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No. 915. Vol. XXVIII.
Week Ending August 22nd, 1925.

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HERE is the Final Set of six puzzle-pictures in our "Famous Cricketers" Competition, but even now it is not too late to enter. All you have to do is to order last week's issue of MAGNET, dated August 15th, from your newsagent, without delay, for you will find that in that number we reprinted all the picture-sets to date as well as the complete List of Cricketers' Names.

THE WAY TO WIN

is to make out the answer to each of the puzzle-pictures in this Final Set, as well as those in the earlier sets, and write it **IN INK** in the space underneath. Every name represented by a puzzle-picture will be found in the List of Names which we printed last week. Only one solution must be written under each picture.

HOW TO SEND IN YOUR ENTRIES.

When you have decided on the solutions to all the puzzles in this week's set you should sign the coupon, **IN INK**, and cut out the whole tablet. Now gather together the previous puzzle-sets which you have been keeping by you, and attach them to the Sixth Set.

Remember that each effort must be a complete solution of the whole series of six puzzles; that is, Sets Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive.

Then place your effort in an envelope and post to:—

"Famous Cricketers" Competition,
c/o MAGNET,

Gough House, Gough Square,
London, E.C. 4 (Comp.).

so as to reach that address not later than **THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3rd**, the amended Closing Date.

YOU MUST ADHERE STRICTLY TO THESE RULES.

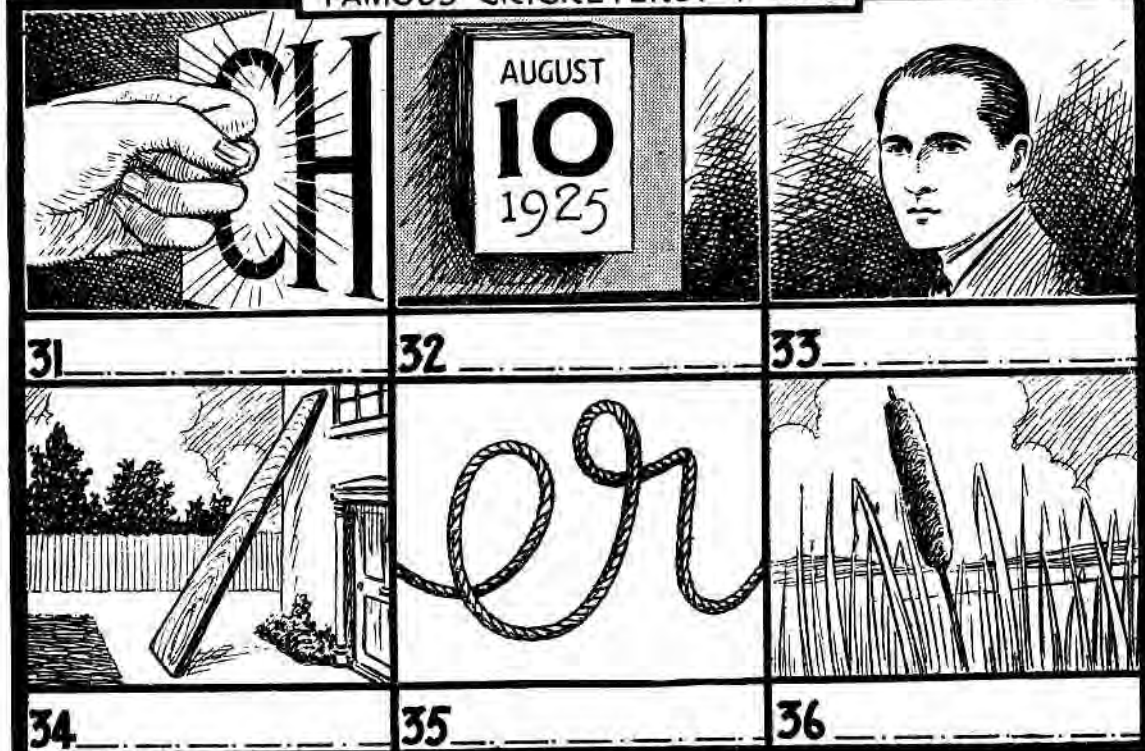
The first prize will be awarded to the reader who sends a correct, or most nearly correct, solution of the six sets of puzzle-pictures. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

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 6



In entering "Famous Cricketers" Competition I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final. "Magnet"

Name

Address

AMENDED CLOSING DATE, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3rd, 1925.

"Yurrrggghh! You cheeky rotter! Walsingham!"

"By Jove!"

"Grrrrrrrr! I won't bring you any more grub, you ungrateful rotters! Grooooooogh!"

"Great pip!"

Bunter was not awake yet. Slumber's golden chain had evidently bound him very tight. Johnny Bull's shaking was apparently forming a part of his horrid dream, and, from his grunting ejaculations, it seemed that he was dreaming that he was in the grasp of Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, and Walsingham, the late butler of Combermere Lodge. Though why Bunter should be dreaming of those two individuals was a mystery to the Famous Five. It would have been more like Bunter to be dreaming of his dinner.

"Yurrrgggh! Leggo! Springing on a chap like a tiger! Ow! Wow! I'll jolly well leave you to starve! Ow! Grooogh!"

"Wake up!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Gurrrgggggg!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!

Tommy Bull put his beef into it and administered a series of shakes that would have awakened Rip Van Winkle or Epimenides of old.

Bunter's little round eyes opened behind his big spectacles, and he blinked dazedly at the chums of the Remove.

"Grooogh!"

"Bunter—"

"Pilkins, you rotter—"

Crash!

"Oh!" roared Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter's fat fist came out with unexpected suddenness, and it landed on Johnny's nose with a terrific smite. Johnny Bull went over backwards, as if a cannon-ball had smitten him. A lacquer table with a coffee-tray on it was in Johnny's way, and it flew, and coffee cups crashed right and left as Johnny Bull sprawled on the floor.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

"OH!" roared Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter jumped up. The mists were clearing from his fat brain, and he realised that he was in the presence of the Greyfriars fellows, not of Pilkins, the estate agent, and Walsingham, the butler.

He blinked rather dizzily at the juniors.

"I—I—I've been asleep!" he gasped.

"Go hon!" said Bob Cherry, with deep sarcasm.

"I must have been dreaming," said Bunter. "I thought it was—ahem!—I mean, I didn't think—"

Johnny Bull scrambled up. There was a crimson smear on his nose, and there was fury in his face. He did not speak; he hurled himself at Bunter, and his comrades grabbed him and dragged him back, only just in time.

"Let go!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Hold on!"

"I'm going to smash him!"

"Hold on, you ass!"

"Look at my nose!"

"Bother your nose!" said Bob Cherry, holding the infuriated Johnny back by main force. "You can't punch your giddy host! Remember your manners, old man."

"I say, you fellows keep him off!" yelled Bunter.

All serene, fatty!"

"Look at my nose!" raved Johnny Bull.

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"Well, you asked for it," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I didn't know it was your silly nose. I thought it was Pilkins—"

"Why the thump should you want to punch Pilkins' nose, even if you thought it was Pilkins?" demanded Nugent.

"Because— I mean—I didn't—"

"What?"

"I mean, I didn't think it was Pilkins! That was what I really meant to say," stammered Bunter.

"Chuck it, Johnny, old man!" said Harry Wharton soothingly. "You woke Bunter up rather suddenly, you know, and he didn't know it was your nose he was punching."

"Look at it!" breathed Johnny Bull sulphurously.

"Better go and bathe it, old chap."

Johnny Bull nodded, and tramped out of the room. He realised that it would not do to punch the fat junior who was his host at Bunter Court. He simply yearned to punch him; but he sagely went to bathe his nose instead. There was no doubt that it needed bathing.

"All right now, fatty?" asked Nugent. "You were making a horrid row, you know. We heard you from the terrace."

"I was dreaming," grunted Bunter. "Those two beasts sprang on me— I mean, they didn't spring on me—"

"What two beasts?"

"Nobody—nothing! I mean, it was a nightmare," said Bunter hurriedly. "I—I say, you fellows, have I been saying anything?"

