brows.

The "queerness" of that holiday at Bunter Court seemed to be on the increase. To the other innumerable peculiar circumstances now seemed to be added the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Pilkins, the estate-agent who had apparently—let the house to Bunter. At this rate, the mysteries of Combermere Lodge seemed likely soon to equal the Mysteries of Udolpho, or the Castle of Otranto.

Harry Wharton was left in a rather troubled mood; irritated by the impudent suspicions of the pimply young man from the estate-agent's office. It really looked as if Parker suspected foul play of some kind; and the mere idea of foul play, in connection with the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove, was so ludicrous that Wharton laughed at the idea. Billy Bunter really was not the fellow to knock an estate-agent on the head, and bury him darkly, at dead of night, under one of the trees in the park.

But what had become of Mr. Pilkins? Really, it was very mysterious, and Harry could not help feeling that this summer vacation was having more than its fair share of mysteries.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Arthur Augustus Arrives!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stepped from the train at Combermere Station, adjusted an eyeglass in his noble eye, and glanced about him. A fat figure bolted across the platform to greet the swell of St. Jim's. Billy Bunter's fat face beamed with genial welcome; his very spectacles gleamed with it.

"Gussy, old chap!"

"Bai Jove! Buntah!"

The Owl of the Remove extended a fat hand, full of friendship but a little grubby.

Arthur Augustus shook hands with him.

"Jolly glad to see you, old fellow!" said Bunter effusively.

"You are vewy kind, deah boy!"

"Awfully good of you to give me a look in!" said Bunter.

"Not at all! Vewy kind of you to ask me!" said Arthur Augustus. His glance was still wandering. "Any of the othah fellows heah?"

"No; they're at the Lodge——"

"The Lodge?"

"I mean, Bunter Court."

"Oh!"

"This way, old chap!" said Bunter. "I've got my car outside."

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked out of the station with Bunter. His noble face wore a rather thoughtful expression.

He did not quite know why he had accepted Bunter's invitation to pass a week of the summer holidays at Bunter Court. Certainly he did not yearn for the fascinating society of William George. Probably it was due to the difficulty Gussy found in saying "No" to anybody.

Bunter had persistently bothered him to come, till at last he had consented; and undoubtedly the fact that Harry Wharton & Co. were staying with Bunter had helped him to make up his mind.

He knew the Famous Five, and liked them immensely; and doubtless he considered that if they could stand Bunter he could stand him also. And he had not seen Bunter for some time, too. Now that he saw him again he began to doubt very seriously his wisdom in accepting the invitation to Bunter Court.

But it was rather too late to think about that now; he was "for it," and bound to carry it through with a good grace.

After all, it was kind of Bunter to ask him; and if Bunter felt friendly, why shouldn't he feel friendly in return?

Possibly, too, he had a slight curiosity to see Bunter Court. On the occasions when he had encountered Bunter he had heard a great deal about that palatial residence of the Bunter tribe. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a very unsuspicious fellow; but, somehow, he had not swallowed Bunter Court. Yet that was the place to which Bunter had now asked him; having, indeed, telephoned several times to Eastwood House to urge him to come. Evidently the place had, after all, a local habitation and a name. But Arthur Augustus, unsuspicious as he was, was far from expecting to see the lofty magnificence Bunter had often dwelt upon.

Outside the station stood a handsome Rolls-Royce car, with a liveried chauffeur in attendance.

It did not even occur to D'Arcy that this car belonged to Bunter. It was too much out of keeping with the Owl of the Remove that he knew. Fellows who borrowed half-crowns of casual acquaintances could not be guessed to be the owners of thousand-guinea cars.

D'Arcy glanced round through his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! Did you say your cah was heah, Buntah?"

"Yes, old chap!"

Bunter grinned. The chauffeur touched his cap to them.

"Here it is, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! Is this your cah?"

"That's it!"

"Oh!"

"My father's car, of course," explained Bunter.

"Oh! Yaas, wathah!"

"Hop in, old bean!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy "hopped" in. It required all his good manners to conceal his surprise.

The car rolled away through the High Street of Combermere. It passed the office of Mr. Pilkins, house and estate agent, and Bunter glanced at that office and grinned.

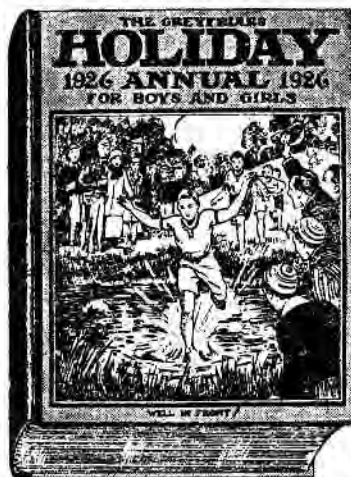
He wondered for a moment how Mr. Pilkins estate business was getting on in the prolonged absence of Mr. Pilkins. But that was a trifling matter, which Bunter dismissed at once from his mind.

"It's no end of a pleasure to see you here, old fellow," said Billy Bunter, as he sat beside Arthur Augustus in the car and leaned back luxuriously on the softly-cushioned seat. "By the way, you won't see any of my people, as it happens."

"Not weally?" asked D'Arcy.

Possibly he was not overwhelmed with dismay at the prospect of not seeing anything of Bunter's people. In fact, one Bunter was enough at a time.

COMING



SOON, BOYS!

"No. My pater's abroad with the mater, you know. He generally has a rather expensive trip in the summer."

"Bai Jove!"

"Why not, when a man's rolling in money?" said Bunter.

"Oh!"

"Bessie's gone home——"

"Th?"

"I mean, Bessie's gone on a visit for the vac, and Sanmy left this morning, to stay with one of our titled relations."

"Oh!"

"So I'm the only one of the family at the Lodge——"

"The Lodge?"

"At home, I mean. But I've got some friends staying with me, as I told you—not wealtby people like myself, but fairly decent, in their way. You know Wharton, the captain of our Form at Greyfriars."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then there's Nugent—rather soppy, but a nice chap in his way. And Bull—Johnny Bull's a bit of a hooligan, but I had to ask him with the others. And Bob Cherry—his people are rather poor, but quite respectable, oh, quite!"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He had had ten minutes of Bunter, and he was wondering dismally how he was going to stand seven days of him.

"And Hurree Singh," went on Bunter. "Inky, you know. Of course, he's only a dashed nigger, but he's a prince in his own country—he, he, he!"

"I have a gweat wespsect and wegard for Huwwee Singh, Buntah."

"Oh, he's all right!" said Bunter carelessly. "The lot of them are hardly up to our style, Gussy; but you'll be able to stand them."

"I am lookin' forward vewy much to seein' them, Buntah."

"That's our park," said Bunter, as the tall oaks and beeches of Combermere came in sight.

"Bai Jove, is it? That's a nobbav park!"

"Oh, the place is fairly decent!" said Bunter, casually. "Of course, it's been added to considerably since Sir Bunter de Bunter was granted the lands by William the Conqueror, in—in 1538."

"In what?"

"The date of the Conquest, you know."

"Bai Jove! I thought the date of the Conquest was 1066."

"Not at all—1583," said Bunter. "I dare say you're a bit slipshod with your history at St. Jun's. We learn things at Greyfriars."

"Oh!"

"Yes, 1066 was the date of the Spanish Armada, you know," added Bunter, willing to enlighten the ignorance of his guest from the great stores of his knowledge.

"Bai Jove! But the Spanish Armada couldn't have happened before the Conquest, you know."

"Well, it must have, from the dates," said Bunter carelessly. "You'll find I've got it right; I'm a whale on dates!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus let it go at that. Even if he had taken history as a holiday task, Bunter's instructions would not have helped him very much.

"Here we are!" said Bunter, as the great gates came in sight, opened by the lodge-keeper as the car appeared.

"Is this Buntah Court, deah boy?"

"Oh, yes!" Bunter gaped in his pocket. "Dash it all, I've left my purse indoors! Have you a pound-note about you, Gussy?"

"Certainly, deah boy!"

"I generally tip the man when he opens the gates," said Bunter. "I believe in encouraging good servants when they know their place—what?"

"Bai Jove!"

At Eastwood House, Arthur Augustus had never heard of encouraging the servants by tossing them pound-notes. But he was not there to criticise Bunter's methods. He was there, indeed, to supply Bunter with the wherewithal to carry on his magnificent methods. The lodge-keeper touched his hat with great respect as one of D'Arcy's pound-notes was tossed to him by Billy Bunter, and Bunter, fortunately, did not see the wink which the man exchanged with the chauffeur.

The car rolled on up the drive.

It was a long drive, under ancient oaks and beeches.

Arthur Augustus glanced about him, with growing interest and wonder, carefully concealing his surprise, though it was very great.

If this place was Bunter Court, the Owl of the Remove had rather understated than overstated the case in his descriptions of his magnificent home.

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The long, many-windowed front of the great house came in sight at last, and the Rolls-Royce stopped before the great portico.

"Here we are!" smiled Bunter.

"Bai Jove! This is Buntah Court?"

"Just that."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy alighted from the car. The great door had been already opened by Walsingham; he was there portly, deferential, impressive. Bunter ushered his honoured guest in. A footman took D'Arcy's hat, another his gloves, another his cane.

A young man with a shiny, pimply face looked out of a morning-room that opened on the great hall of Combermere. It was Parker, Mr. Pilkins' clerk and factotum. His expression was sneering and suspicious as he looked at Billy Bunter; he was fairly well assured that that fat youth was little better than a "bilk"—if any better. But his expression changed as his glance rested on the calm, aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was something reassuring in the looks of that elegant St. Jim's fellow.

Parker had been about to step out and address Bunter; but D'Arcy averted him, and he waited till Walsingham was showing the noble youth up the great staircase to his room before he intervened. Then, as Bunter stood in the hall blinking up the staircase after his guest, he felt a touch on the arm, and turned in surprise, to see Parker's shiny face at his elbow, with impudent suspicion in it.

"I want a word with you!" said Parker.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Exit Parker!

BILLY BUNTER blinked at him. He did not know Parker, and was not at all pleased by the impudent familiarity of his address. He jerked his arm away. The grandeur of his surroundings had quite got into Billy Bunter's head; he was no longer the Owl of the Remove, whom fellows shoved, and even kicked, with impunity. He was lord of Bunter Court, monarch of all he surveyed; and an earl's son was his guest. Parker's impudent and familiar jog of his elbow shocked him, as a nudge from a Nubian slave might have shocked a Roman patrician. He glared at Parker in wrathful contempt.

"Who the deuce are you?" he demanded. "Walsingham—Thomas! Thomas, what do you mean by letting this person into my house?"

Walsingham had gone up with the newly-arrived guest. Thomas, the first footman, came respectfully forward.

"It's Parker, sir—"

"Who the thump is Parker?" asked Bunter testily.

"Mr. Pilkins' clerk, sir, in the estate office."

"Oh!"

"He has been waiting to see you, sir," said Thomas.

Billy Bunter felt a slight trepidation. Anyone from Mr. Pilkins' estate office was liable to cause him a little inward uneasiness.

Parker was eyeing him not at all respectfully. The estate office young man had no respect to waste on a fellow whom he regarded as a "bilk."

"Well, what do you want, Barker?" snapped Bunter.

"My name's Parker."

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"It doesn't matter whether its Barker or Parker," said Bunter. "You cannot expect me to remember the names of fellows of your sort, Marker—I mean Barker—that is, Parker. I have only a few minutes to spare. What do you want?"

"Where's Mr. Pilkins?"

"Pilkins?" said Bunter calmly. "Do you mean your master?"

"I mean my employer," said Parker.

"Really I can scarcely be expected to know where your master is," said Bunter. "Thomas!"

"Sir?"

"Is this young man sober?"

Thomas coughed, and Parker's eyes gleamed.

"Mr. Pilkins came up 'ere on Toosday, and he did not come back to the office," he said. "I ain't heard from him. So far as I know, no papers have been signed about the letting of this house. Everything is very irregular, and I know that Mr. Pilkins was fair scared and knocked over when he 'eard that you had the house, Mr. Bunter. I want to know what it means?"

"You had better ask your employer," said Bunter haughtily. "I decline to bandy words with you."

"That ain't good enough!" said Parker obstinately.

"Thomas!"

"Sir?"

"Show this young man out."

"Very good, sir!"

"Kindly do not admit him again," said Bunter.

"Certainly not, sir."

Parker glared at Bunter and seemed disinclined to go, but Thomas gently urged him towards the door. Billy Bunter blinked at him with lofty disdain. Parker was uneasy and suspicious, that was clear; but certainly he had no suspicion that Mr. Pilkins was on the premises, and never even dreamed that the hapless estate agent was locked up in the wine-cellars. Parker's suspicions, indeed, were extremely vague; he really did not know what to suspect, only he had a feeling that something was very much wrong somewhere. The unexplained absence of Mr. Pilkins was extraordinary, and so was Bunter's tenancy of Combermere Lodge.

"Look here, Mr. Bunter—" recommended Parker.

Bunter waved a fat hand.

"That is enough!" he said. "Go!"

"I ain't satisfied!" said Parker.

"It is a matter of no moment to me whether you are satisfied or not, Barker," said Bunter, with crushing disdain. "I am not accustomed to bothering about the opinions of such persons as you."

"Oh, indeed!" said Parker. "Well, I'll chance it so far, sir, as to say that I consider you a bilk."

"I have told you to show this man out, Thomas!" roared Bunter. "Turn him out this instant!"

"Yes, sir. Come on, Parker!"

Parker had more to say, and apparently intended to say it. But Thomas took a grasp on his arm, and Albert took a grasp on his other arm, and between the two footmen he was propelled to the door. He descended the great steps of Combermere Lodge in rather a hurry, and was rather breathless and untidy when he reached the bottom. He stared back angrily at the two footmen grinning down at him, and then tramped away down the drive.

"Shocking!" said Bunter. "Most impudent! Thomas, you will be very careful never to admit that person again!"

"Yes, sir."

"I am quite upset by his vulgarity," said Bunter.

"Yes, sir."

"I hardly know what the lower classes are coming to, Thomas."

"Indeed, sir," said Thomas.

"I am very shocked indeed!" said Bunter, shaking his head seriously. "The low fellow actually laid his hand on my arm!"

"Did he indeed, sir?" said Thomas, with a face as expressionless as that of a stone image.

"He did! A low ruffian!" said Bunter. "I am surprised that Mr. Pilkins should employ such a person! I shall complain to him very seriously about this. Do you know where Mr. Pilkins is to be found, Thomas?"

"No, sir."

Walsingham came down the staircase. Bunter called to him. The Owl of the Remove was not only playing his part; he was living it, and taking it with all seriousness. His patrician haughtiness was quite shocked and jarred by the impudent familiarity of an estate office young man.

"Walsingham, I have been treated with actual rudeness by a young man named Barker, or Barker, employed by Mr. Pilkins."

"Surely not, sir!" said Walsingham.

"I have indeed! I desire a very serious complaint to be made to Mr. Pilkins. It would be beneath my dignity to attend to the matter myself; so kindly speak to Mr. Pilkins on the telephone, and tell him that I expect him to discharge that impudent young man."

Walsingham eyed the Owl of the Remove rather curiously.

"Mr. Pilkins does not seem to be at his office, sir, or at his place of residence," he said. "According to what Parker says, he has not returned to Combermere since the day he called here."

"Indeed!" said Bunter.

"Perhaps you will excuse Parker, sir, as he seems to be alarmed about his master. He fears that something may have happened to Mr. Pilkins."

"Mr. Pilkins has not returned from London?" asked Bunter.

"Apparently not, sir."

"Possibly he has been run over by a motor-bus or a taxicab," suggested Bunter. "I trust it is nothing more serious. If Mr. Pilkins has absconded, it may place me in a very awkward position."

"Absconded, sir!" said Walsingham, opening his eyes.

"I know nothing of his movements, of course," said Bunter. "But I know that he received a very large payment from my father, and it is odd, to say the least, that he has not returned to his office. Do you not consider it odd, Walsingham?"

"It certainly seems so, sir!"

"Very odd indeed," said Bunter, shaking his head. "I should not like to be distrustful, Walsingham; but this strikes me as extremely odd."

And Bunter rolled away, feeling that he had furnished the servants' hall at Combermere with a really plausible explanation of Mr. Pilkins' strange disappearance. It did not even cross his fat mind that there was anything reprehensible in thus traducing the hapless gentleman who was locked up in the wine-cellars. Bunter had never been very particular in his methods, and in his present peculiar position he was likely to be less particular than ever. He was, in fact, skating on such exceedingly thin ice that he really could not afford to think of anybody but himself.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Shell Out!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. met D'Arcy of St. Jim's when that elegant youth came down to lunch, and they greeted him warmly.

They were, perhaps, a little surprised to find the swell of St. Jim's a guest of Billy Bunter's. D'Arcy, on his side, was doubtless a little surprised to find Harry Wharton & Co. guests of the Owl of Greyfriars. But they were very glad to see one another.

Billy Bunter presided at lunch in his most magnificent manner.

Everything was of the very best; for although the tenant of Combermere Lodge had not yet paid a single penny piece towards the expenses of running that great establishment, apart from lavish tips to the servants, his credit was still good. Walsingham, in the belief that Mr. Pilkins had arranged everything with Bunter's father, carried out Bunter's instructions to the very letter, and gave magnificent orders to the Combermere tradesmen.

No doubt he was booked to receive his commission on those orders—when payment for the same came along. He certainly did not suspect how extremely problematic was that payment. Neither did the Combermere tradesmen. So far, they were glad to send their goods up to the great house, and they charged royally for every item supplied and for a good many items that were not supplied. Enormous bills hovered over Billy Bunter; but like the sword that hovered over the head of Damocles of old, they hovered dangerously without descending to overwhelm him. What would happen when the tradesmen grew restive, and the bills came down in a shower, Bunter had not considered. It was no use meeting troubles half-way.

Arthur Augustus and the Greyfriars fellows had plenty to say to one another over the lunch-table, and it was a cheery meal. In the interest of talk about St. Jim's and Greyfriars, Harry Wharton forgot his interview with Parker that morning, which he had intended to mention to Bunter. He remembered it as they rose from the table, and turned to Bunter.

"By the way, Bunter, I saw a man this morning who called to see you. He asked to see me as you weren't here. Man named Parker."

"What the thump did he want to see you for?" growled Bunter.

"Mr. Pilkins' clerk. It seems that Pilkins has not been back to his office since he called here about letting—"

Wharton broke off, quite startled by the extraordinary expression that came over Bunter's face.

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Bunter.

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strolled away with Bob Cherry. He was not a very observant youth, but he was observant enough to realise that Wharton had been about to say something that Bunter did not wish him to hear. With a delicacy that was far beyond Bunter's comprehension, the swell of St. Jim's moved away.

"You silly owl!" hissed Bunter, as soon as D'Arcy was out of hearing.

"You jolly nearly let it out!"

Wharton stared at him blankly.

"Let what out?" he demanded.

"I mean—nothing! You fellows have heard some yarn that—that this isn't really Bunter Court, but only taken furnished. I don't want D'Arcy to hear anything of the kind!"

IS YOUR NAME HERE?

RESULT OF "WHAT IS IT?" COMPETITION NO. 2.

In this competition so many competitors qualified for the third grade of prizes that a slight rearrangement of the prizes has been necessary.

The THREE CAMERAS have been awarded to the following competitors whose solutions, each containing two errors, came nearest to correct:—

VICTOR CLEWLOW, 44, Oxney Rd., Rusholme, Manchester.
GEORGE L. MITCHELL, 37, Gothic St., Rock Ferry, Cheshire.
J. P. O'CONNELL, Coppingers Staun, Ballinlough Rd., Cork.

The SIX MODEL YACHTS have had to be deleted and the TWELVE POCKET-KNIVES INCREASED TO TWENTY-SIX, and awarded to the following competitors whose solutions came next with three errors each:—

H. G. BARCLAY, 56, Queens Drive, Queens Park, Glasgow, S.S.
L. A. BIRCHETT, 30, Whitefriars Ave., Wealdstone, Middlesex.
J. A. CARROLL, 71, Lumsden Ave., Shirley, Southampton.
HAROLD COX, 331, Fairfax Drive, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex.
THOMAS DEAN, Queen St., East Newport, Eife.
W. P. DORGAN, 46, Kelvin Rd., Clydach, Swansea.
MISS N. FRANKLAND, 79, Hollin Lane, Middleton, nr. Manchester.
LAWRENCE GORDON, 81, Sandringham Rd., S. Gosforth, Newcastle-on-T.
ERNEST HARE, 23, Bloemfontein Ave., Shepherds Bush, London, W.
HARRY HODGSON, 16, Old Side, Workington, Cumberland.
ALAN R. JUPP, 90, Springfield Rd., Southboro, Tunbridge Wells.
CLIFFORD KAY, 59, Hope St., Oldfield Rd., Salford, Manchester.
H. G. MERRITT, Golden Privet, Hollands Rd., Henfield, Sussex.
J. L. MILLER, Woodside, Frant, nr. Tunbridge Wells.
JOHN PARKER, 11, All Saints Crescent, Hastings.
BURNHAM ROE, 158, Russell St., Moss Side, Manchester.
MISS M. SIMCO, 141, Winson Green Rd., Birmingham.
NEVILLE SMITH, 12, Law St., Balby Bridge, Doncaster.
ERIC R. STEWART, 37, Leonard St., Nelson, Lancs.
DESMOND THORNTON, 19, Annadale Ave., Fairview, Dublin.
ERIC TURNER, 58, Flood St., Dudley, Worcestershire.
R. J. VIPOND, 10, Heslop Rd., Balham, London, S.W. 12.
H. WILDSMITH, 12, Brunswick St., Leamington.
MISS WILDSMITH, 12, Brunswick St., Leamington.
MISS N. WILDSMITH, 12, Brunswick St., Leamington.
H. WILKINS, Brimscombe Farm, nr. Stroud, Gloucestershire.

The Correct Solution was as follows:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Windmill. | 5. Wood. |
| 2. Signpost. | 6. Fisherman. |
| 3. Wild Flowers. | 7. Footpath. |
| 4. Hamlet. | 8. Hayfield. |

Wharton understood then.

"Do you mean that you have stuffed D'Arcy that this is your father's house, the same as you stuffed us when we broke up at Greyfriars?" he asked.

"I have told him the facts!" said Bunter loftily. "You fellows can believe the tattle of a discharged servant, if you like!"

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Wharton hotly. "We know from a dozen sources that this place is Combermere Lodge, and that it is let furnished by Mr. Pilkins for Lord Combermere."

"Well, whatever you know, or think you know, don't get tattle about it to D'Arcy!" snapped Bunter. "I expect my guests to help me to keep up appearances."

"To help you keep up silly swank, do you mean?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"
"Of course, it's no business of ours," said Harry. "You can tell D'Arcy what you like, and it's not our bizney to contradict you. But it's jolly awkward, all the same!"

"Oh, rats!"

Wharton regarded him steadily.

"Perhaps the simplest thing would be for us to clear if you're tired of our company, Bunter," he said quietly. "It was rather a mistake for us to come, I'm afraid. If that would suit you better—"

The Owl of the Remove looked alarmed.

"Oh, really, Wharton, you can't let me down like that after coming home with me for the vac!" he exclaimed.

"I don't see that it would be letting you down. It's dashed awkward for us listening to you swanking to D'Arcy, when we know the facts," said the captain of the Remove. "Go easy in the swanking line, anyhow! For goodness' sake cut off the gas a little, Bunter!"

"Mind your own business, blow you!"

"Look here, Bunter, I think we'd better—"

"I mean—that is, it's all right," interrupted Bunter. "Nothing to be offended at, old chap! You can't let me down, you know."

"Well, if you put it like that—" said Harry reluctantly.

"I do!" said Bunter.

"That settles it, then."

Harry Wharton followed his chum from the room. Billy Bunter blinked after him morosely.

He did not want to lose his guests. Their entertainment cost him nothing, and Bunter was a gregarious youth. Moreover, he depended on the chums of the Remove for an unending series of small loans to tide him over the pressing want of ready money. He was quite alarmed at the idea of Harry Wharton & Co. departing and leaving him stranded—stony—in the midst of the magnificence of Bunter Court.

(Continued on page 16.)

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THE GREYFRIARS HERALD

Supplement No. 234.

HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week Ending August 8th, 1925.



SPORTING CHAMPIONS!

WHO is the champion cricketer of Greyfriars? Many of you will plump at once for good old George Wingate, or possibly for Pat Gwynne; but you will be wrong. Loder of the Sixth is our champion cricketer. "Why Loder?" you will gasp. Because he has no equal at making "late cuts"—through the box-room window!

WHO is the champion tennis-player at Greyfriars? Another surprise for you here! It isn't Wingate, or Gwynne, or Faulkner, or Hammersley. It's the dear old plump waitress in the dining-hall. You see, her "service" is absolutely without "fault"!

NOW we come to swimming. Mr. Quelch is easily the champion in this branch of sport. Can you find another master with such an effective "over-arm stroke"—when administering a flogging?

MR. QUELCH also claims the croquet championship. You may possibly wonder what he has done to merit this proud title; but you must agree, on reflection, that Quelch is a past-master in the art of putting you fairly "through the hoop"!

YOU have perhaps heard this one before, but it fits in so jolly well with our subject that it will bear retelling. Who is the champion golfer at Greyfriars? Billy Bunter—because he has never been known to "miss his tee"!

GOSLING, the porter, of all people, lays claim to being the champion oarsman of Greyfriars. Gosling, an oarsman? Preposterous! Yet on the rare (?) occasions when he visits "The Cross Keys," Gosling is particularly partial to "a long pull"!

THE HEAD is our bowls champion, because he always views things with a right "bias"! Joking apart, however, Dr. Locke is really hot stuff on the bowling green, his only superior at the game being Mr. Prout.

I suppose Mr. Prout can also claim to be our champion angler, because when he gives a lecture he invariably "drags things out"!

Our best "all-round" sportsman is undoubtedly Billy Bunter. Find a fellow with a greater circumference than Billy—if you can!

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THE BOWLS CHAMPION!

By DICK PENFOLD.

WHEN Drake and Walter Raleigh,
Those gallant knights so pally,
Played their famous game of
bowls on Plymouth Sound,
Their form, no doubt, was smashing;
But they'd get a fearful thrashing
Had they lived to challenge Prouty,
I'll be bound!

For the famous Fifth Form master
Is a finer man and faster

Than all the doddering greybeards on
the green;

He has studied "spin" and "bias,"
And I'm not an Ananias

When I say his form's the finest ever
seen!

He has licked Sir Hilton Popper

In a manner good and proper,

He has beaten Mr. Quelch and Mr.

Twigg;

And he pulverised old Hacker,

Who is something of a slacker,

While he made the Head look very
"infra dig."

He can stoop for hours together,

And he doesn't mind the weather,

For he once defeated Capper in a gale.

He can on his knee all day go

Without danger of lumbago,

Or other ills that make the "bowler"
quail!

At cricket, he's a duffer,

And a muggins and a muffer,

And at swimming he's as buoyant as a

brick;

When he tries to shoot a rabbit

He can never seem to nab it,

But at "bowling" he's a wonderful
old stick!

Hats off to Prout, the hero!

May he never drop to zero

In the estimation of the sporting
throng;

May he go on winning matches,

And be "mentioned in despatches"

As a "bowler" who's the strongest of
the strong!

Well Worth Waiting For—

**The First FOUR Superb
Cut-out Stand-up Action**

Photos of Famous

Cricketers

Yours Next Monday!

EDITORIAL!

By Harry Wharton.

GATHER around, ye merry sportsmen,
and improve the shining hour by
perusing our Grand Summer Sports
Number specially designed for your
benefit!