The Owl of the Remove blinked with deep suspicion at the Famous Five. They stared at him in return.

It was obvious that Bunter feared that he had talked in his sleep, and given away some deep secret that he was anxious to keep from the knowledge of his guests.

"You were gurgling and groaning," said Harry. "Chattering a lot of rot, too."

"Oh! Did—did I mention any names?"

"Yes, Pilkins and Walsingham."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows it ain't cricket to listen to a chap talking in his sleep, finding out his private affairs—"

"You cheeky owl!" roared Wharton. "We came in to wake you because we thought you were suffocating. Do you think we want to know anything about your silly affairs, you chump?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I'd jolly well kick you, only—"

The captain of the Remove paused, remembering, like Johnny Bull, that he was Bunter's guest. Really, it would not have been a seemly proceeding to kick his host, much as his host deserved it.

"No offence, old chap!" said Bunter hurriedly. "What are you getting your rag out for? I haven't said anything to offend you, have I?"

Wharton stared at him, and burst into a laugh. It was not much use to take Billy Bunter seriously. Apparently, he saw nothing offensive in accusing fellows of listening and prying.

"Look here, if I've said anything, you fellows tell me what I said," exclaimed Bunter anxiously.

"What the dickens does it matter?"

"It does matter!" snapped Bunter.

"Blessed if I remember—something about Pilkins and Walsingham, and bringing grub to somebody."

Bunter jumped.

"Oh, crumbs! Is—is—is that all?"

"That's all I remember," said Harry.

"You seem to have been dreaming that Pilkins and Walsingham were in the

house, and that they had sprung on you. You overdid it at dinner."

"Of course, that was it," said Bunter, relieved. "Just indigestion, of course. Nothing in it, you know."

"Of course not," said Harry blankly. "Pilkins and Walsingham are not here, and if they were, you wouldn't be scrapping with them, I suppose. What do you mean?"

"Nothing, old chap."

"Well, if you're all right, we'll get back to D'Arcy," said Wharton. "Better cut supper to-night, or you'll have it again."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Well!"

"Did I say anything about the wine-cellar?"

"The wine-cellar!" ejaculated Wharton. "Not that I heard! I suppose you weren't dreaming about the wine-cellar?"

"Yes—I mean, no! Of course not!" said Bunter. "Why should I be dreaming about wine-cellar? Ridiculous!"

Nugent and Bob and Hurree Singh went back to the terrace. But Bunter laid a fat hand on Wharton's arm and detained him. He blinked at the captain of the Remove with great uneasiness.

"I say, Harry, old chap—"

"Well?" said Wharton, rather curtly. He was Bunter's guest, but he did not wholly like "Harry, old chap" from the Owl of the Remove.

"You—you're sure I didn't say anything more?"

"Not that I noticed."

"Honest injun?" asked Bunter.

"Yes, you ass!" said Harry impatiently. "For goodness' sake, Bunter, don't be such an ass! Anybody might think that you had some awfully shady secret, and were afraid you'd let it out."

"Nothing of the kind, of course!" gasped Bunter, in alarm. "Don't you run away with a silly idea like that, Wharton! I haven't got any secret."

"You jolly well talk as if you had," growled Wharton.

"What rot! You're suspicious, you know."

"What?"

"It's jolly low to be suspicious," said Bunter, shaking his head at the captain of the Remove in a manner of lofty admonition.

Harry Wharton breathed hard and deep. It was useless to take Bunter seriously; but some of the fat junior's manners and customs were hard to tolerate. Wharton shook off the fat hand, and walked out on the terrace.

"I'm going to bed," called out Bunter. "I suppose you fellows will be going soon?"

"Yes. Good-night!"

"Good-night, old chap!"

Billy Bunter rolled away. He wanted to finish his nap; but, apparently, he would not trust himself to finish it in the chair. Obviously, he was afraid that he had let out some secret, though what that secret could possibly be was a perplexing puzzle to the chums of the Remove. But in the great four-poster bed in Lord Combermere's state bed-room, Bunter's secrets were safe—he could mumble and grumble as much as he liked without fear of being overheard.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Poor Old Bunter!

HARRY WHARTON'S brow was thoughtful as he sank into his chair on the terrace. He was troubled in mind.

Many times since Greyfriars School had broken-up for the holidays, and the

Famous Five had come "home" with Bunter, misgivings had vaguely troubled the captain of the Remove.

In the case of any fellow but Bunter, his misgivings would have been deeper. But he was so accustomed to the fibbing and swanking of the Owl of the Remove, that finding Bunter out in a few "whoppers" was a trifle. The discovery that "Bunter Court," the ancestral home of the Bunters, was in reality Combermere Lodge, taken furnished for the summer, had not really surprised the chums of the Remove; it was in keeping with the Bunter they knew so well. It was exactly like William George Bunter to swank in that palpable way, and to roll out enormous fibs that were certain to be detected in a short time.

If Bunter chose to call the house 'Bunter Court,' and to spin various incompatible yarns on the subject, it was his own business, and just what might have been expected of him.

And if that was all, there was no occasion to worry. Certainly, it would have been an improvement had Bunter kept to the truth. But nobody could expect such an extraordinary improvement as that in Bunter.

But was that all? Fibbing was to be expected from Bunter, as really he hardly seemed to know the difference between truth and untruth. Swank was to be expected from him, as he loved to "spread" himself, and magnify his importance. But it was beginning to look to Wharton as if the matter was more serious.

If Mr. Bunter could afford to pay forty guineas a week for a summer residence for his son, it was odd, to say the least, that he left his son unprovided with any ready cash. And Bunter, while he revelled in the magnificence of Bunter Court, was as impecunious as when he had borrowed "bobs" and sixpences in the Greyfriars Remove. He had cleared out his guests of most of their ready money in a series of little loans; and Wharton more than suspected that he had also raided Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's supplies, though the St. Jim's junior had breathed no word on the subject.

Moreover, it was known that, although the tenant of the Lodge was responsible for the wages of the servants left behind by Lord Combermere, no wages had been paid since Bunter came into possession.

Lavish tips had been distributed to keep the numerous members of the household in good humour; but it was clear enough that the cash thus expended had been drawn from Bunter's guests.

Magnificent orders had been handed out to the Combermere tradesmen, who had been glad enough to send their goods up to the big house. But bills had not been paid; as the juniors had learned when Horrocks, the butcher, paid a visit to the house loudly demanding settlement.

Bunter, apparently, was running the whole thing on tick; and if there was no money behind, the situation was serious.

And yet it seemed impossible that Bunter could have got hold of such a place, unless his father had gone through the necessary negotiations with the estate agent who had the letting of the furnished house.

Mr. Pilkins, the agent, could scarcely have let the house to anyone without satisfying himself as to that person's bona fides. Walsingham, the butler left in charge by the noble owner, would hardly have admitted a tenant unless



"Wake up!" roared Johnny Bull. "Gurrrrrggggg!" Shake, shake, shake! Johnny Bull put his beef into it. Bunter's little round eyes opened behind his spectacles, and he blinked dazedly at the juniors. "Wake up, Bunter!" Crash! Bunter's fist came out with unexpected suddenness, and it landed on Johnny Bull's nose! (See Chapter 1.)

assured by Mr. Pilkins that he could safely do so.

Those considerations had reassured Wharton, when misgivings had arisen in his mind.

For what extraordinary series of tricks, by what extraordinary run of luck, could Bunter have "diddled" the estate agent and the butler? Certainly, he was as full of tricks as a monkey; and there was such a thing as "fool's luck." But it really seemed that he could not have brought off such a coup; and it seemed improbable that even Bunter could be as enough to pile up enormous liabilities that he could never meet.

But Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, had disappeared, and Parker, his clerk, suspected that Bunter had somehow cleared him off. The suspicion seemed absurd to Wharton, and yet—the estate-agent was gone, without a word. And Walsingham, the butler, was gone, too; according to Bunter, he had been sent to London on business. Parker believed that Bunter had somehow got rid of the butler because he had found something out. Again, it was absurd—and yet, where was Walsingham?

Wharton could not help feeling worried.

Bunter's mutterings and mumblings, in the grip of nightmare due to indigestion, had put the lid on, as it were.

Why was he dreaming about such persons as Pilkins and Walsingham—dreaming, too, that he was struggling with them. Why were they pictured in his slumbering mind as enemies—Pilkins, who had let him the house, Walsingham, who had been an urbane and deferential butler?

It was mysterious and it was disquieting.

More than once it had been borne in on Wharton's mind that the best thing he and his chums could do was to leave without delay, leaving Billy Bunter to enjoy the magnificence of Bunter Court on his own.

But he did not quite like the idea. If his misgivings were unfounded, and matters were on a solid footing, it was not necessary, and it was scarcely the thing to let Bunter down after accepting his invitation for the holidays.

While, if the fatuous Owl really had got himself into some fearful scrape, by his fatuous folly, Wharton had a feeling that it was up to the Co. to help him out somehow.

And there was D'Arcy to consider. Wharton certainly did not care to communicate his uneasy misgivings to the St. Jim's junior. He did not want to tell Arthur Augustus that he suspected a schoolfellow of his own of being a wholesale "bilk." But going away and

leaving D'Arcy in the dark, was not cricket. If a crash was coming, as Parker had warned him, it would not be playing the game, to clear off and leave the unsuspecting St. Jim's junior in the midst of it.

Worried as he was, Wharton felt that it was up to him, at least, to stay on till D'Arcy's week at the Lodge came to an end. Then he could decide whether to stay or go.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—in the intervals of tenderly caressing the bump on his aristocratic head—glanced several times at Wharton's frowning, thoughtful face.

"What's the wowwy, old man?" he asked, at last.

Wharton started a little.

"Oh! I was thinking—"

"About Buntah?"

"Well, yes!" Wharton looked attentively at the swell of St. Jim's. He wondered whether some misgiving had penetrated even into Gussy's innocent and unsuspecting mind.

"It's wathah wuff on him, isn't it?" said D'Arcy. "He mentioned it to me, you know."

Wharton started again.

"He's told you—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat! Then you know how he's fixed?"

"Oh, yaas!"

"Oh," said Harry, puzzled. "If I may put the question, D'Arcy, has he asked you to help him out in any way?"

"Not at all, deah boy; you see there's nothin' I can do," said Arthur Augustus. "I could only advise him to see a doctor."

"A doctor?" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yaas; though weally, my pwivate opinion is that if old Buntah would eat a little less, he would find it all wight."

"Eat a little less?" said Harry blankly.

"Yaas, wathah."

"I—I don't quite follow," said Harry.

"Do you mean that the bills would be smaller if Bunter went easier on the tuck?"

"Eh? Buntah isn't wowwied about bills, is he?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

Wharton bit his lip. Evidently it was not of Bunter's financial difficulties that the swell of St. Jim's was thinking.

"You said that Bunter had mentioned something to you, and you know how he's fixed," said Harry. "What were you speaking of?"

"His sleep-walkin', you know."

"His what?" almost yelled the captain of the Remove.

"Didn't you know, deah boy?"

"Eh! No!"

"The poor chap suffahs fwom somnambulism, so he told me," said Arthur Augustus. "That feahful nightmare you woke him out of is somethin' of the same sort, I suppose. What?"

"Oh!" said Harry blankly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is Bunter a jolly old sleepwalker, then?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I suppose you fellows knew, of course," said D'Arcy. "I happened to mention to him that I heard somebody movin' about at night, you know, and he explained that he was subject to sleepwalkin', and that if I ever happened to see him about at night, that was the weason."

"Oh, my hat!"

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances.

They remembered a certain night, during their stay at Bunter Court, when

they had found Bunter wandering about the house at midnight, and had taken him for a burglar.

Evidently he had been night-wandering again; and apparently there might be more of it, as he had furnished D'Arcy with this explanation in advance, as it were.

Bunter, certainly, had not been sleep-walking the night they had taken him for a burglar. He had been very wide awake indeed.

This was, in fact, one more of his unnumbered "whoppers." For some utterly inexplicable reason, Bunter roamed the house when everybody else was in bed, and a story of somnambulism had come into his fat mind as a plausible explanation to give of his amazing proceedings.

Undoubtedly, Bunter was at liberty to walk about his own house at any hour of the night or day. But it was extraordinary. Bunter was the last fellow in the world to leave his comfortable bed at night except for the most powerful reasons. What reason could he possibly have?

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the surprised faces of the Famous Five.

"You fellows didn't know?" he asked.

"No fear!" said Johnny Bull. "I know he trots about at night sometimes, but goodness knows why."

"We found him one night, and collared him for a giddy burglar!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "He babbled something about the wine-cellar."

"Bai Jove! Buntah doesn't dwink, surely?"

"Ha, ha! No. But he keeps the key of the wine-cellar about him, for some reason. Perhaps he's afraid we shall raid the giddy wine-bins!"

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"Yaas, I wemembah he lost the key and I found it and handed it to the butlah, not knowin' it was his. He seemed feahfully upset about it."

"That was the day Walsingham went," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully.

"It's vewy wuff on poor old Buntah to be twoubled with sleep-walkin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "You see, a fellow might fall downstairs, or somethin'. I have been thinkin' ovah this vewy sewiously. My ideah is that Buntah would find it all wight if he put away wathah less in the gwub line. Of course, it's wathah a delicate mattah to mention; but a little advice might be vewy useful to him. I have been wondahin' whethah to give Buntah a hint on the subject. He might not like it!"

And Arthur Augustus looked very seriously at the Greyfriars fellows.

They grinned.

"I don't think a hint would keep Bunter away from tuck!" chuckled Bob. "I rather fancy that wild horses couldn't do that!"

"Yaas, but sleep-walkin' is a howwid thing, you know."

"Hem! Very!" agreed Bob.

The chums of the Remove did not feel called upon to explain that this was only one more of Bunter's "whoppers." Bunter was, after all, their host.

Thomas, the footman—promoted butler since the departure of Walsingham—hovered on the terrace. Wharton looked at his watch.

"Nearly ten!" he said. "Who says bed?"

"Bed!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Bunter's house-party dispersed to their rooms.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

At Dead of Night!

"WOTTEN!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy addressed that remark to space.

His weary head was turning on his pillow, wooing slumber, but wooing in vain.

It was past midnight, and the great house of Combermere was very still and silent.

Long since, the last door had closed; the last sleepy head had sunk upon a pillow. But D'Arcy was still wakeful.

The bump on his noble head was the cause. Billy Bunter had bowled, not wisely, but too well, when he landed the cricket-ball upon the aristocratic "napper" of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was a large bump, and it was a painful bump, and it kept Arthur Augustus wide awake.

He had dozed for a time, and awakened again. Then he had turned on the light and read his "Holiday Annual" for an hour or so. Then his tired eyes blinked, and he switched off the light and sought his pillow. But he sought slumber there in vain. If he dozed off for a few minutes he was sure to wake up again.

It was, as he remarked, rotten.

He was tired, and he was sleepy, and he could not sleep. That aching bump was sure to awaken him if he nodded off. He turned his tired head on the pillow again and again, and still sleep would not come.

"Wotten!" groaned the swell of St. Jim's. "Weally wotten, bai Jove! That howlin' ass Buntah ought to be pwohibited fwom playin' cwicket! Bangin' a cwicket-ball on a fellow's nappah, bai Jove! Oh deah!"

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed.

Moonlight glimmered in at the windows. It was a beautiful summer's night. Arthur Augustus thought of the moonlit terrace, and wondered whether a stroll there would help to banish his restlessness. But the house was locked up. And D'Arcy was a considerate fellow; he did not want to disturb anybody. But sitting in bed, sleepless and restless, was a bore, and he was fed-up.

He turned out of bed, and slipped on a dressing-gown over his beautiful silk pyjamas, and put his elegant feet into a pair of soft slippers. Then he went to his door.