Tom Brown, who has been asked to air his views on summer sports, remarks that "Summer sports—and some are not!" Browney yields to nobody in his affection for cricket, and he has a warm place in his heart for lawn tennis; but as for the rest of the summer sports, he will have none of them. He goes for golf, he chastises croquet, he belabours bowls, and he waxes sarcastic about swimming! But I must ask the golfers and croqueters and bowlers and swimmers not to get their backs up. Browney is merely trying to be funny.

Personally, I don't dislike golf. We don't play it much at Greyfriars—it's hardly a boy's game. But the other day a party of us borrowed Mr. Quelch's golf-clubs, and treated ourselves to a game of "clock-golf" in the Head's garden. We didn't improve either the golf-clubs or the garden; we merely improved the shining hour! Frank Nugent went round in five strokes, which was a jolly good performance, considering he got bunkered in an asparagus-bed. Johnny Bull did well up to a point, but he came to grief among the rhubarb. As for myself, I believe I should have won the game, but just as I was holing-out on the "green"—or, rather, among the greens—who should come striding on the scene but Quelch? That put a sudden end to our game of clock-golf. We were all marched off to Quelch's study, where we stood in a crestfallen circle, while Quelch went round in ten strokes—a couple each!

Croquet is not a game I care for. It's more suitable for the Cliff House girls than for our illustrious selves. Bowls I shall refrain from playing till I've grown a flowing beard, and acquired a humped-back. Not that I wish to denounce bowls as a game for the young. There's more in it than meets the eye, and it calls for much skill. But I don't like these games where you have to bend down and touch your toes. They remind me unpleasantly of certain painful episodes in the Head's study!

Swimming, whether in fresh water or in "the briny," is one of the grandest of our summer sports. Tom Brown rejects it on the grounds that so much time is taken up in dressing and undressing. I verily believe that Browney is getting as lazy as Lord Mauleverer! I shall have to get Bob Cherry to shake him out of his sloth. Meanwhile, I leave this number in my readers' hands with even more confidence than usual. Sport is a subject which cannot fail to "fetch" you.

Before I ring off I would like to inform my readers who have been asking for a special Supplement on "Expulsion" that these pages will be devoted to this subject next week. While I am about it I would remind you all that we are always open to receive suggestions. If you have a fancy for any particular Supplement, drop me a line on a postcard, and I will see what can be done. But please don't ask for a "Knitting" Supplement. Really, we draw the line at that. Cheerio, chums!

HARRY WHARTON.



Summer Sports—and Some Are Not!

By Our Tame Humorist
TOM BROWN.

(Note.—The Editor can accept no responsibility for the views expressed in this article. Golf-lovers, croquet-players, and others, who feel that they have been insulted, are respectfully requested to take their grievances to Tom Brown, and not to punch the Editorial proboscis in their wrath.)

OUR right honourable and illustrious Editor (I call him honeyed names because he has just given me a place in the Remove Cricket Eleven) has asked me to unburden myself on the subject of summer sports.

Well, there's enough summer pastimes to fill a good-sized catalogue. King Cricket tops the bill; then we have tennis and golf and swimming and boating and fishing and bowls and croquet and so on, ad lib., ad infinitum.

And now I'm going to loose off a few rhetorical fireworks against some of these so-called sports. To my mind, King Cricket and Prince Tennis are the only two summer sports worth while. This will annoy the Noble Army of Croakers (or do they call them "Croqueters"?) and it will shock the swimmer, and get the goat of the golfer, and 'orrrify the oarsman, and aggravate the angler! But I can't help their troubles. I shall stick to my guns.

Cricket and Tennis need no praises from my pen. They are glorious games, and it is a toss-up which is the more popular of the two. Their position as the premier summer sports is secure. All sane fellows play one or both of these games; and they leave the other recreations to the tame lunatics.

Look at golf. (Or, rather, don't look at golf or you'll get bored stiff!) I ask you, where is the sense in smiting a harmless and inoffensive little ball for a long distance, and then walking all the way after it, and giving it another swipe? Or perhaps you miss your tee-shot, and send a shower of dirt into the face of your opponent! Or maybe the ball drops into a gully, and you have to take off your shoes and socks and wade in after it. Then, again, your ball might land in what they call "the rough," and you have to spend hours burrowing on your hands and knees among prickly heather and spiky thistles. Groo! Prate not to me of the joys of golf! There aren't any!

Croquet is another asinine game. Fancy wandering around with a mallet, bashing a ball through a hoop! In some countries, if they found a fellow acting in such a strange manner, they'd promptly put him in a strait-jacket! And yet this form of insanity

is practised in England, summer after summer.

So far as swimming in the Sark is concerned, I suppose I ought not to wax Sark-astic. I've no real quarrel with swimming, as a sport; but it's the beastly fag of dressing and undressing that takes all the gilt off the gingerbread. I perform my toilet every morning in the Remove dormitory, and once a day is quite enough for me. I don't want to fritter away the golden hours of youth in dragging off my giddy vestments, and then dragging them on again!

My grievance against rowing is that it's too much like hard work. You lie back and pull until your shoulders are nearly wrenched out of their sockets. You go purple in the face; you gasp for breath; you combine the efforts of a Hercules with the energy of a Samson; and all for the sake of dragging a beastly tub through the water! No, sirree; it's not good enough!

When it comes to fishing, words almost fail me! Can you understand the mentality of the maniac who squats on the river-bank for hours at a stretch, dangling a silly line into the water, and giving a little squeal of excitement every time the float starts bobbing about? He jerks his line out of the water, only to find nothing on the end of it. The fish has "swallowed the bait"—literally! And even supposing the angler is lucky enough to land a fish, it is generally a poor, emaciated, undersized ha'porth of fish and scales, that needs a powerful magnifying-glass to detect what sort of fish it is.

As for the historic game called bowls, I should like to tell you exactly what I think of it, in simple, savage prose. But I must stay my pen. Mr. Prout happens to be a bowls fanatic; and as he's pretty certain to read this issue of the "Herald" I'd better shut up like an oyster, while I'm safe!



Bunter on Cricket!

W.G. GRACE has long been recognised as England's greatest cricketer; but the proud position of the "Grand Old Man" is now disputed by another "W.G."—to wit, W.G. BUNTER!!

HAMPSHIRE people boast that their county was the cradle of cricket. Kent people claim that they first started bowling long-hops in the "hop" county.

Both claims are boguss. Cricket first started in the county of Loamshire before William the Konkeror came over to England to sign the Magna Charta. The original Loamshire eleven contained no fewer than nine of my ancestors, and bekwase of this they began to call the county Buntershire, just as they used to speak of Worcesterabire as Fostershire.

So if anybody asks you where cricket started, you'll now be able to reply:

"Not in Hampshire, not in Kent,
Not beside the River Brent,
Not in Leeda or Stoke-on-Trent,
But down in good old Buntershire!"

That worthy ancestor of mine, Sir Filbert Duxegg Bunter, was the greatest cricketer who ever sped along the wing, amid roars of "Pass!" and "Shoot!" A wonderful chap was Sir Filbert. He used to pile up the merry goals, and send the specked-taters frantick with eggseitement. His tea-shots were simply great; and at putting on the

green and holing-out in two he had no equal. Trooly a famous cricketer!

But I haven't set out to describe the feats of arms of my ancestors. I'm going to step out into the limelight for once and blow my own trumpitt. I've hidden my light under a bushel too long. And, as I don't employ advertising agents, I shall have to pipe my own praises.

My own cricketing career was inspired by a book I read—I believe it was by Dickens—called "Cricket on the Harth." [That book has nothing to do with cricket, you silly fat Owl!—Ed.] That book, if I remember rightly, was full of the eggspoits of famous cricketers like Oliver Cromwell, Sir Walter Rally, and Richard Cur de Lien. My hart thrilled as I read of their wonderful feats, and I ressolved, there and then, to "go and do likewise."

My first club was the C.C.C.C. (Corpulent Chappies' Cricket Club). In my first game I made what they call "a pair of spectacles"—a duxegg in each innings. But I did this on purrpuess, to deseeve the others as to my real form. I was sollumly warned by the skipper of the side—a fellow called Portleigh—that unless I put up a better show in the next game I should be dropped from the team. When the next match came off I revealed myself in my true cullers, and

scored a century of goals. The goalkeeper had no chance to save any of my mighty drives to the boundary.

I hadn't been with the C.C.C.C. very long before I reeseved an invitation to join the Rolling Players. I travelled all over the country with this team, and we won all our matches, thanks to my wonderful play.

In due course I came to Greyfriars. Bulstrode was kaptin of the Remove and kaptin of cricket at that time, and from the moment I set foot in the plaice he saw that I was far sooperior to any other kricketer in the Form. But the artful bounder, fearing that I should owst him from the kaptincy if my fine form was revealed, never gave me a chance to show what I could do with bat and ball. When I turned up to krickett pracktiss, he told me to run away and pick flowers. He said I might come in useful for rolling the pitch, but I was no earthly use as a kricketer. I was what they call coybotted—I think that's the right word.

Later on, when Wharton took Bulstrode's plaice as skipper, he barred me in just the same way.

And so all this time I have been kept out of the Remove eleven through sheer personal jellussy, and bekwase Wharton is in a blue funk lest I should be preferred to him as kaptin of krickett.

But this state of affairs can't go on for ever. The day will dorn when I shall come into my own, and then you'll see some krickett, with a kapital K! When the batting averidges are publicated at the end of the season, they will read something like this:

	No. of Innings	Runs	Most Times in an Innings	not Ave
W. G. BUNTER	20	2,000	200	20 2,000
BOB CHERRY	20	20	2	0 1
H. WHARTON	20	10	1	0 .5

Abserd, you say? Well, just you weight and sea!

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(Continued from page 13.)

He rolled out on the terrace, and found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there with the Famous Five. Gussy was speaking as Bunter came up behind him.

"Bai Jove! Buntah's got a wippin' place heah—what?" said Arthur Augustus as he looked out over the great park. "Buntah is wathah a luckay bargee."

"Hem! Yes," said Wharton. "It's a fine place, there's no doubt about that!"

Bob Cherry coughed.

"Ripping, isn't it?" said Bunter, joining the group. "Glad you like the show, D'Arcy, old bean!"

Arthur Augustus glanced round.

"I did not see you, Buntah! I was just wemarkin' what a wippin' place this is!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

"My pater gave a cool fifty thousand for it!" said Bunter, with a defiant blink at the captain of the Remove.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus could not help being surprised, as he had learned from Bunter, only that morning, that the lands had been granted to Sir Bunter de Bunter by William the Conqueror. Bunter never could remember that a certain class of persons should have good memories.

"Come and have a look at the picture-gallery, Gussy," said the Owl of the Remove, slipping an arm through D'Arcy's. "No end interesting—portraits of all my ancestors, you know. Generations of Bunters!"

"Bai Jove!" repeated D'Arcy blankly.

If generations of Bunters had flourished at Bunter Court, it was odd, to say the least, that Bunter's father had had to give fifty thousand for the place.

However, he went in with Bunter, leaving the Famous Five grinning. They did not suppose that it would take even the unsuspicious Gussy long to "tumble" to the facts of the matter. Bunter really was a most unconvincing spinner of yarns, in spite of the extensive practice he had had.

"Here they are!" said Bunter, as he walked Arthur Augustus along the great picture gallery of Combermere. "Family resemblance very strong, what?"

Arthur Augustus did not perceive any family resemblance between Billy Bunter, and the portraits of Lord Combermere's ancestors. But he was too polite to say so.

"By the way," went on Bunter, lowering his voice confidentially. "I mentioned that my pater is away at present, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's been some delay in the post, old chap, and I haven't received a remittance I was expecting from him."

"Haven't you weally, Buntah?"

"No; it's a bit awkward, as it leaves me absolutely without ready money, in the midst of all this magnificence," said Bunter.

"Oh!"

"In my careless way, you know, I

gave my last fiver yesterday to a beggar," said Bunter.

"That was vewy genewous, deah boy."

"Oh, I'm a generous chap," said Bunter carelessly. "It always was my weakness. I never think of myself."

"Bai Jove!"

"But as the matter stands, I'm actually hard up for ready money, until that remittance arrives," said Bunter. "It's absurd—but there you are! Still, among friends these trifles are of no consequence. I daresay you could lend me a tenner to tide me over to-morrow."

"Oh!"

"I never spend more than a tenner a day really—I believe in a chap being careful with money," said Bunter.

"Bai Jove!"

"I'll give you my I.O.U. for the sum," said Bunter, taking out a pocket-book and rummaging in his pocket for a pencil. A far from clean handkerchief came into view, with a chunk of toffee adhering to it, and finally a stump of pencil. "I'll make it for a tenner, shall I?"

There was a momentary pause.

"Yaas!" said Arthur Augustus, at last.

Two fivers passed into Billy Bunter's possession; and a grubby I.O.U. into D'Arcy's. The two fivers, indubitably, were worth ten pounds. What the I.O.U. was worth was another matter.

"Thanks, old chap," said Bunter indifferently. He shoved the fivers into his pocket, with the magnificent carelessness of a fellow to whom fivers were as sixpences to common persons. "Now, I generally take a nap after lunch, Gussy, so I'll leave you to look at the pictures—you'll find the fellows in the grounds when you're tired of them."

And Bunter rolled out of the picture-gallery.

Arthur Augustus stared after him, with an exceedingly thoughtful expression upon his aristocratic face.

He stood quite motionless for some minutes; and then he moved at last. His foot clinked against something on the floor, and he glanced down. It was a small steel key.

"Bai Jove!" D'Arcy picked up the key. "Somebody's dwopped that heah—lookin' ewewywhah for it, I dare say. I suppose I had bettah give it to the butlah."

It was obviously a door-key; so it naturally did not occur to Arthur Augustus that Bunter had dropped it. He had no reason to suppose that Billy Bunter walked about his own house with door-keys in his pockets. The key had fallen on a rug, and made no sound, when Bunter was sorting out the materials for his precious I.O.U. Bunter was blissfully unaware of the fact; and it did not even cross D'Arcy's mind that the key might belong to Bunter. As a matter of fact, it did not belong to him.