Outside there was a wide corridor, with a large window at one end, through which the moonlight streamed. The other end of the corridor gave upon the great landing, below which lay the staircase in deep darkness. Arthur Augustus paced along the corridor, finding relief in motion, and hoping to make himself sleepy by constant movement.

Up and down the corridor he went, soundless in his soft slippers, occasionally running his hand tenderly over the bruise on his head. As he was Billy Bunter's guest, he did not like to think hard things of Bunter; but he would really have liked to tell the Owl of the Remove what he thought of him as a cricketer. It was too bad to be pacing a lonely corridor like this towards one in the morning, simply because Billy Bunter fancied that he could bowl.

A sudden sound in the silent house caught his ear, and he stopped.

The sound thrilled him for a moment. For, soft and stealthy as it was, it was unmistakably a footstep; and a footstep in the house at that hour was

startling. The thought of burglars came into Gussy's mind at once.

But the next moment he smiled.

"Buntah, of course!" he murmured.

The footsteps came from a branch corridor, on which, as he knew, was the door of the Combermere state bed-room now occupied by Billy Bunter. He had no doubt that it was Bunter who was abroad at that late hour—sleep-walking!

It had never occurred to D'Arcy's unsuspecting mind to doubt Bunter's mendacious statement.

That Bunter had some secret motive for wandering about the house at night, and that he had invented a story to account for it, was not likely to occur to the swell of St. Jim's.

He knew Bunter well enough by this time to suspect his veracity if Bunter had any motive for lying. But in this case no motive was discoverable, so he believed the statement without thinking about it.

So Arthur Augustus kept his eyes on the corner of the corridor as the stealthy footsteps approached, fully expecting to see Bunter appear in the dim moonlight, and fully believing that the fat junior would be in the grip of somnambulism.

A fat figure, fully dressed, emerged into dim view.

It was Bunter.

D'Arcy had a glimpse of his face, with the moonlight glinting on the Owl's big spectacles. He noted, too, that Bunter had a bag in his hand.

Without glancing in D'Arcy's direction, the Owl of the Remove glided stealthily on towards the stairs.

In the dim moonlight from the high windows he would probably not have seen D'Arcy had he looked in his direction; he was too short-sighted for that. But his absolute unconsciousness that there was a fellow standing in the cross-passage seemed to D'Arcy to indicate that Bunter was, without doubt, fast asleep as he walked.

Indeed, any casual observer might well have supposed the same. Had Bunter been, like D'Arcy himself, taking a stroll from sleeplessness, he would hardly have been carrying a bag in his hand and stealing along swiftly like a fellow with a fixed destination.

If he was not sleep-walking, obviously he was making a secret expedition with something in the bag—which was so improbable that D'Arcy naturally did not think of it at all.

"Pooah old Buntah!" murmured D'Arcy.

He made a step towards the dim figure in the distance and then stopped.

His first idea was to wake Bunter and get him back to his bed-room. But he recollected in time that it is said to be dangerous to awaken a sleepwalker; liable to cause a severe shock to the nervous system of the unhappy victim of somnambulism.

So Arthur Augustus stopped quite suddenly. The throbbing bump on his head, which he owed to Bunter, did not diminish his sympathy for the Owl of the Remove. He was deeply concerned about Bunter, especially as the supposed somnambulist was obviously heading for the stairs.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus in distress. "Pooah old Buntah! I must not startle him—might have a fearful effect on the pooah fellow's nerves! But I can't let him wip! If he wakes up suddenly and finds him wandewin' downstairs he will feel howwid."

Arthur Augustus trod softly on Bunter's trail.

In his soft slippers he made no sound, and he was very careful indeed to make no noise that could alarm Bunter.

His intention was to keep an eye on the somnambulist, and see that he came to no harm. If Bunter showed a sign of falling, he would rush on and catch him at the risk of waking him suddenly. But he had read that sleepwalkers have a wonderful sureness of foot; often, indeed, walking where in waking hours they could not walk. And as he watched the dim figure flitting ahead, he was soon assured that Bunter was in no danger of falling. So all there was for D'Arcy to do was to keep a careful eye on him, and render any assistance that might be needed—especially if Bunter woke up suddenly before wandering back to his bed. His feelings, in such a case, finding himself downstairs alone in the dark would be horrid—and then a friendly hand and a friendly voice would be invaluable to him.

But for D'Arcy's fixed conviction that Bunter was walking in his sleep, he would perhaps have doubted whether the fat junior was acting quite like a somnambulist.

He went down the staircase with a sure step, and paused in the great hall of Combermere.

Then he stopped, and seemed to be blinking round him, like a fellow who was wide awake and afraid of ghosts.

D'Arcy watched him over the banisters.

Bunter moved again in a few moments, and disappeared into the gloom of a passage leading past the butler's room.

D'Arcy hurried down the stairs.

Combermere Lodge was an immense building, and the St. Jim's junior did not want to lose Bunter in the mazes of the great house.

A glimmer of light struck his eyes.

The somnambulist—if such he was—had turned on a pocket electric torch. D'Arcy was quite startled for a moment. But he realised that sleepwalkers are very likely to act just as if they are broad awake. It did not even yet dawn upon him that Bunter was not a sleep-walker at all.

The Owl of the Remove stopped at a vaulted doorway, which D'Arcy knew to be the opening of the wine-cellars.

There he fumbled in a pocket and produced a key.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

It was the key of the wine-cellars which Bunter always carried about



The light from the torch flashed on the pale, startled face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the staircase, and Billy Bunter stopped dead, with a startled gasp. "Who—what—" "Buntah!" gasped D'Arcy. "Oh, crikey!" panted Bunter. (See Chapter 4.)

with him, for reasons utterly inexplicable to his guests. He had lost it once, and D'Arcy, finding it, had naturally handed it to the butler—a circumstance which had disturbed Bunter greatly, Gussy could not even guess why. Now, obviously, it was in Bunter's possession again, for he was unlocking the door with it.

The oak door was pushed open, and Bunter stepped through, and vanished.

D'Arcy hurried on to the doorway.

He could hear the footsteps of the fat junior, descending the winding stair to the cellars. Bunter's footsteps were less stealthy now; he was taking less care, now that he was far from the sleeping quarters of the house. The gleam of the torch vanished beyond the bend below.

D'Arcy paused a few moments, and then began to descend the steps.

He was quite alarmed for Bunter now.

It was odd that the somnambulist's wandering footsteps should have led him to such a remote recess as the wine-cellar under Combermere Lodge. That was a dismal and lonely place for a sleep-walker to awaken in suddenly; in such a case, a fellow like Bunter was liable to have a fit from sheer funk. Arthur Augustus debated in his mind whether he had better take the Owl of Greyfriars by the arm and lead him gently back to bed, at the risk of awakening him, lest worse should befall.

Softly, silently, the St. Jim's junior descended the oaken staircase, and the gleam of the electric torch was visible again.

Bunter was standing at the bottom of the stairs, close to an oak door that shut off the staircase from the cellars.

He had slipped the key into the lock, and stood with his fat hand on it, as if hesitating to turn.

There was a faint click, and the electric torch was shut off. All was darkness—thick darkness—and the Owl of the Remove vanished from the gaze of the junior a few steps above him.

D'Arcy stopped, vaguely alarmed.

The lower door was apparently opened by the same key as the upper door; but Bunter, who had not hesitated at the upper door, was hesitating strangely at the lower one.

Had he been awake, conscious of what he was doing, it would have been clear that he feared to open the second door, uneasy of what might lie behind it. But to D'Arcy's unsuspecting mind he was a sleep-walker, and D'Arcy wondered whether this long pause meant that he was about to waken. He wondered whether he had better speak. While he was wondering he heard a muttering voice below; the fat voice of Billy Bunter.

"Beasts!"

Apparently Bunter was talking, as well as walking, in his sleep—if he was asleep!

"Rotters! They ought to be fast asleep now—but suppose they spring on a chap as soon as he opens the door!"

This was so much Greek to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; merely the mumbling of a fellow in a nightmare.

"I've got to chance it—I can't let them starve!" the muttering went on. "Beasts! Trying to bite the hand that feeds them! Rotters!"