Utterly unaware of the far-reaching consequences that hung upon his action, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy proceeded to look for Walsingham—to hand to the Combermere butler the key he had picked up; the key of the wine-cellar in which Mr. Pilkins, the estate-agent, was a prisoner!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Arthur Augustus Puts His Foot In It!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I say, I—I've lost something."

Bunter's fat face was puckered with anxiety. He hurried down to the

grassy bank, where the Famous Five were running out a boat into the river.

It was Bunter's custom to indulge in a nap after lunch—his lunch was extensive, and such exertions as Bunter's required rest to follow. The dinners of two or three other fellows would scarcely have made up one lunch for William George Bunter. But Harry Wharton & Co. were not inclined to follow Bunter's example, and they had come out to take a run up the river with D'Arcy while Bunter was snoozing.

They had not expected to see Bunter again till they came in to tea—a loss of fascinating society which they were prepared to bear with fortitude.

But for once, Bunter had broken his custom of retiring, like a loca-constrictor, to a quiet spot for repose after a feast. Here he was—displaying unusual activity. The speed with which he came down to the river bank was really remarkable, considering the extent of the lunch that was packed within his circumference.

Harry Wharton & Co. gave him their polite attention at once. Being Bunter's guests, they were prepared to take it cheerfully if he had decided to come on the river with them.

However, it was not so bad as that!

Bunter, apparently, had lost something, and was inquiring after it. As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not yet arrived at the boat-house, the chums of the Remove had to wait for him, anyhow. So they had a few minutes to spare for Bunter.

"Lost something?" repeated Johnny Bull. "Not your purse, I hope, with all your fifty-pound notes in it."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Not your gold watch, the one that cost your pater a hundred and fifty guineas?" asked Frank Nugent, with great seriousness.

"Or your diamond tie-pin, the present from Lord Bunter de Bunter Fitz-Bunter?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"This is a serious matter!" roared the Owl of the Remove wrathfully. "If one of you fellows has pinched my key—"

"Eh, what!"

"I want that key!" howled Bunter.

"What key, you silly owl!" demanded Harry Wharton.

"I've lost a key, or else someone has pinched it," said Bunter. "If one of you fellows has taken it for a silly joke, hand it over."

"Never knew you had any silly old keys," yawned Bob, "and I shouldn't see any screaming joke in pinching a key. You've dropped it somewhere. What does it matter, anyhow?"

"It matters a lot," growled Bunter. "It's a very important key—a key I always carried in my pocket."

"Key of the strong-box where you keep your banknotes?" asked Johnny Bull.

"It's a key—just a key—a steel key, about two inches long," said Bunter. "I simply must have it. It's very important."

"Oh, my hat! That sounds like the description of the key Walsingham has lost," said Bob. "He's lost the key of the wine-cellar, or rather, it has been pinched from his room."

Bunter snorted, as the chums of the Remove grinned at him. They were very well aware who had "pinched" that key from the butler's room, though what Bunter could want with the key of the wine-cellar was a mystery to them. Apparently he did want it, since he had "pinched" it; and, apparently, he had now lost it and was greatly disturbed about it.

"I suppose a fellow can take charge of the cellar-key in his own house, if he chooses," growled Bunter.

"Certainly," assented Harry, with a laugh. "Why not inquire among the servants, if you've lost the key? Somebody's bound to see it, if you dropped it about the house."

"I thought I'd ask you fellows first," said Bunter. "Sure you haven't seen it anywhere?"

"Quite!"

"The quietfulness is terrific!"

Bunter blinked rather suspiciously at the Famous Five. Evidently a doubt was lurking in his fat mind that the Greyfriars juniors might have "pinched" the cellar key from him by way of a jest. Realising himself how awfully important it was that he should keep that key in his possession, he did not realise that the other fellows gave the matter no thought whatever.

"Have you looked for it?" asked Bob sympathetically. Bunter was so disturbed about his loss that Bob felt quite sympathetic, though it was a puzzle to him why Bunter wanted the key at all. For there was no doubt that it was the missing key of the wine-cellar that he had lost. The juniors had heard a description of that key, which Walsingham and his myrmidons were still looking for.

"Yes," grunted Bunter. "I've looked in the dining-room. I know I had it in my pocket before lunch. I felt it there after I came in with D'Arcy. I've looked in the picture-gallery, but it isn't there. I was just nodding off, you know, taking my nap, when I remembered the key. I was going to put it under my pillow for safety, you see, and it wasn't in my pocket. What are you blinking at?"

The chums of the Remove could not help blinking at Bunter. His extraordinary concern about the wine-cellar key was simply amazing. Unless he had buried a treasure in the wine-cellars under Combermere Lodge, there was no accounting for his mysterious interest in that remote quarter of the establishment.

"What on earth does it matter about the key?" asked Bob. "If it's so awfully important, you can get a locksmith from Combermere to come and fit a new one."

"Well, it does matter, and I don't want a locksmith messing about the place," grunted Bunter.

"One of the servants may have found it," suggested Nugent. "He would take it to Walsingham, of course. You haven't told the butler that you wanted to keep it about you, I suppose?"

"Nunno. But—"

"Well, hadn't you better buzz off and ask Walsingham, if it's so jolly important about the key?" asked Bob.

Bunter hesitated.

It was clear that he hoped to find the key without consulting the butler in the matter. Certainly Walsingham would have been greatly surprised to learn that it was Master Bunter who had taken the key from his room.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes D'Arcy," said Bob. "Perhaps he's seen your jolly old key, Bunter."

Bunter turned hopefully to Arthur Augustus, as that elegant youth came down the grassy bank, a thing of beauty in spotless flannels and a Panama hat.

"I say, Gussy—"

"Yaas, deah boy! Sowwy if I've kept you waitin', old fellows. I wasn't vewy long changin', was I?"

"Not at all," said Wharton, with a smile.

"Have you seen anything of my key, D'Arcy?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Bai Jove! Have you lost a key?"

"Yes. If you've seen it—"

"Was it a steel key, about two inches long?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes!" exclaimed Bunter eagerly.

"You've found it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Bunter, in great relief.

"I am vewy glad I found it, Buntah, if it is important," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, it is a weal pleasuah. I picked it up in the picture-gallery, neah where you had been standin', deah boy. As it was a door-key, I did not suppose that it was one of your keys, or of course I would have brougth it to you at once. I supposed that some servant must have droppod it there."

"That's all right, if you've got it safe," said Bunter. "I'm jolly glad you found it, old chap!"

"All sewene. It's safe now," said D'Arcy. "The butlah says that it has been missin' for some days—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Appawvently he did not know that you had it, Buntah," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "I took it to the butlah, supposin' it to be one of the keys of the house, and he told me that it was the key of the wine-cellars, and had been missin' for some days. He weally could not guess how it came to be in the picture-gallery. Of course, it nevah occurred to me that you could have droppod it there."

Bunter gasped.

"Where's that key now?"

"I handed it ovah to the butlah—"

"You silly idiot!"

"Eh?"

"You crass ass!" roared Bunter.

"Bai Jove!"

"You—you—you've given that key to Walsingham!" shrieked Bunter.

"Natuwally I weturned it to the butlah, Buntah, as it was plainly a house key, and had appawvently been droppod about the house," said Arthur Augustus. "I fail to understand you, Buntah. This mode of address—"

"You—you—you dummy!" gasped Bunter. In his dismay, the Owl of the Remove quite forgot that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a distinguished guest, and a fellow whom he delighted to honour.

"Buntah!"

"You silly chump!" roared Bunter.

"Weally, Buntah—"

"You frabjous ass!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"Look here, Bunter—" began Harry Wharton warmly.

"Oh, shut up!" howled Bunter.

And, turning his back on his astonished and indignant guests, Billy Bunter raced off towards the house.

The chums of Greyfriars stared after him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass to his noble eye, and fixed it upon the departing figure of William George Bunter. His feelings seemed to be too deep for words for some minutes.

Bunter vanished from sight, going strong.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning to the Greyfriars fellows at last. "What is the matlah with Buntah? I twust that he is not off his wockah!"

"Blessed if I know what's the matter

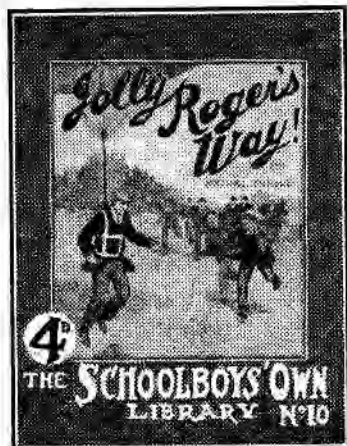
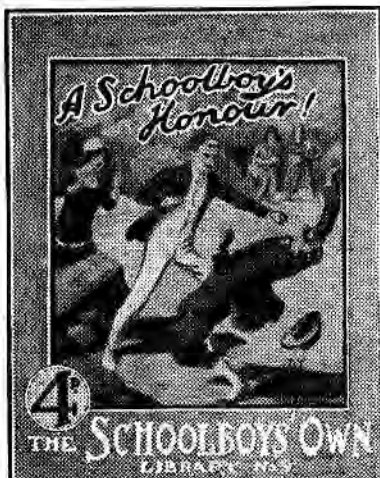
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with him!" growled Johnny Bull. "I know jolly well that if we had him at Greyfriars now, we'd jolly well bump him for his dashed impudence!"

"The bumpfulness would be terrific!" "As Bunter's guest, it is impos- sible, for me to punch his nose," said D'Arcy. "But, weally, I cannot allow a fellow to address me in such a mannah. It is weally a vewy awkward posish."

"Oh, never mind Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "His manners would make a grizzly bear envious. You must take Bunter as you find him."

"Yaas, but—" "He seems no end worried about that blessed key," said Frank Nugent.

"Yaas; but—it is vewy odd," said Arthur Augustus. "I supposed that I was doin' quite wight in weturnin' the key to the butlah. Don't you fellows think so?"

"Of course!" "I could not guess that Buntah was takin' personal charge of the key of the wine-cellarah, and 'cawwin' it about with him. The butlah had no ideah of it, eithah. It is vewy unusual for a fellow of Buntah's age to take personal charge of the key of the wine-cellarah. I suppose Buntah does not dwink?"

"Ha, ha! No!" "It is vewy extwaordinawy!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head in great perplexity.

"Never mind. Let's get out in the boat," suggested Bob Cherry.

Arthur Augustus paused. "I am wathah wowried about this," he said. "The question is, can I wemain undah Buntah's woof, atfah the mannah in which he has addressed me. A fellow has to considah his personal dig, you know."

"Think it over in the boat," suggested Bob. No doubt the position was awkward for the Swell of St. Jim's, from his personal point of view; but Bob Cherry was anxious to get on the river.

"Yaas, wathah! That is a good ideah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

And he stepped elegantly into the boat, and the chums of the Remove pushed off. And as they pulled up the sunny river, between banks lined with green, shady woods, they dismissed Billy Bunter from their minds. And assuredly they did not dream of what was happening at Bunter Court in those very hours!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Only Way!

WALSINGHAM!" Billy Bunter panted out the name of the butler as he burst into Walsingham's room. He arrived there breathless.

By a series of amazing strokes of luck, as it were, Bunter had obtained and kept possession of Combermere Lodge; he had skated on the thinnest of thin ice, and had not yet gone through.

His position was a good deal like that of a juggler keeping a number of balls in the air at once, with disaster to follow if a single mischance occurred.

Indeed, if Bunter had had the ordinary allowance of common sense the situation would have been sufficient to wreck his nervous system.

Fortunately—or unfortunately—common sense had been left out of William George Bunter's composition.

So long as no disaster occurred he was content to keep on cheerily, living on the fat of the land and not worrying.

But now it really looked as if the crash had come.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 913.

The news that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had handed the key of the wine-cellarah over to Walsingham fairly flabbergasted him. Walsingham might, or might not, pay an immediate visit to the cellarah. As he was a dutiful butler, keeping an eye on every part of his master's house, it was probable that he would go down without delay, as—owing to the key being missing—it was some time since the wine-cellarah had been visited.

And if he went down— The bare thought of it made Billy Bunter feel faint. He pictured the butler's amazement at finding the missing estate agent locked up in the cellarah. With still greater dismay and trepidation he pictured the fury of Mr. Pilkins—released and on the trail of vengeance.

Bunter's tenancy of Bunter Court, always extremely uncertain, would come to a sudden and inglorious end. The whole story would become known to the Greyfriars fellows and to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Mr. Pilkins might take any vengeful measures—even to the extent of calling in a police-constable to take Bunter in charge. That awful possibility, which the fatuous Owl had shut out of his fat mind simply because it was unpleasant to think of, could no longer be dismissed.

At any cost Bunter had to recover the key before Walsingham used it—and he might even now be too late!

FOR YOU!

**HOBBS, SUTCLIFFE,
PARKIN & HENDREN.**

NEXT MONDAY!

The speed with which Bunter travelled back to the house would have done him credit on the cinder-path at Greyfriars. Anyone who had seen him then would have considered him a good man for the hundred yards.

Puffing and blowing, he rushed to the butler's room and hurried open the door and spluttered:

"Walsingham!" There was no answer.

Bunter blinked round the room almost in anguish. Walsingham was not there! Where was he?

The Owl of the Remove felt his brain almost swimming for a moment. Suppose Walsingham was already in the wine-cellarah—suppose he had found Mr. Pilkins—suppose they were at that very moment ascending to the upper regions together?

Bunter leaned on the door and panted.

He was tempted to scud away, to clear out of Combermere Lodge on the spot, and head at once for the railway-station—going while the going was good, as the astute Sammy had done.

But Bunter was a stickler. He was certainly not of the stuff of which heroes are made, though he had landed himself in a position which might have caused qualms to a fellow of iron nerve. But he would not go while a chance remained. So long as he could swank as the lord of Bunter Court he would keep up the peculiar game.

He stayed only to recover his breath, and then he rolled away in search of the butler. After all, very likely Walsingham was somewhere about the house; very likely he had not yet used the recovered key.