Arthur Augustus felt a wave of sympathy.

The bag was explained now; the somnambulist was dreaming that he was taking food to somebody whom he imagined to be in the wine-cellar!

That was how it seemed to Arthur Augustus. It was, indeed, all he could

think—little dreaming of the extraordinary manner in which Billy Bunter had relieved himself of the troublesome Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham the butler.

Another pause.

Then D'Arcy heard the faint sound of a key cautiously turned.

In the dense darkness he knew that the lower door opened—he heard a crash as Bunter's bag was hurled in.

Slam!

The door slammed again almost instantly. But quick as it was, a sound escaped from the cellar—the sound of a human voice calling out something indistinctly.

Arthur Augustus almost fell down the stairs.

There was somebody in the wine-cellar! Somebody was there, and whoever it was, was locked in! Bunter had already turned the key in the lock again, and D'Arcy heard it withdrawn.

As he stood in blank amazement and consternation, he heard a fat chuckle float up from below.

"He, he, he! Neat! He, he, he!"

Thump, thump, thump!

Faintly, for the oak was thick, there came a sound of hammering from the other side of the door.

Arthur Augustus leaned on the wall, almost overcome. Clearly into his mind, at last, it came, that there was somebody in the wine-cellar—a prisoner who was locked in by Billy Bunter! Bunter was not a somnambulist—he was wide awake! He was not dreaming—he was taking food at that silent hour in the dead of night to the prisoner of the wine-cellar!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy understood it now; but the discovery was so amazing, so utterly overwhelming, that he leaned weakly on the staircase wall, almost doubting the evidence of his own senses.

There was a footstep. Bunter was coming up. The gleam of the electric torch was seen again, Bunter dim behind it. The light flashed on the pale, startled face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the staircase, and Billy Bunter stopped dead, with a startled gasp.

"Who—what—"

"Buntah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Oh crikey!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Arthur Augustus Makes Discoveries!

BILLY BUNTER stood transfixed on the wine-cellar staircase, his little round eyes fairly bulging behind his spectacles.

He stared at Arthur Augustus as if the swell of St. Jim's in his natty dressing-gown had been some grisly spectre.

He could not speak; his fat jaw dropped and he blinked at Arthur Augustus in sheer terror.

D'Arcy blinked back at him.

He was so astounded that he did not know what to think, what to surmise. Unless Bunter was mad, there seemed no explanation of his extraordinary actions. A sane fellow could scarcely be keeping a prisoner locked up in the Combermere wine-cellar. And it was indubitable that there was a prisoner there; even yet the faint hammering could be heard on the oaken door.

"Buntah!" gasped D'Arcy again.

It was not a pleasant thought, that of being shut up on a subterranean staircase, far from help, with a lunatic!

"You!" stuttered Bunter.

"Yaas! What—"

"You! You cheeky ass, what are you doing here?" gasped Bunter. "Spying on a chap!"

D'Arcy crimsoned.

"You fat wottah!"

"What?"

"How dare you accuse me of spyin'?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus furiously. "I followed you because I supposed you to be sleep-walkin'; you told me you were subject to it—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Not for the first time, Bunter's "whoppers" had come home to roost, as it were.

Had D'Arcy known him to be awake he certainly never would have dreamed of following Bunter to see what he was doing. The thought of it would not have crossed his mind.

Bunter owed this dismaying discovery to his own tortuous methods—his preference for untruths when truth would have served his purpose at least as well.

"I was afraid somethin' might happen to you!" went on Arthur Augustus. "I was alarmed about you! I believed you were sleep-walkin'—"

"Oh! So—so I was!" gasped Bunter.

"Eh?"

"It's all right. I was—in fact, I am; I'm fast asleep now—"

"What?" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"I—I mean I—I've just woke up!" said Bunter hastily. "I—I say, where am I?"

D'Arcy stared at him. Lying, which was Bunter's usual resource, was his resource now, as a matter of habit. He did not realise that it was, so to speak, a chicken that would no longer fight.

"Where am I?" repeated Bunter.

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Do you think I am goin' to believe you now?"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"I fancied you were sleep-walkin', but it was nothin' of the kind. There is somebody shut up in that cellah, and you were takin' him food."

Bunter jumped.

"Nothing of the kind, old chap! There's nobody there! I haven't pitched a bag of grub in—"

"You uttah duffah, I heard it dwop!"

"I—I mean—"

"There is somebody there!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you are in your wight senses, Buntah, what does it mean?"

"There's nobody there—"

"Bai Jove! I can heah him ham-mewin' on the door, whoever he is!"

Bunter jumped again. Once the upper door was closed that sound of thumping would be inaudible in the house. But on the cellar staircase it was quite audible, though faint through the thick oak.

"Are you deaf, Buntah?" hooted Arthur Augustus. "I suppose you can heah it as well as I."

"Oh! Oh, that!" gasped Bunter.

"That—that's the wind!"

"The wind?" stuttered D'Arcy.

"Yes, old chap! It—it's very windy in—in these cellars, you know. I—I'm going to have it seen to," stammered Bunter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass a little more tightly into his eye and stared at Bunter. In the glimmer of the electric torch Bunter's fat face looked startled, dismayed, but it certainly did not look insane. Bunter was not out of his fat senses, as the swell of St. Jim's had feared. But, that theory being dismissed, there seemed no explanation whatever available to the amazing state of affairs.

But one thing was quite certain. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy meant to know. Whoever it was that was locked up in the wine-cellar was going to be released now that Arthur Augustus knew of his imprisonment. If Bunter was not

"potty," he was acting in a recklessly lawless manner, that was certain, and his unknown victim was entitled to help.

"That's all," said Bunter more confidently. "Merely the wind, old chap. Frightfully windy in these cellars! Let's get back to bed, shall we?"

"I wefuse to go back to bed, Buntah, until this mattah is settled."

"But it's settled now, old chap!" urged Bunter.

"It is not settled, Buntah!"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy—"

"There is someone in that cellah, Buntah, twyrin' to get out. I wefuse to be a partay to such pwoceedin's. I wegwet vewy much that I came heah as your guest; but now I am heah I wefuse to be accessowy to illegal pwoceedin's. Open that door at once!"

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Will you open that door, Buntah, or give me the key?"

"No fear!" said Bunter promptly.

"They'd jolly well spring on me like tigers—"

"I wefuse to allow you to pass, Buntah, until you have unlocked that door!" said Arthur Augustus quietly.

"If you want me to give you a licking, D'Arcy—"

"You are vewy welcome to twy, Buntah!"

"I—I mean, of course, I wouldn't lick an old pal like you, Gussy. Let's get back to bed, and I—I'll explain to-morrow."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind while there is a man locked up in those cellahs!"

"Look here, is this what you call proper behaviour in a guest?" demanded Bunter. "Do you always meddle like this when you're on a visit? I don't think much of St. Jim's manners if you do."

D'Arcy crimsoned.

The swell of St. Jim's rather prided himself upon his polished and unexceptionable manners, and he was touched on his weakest spot. But he did not budge.

to take it fwom you," said the St. Jim's junior.

"I—I say, hold on! I—I'll explain!" gasped Bunter. "The—the fact is—the actual fact—is—is—that—that it isn't safe to open that door. They'd spring on you. I'm only thinking of you, old chap! Your safety, you know! They'd spring on you like—like tigers!"

"Wats!"

"Look here, I'll tell you the whole thing, Gussy!" said Bunter. "It's rather a—a painful story, but I'll tell you, because—because I can trust you, I'm sure. The fact—the actual fact is that—that my uncle—"

"Your uncle?"

"Yes, my uncle, he—he went suddenly mad while on a visit here, and I—I thought I'd better lock him up for a bit. See?"

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

Bunter blinked anxiously at the swell of St. Jim's. To his dismay he saw no sign in D'Arcy's face that that youth,



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, greatly to his astonishment, received a violent shove in the back. "Oh!" The swell of St. Jim's, taken by surprise, staggered forward into the cellar. Slam! Click! Bunter jerked the key out of the lock, grabbed up the torch, and fled up the stairs. (See Chapter 6.)