"Thomas!" called out Bunter, as he caught sight of the footman.

"Sir?" "Where is Walsingham?" "I think he is gone down to the wine-cellarah, sir."

Bunter staggered. "Wha-a-at!"

Thomas blinked at him. He could see no reason why his simple statement should have such a staggering effect on Bunter.

"The missing key has been found, sir," said Thomas. "Master D'Arcy brought it to Walsingham a short time ago, sir."

"D-d-d-did he?" gasped Bunter. "Are—are you sure that Walsingham has gone down, Thomas?"

"He told me a few minutes ago, sir, that he would do so," said Thomas. "I can call him up, sir, if you desire to see him."

"No!" gasped Bunter.

"Shall I go down, sir?"

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Oh! Very well, sir!" gasped the astonished Thomas. Bunter turned away, to hurry to the wine-cellar staircase. Desperate thoughts were in his mind; the game was not up yet. Thomas stared after him blankly.

The Owl of the Remove turned back. He was aware that he had aroused the footman's wonder and curiosity, and he did not want any more witnesses. Walsingham was enough.

"Thomas!" "Yes, sir?"

"Go down to the boathouse and tell Master Wharton that I shall join him in a few minutes. Hurry, or he may be gone in the boat."

"Very good, sir!" Thomas hurried away.

Bunter only waited for his back to be turned, and then sprinted for the wine-cellar staircase. The upper door was open; evidently the butler had gone down.

Bunter crept down the stairs. There was a turn in the staircase; but Bunter could see a glimmer of light from below. The lower door was evidently open.

On tiptoe Bunter descended. His fat heart was thumping, his little round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. Was there a chance yet?

He heard a murmur of voices. As he crept farther down he distinguished the voice of Walsingham.

"Pilkins! Am I dreaming this? Pilkins! Mr. Pilkins! What are you doing here? How did you come here? What does this mean?"

Evidently the butler had only just entered the cellarah, and had been astounded to behold Mr. Pilkins there.

Bunter reached the lower door. It was opened by the same key as the upper door, as Bunter knew well. To his intense relief the key was still in the lock. Walsingham had naturally not troubled to take it out after unlocking the door, as he had to look the door again on leaving.

Bunter breathed hard. The door stood a foot open, and through the opening he had a view of the Combermere butler standing like a statue in his amazement staring at Mr. Pilkins.

Mr. Pilkins had apparently been dozing on his rugs. He had risen to his feet, and was rubbing his eyes. Billy Bunter watched the two of them through his big spectacles, with a sort of fascinated gaze. Walsingham had found the imprisoned estate agent; but Billy Bunter was on the right side of

the door, with command of the key! Bunter was still master of the situation.

"Thank goodness you've found me, Walsingham!" gasped Mr. Pilkins. "How long have I been here? It seems like weeks!"

"How did you come here at all?" exclaimed the amazed butler. "What does it mean? Your clerk, Parker, was inquiring after you here to-day; he thought something had happened to you because—"

"It had!" gasped Mr. Pilkins. "It had! I have been a prisoner here ever since that young scoundrel kidnapped me—"

"What?"

"I thought he was keeping the key; I had almost given up hope that you would find me—"

The portly butler gasped for breath.

"You have been a prisoner here?" he said faintly.

"Yes!" hooted Mr. Pilkins. "That young villain tricked me down to the wine-cellars when I called on him, and locked me in!"

"Good gracious!"

"That young scoundrel Bunter—"

"Master Bunter!" stuttered Walsingham.

"I'll Master Bunter him when I get my hands on him!" howled Mr. Pilkins. "I'll break every bone in his body! I'll slay him! I'll smash him! I'll have him locked up! I'll prosecute him! I'll sue his father for damages! I'll—"

Breath failed the unfortunate Mr. Pilkins.

"But—but—but what does it mean?" stammered Walsingham helplessly. "I have been told that you went to London to see Master Bunter's father—"

"Humbug, sir—humbug!" roared Mr. Pilkins. "No document has been signed. The young scoundrel is an impostor; no money has been paid, no money ever will be paid! I should not be surprised if the young villain is in league with a gang of burglars to rob the house. I should not be surprised in the very least. You are to blame, Walsingham! You let him take possession of the house while I was laid up in a nursing-home! You are answerable—"

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Walsingham. "You brought him here, in the first place, and you telephoned to me that you had let him the house—"

"I did nothing of the kind!" raved Mr. Pilkins.

"You did!" hooted Walsingham.

"I did not!" shrieked Mr. Pilkins. "If anyone telephoned, it was that young scoundrel!"

"I knew your voice—"

"And I knew your voice, when I telephoned to you to ask you what you meant by letting that young villain into the house. But it was that—that—that young rascal who was taking the call and imitating your voice. He is evidently a practised criminal!"

"Good heavens!"

"If you supposed I told you on the telephone that I had let him the house, you were tricked—as I was tricked!" hooted Mr. Pilkins.

"Then—then he is a swindler!" exclaimed Walsingham, aghast. "You say that no money has been paid—"

"None at all!"

"And he has had the house for weeks—enormous bills have been run up with the tradesmen—"

"Your fault—your fault!" snarled Mr. Pilkins. "I am not responsible—not responsible in the very least! I disclaim the slightest responsibility!"

"Look here, Mr. Pilkins—"



"Where's that key you found?" asked Bunter. "I handed it ovah to the butlah—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You silly idiot!" roared Bunter. "Eh?" "You crass ass!" "Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy faintly. "You dummy!" spluttered Bunter. "You—you—you've handed that key to Walsingham? Oh lor'!" (See Chapter 10.)

"Look here, Walsingham—"

"We are wasting time!" exclaimed the butler. "Come out of this at once, and I will telephone for the police!"

"Good! The whole gang of them can be arrested!" exclaimed Mr. Pilkins. "Of course, they are all in the game together."

And the enraged estate-agent started for the door of the cellar, the amazed butler at his heels.

Slam!

The door was drawn shut under their eyes.

Click!

The key turned in the lock.

"What!" ejaculated Walsingham.

He jumped to the door and dragged at the handle.

But it was locked on the staircase side, and it did not budge. Mr. Pilkins uttered a yell of rage.

"You idiot, Walsingham!"

"What?"

"You left the key in the lock—"

"Yes, of course! But—"

"That young villain has followed you down!" raved Mr. Pilkins. "He has locked you in along with me!"

"Impossible!" gasped Walsingham.

"The door is locked!" howled Mr. Pilkins.

"Good heavens!"

Walsingham dragged at the door. He hammered and shouted. But the door

remained fast, and there came no answer to the shouting.

He desisted at last, and stared in a petrified way at the estate-agent. Mr. Pilkins groaned. His freedom, so close at hand, had been snatched away at the last moment; he was still a prisoner in the vault under Combermere Lodge, the only difference being that he now had a companion in misfortune—the Combermere butler was his fellow-prisoner.

Billy Bunter locked the upper door of the staircase, and slipped the key into his pocket. He rolled away, with beads of perspiration on his fat brow.

Even Bunter realised that the situation was growing desperate. The absence of Walsingham would excite astonishment in the servants' hall; it had to be accounted for somehow. There were two prisoners in the wine-cellars—two captives to be fed, though it was pretty certain that they would have to be content with very short commons.

It was a situation that might have made any fellow quake. But it did not make Billy Bunter quake. His chief feeling was relief that he had staved off the danger in this masterly manner. The future could take care of itself.

He was, indeed, sorry to be deprived of Walsingham's deferential services. But it could not be helped. Walsingham

had "butted in," and left Bunter no choice—if he was to remain master of Bunter Court. It was the only way! As it was the only way, Billy Bunter felt, of course, quite justified in taking it; in fact, there was nothing else to be done, if his fat comfort was not to be interfered with. And that being the most important consideration in the wide universe, Bunter's conscience was quite easy.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Promotion for Thomas!

"**Y**OU rang, sir?" Billy Bunter, lolling at ease in an armchair in the Combermere library, condescended to turn his head as Thomas presented himself.

"Yes, I rang," he assented. "Let me see! For a few days, Thomas, I shall require you to take Walsingham's place."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes. I have had a telephone call from Mr. Pilkins, in London, and it seems that Walsingham is required to attend to some details about the lease."

"Yes, sir," said Thomas.

"I have sent him to London," said Bunter calmly, watching the footman's face out of the corner of his eye. "Probably he will be absent a few days. I suppose you can carry on, Thomas?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Thomas.

"As a matter of fact," went on Bunter, "it is possible that Walsingham may go abroad to join Lord Combermere. In that case, I shall appoint you butler in his place, Thomas!"

"Very good, sir!" said Thomas, allowing, for a moment, an expression of satisfaction to appear upon his well-trained, expressionless visage. "I shall endeavour, sir, to give every satisfaction."

"Quite so, Thomas! You will find me a good master," said Bunter. "Let me see, I think that is all! No. I find that I have run out of currency notes, Thomas."

"Indeed, sir."

"Take these two fivers and change them for me, Thomas."

"Certainly, sir."

Thomas retired with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's two fivers. When he returned with ten currency notes on a salver Billy Bunter picked them up carelessly, like a fellow to whom pound-notes were trifles. He tossed one of them to Thomas.

"Take that, Thomas!"

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said Thomas.

Bunter dismissed him with a lordly wave of the hand.

He grinned serenely when Thomas was gone.

Walsingham's sudden absence was accounted for now. The servants' hall would know what to think, and Thomas especially was in a state of happy satisfaction at the prospect of stepping into the butler's shoes.

Billy Bunter felt that he was getting on well. So far as he could see, the only drawback to the position was that he had lost Walsingham's services. No doubt there were other drawbacks, but these the Owl of the Remove carelessly dismissed from his mind. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof!

A little later Bunter strolled carelessly by the door of the wine-cellar staircase. That strong oaken door was safely locked, and the key was safe in Bunter's pocket. He was not likely to lose it again. He had wondered whether two voices in unison might possibly be

heard, shouting from the cellars below. As he passed the door he loitered and listened, but there was no sound from the depths. And he grinned as he walked on. By that time probably Walsingham was sorry that he had "butted" in.

As for the feelings of the hapless butler, locked in the wine-cellar with the hapless estate agent, Bunter did not consider them at all. All his consideration was reserved for one much more important personage—William George Bunter.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Apologises!

"**B**AI Jove, you know, we've had a wippin' aftahnoon!"

"We have!" assented Bob Cherry.

"The ripfulness was terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton & Co. had returned, in the summer dusk, ruddy and cheerful from their afternoon on the river.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had enjoyed his afternoon in the boat with the Greyfriars fellows. His pleasure had not been at all marred by the absence of his host, William George Bunter. But as he stepped ashore a thoughtful expression came over the face of the swell of St. Jim's.

"As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I should weally enjoy stayin' on heah with you fellows," he confided to the Famous Five as they strolled up to the house. "But—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's jolly old Bunter!"

Billy Bunter joined his guests, his fat face bright and cheerful. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at him rather uncertainly. Apparently Bunter had forgotten the trifling circumstance that he had addressed his distinguished guest as a frabjous ass and a silly idiot.

"Had a good time?" asked Bunter cheerily.

"Oh, ripping!" said Bob.

"Good! My river's rather decent, isn't it?" said Bunter.

"Your river! Oh!"

"My river!" said Bunter firmly.

"You must take a run in my motor-boat to-morrow, Gussy."

"Hem!"

"I'm going to give you a good time here, old bean."

"Hem!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Have you caught a cold on the river, Gussy?"

"No."

"You seem to be coughing."

"Hem!"

"There you go again. I'll telephone for the doctor if you like," said Bunter. "You can't be too careful. I don't mind running up a bill—expense is no object when I'm entertaining my friends."

"Oh!"

"By the way, I've had to send Walsingham away on important business," said Bunter casually. "I'm making Thomas butler in his place, for the present. If the service is not quite up to the mark for a day or two, Gussy, I'm sure you'll excuse it."

"Hem!"

"I'm sure you've caught a cold, old fellow," said Bunter, slipping his fat arm through Arthur Augustus' as they walked to the house. "You'd better let me telephone for the medico. Expense is—"

"Hem!"

"No object, you know. I want to take every care of you while you're under my ancestral roof, Gussy."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry involuntarily.

Bunter gave him a glare.

"Hem!"

"Gussy, old man—"

Arthur Augustus cleared his noble throat.

"The fact is, Buntah—"

"You've caught a cold, old chap. These fellows might really have taken a little more care of you," said Bunter. "They never think of anybody but themselves—a thing I've always despised."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Selfish fellows, you know," said Bunter. "Selfishness is a thing I never could stand."

Arthur Augustus gazed at Bunter in wonder. Harry Wharton & Co. grinned. They were used to Billy Bunter's polished manners.

"The fact is, Buntah—" recommenced Arthur Augustus.

"Hurry up, old chap, if you've caught a cold—"

"I have not caught a cold, Buntah," said Arthur Augustus, jerking his arm away from the Owl of the Remove. "But the fact is I think it is time for me to catch my tawn."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Time for dinner, you mean," he said.

"I am sowwy I shall not be able to stay for dinnah, Buntah."

"Eh?"

"Aftah the way you addressed me this aftahnoon, Buntah, I feah that I shall be unable to wemain your guest," said Arthur Augustus in his most stately manner.

Bunter jumped.

"You're jolly well not going!" he exclaimed. "If you're thinking about the tenner—"

"I was not thinkin' about the tennah, Buntah."

"Phew!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"I shall settle that up when I get my remittance to-morrow, or the next day at latest," said Bunter.

"I am weferrin' to the opprobrious epithets you applied to me, Buntah. I cannot wemain the guest of a fellow who chavactewises me as a cwass ass."

"I apologise, old fellow!" said Bunter, quite dismayed at the prospect of losing his noble guest, and a long series of borrowed fivers. "My dear chap, I take it all back. I hadn't the least intention of letting you know that I think you an ass. Honour bright!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the chums of the Remove.

"Weally, Buntah—"

"Here we are, old fellow—come in."

Arthur Augustus allowed himself to be persuaded; and when dinner was served at Combermere Lodge that evening—with Thomas presiding in the place of Walsingham—the swell of St. Jim's adorned the festive board with his elegant person.

But if Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could have foreseen what was shortly to happen at Bunter Court, undoubtedly he would have rushed for his train. And probably Harry Wharton & Co. would have rushed with him.

Fortunately—or unfortunately—they could not foresee!

THE END.

(What will be the end of this amazing trickery? How long can Billy Bunter put off the day of reckoning? Next week's ripping story—"The Bunter Court Election" will tell you.)

THE PHANTOM LAUGH!—Peal upon peal of demoniacal laughter, high-pitched and eerie in the extreme, proceeds from an empty house at frequent intervals. What does it mean? What bearing has it upon—

No VELDT TRAIL!

A magnificent story of thrilling adventure in South Africa, featuring Ferrers Locke, the world-famous detective, and his boy assistant, Jack Drake.



The Phantom Laugh!

WILLIAMS, the plain-clothes man, stepped forward.

"Our men are busy searching the house now, Mr. Locke," he said, "but I'm afraid there's no one else in hiding here—"

"It's as I expected," nodded Locke disappointedly. "Pyecroft said there were only two men here—Bristow and the native!"

"That's right!" said Jack Drake. "They seemed to be in league with each other. There was no one else here, though I'm inclined to think Bristow has other confederates from some of the remarks he let fall when he thought I was unconscious!"

Locke nodded again, as if this information did not surprise him.

"We'll go into all that presently," he said. "Meantime, I want to scout round this place on my own. Bristow's vanished, but he may have left some sort of a trail—"

He ceased speaking, and glanced keenly about him.

Williams and his associates had now left the room to Locke and Jack Drake, while they pursued their search in the other parts of the building.

Locke saw that the room was very crudely furnished. The floor was quite bare, and a large packing-case, upturned, did duty for a table, on which stood an evil-smelling, smoky oil lamp.

There were a couple of dilapidated-looking chairs, a camp-bed, and a large cupboard, which a brief inspection showed to be empty.

The window was devoid of anything in the way of curtains, though a piece of torn sacking, lying on the floor near by, suggested that this was the means adopted to provide a covering.

The walls, rotting and cracked in many places, were festooned with cobwebs, and the whole place gave off an odour suggestive of a crypt.

From a cursory glance it would appear to be a waste of time to search for anything in the way of clues. The place seemed utterly barren of anything of the kind, and had obviously been used only as a temporary shelter.

But Ferrers Locke was not the sort of man to do anything by halves. He

knew, from his great experience in handling criminal problems, that the real clues—the clues that help to build up a theory and so convict a criminal—were rarely to be found lying around, as it were, for every eye to see and to read.

They had to be searched for, and this the great detective forthwith proceeded to do.

WHO KILLED SIR MERTON CARR?

GERALD BRISTOW, an escaped convict, also known as *Arthur the Dude*, who has a two-fold purpose in visiting South Africa—one to seek the treasure of an old Boer farmer named *Piet de Jongh*, the other to square accounts with a former prison acquaintance to whom he has told the secret of the hidden treasure, and who, Bristow thinks, has double-crossed him. Stranded in Johannesburg without money or food, Bristow breaks into the house of his uncle.

SIR MERTON CARR, a wealthy mining magnate, to whom, if it exists, the treasure of his deceased friend, *Piet de Jongh*, rightly belongs. To Bristow's horror, he finds his uncle stretched out on the floor of the library, to all intents and purposes dead. While Bristow is standing there he is amazed to hear his uncle's voice. The words uttered signify that Sir Merton is under the impression that he has been attacked by his nephew. In a state of terror, Bristow flees from the house, and seeks the aid of

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective, who, with his clever boy assistant, **JACK DRAKE**, and **INSPECTOR PYECROFT**, is preparing to leave Johannesburg for England. Bristow's story interests Locke, for he was a great friend of Sir Merton Carr, who, it transpires, has been murdered. The detective proceeds to investigate the case, what time Bristow disappears. The case is wrapt in mystery, for so many other people are concerned in the murder, although to what extent the sleuth does not yet realise. Prominent amongst them are

DAFT DAVE, a half-wit, and **STEPHEN JARRAD**, the dead man's secretary. Soon after the case opens Drake is lured away to a house in Vrededorp, to which Pyecroft has already been taken prisoner. Pyecroft escapes, and tells of Drake's capture. The house is raided, and *Unlilli*, a giant native, is taken prisoner. Drake is released, none the worse for his experience, and Locke intimates to the inspector in charge of the police that it is time the house was searched.

(Now read on.)

Every inch of the room in which he and Jack stood came in for Locke's closest scrutiny. Every nook and cranny was inspected and examined—in some cases with the aid of a powerful magnifying lens—and even the walls, floor, and ceiling were diligently tapped and thumped in turn, in case there should be such a thing as a secret recess hidden anywhere.

Over two hours were spent in this way by Locke, not only in covering this particular room, but in going over the entire house.

And the net result of it all was—nil.

At least, that was how it appeared to Jack Drake, who, at the end of the search, stood beside Locke gazing, with an expression of mingled puzzlement and disgust at a broken, jagged fragment of black metallic material which the detective held between finger and thumb.

"And what on earth is that?" asked Jack at last.

"A fragment of shellac," explained Locke, with a dry smile, "which, as you know is a resinous substance obtained from trees growing, for the most part, in eastern India."

"But what's the use of it, anyway?"

"It has many uses," returned Locke, with an air of mock reproof. "As a commercial commodity its value is enormous, though we are not concerned with that aspect of it in this instance."

He broke off, thrust his thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat-pocket and produced another piece of shellac, broken and jagged like the piece already held in his other hand.

"I found this on the floor in Sir Merton's library," he explained. "The two pieces do not, of course, fit together, but they have emanated, I feel sure, from the same source."

"Yes, but of what earthly use are they—as clues, I mean?" protested Jack, utterly mystified.

"That remains to be seen," was Locke's cryptic response. "But I think I can safely say that these odd pieces of shellac are going to provide us with quite a thrilling story. It just depends on how a certain idea I have in my head works out."

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"I see," returned Jack, who, as a matter of fact, did not see at all. "And the idea is—"

But Ferrers Locke smiled and shook his head.

"Nothing doing, son," he murmured. "The idea is in a very nebulous state at present—a mere ghost of a theory, too fragile to bear discussion at this stage. But time will tell whether it is a true theory, and, in that case, the story which I think these two pieces of shellac may be able to tell us will be interesting indeed!"

Jack remained silent, well knowing that it was useless to press the matter further. In due course, Locke would explain everything, provided his at present only vague theories came to fruition.

The detective placed both pieces of shellac away in his pocket, and then crossed to the window and gazed down into the street below.

The huge crowd which had collected during that exciting chase over the housetops had not melted entirely away, and the street had resumed its normal appearance of dejected emptiness, with only an occasional passer-by to provide some slight variety to the sheer, drab monotony of it.

Locke and Jack were alone in the house now, the plain-clothes men having long since taken their departure.

"I say, guv'nor," said Jack suddenly, as he remembered something, "what about that nigger—that chap Umlili? He was captured, you say?"

"Yes, and by now he's probably busy reflecting upon his foolhardiness in a police cell," replied Locke. "Oh, I've not finished with him by any means. Bristow has, for the present, eluded us; but we have the native, and we're going to stick to him. What is more, we are going to make him talk!"

The detective's voice snapped off abruptly, for, even as he uttered the last sentence, there came a fresh sound from out of the silence of the empty house—a sound which caused both Locke and Jack Drake to swing round with united gasps of wonderment.

"He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!"

Out of the stillness it came, that high-pitched, cracked laugh, and echoed its eerie way through the empty house as though it were a living, breathing thing, causing an involuntary shudder to pass down Jack's spine.

Weird in the extreme, it sounded unnatural, almost ghostly, in its effect.

"Where—where the dickens did that come from?" gasped Jack, breaking the strangely tense silence which had followed upon that laugh.

"It seemed to come from downstairs," began Locke vaguely.

"I thought it was over our heads," muttered Jack, staring at the detective wonderingly. "It seemed—My hat! There it is again!"

"He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!"

Once more the wild laughter broke the silence, peal after peal of it awakening the echoes and then dying down to a whispering sigh.

Ferrers Locke spun round again.

The voice, like some elusive phantom, seemed to emanate from several places at once!

Next instant the detective had raced from the room, and was tearing down the stairs; while Jack, after a momentary hesitation, began a similar search of the upstairs rooms.

But though they raced through the house, searching it from top to bottom, they found nothing. Nor did that weird laugh again break the silence.

It was as if the thing had been born of the very air itself, and had as quickly dissolved into air again!

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Locke and Drake stared at each other, mutually dumbfounded.

There was no getting away from the fact—the house was quite empty, deserted save for themselves.

Not a sign, not a trace of the origin of that wild, high-pitched laugh could be found anywhere!

Locke shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Well, that's that!" he exclaimed.

"Blessed place must be haunted!" said Jack, almost breathlessly.

He was not given to foolish fears of the supernatural, but that wild, discordant laugh had shaken his nerves somewhat, in spite of himself.

"Nonsense!" snapped Locke impatiently. "The thing's capable of an ordinary, common-sense explanation, sure. And I'll find that explanation before I'm through with this case!"

He spoke irritably, almost angrily. Locke had the healthy-minded man's wholesome detestation of anything suggestive of a "fake," and he was positive that the laugh they had just heard was some trick, some ventriloquial effort designed expressly to befog and perhaps even unnerve him.

Some five minutes later Locke went round the house and locked and sealed all the doors, after which he and Jack Drake hastened to their hotel to partake of a belated luncheon.

Immediately this was over Locke turned to Jack.

"We're going out to Parktown again right away," he said. "I haven't concluded my investigations there as yet."

Jack nodded, and they chartered a taxi, and were soon driven to the house of the late Sir Merton Carr.

They were met at the door by Inspector Pyecroft, who seemed better now, but wore a tense, worried look.

He seized Locke by the arm and drew him quietly but urgently into the nearest adjoining room, Jack following close on the detective's heels.

"What's the joke now?" asked Locke, with an amused smile at Pyecroft's elaborate attempts at secrecy.

But Pyecroft did not smile.

"No joke," he returned briefly. "Jarrad, the dead man's secretary, has disappeared—bunked—run away!"

The Mystery of Stephen Jarrad!

FERRERS LOCKE stared at the inspector in astonishment.

"Jarrad run away?" he echoed.

"But what ever for?"

Pyecroft shrugged his shoulders and held out an envelope.

"I don't know any more than you do," he returned; "but he's gone, and we found this note propped up on the table in his bed-room. I've been waiting for you to come back in the hope that possibly the note will give some explanation. It's addressed to you, and I didn't care to open it, despite the urgency of the matter."

Locke took the envelope, which was, as Pyecroft said, inscribed to him.

He ripped it open amid a tense, expectant silence, and extracted from it a half-sheet of paper, on which a few words were hastily scrawled.

"I am sorry to cause you any trouble," read the detective aloud, "but I think it best to clear out. I can't stand the strain any longer. Sooner or later, you or the police would have got me, and I can't face up to the disgrace, especially as I have not only myself to consider. Please don't try to find me. It would be a waste of time. I've gone where you'll never get me."

"STEPHEN JARRAD."

That was all.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" gasped Jack Drake, as the detective ceased reading. "Who'd ever have thought that young Mr. Jarrad, of all people, could have murdered—"

"Here, steady on, my lad!" cut in Locke sharply. "Nobody has accused him of the crime—yet. And I've told you before about the fatal mistake of jumping to conclusions in detective work!"

"Yes; but that letter!" protested Pyecroft, with an expressive gesture. "Why, the fellow's practically confessed! Hasn't he said—or, rather, written—something about the police getting him sooner or later, and his not being able to face the disgrace—"

"The whole letter's full of wild statements," answered Locke quietly. "It has obviously been written under the stress of great emotion. But that does not necessarily imply that the fellow's guilty, or that he even knows anything about it!"

"But why should he run away?" urged Jack.

"I don't know," admitted Locke frankly, "unless he got the wind up over my rather stiff cross-examination this morning. Vane will recollect it. Jarrad had made a statement at the time when the crime was first discovered, and later had withdrawn it and substituted another, so diametrically different that it naturally aroused comment, if not actually suspicion. When I heard of this, I had him brought before me, and put him through it. There was quite a scene."

And forthwith the detective gave a brief outline of what had occurred, describing how Jarrad had become almost demented with fear, and had shouted his innocence in the most excited tones.

"So, you see," concluded Locke, "the poor fellow unquestionably got it into his head that he was suspected, and of all human emotions, there's nothing like sheer, stark, unreasoning fear to make a man lose his head, if only temporarily, as Jarrad has obviously now done. If he'd only stopped to think, he would have realised the fatal mistake he was making in running away."

"Unless he's really guilty!" grunted Pyecroft.

"You seem to have made up your mind about his guilt, Pyecroft!" said Locke somewhat reprovingly.

"Well, I ask you!" exclaimed the Yard man in exasperation, pointing to the letter which Locke still held in his hand.

"What's he mean about not having only himself to consider?" put in Jack suddenly.

"Vane said something to me about his having an invalid mother dependent upon him," replied Locke. "It came out during the examination of the various members of the household at the time when the crime was first discovered. By the way—he turned to Pyecroft—"where's Vane now?"

"He's gone off for an hour or so—got a call from the station," answered Pyecroft; "but he said he'd be back as quickly as possible, especially as he was anxious, as I was, to get at the contents of that letter."

Locke nodded.

"We'll have a look round Mr. Jarrad's room, I think," he murmured.

"I've done that," cut in Pyecroft, "but there's nothing there!"

"Still, we'll have another look, if you don't mind," persisted the Baker Street detective, the merest shadow of a smile playing round his lips.

It was not that he doubted Pyecroft's abilities as an investigator, as Pyecroft well knew.

But Locke had his peculiarities, like most great men, and one of them was an inflexible resolve always to give his own personal attention to all the details of a case, whether these details had been investigated by others before him or not.