"Who would?"

"Oh! Nobody! There's nobody there, of course!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Nobody at all," said Bunter. "Merely your fancy, D'Arcy! Let's get back to bed!"

The hammering on the door had stopped. Doubtless the prisoners of the Combermere cellars had hammered on that door often enough, and desisted in despair of being heard. But for once there had been ears to hear. All was silent now; but D'Arcy knew that there was a prisoner in the cellars—indeed, from Bunter's inadvertent admission, he knew that there was more than one.

"Come on, old fellow," said Bunter urgently. "You're losing your sleep, you know."

"I wefuse to stir a step, Buntah!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"Kindly do not call me Gussy, Buntah. I do not wegard you as a friend."

"Let me jolly well pass—and be blowed to you!" exclaimed Bunter angrily.

"I shall not remain your guest, Buntah, aftar to-night," he said. "And I am bound to interfere heah. I cannot leave a person locked up in the cellahs. That is quite imposs. If you are in your wight mind you are committin' a cwise in impwisonin' him there."

Billy Bunter started and blinked indignantly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed. "I suppose a fellow has a right to keep a meddling ass from interfering with him?"

"Not in that way, Buntah, whoever he is. Who is in the cellah?"

"Nobody! Nobody at all!"

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, losing patience. "If you keep on tellin' me sillay lies I will punch your sillay nose, Buntah!"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy! The—the fact is—"

"Give me that key!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I will wesease the man myself!"

"Sha'n't!" retorted Bunter.

"If you wefuse, Buntah, I feel bound

unsuspecting as he was, swallowed that extraordinary explanation.

"You—you see now, D'Arcy?" asked Bunter. "I—I suppose you can take a fellow's word?"

"Bai Jove!"

"It—it's rather a painful story—painful family incident, and all that," said Bunter. "Keep it dark, of course. I rely on you to keep it dark. Now, let's get back to bed, shall we?"

"You fwabjous ass!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Do you think I believe a single word you have said?"

"Oh dear! Don't you?" gasped Bunter.

"Certainly not, you silly ass!"

"Well, look here, D'Arcy, if you can't take my word that there's nobody in the cellar—"

"Take your word that there's nobody in the cellar!" said Arthur Augustus quite dazedly.

"Yes, I think it's up to you to take my word, you being my guest," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I'm really rather offended, D'Arcy, at this—this distrust!"

"Oh, bai Jove! I weally begin to think that you are hardly accountable for your actions, Buntah. I might weally have guessed it, fwom the way you play cwicket. Give me that key at once!"

"If you don't believe me——"

"Give me the key, you fat duffah!"

"Look here, then, I'll—I'll tell you exactly what's up!" said Bunter desperately. "Mind, I rely on you to stand by me if I tell you. I've got to keep them locked in, or I shall be booted out of Bunter Court. They—they're—they're——"

"Well, who are they?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"One of them's Pilkins, the estate agent, and the other's Walsingham, the butler!" said Bunter desperately. "Now do you understand? If they get out I've got to clear, so I rely on you to keep it dark, old chap, as—as a pal, you know."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Caught Napping!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stared blankly at Bunter. That fat youth blinked at him anxiously.

"Pilkins!" repeated D'Arcy. "Walsingham! Oh, my hat! Oh, bai Jove! Are you pottay, Buntah?"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Give me that key at once!"

"Look here, D'Arcy, do listen to a chap!" urged Bunter. "I'm taking you into my confidence, you know."

"I wefuse to be taken into your confidence, Buntah!" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"You see, it's a delicate matter," pursued Bunter. "That estate agent chap, Pilkins, is a distrustful beast. You'd hardly believe it, but I shouldn't have got hold of the house at all if he hadn't been knocked out in a motor accident and had to stay in a nursing home for a time. But for that, and pulling Walsingham's leg, I should never have got the place for the vacation at all. These house agents are a downy lot, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"It was a stroke of luck, getting him locked up in the wine-cellars the day he came here to see me. Pretty good strategy, too," said Bunter. "I wasn't standing any of his low impudence, you know. He refused to take my word that the money was all right—refused to let me the house in any circumstances! Fancy that, you know! Luckily, I got here and turned the key on him!"

Arthur Augustus gazed at him.

Obviously, the Owl of the Remove was extremely satisfied with his masterly strategy in dealing with the Combermere estate agent.

"As for Walsingham," resumed Bunter, "it's your fault that he's locked up along with Pilkins."

"My fault?" stuttered D'Arcy.

"Yes, rather! You gave him the key of the wine-cellars, and he went down and found Pilkins. What was a fellow to do?"

"Oh dear!"

"If he hadn't left the key in the outside of the door when he went into the cellars it would have been all U P," said Bunter impressively, "and it would have been your fault."

"Weally, Buntah——"

"Luckily he did, and I nipped down behind him and locked him in along with Pilkins. It was a narrow escape, I can tell you."

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"I weally begin to believe that you are not quite wight in the head, Buntah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know! I think I've shown myself equal to the situation," said Bunter. "Precious few fellows could have handled it as I've done. Now you see how the matter stands, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You'll keep it dark, old chap?"

"Certainly not!" hooted D'Arcy.

"Now, look here, old fellow, you can't give me away. If those fellows got out, look at what would happen. They'd be in a frightful rage! They haven't the slightest feeling of gratitude——"

"Gwatitude?" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

"Well, I've been feeding them—taking a lot of risks, too," said Bunter. "Every time I've opened the door to chuck in a bag of grub they'd have got out if they could. They're simply destitute of anything like proper feelings. I've given them jolly good grub, too, at my own expense. I'm paying for it all—at least, I'm going to. That man Pilkins would think nothing—simply nothing—of fetching a bobby to turn me out of this house, Gussy. That's the kind of man he is."

"Buntah!"

"As for Walsingham, he's as bad as Pilkins, or worse. As likely as not he thinks he won't get his wages now, and you know what servants are about their wages—greedy, you know. If he got out I shouldn't wonder if he actually had the cheek to lay his hands on me. His voice sounded like it, at least. What menservants are coming to in these days I really don't know. It's a time for gentlemen to stand by one another, Gussy. I'm sure you see that!"

"I do not wegard you as a gentleman, Buntah!"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy——"

"Fwom what I can see, you are a bilkin' wottah!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Your only excuse is that you are such a sillay idiot that you weally do do not know what you are doin'."

"Well, I like that—from an ass like you!" said Bunter warmly. "Of all the howling asses, in fact——"

"I shall leave this house the first thing in the mornin', Buntah. I shall feel bound to tell your Gweyfwiahs schoolfellows the facts, so that they can also withdwaw. But, first of all, I am goin' to welease those two persons whom you have shut up in the wine-cellars. I will not allow you to delay one minute longah. For your own sake, if for no othah weason, they must be weleased as quickly as possible. Give me the key."

"But I've explained——"

"You uttah ass! Give me the key. I twust, Buntah, that you will not dwive me to take it fwom you by force."

Billy Bunter blinked savagely at the swell of St. Jim's.

Apparently his explanations had had no effect whatever upon that youth. Inexplicable as it was to Bunter, Arthur Augustus could not see that he was in the right all along the line.

It was clear enough to Bunter. Bunter's amazing intellect moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.

But Arthur Augustus plainly took a different view. Argument was wasted on him. Bunter realised that.

A cunning gleam came into his little round eyes behind his spectacles,

Arthur Augustus was prepared to handle the Owl of the Remove, to get possession of the key. Evidently it was a case for strategy—more of Billy Bunter's masterly strategy.

"I think this is rather unfeeling, D'Arcy," said Bunter, shaking his hand. "I've asked you here, and given you a good time, and never told you what I thought of you. After that, you turn on me like this. I've given up expecting gratitude of anybody, but really, this is rather thick. If you insist, though——"

"I do insist, Buntah."

"You want me to open that door?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you don't leave me any choice in the matter——"

"None at all, you wottah," said Arthur Augustus sternly. "If you do not unlock that door immediately I will take the key fwom you and unlock it myself."

"Here goes, then!"