They made their way through the house, up a flight of stairs, and so to the bed-room occupied by Sir Merton's secretary.

The room, as had been specially noted earlier in their investigations, was situated immediately over the library, in which the murder had taken place.

It was a fairly large and well-furnished apartment, and, in addition to the usual bed-room furniture, one side had been fitted up as a sort of private office, where, according to Jarrad's own statement, the young secretary sometimes worked when he wished to be entirely alone.

Locke glanced keenly about him, and then began a systematic search.

Every single item in the apartment was inspected, moved, turned about, and replaced, the detective moving about from one to another with his customary speed, yet letting nothing escape his most searching scrutiny.

At the end of half an hour he came to a standstill, his brows drawn together in a perplexed frown.

Apparently Pyecroft was right. There was absolutely nothing in the way of clues to be found.

Finally the detective dropped on to his hands and knees and began inspecting the carpet on the floor, going over it inch by inch, tapping and pressing it as he went, lifting up the edges here and there, even sniffing at them now and again.

It was a long and monotonous task, and more than once Pyecroft yawned as he stood near the door with Jack Drake, waiting for Locke to conclude.

Then suddenly the great detective came to an abrupt stop.

He had crawled practically all round

the room, and was now busy examining the last few inches of the carpet.

Pyecroft and Jack Drake, noting that Locke had stopped, moved a step or so nearer, and saw that the detective was busy turning back a section of the carpet, which he had lifted from the floor after prising up the tacks with which it had been laid.

He paused as they drew near and beckoned to them.

"It may mean nothing at all," he murmured, addressing his remarks mainly to Jack, "but it's just as well to mention it if only to give you another example of my oft-repeated phrase that it's the little things that count in our business. See these?"

He held out his hand, in the palm of which reposed some half-dozen or so of carpet-tacks.

Jack picked one of them up and studied it thoughtfully.

"Tacks!" he said brilliantly. "Just so," murmured Locke. "And even an ordinary carpet-tack can tell a story. Five out of the seven tacks in my hand are new, the other two are not—note the slight rust on them. Does that give you an idea at all?"

"Well, it couldn't mean that the carpet has just been laid!" muttered Jack thoughtfully. "For one thing, this carpet's old and worn—"

"And for another, the tacks are mixed," completed Locke, with a smile. "and if you cared to take the trouble to go round the rest of the carpet you'd find

that all the rest are old and rusty tacks. Only in this spot are they new—see, there are two more still stuck in the edge of the carpet. As you say, it couldn't mean that the carpet has just been laid, but it could mean that a section of it has been recently retacked, and it might mean that this particular section had previously been lifted up!"

He turned away, and began examining the floorboards intently, while Pyecroft and Jack Drake watched him with suddenly renewed interest.

After a moment Locke took a pen-knife from his pocket and began scraping round the edges of one of the boards.

"Two and two make four," he murmured, as if to himself. "Not once now and again, but every time! Two and two make four—and here's your 'four' this time!"

He swung round. The floorboard had now been levered up, revealing a narrow, dark cavity, into which Locke had thrust his hand while speaking.

And now, as he turned towards them, he held something between his fingers—something which gleamed spasmodically as it caught the rays of the setting sun which crept through the window.

"Gug-good heavens!" gasped Jack Drake. "A—*a dagger!*"

"Say, rather, *the dagger*, my boy!" murmured Locke, rising to his feet. "The dagger which killed Sir Merton Carr!"



As Ferrers Locke turned towards them, he held something between his fingers—something that gleamed spasmodically as it caught the rays of the setting sun which crept through the window. "G-good heavens!" gasped Drake. "A—*a dagger!*" "Say, rather, *the dagger*, my boy," murmured Locke. "The dagger which killed Sir Merton Carr!"
(See this page.)

And then, before any one of them could speak again, there came the sound of a wild, chattering laugh, apparently out of the air itself!

Locke spun round, and in his excitement the dagger slipped from his fingers and clattered to the floor.

"That laugh again!" he exclaimed. "It's the same as that which we heard at the house in Vrededorp, and—"

He broke off and without any warning rushed across the room to the french windows which led on to the veranda. Wrenching these open, he dashed through just as that weird, uncanny laugh burst out afresh.

But now it broke off with a snap, to be succeeded by a sudden yelp of mingled amazement and fear; and Jack and Pyecroft, tensely waiting in the room, heard Locke's voice from the veranda, raised in tones of angry challenging.

"Got you, my beauty! And what's your little game—eh?"

Next instant the detective reappeared, dragging by the scruff of the neck the undersized, hunchbacked figure of Daft Dave, who wriggled and squirmed helplessly in Locke's firm grip.

A Fresh Trail!

EVEN as Ferrers Locke re-entered the room, a door on the opposite side opened to admit Superintendent Vane, who fell back a step at what he saw.

"Daft Dave!" he cried.

Locke dragged the squirming figure of the half-wit well into the room, and then released his grip, the man backing away in an attitude of mingled fear and rage.

"So you're the fellow who tried to frighten us away from the house in Vrededorp with that ghastly laugh, are you?" growled the detective.

"I do not know what you mean!" shrilled Daft Dave, backing away.

"Oh, yes, you do!" snapped Locke. "You were hiding somewhere in or about that house while my assistant and I were investigating, and then you set up that eerie laugh, doubtless with the idea of scaring us away."

But still the man shook his head. His eyes widened in surprised, injured inquiry, and he flung out his gnarled hands expressively.

"What is it you speak—no, yes?" he persisted. "It is all so strange to me!"

Superintendent Vane, who had been watching the scene with puckered brows, now strode forward and seized the half-wit, shaking him like a rat.

"That's enough of the baby-innocent stunt, Dave!" he snapped. "You can come off it with me, at any rate. I know you! What've you been up to now? Come on, out with it!"

"But I tell for you I know not'ing at all!" cried Dave in a high-pitched voice, struggling vainly to break free. "What for you always chase after me? I ain't done not'ing—"

"What were you doing on that veranda, anyway?" put in Locke challengingly.

"Not'ing!" returned the half-wit. "I was going away. I just been to see Mrs. Higgins, and she give me some skoff,* and now I go and sit down for a little rest—"

Locke turned towards Vane interrogatively.

"Better fetch Mrs. Higgins," grunted the superintendent, striding across the

* Food.

room and touching a bell. "She's the cook here, you know."

In a few moments Mrs. Higgins, wiping her hands nervously on her apron, entered in response to Vane's summons.

"Yes, that's quite right, gentlemen," she nodded. "Davie came round to the kitchen, and I gave him some scraps; the master always used to tell me to do so. He said the poor fellow spent half his life more or less starving, and—"

"I see," nodded Locke. "But what was he doing on this veranda afterwards?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned the cook. "But he often strolls round the place after he's been to see me. He never does any harm, and Sir Merton let him have his own way. Most probably he was sitting down, taking a rest. He's got nothing to do, you see, and this place is about the only one where he gets a bit of kindness—"

Locke frowned, puzzled.

Mrs. Higgins took her departure, and the detective turned again to the half-wit.

"Well, and if you were doing nothing on the veranda," he said, "what were you laughing about?"

Daft Dave stared at him stupidly for a moment.

Then, as if suddenly realising the nature of the question, he thrust one hand into his coat-pocket, and withdrew a torn and greasy copy of a comic paper.

"I just look at dis," he said innocently. "Much funny, so I laugh. He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!"

And once again that wild, discordant laugh broke the silence—this time close beside its astonished listeners.

Jack Drake fell back, and his face paled somewhat.

There was something positively uncanny, even unnerving, about that laugh. It was unnatural, almost demoniacal. And it broke off with startling abruptness, leaving Daft Dave suddenly serious.

"Where Sir Merton?" he said suddenly. "Everyone say he dead. But it is not true—no, yes? I come plenty times to see him; he was my good friend—"

"Sir Merton Carr is dead," answered Locke, looking straight into the man's cross-eyed face. "He has been murdered!"

Daft Dave returned the gaze with a stupid stare and shook his head.

"No, no! All lies!" he muttered. "Sir Merton he my friend; he always very good to me!"

"I tell you he's dead!" almost shouted Vane, suddenly coming forward impatiently. "He was killed in his library the other night!"

"All lies!" muttered Daft Dave stubbornly.

"And you," growled Vane, thrusting his face into that of the half-wit—"you know something about it! You know who killed Sir Merton!"

Daft Dave fell back with a low cry.

"Me? Me know?" he echoed, beating his hands before his face. "No, no! I know not'ing, I tell you! 'Ow should I know? It's all lies—all lies!"

His voice rose till it became almost a shriek, and he backed away till his misshapen body collided with the wall, and then crouched there like a cornered rat.

Vane turned towards Locke. The

superintendent's face was almost mottled with impotent rage.

"The man's play-acting, Locke!" he muttered savagely. "He knows more about this than he'll tell, and he's depending on his local reputation as a half-wit to get away with it! But he's not going to put it across me! I'll make him squeal out the truth before I've done with him! I'll—"

"Half a minute, Vane!" Locke's quiet voice was in striking contrast to the high-pitched dialogue which had been going on during the past few moments. "Take it easy, old man. Let him go!"

"Let him go?" repeated Vane, amazed. "But—but, man, I tell you he knows—"

"No; he doesn't," interposed Locke. "He's just a fool—a poor fool! And we're only torturing him. Let him go, I say. He's harmless enough!"

Vane stared at the detective as if he had taken leave of his senses.

Daft Dave, listening to Locke's words, crept out of the corner now, his beady eyes glittering with satisfaction.

"But, man alive," expostulated the superintendent, "you surely don't mean to say, after—after what happened in the house at Vrededorp and at this house only this morning, that you believe this fellow to be—"

"I don't believe he knows anything at all about it," interrupted Locke in the same calm voice. "And it's sheer waste of time, as well as cruelty to him, to keep on bullying him. Let him go."

Vane fell back, muttering; and Locke signalled to Daft Dave, who crept forward now, rasping his hands together, his ugly face contorted into what was doubtless intended to be a grin of pleasure.

"Take my tip," said Locke briefly, "and keep away from here altogether if you want to avoid trouble. Understand?"

Daft Dave nodded energetically.

"Me unnerstan!" he exclaimed. "Me go long way. Good-bye! Hope you find scoundrel who kill Sir Merton! He very bad man to kill my friend! Hope you will find 'im and hang him quick!"

"Get out!" snapped Locke.

"Me go ver' quick!" retorted Dave, staring up into the detective's face almost impudently. "Goodee-bye!"

And he shambled his way across the room and through the door, which closed softly after him.

"Well, I'll be—!" began Vane, and stopped.

From beyond the door came that amazing laugh—wild, chattering, discordant. It rose almost to a scream, and then died down to a mere whisper, finally trailing off into silence.

And it left everyone in that room feeling strangely cold and uneasy.

"Locke"—Pyecroft moved forward, his face suddenly grave and set—"what on earth did you let him go for? Surely you couldn't fail to see that he must be mixed up in this confounded affair somewhere? Why, the very look on the man's face—"

Locke turned towards the Yard man, who started as he saw the detective's eyelid slowly droop in a deliberate wink.

"Red herring!" murmured Ferrers Locke. "Surely you know that it sometimes pays a detective to be deceptive! Now, Jack, my lad, on the ball!"

He swung round, pointing to the door significantly, and Jack nodded.

"Don't let him out of your sight, if you have to trail him to Timbuctoo!" muttered Locke urgently, as he followed his young assistant to the door. "And, above all, don't let him suspect for an

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Barely had Locke switched on the electric light when there came a sudden flash and a sharp report, followed by a low cry. The figures separated, and at the same instant the door was thrust open and Pycroft, in night attire, appeared on the threshold. "What the——" he began. (See page 27.)

instant that you're following him. Get back as soon as you can and report to me here. I'm going to shake-down in this house for the time being. Off you go!"

The door closed behind Jack, softly, noiselessly, and Locke came back to the centre of the room.

"Sorry, old man!" said Pycroft, flushing uncomfortably. "I ought to have known that little dodge of yours by now! Of course, you played up purposely in Daft Dave's presence, leading him on to believe you thought he knew nothing about it, and so putting him off his guard for the future, whereas all the time you suspect——"

"I suspect everything—and nothing!" cut in Locke, somewhat abruptly. "Besides, surely you've not forgotten our discovery in this room?"

"The dagger!" exclaimed Pycroft, suddenly remembering. "You found it under that floorboard——"

"Where Stephen Jarrad had hidden it!" cried Vane excitedly.

"Stephen Jarrad," murmured Locke, crossing the room to the spot where he had dropped the weapon, "or maybe Daft Dave, or Bristow, or—— Why, what the thunder!"

He broke off, staring in blank amazement at the floor. Then he veered round abruptly.

"It's gone!" he muttered. "The dagger's vanished!"

Midnight Visitors!

THERE was no getting away from the fact—the dagger had indeed disappeared!

Locke remembered, as also did Pycroft, that he had dropped it suddenly on hearing that wild laugh from the direction of the veranda, and in the

ensuing scene with Daft Dave the weapon had temporarily been overlooked.

Locke searched round the room, aided by Vane and Pycroft, but all to no purpose.

The dagger had disappeared altogether, and was nowhere to be found.

"You know who's got it, don't you?" put in Vane disgustedly, as they gave up the search. "Daft Dave, for a cert!"

But Pycroft shook his head.

"How could he?" he protested. "We were watching his every movement, and——"

"Oh, well, let it go!" snapped Locke, a trifle irritably. "After all, it was immaterial. What really mattered was the fact of its discovery!"

"Yes," cut in Superintendent Vane, "and in Stephen Jarrad's room, too! I guess the way's clear for me now, even though that fellow Daft Dave has slipped through our fingers. We've no real case against him, as yet, but we have got a clear enough case against Jarrad, and I'm going to issue a warrant right away!"

He strode towards the door, but halted as Locke barred his path.

"I shouldn't do that, if I were you," murmured the detective quietly.

Vane stared at him dumbfoundedly.