Bunter turned back to the door of the wine-cellars.

D'Arcy followed him.

4 More

M. W. TATE - - -

W. G. QUAIFE - - -

J. W. H. T. DOUGLAS

H. STRUDWICK - - -

With Next

The Owl of the Remove laid the electric torch on the bottom stair. It glimmered on the oak door as Bunter put the key into the keyhole. He blinked round at D'Arcy.

"I dare say they've settled down to sleep again. Do you think we ought to disturb them, Gussy?"

"Open that door at once, you ass!" "Suppose they jump at me? They're capable of it."

"Fathead!"

"Well, you jolly well go in first," said Bunter. "You can talk to them, see, while I nip off."

"Vewy well."

Bunter turned the key softly and silently. Arthur Augustus stood ready to step into the cellar.

The door opened.

All was darkness beyond; but a sound of breathing could be heard. Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham had apparently settled down again on the rugs Bunter had kindly furnished them with and turned off the electric light to sleep. But they were not sleeping, for a sound of stirring was heard as the door opened.

Bunter breathed hard.

His fat heart was beating fast.

He pushed the door open, leaving the key in the lock.

The next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, greatly to his surprise, received a violent shove in the small of the back. "Oh!"

The swell of St. Jim's, taken quite by surprise, staggered forward into the cellar, falling on his hands and knees.

"Bai Jove! What——"

Slam!
Click!

Billy Bunter jerked the key out of the door, grabbed up the electric torch, and fled up the stairs.

He closed the upper door and locked it, slipped the key into his pocket, and crept away up the big staircase.

A few minutes later he was in bed.

In the morning one of Bunter's guests would be missing. Nobody—at least, so Bunter hoped—would be likely to guess what had become of him.

Five minutes later Billy Bunter was snoring peacefully, sleeping the sleep of the just!

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Three of Them!

"Bai Jove! Oh! Ow! Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sprawled in the dark in a state of great confusion of mind.

From the darkness came excited voices—the voices of Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham, the butler.

"Quick!"

"Get hold of him!"

"Collar that young scoundrel!"

Hands groped for D'Arcy in the darkness and seized on him. He yelled as he was grasped.

He did not realise, for the moment, that the prisoners of Combermere Lodge took him for Bunter.

They had heard him fall, and their impression was that Bunter had incautiously stumbled into the cellar. And they were not losing an opportunity like this.

In a second or two Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was struggling wildly with two infuriated assailants.

"Yawwoh! Leggo——"

"Hold him, Walsingham!"

"Keep hold of him, Pilkins!"

"The young villain!"

"We've got him at last!"

"Yawwoop! Help! Leave go! Oh, bai Jove! Oh, ewumbs!" yelled Arthur Augustus, hitting out right and left as he was collared, and punched, and pommelled. "You uttah asses! Oh, deah!"

"Ow!" howled Mr. Pilkins as he caught D'Arcy's knuckles with his eye. "You ruffianly young scoundrel! Ow! Take that!"

"Whoop!" came from Walsingham.

In the dark Mr. Pilkins could not see where or what he was punching. It was Walsingham who caught that hefty punch, and the hapless butler rolled over on the flags.

"Oh, you young ruffian!" gasped Walsingham, and he punched out furiously in return, and landed Mr. Pilkins on the chin.

The estate agent closed with him furiously. Each under the impression that he was dealing with Bunter, the two prisoners of Combermere pommelled one another with terrific vim.

Arthur Augustus, finding himself unexpectedly released, staggered to his feet. He was feeling quite dazed.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "Oh, deah! Keep off, you sillay asses! Gweat Scott! They seem to be fightin' one another! I wondah what they are scwappin' about! Oh, deah!"

"Take that, Bunter, you scoundrel!" panted Mr. Pilkins, as he drove a beefy fist into Walsingham's eye.

"Oh, Ow! Ah! Pilkins——" Walsingham recognised the voice, fortunately, before he rallied to the attack.

"Pilkins, you dummy——"

"Oh! Is that you, Walsingham? I thought——"

"You idiot!"

"Where is Bunter, then? Don't let him get away!" shrieked Mr. Pilkins in alarm. "He's got away——"

Walsingham, with one hand to his eye, groped with the other for the electric light switch.

The wine-cellars were suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham glared round for Bunter. They did not see Bunter, but to their amazement they saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's put up his hands defensively.

"Keep off, you silly asses!" he roared. "I am not Buntah!"

"It's a confederate of that young bilk!" shouted Mr. Pilkins. "Collar him before he gets away."

Walsingham rushed to the door. He uttered an exclamation quite incompatible with the grave character of a butler as he found that it was locked on the outside as usual.

Will you seize him, you dummy?" yelled Mr. Pilkins. "Help me!"

The imprisonment in the wine-cellars had plainly told on the tempers of the two hapless victims of Billy Bunter's strategy.

"Hold on!" growled the butler. "We're locked in. This is Master D'Arcy——"

"A confederate of that young scoundrel Bunter!"

"Nothin' of the sort," exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "That feahful wottah pushed me into the cellah, takin' me by surpwise. I can hardly believe that he has had the feahful cheek to lock me in."

"The door's locked," said Walsingham. "Gweat Scott! But that potay duffah can't mean to keep me a pwisonah heah, along with you!" gasped Arthur Augustus blankly.

"Looks like it."

"Oh, deah!"

"Look here, who are you?" growled Mr. Pilkins, eyeing Arthur Augustus a good deal like a tiger deprived of his prey. "If you're not a confederate of that young villain Bunter, who are you, and what are you doing in this house?"

"It's Master D'Arcy," said Walsingham. "That young swindler got him to come here as a guest; I saw him the day he came. He has been taken in by that young villain, like the others."

"That's all very well!" growled Mr. Pilkins. "My belief is that they're a gang of bilks, the lot of them!"

"Weally, Mr. Pilkins——"

"Rubbish!" snapped the butler. "Can't you see that Master D'Arcy has found out we're here, and come down to us, and has been trapped, just as I was when I found you here?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Pilkins.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I insisted upon that uttah ass Buntah openin' the door, to vlease you; and the feahful wottah shored me in, and locked the door on me, bai Jove!"

Mr. Pilkins gave a dismal groan. Once more escape had seemed near at hand, only to fade away like a delightful vision in a dream.

Arthur Augustus looked at his fellow-prisoners. They did not look any the better for their imprisonment in the wine-cellars. Their faces were decidedly grubby, and adorned with stubbly beards; Walsingham was hardly recognisable as the clean-shaven, deferential butler Arthur Augustus had seen on the day of his arrival.

Bunter had provided them with food, but many necessities, of course, were lacking in the wine-cellars, including soap and razors. In point of fact, Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham looked such a pair of scarecrows that Arthur Augustus was almost inclined to smile.

"But—but what does that young villain intend to do?" gasped Mr. Pilkins at last. "How long is he going to keep us here?"

Walsingham shrugged his shoulders.

"He will nevah have the nerve to keep me heah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Besides, I shall be missed."

"Does anyone know you came down here, sir?" asked the butler hopefully.

"Nunno! Ewewbody was fast asleep."

"I suppose I must have been missed, sir?" said Walsingham.

"Bunter told us you had been sent to London on important business!"

Mr. Pilkins groaned again.

"And he will say that this young fellow has left suddenly!" he mumbled. "Who will think of looking for him in the wine-cellars: and you can depend upon it that that young rascal will keep the key safe."

"Oh, ewumbs!" said Arthur Augustus.

The face of the swell of St. Jim's grew long and serious. It was scarcely conceivable to his mind that Bunter, fatuous as he was, could be so utterly fatuous as to intend to keep him a prisoner. But, really, after what had happened, it seemed that there was no limit to the fatuous folly of the Owl of Greyfriars.

Through the long watches of that dismal night, Arthur Augustus did not feel disposed to sleep; he kept an eye on the slow-moving hand of his watch. When it indicated that morning had come he hoped. He simply could not realise that he was to remain a prisoner.

But the hand of the watch crawled on, and there was no sound at the cellar door.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Very Mysterious!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Snore!