"But—but, man, it's a clear case!" he protested.

"Yes, that's the worst of it," replied Locke, with a smile. "These 'clear cases' so often boggle up a detective's work and set his theories at sixes and sevens! Of course, you can please yourself, Vane—I have no power to stop you. But, just the same, if you take my tip, you'll not issue that warrant—or, at least, you'll hold it up for a bit."

"But why?" insisted Vane, perplexed.

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"But why?" insisted Vane, perplexed.

"Here's this man Jarrad, after making two utterly contrary statements, does a bunk, leaves a most incriminating letter behind, and now the very weapon with which the deed was committed is found hidden under the floorboards in his own bedroom! What more do you want?"

"We want the dagger, for one thing," was Locke's quiet response.

"Yes, but hang it all——"

"Just the same, if you take my tip you'll hold your hand," went on Locke.

"And now, if you don't mind, I'll hike back to the hotel and get my kit. I've decided to camp out here, in this house, for the next day or two. I've got a vague idea that something is going to happen. And if it happens, it'll happen here. Therefore I want to be on the spot. Might be as well for you, too, Pycroft, to come along and join me."

"Just the same, if you take my tip you'll hold your hand," went on Locke.

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"He's been some time gone," said Pycroft, breaking the momentary silence caused by Locke's lighting a cigarette.

The detective nodded.

"I expected he would be," he returned, "so I'm not worrying. I expect he's struck something—"

"You really believe, then, that Daft Dave is mixed up in this affair?"

Pycroft looked across at the famous private detective with something like keen anticipation in his eyes.

Locke seemed in rather a communicative mood to-night, and Pycroft was positively bursting with curiosity.

"I shouldn't be surprised!" returned Locke guardedly.

For some moments he smoked away in silence, as if lost in thought.

Then he turned towards his companion.

"While we're waiting here for bed-time," he murmured, with a smile, "we might as well do a bit of tabulating. There's a lot of ragged edges to this case, and I'd like to have a look at 'em while I've got the chance—especially as that chance may not come again for a long while."

"What do you mean by that?" Pycroft jerked upright, all attention now.

But Locke was not to be intimidated thus easily. He shook his head and smiled.

"Nothing, my dear fellow," he murmured, "and yet everything. Something is going to happen, as I've said before; but just what it is, and where or when it will happen, I haven't more than the vaguest notion. Meantime, I'm emulating our friend Brer Rabbit and lyin' low!"

Pycroft grunted.

Locke had a very tantalising way with him sometimes—a habit of arousing one's highest expectations and then dashing them to the ground again by side-tracking direct questions. At least, that was what Pycroft thought about it.

"In every murder—in fact, every crime," said Locke, breaking the silence again, "there is almost always a motive, though that motive is not always easily perceived. In the present case, I think the motive is as plain as you can expect

to find it. The person—man or woman—who killed Sir Merton was out to get something. In plain terms, it is my belief that the murderer was after the secret of the Golden Pyramid—or, rather, the secret which that amazing little stone eventually revealed to Sir Merton himself.

"You will remember, Pycroft, that the pyramid gave direction for Sir Merton to go to a place called Devil's Spruit, and there dig the ground. Evidently he did so, and evidently, too, he found that extraordinary so-called 'treasure' in the old biscuit-tin, in the shape of a childishly written letter and a cheque for five hundred thousand pounds."

"It seems equally certain that Sir Merton proceeded no further, except that he presented the cheque, and, of course, had it returned, dishonoured, by the bank."

"Evidently he became disgusted, regarding the whole thing as an ill-timed practical joke, and tried to forget all about it. But just why he should continue to hoard up the contents of that old biscuit-tin, and the tin itself, is still something of a mystery."

"Maybe he hoped later on to discover something new about it—some hidden secret," suggested Pycroft sagely.

"That's so," agreed Locke. "But at any rate, I think we may assume that he had not done any such thing up to the time of his death."

"Meantime, we have the fact of Bristow's escape from Stonemoor—a marvellously ingenious business, for he not only succeeded in eluding capture in England, he managed, too, to get all the way to Johannesburg, and even to his late uncle's house."

"What did he come here for? His own statement, made to me, was to the effect that he was down and out, that his original job was to find another man, a pal he had made in gaol, and who had since 'double-crossed' him, and that he had broken into this house to steal because he was 'broke.'"

"How much of his story you can believe is open to question. Maybe it's all false. I don't know. Certainly his subsequent behaviour suggests that he was trying to hoodwink me."

"Yet, why should he do so? Why should he have deliberately hunted me out, come to see me, knowing as he did that he was an escaped convict, that he was also liable to immediate arrest on the charge of murder?"

"According to what Jack and you, Pycroft, experienced in that house in Vrededorp, Bristow had had a shave and a general clean-up, was sporting an eye-glass, and once more looked his old self. It suggests that he feels pretty safe. It also suggests that he's got some big stunt on—something at which we can only remotely guess."

"But something connected with Sir Merton's death?" suggested Pycroft.

"Undoubtedly," nodded Locke. "Else why go to such pains to kidnap you and Jack? He told you both, openly enough, that he wanted that old biscuit-tin and its contents, evidently believing that they hold some secret. But if he broke into this house, even if he did not murder his uncle—which is open to doubt both ways—why didn't he take the tin and its contents there and then?"

"He says he found Sir Merton dying, in precisely the position in which Griggs, the valet, found him at lunch-time. One must reasonably infer that Bristow also saw the open safe and its contents strewn about the floor—contents which included the biscuit-tin and what it contained. Why, then, didn't he seize his chance on the spot, and take it?"

"Then there are the clues we've picked up since. Aside from the contents of the biscuit-tin, there's Sir Merton's diary, the fragments of charred paper which I found in the fire-grate in this room, and the two pieces of shellac—one of them in this room, and the other at the house in Vrededorp."

Locke broke off, and, opening a small valise that stood on end beside his chair, carefully extracted the diary, turning its pages thoughtfully.

"Most of it is in shorthand," he murmured, "but I can read it easily—evidently Sir Merton was a very good shorthand-writer."

"Here, for instance, is a note of his experiences on the voyage out from England. And here is the date of his arrival in Johannesburg, followed by a note about his departure for Devil's Spruit when—"

He turned a few pages, scrutinising each closely as he did so.

"Ah, and here is a report of his find at Devil's Spruit!" he went on. "It reads: 'After digging some five feet I found the biscuit-tin with its absurd contents, obviously written by Piet de Jongh, but equally obviously ridiculous. An ill-mannered joke, practised on one who had tried all along to be the man's friend. Have kept the biscuit-tin pro tem.'"

"A couple of weeks later," went on Locke, turning the pages of the diary once more, "we find Sir Merton is back in Johannesburg. Listen to this: 'Have looked away the biscuit-tin and its contents. Might be something in it, but I haven't the time nor the inclination to go into it now. Bank returned cheque marked "RD." and Phillips, the manager, openly laughed when I spoke to him about it. Said De Jongh had once had a small account with one of the bank's small branches in the Cape Province, but it had never exceeded fifty pounds. Have come to the conclusion that De Jongh must have gone mad—sunstroke, or something.'"

Locke laid aside the diary at last. "There are other and later entries," he said, "which may prove important. But

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meantime I want to have a look at those charred fragments of paper."

He took them from his pocket and spread them out on the table before him. There were about three in all—mere fragments on which appeared to be a few broken lines of typewriting.

Locke endeavoured to piece them together, but without success—they had evidently been too badly burned to enable him to make much sense out of them.

Two out of the three fragments Locke eventually discarded as valueless. The third, however, he studied closely for some moments, and Pycroft, staring over his shoulder, could just make out a few fugitive words:

"... X's inven test will show able of development . . . ng . . . entific lines one, elaborated, by means of a new dis which enables cording of the ice . . ."

"Absolute gibberish!" granted Pycroft, after a few moments.

"As it stands—yes," murmured Locke; "but originally it was probably a most important document. Take these isolated words, for instance. They might read something like this—"

And Locke began to write on a sheet of blank paper at his side, glancing now and again at the charred fragment.

"X's invention—test will show—capable of development along scientific lines—one—elaborated, by means of a new discovery which enables—"

"Fraid that's as far as I can get!" he muttered rather disappointedly at last. "Obviously it is some document dealing with an invention—probably a scientific report on the invention's possibilities."

Suddenly an idea came to him, and he picked up the diary again, turning its pages rapidly.

"If only Sir Merton had kept this diary up-to-date," he muttered, as he studied the pages, "there might be something—Ah, what's this?"

He stopped, and began reading some of the neatly written shorthand signs, while Pycroft, who was not a shorthand writer, watched him almost breathlessly.

"The last entry in this book," said Locke at last, "was made just two days before the murder."

"It is a long entry, mostly taken up with a summary of Sir Merton's business visit to Natal, from which, you will remember, he had only just returned."

"But at the end there are just a few words. Listen: 'X is bringing the latest model of his invention for me to see some time this week. I hope it comes up to expectations. I mentioned it to Ryley, at the Rand Club only to-day, and he laughed and described it as a lot of scatter-brained nonsense, but I am inclined to think there's something in it. At any rate, we shall know all about it when it is actually tested in my presence.'"

"That's all," said Locke, looking up. "But it fits in pretty well with the fragments on this charred paper."

"But what on earth does it mean?" asked Pycroft doubtfully. "And who is this mysterious person 'X,' anyway?"

Locke smiled. "The unknown quantity, at present," he murmured.

Then, rising, he stretched himself and yawned.

"I'm off to bye-byes," he said. "It's past eleven, and I'm owing the bed several hours as it is!"

"But what about Jack Drake?" asked Pycroft somewhat anxiously.

"Oh, he'll be all right!" answered Locke. "He'll take greater care this

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time, after his experience at Vrededorp. You can bet!"

"Shall I stay up?"

"Stay up? My dear fellow, what for? I don't suppose anything'll happen to-night, in spite of my premonitions. Besides, you need a good rest yourself, especially after the agonies you endured at the hands of those fiends. Good-night, old chap!"

"Good-night—happy dreams," returned the C.I.D. man cheerfully.

And Locke made his way upstairs to Jarrad's room, where he prepared to retire.

Pycroft followed almost immediately, switching out the lights as he went, and then the big house was wrapped in silence, for, of course, the servants had long since retired.

Ferrers Locke did not, however, fully disrobe. Something—he could not tell what—seemed persistently to warn him to be on his guard.

He clambered into bed only half undressed, and, switching off the light, lay thinking for some time, till at last sleep took him unawares.

But he sat up with a jerk barely two hours later.

A confused chaos of sounds had percolated through into his slumbers, insistently dinning at his sub-consciousness until at last he awoke, to find passing backwards and forwards before his eyes a succession of weird, grating shadows, accompanied by much scuffling and panting of breath.

He sprang out of bed in a flash, and then fell staggering backwards as the shadows—now most uncomfortably substantial—bumped heavily into him and swayed past him, knocking over a chair and then a table in their mad struggle.

Locke dashed across the room towards the electric switch, for he realised that it was useless to attempt to join in the mad affray without more light. The two men seemed inextricably locked in a deadly embrace, and were obviously fighting wildly, desperately for mastery.

But barely had Locke's hand touched the switch when there came a sudden flash and a sharp report, followed by a low cry.

The figures separated just as the detective's finger pressed down the switch and flooded the room with light. At the same instant the door was thrown open, and Pycroft in night attire appeared on the threshold.

"What the—!" he began.

But Locke, with a sudden shout, had thrust him aside, and was pounding towards the french windows in the wake of a rapidly disappearing figure.

(What are these two intruders doing in the room lately occupied by Stephen Jarrad, and why are they fighting? Next week's magnificent instalment of this powerful mystery serial will give you the answer. Don't miss it, boys. Don't forget either the four beautiful Free Gifts given away with next week's MAGNET.)

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TO AND FROM YOUR EDITOR!

FOUR FREE GIFTS NEXT WEEK!

THESE topping stand-up cut-out photos of famous cricketers, of which such a lot has been said recently, will definitely appear with next week's bumper issue of your favourite paper. There is little need for me to praise these FREE GIFTS—they will speak for themselves, apart from which you now know all there is to know about them. Perhaps I might stress the point that, instead of TWO CUT-OUT PHOTOS, as was originally intended, each Magnetite will now receive FOUR of these beautiful two-colour photos each week! Having said that, I will leave you to judge for yourselves the quality of the Free Gifts, feeling perfectly assured beforehand that you will be eager to collect the entire set. Next Monday, then:

OUR COMPETITION!

To make things easier for anyone who has missed those issues of the paper containing the first four sets of the "Famous Cricketers" Competition I am going to republish the whole lot next Monday, so that everyone will have a fair chance of bagging something from the gigantic prize list. See to it, boys, that you make the most of this opportunity.

"TOMBOY!"

I have received a real chummy letter from an ardent reader of the "Companion Papers" who is of the fair sex. She has every right to use the pseudonym of "Tomboy," for my girl chum states that she can play cricket—howling real overlanders—and football; she can skate, climb trees, ride a boy's bicycle, walk on stilts—quite a ticklish business that—and participates in all the pastimes of the average boy. Splendid! My girl chum is obviously a sport—a typical member of our great band of Magnetites. She wants to know whether I could reproduce in the MAGNET photographs of the leading lights at Greyfriars. Strangely enough, I had made up my mind to do so a few days ago. Look out, then, "Tomboy," for a series of photos of Harry Wharton & Co.—they'll be appearing in the MAGNET very shortly.

A GREAT COMEDIAN!

It might interest my readers to know that Herbert Mundin, the famous comedian, who has made such a success in "Charlot's Revue," has read the MAGNET without a break since he was seven years old. Even when he was on Active Service during the Great War the MAGNET went the weekly round with him. In America, too, where Mr. Mundin delighted American audiences for a year, he did not lose touch with the MAGNET—it was sent out to him every week. "I find nearly all my best jokes in the MAGNET," he says. Bravo, Mr. Mundin. We are proud to have

you with us, proud of this proof that the MAGNET still offers such good fare as it offered in the days gone by. Good luck to you!

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