"What's become of D'Arcy, Bunter?"

Snore!

"Bunter, old man——"

Snore!

Bob Cherry stared in at the doorway of Billy Bunter's room.

The Owl of the Remove was in bed; it was only half-past ten. Judging by his deep snore, he was still fast asleep. But Bob's stentorian tones might almost have awakened the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus; and he was quite sure that they had awakened Bunter.

The lord of Bunter Court did not want to be disturbed. But this was an occasion which Bunter's wants had to be disregarded.

Bob strode into the room, grasped Bunter by one fat ear and shook him. The deep snore changed to a furious yell.

"Yarrah! Beast! Leggo!"

"Bunter, old man——"

"Leggo! Get out! Don't wake me up, you cheeky chump!" roared Bunter.

"I won't be woke up early! Ain't a fellow master in his own house? Let me alone!"

"Something's happened, Bunter——"

"Rot!"

"D'Arcy——"

"Bother D'Arcy!"

"Do you know where he is?" demanded Bob.

"How the thump should I know where he is?" roared Bunter. "Blow him, and blow you! Let a fellow sleep!"

"But, look here——"

"I suppose he's in bed, if he's got any sense. If he's not in bed, I suppose he's got up! I don't care where he is or what he's doing! Mind your own business! Get out!"

Bob Cherry grinned.

He was well accustomed to the polished politeness of his host at Bunter Court. But, really, the lord of that noble domain seemed to be excelling himself now.

But William George Bunter never was good-tempered when he was awakened early, and half-past ten was early for Bunter in vacation. At Greyfriars, it was true, the rising-bell clanged at a much earlier hour; but the Greyfriars rising-bell was a thing of the past now, only remembered with loathing.

Bunter settled his head on the pillow again. Apart from his desire to slumber, he did not want to face inquiries with regard to Arthur Augustus so long as he could postpone them. He had not yet invented a yarn to account for the sudden departure of Arthur Augustus—that required some thinking out.

Bunter was not going to exert his fat intellect before breakfast simply because Harry Wharton & Co. had missed their fellow-guest. He was going to finish his sleep, and breakfast at his ease, and then he would give his lofty attention to lesser matters.

"Bunter, old man, you ought to know!" urged Bob, as the Owl of the Remove closed his eyes again. "Something must have happened to D'Arcy or——"

"Bosh!"

"He's not in his room——"

"Blow him!"

"His clothes are there——"

"Bother his clothes!"

"We can't find him anywhere."

"Don't find him, then!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 915.

"Dash it all, Bunter, he's your guest!" exclaimed Bob. "I tell you something must have happened!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, Bunter——"

Snore!

"It's jolly queer——"

"The queerfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh's voice at the doorway.

Snore!

Bob Cherry gave a grunt. If Bunter did not choose to turn out, he was his own master; it was not for his visitors to dictate to him. Bob strode out of the room, and joined his chums, who were waiting for him.

"Bunter doesn't care!" he growled. "I suppose he's too jolly sleepy to think about it, so early as this. Only half-past ten!"

"Well, never mind Bunter," said Harry. "He would have told you, anyway, if D'Arcy had gone away unexpectedly, after we'd gone to bed last night."

"He couldn't have; he went to bed at the same time," said Johnny Bull. "Of course, there might have been a late telephone-call, or something; but it's jolly unlikely!"

"It is. But where's D'Arcy?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Something must have happened," said Frank Nugent.

"Yes. But what?"

"Let's go and look in his room again," said Bob, and he led the way to the room that had been tenanted by the swell of St. Jim's.

It was a perplexing matter.

The Famous Five had gone down to breakfast that morning as usual, not expecting to see Bunter, who was never early; but they had been rather surprised when D'Arcy did not appear. As a rule, the swell of St. Jim's came down at the same time as the Greyfriars fellows. However, they gave no particular heed to the circumstances that D'Arcy had overslept himself for once; Bob suggested that the bump on his head might have kept him sleepless during the night, and that perhaps he was making up for it in the morning.

But after breakfast, the St. Jim's junior still did not appear, although an excursion up the river had been arranged for the morning. So Bob Cherry had gone up to give him a call, and made the surprising discovery that D'Arcy was not in his room.

As his clothes were still there, where he had laid them out overnight, it was clear that he had not dressed and gone out on his own.

In great surprise, the chums of the Remove questioned Thomas, but Thomas was as surprised as themselves.

Neither Thomas nor any other servant at Combermere Lodge had seen Master D'Arcy that morning.

Hence the visit to Bunter's room, and that inexcusable awakening of Bunter from his morning nap.

In the circumstances, the Co. had to apprise Bunter of what had happened; he was D'Arcy's host, and had to be supposed to be concerned about him if something had happened to him.

How much concern Bunter felt about his missing guest, however, was soon clear. He was already snoring again when the Famous Five turned away from his door.

Harry Wharton & Co. were deeply perplexed, and even a little alarmed. The absence of Arthur Augustus was simply amazing. No door had been found open or unfastened, as Thomas had informed them. It seemed that D'Arcy could not have left the house. If he had, he had apparently gone out in his pyjamas and dressing-gown, and that was unimaginable, unless he had suddenly taken leave of his senses. But if he had not gone out, he was still in the house; and he was undiscoverable anywhere within the walls of Combermere Lodge.

Bob Cherry led the way into D'Arcy's bed-room. Thomas, the footman, was there with a bewildered expression on his face.

"Seen anything of him, Thomas?" asked Bob.

Thomas shook his bewildered head.

"No, sir! I can't understand it, sir. His clothes are here—I've looked. The pyjamas are gone, and the dressing-gown. Albert laid out the pyjamas on the bed yesterday evening, sir, and you can see that the bed has been occupied. Master D'Arcy must have got up and put on his dressing-gown."

"That much seems clear," said Harry.

"I've questioned all the servants, sir," said Thomas. "Nobody has seen him. I'm absolutely sure, sir, that no door was unfastened this morning. It is my duty to see to the fastenings of doors and windows at night since Mr. Walsingham went away, sir. Everything was secure last night, and everything was found secure this morning."

"Then if he's gone, he must have got out of a window," said Nugent blankly.

"An upper window, sir," said Thomas. "It's very odd, sir! I can't understand it, sir. And his clothes are all here, sir."

Wharton glanced at D'Arcy's natty evening clothes, which lay where he had folded them up the previous night. A lounge suit was laid out ready for the swell of St. Jim's to put on in the morning; obviously, he had not put it on, for there it was.

"He may have taken another suit from his trunk," Wharton suggested.

Another shake of the head from Thomas.

"I've helped Master D'Arcy with his clothes, sir, several times since the young gentleman has been here, sir, and they are all in this room. A rather unusually large supply, sir, but I know them all, and none are missing."

"Well, it's a giddy mystery!" said Bob.

"I am quite perplexed, sir," said Thomas deferentially. And he withdrew, leaving the chums of Greyfriars to the problem.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

An Amazing Disappearance!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. looked at one another.

Each read blank amazement and bewilderment in the faces of the others.

The disappearance of D'Arcy was simply inexplicable.

That he had had no intention of leaving "Bunter Court" suddenly was quite certain; the previous evening he had said nothing of it, but had, indeed, discussed an excursion for the morning with the Greyfriars fellows.

Moreover, it was clear that he had been to bed; the bed had been occupied, if not slept in, and D'Arcy evidently had put on his pyjamas, as they were missing along with him. Plainly, he had intended to pass the night as usual at Bunter Court.

ANSWERS
Every Saturday—PRICE 2:

What had happened in the hours of darkness?

What could have happened?

All the doors and windows had been found secure by Thomas in the morning, which proved not only that D'Arcy had not gone out, but that no one had come in; it was simply impossible to theorise that Lord Eastwood's son might have been kidnapped.

But what had become of him?

The whole house was in a buzz of excitement over the amazing disappearance of the Honourable Arthur Augustus. Thomas and his men had searched right and left, up and down, and round about. The search, in fact, was still going on.

It really looked as if Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had vanished into thin air, like a Hunter of the Snark who had suddenly seen face to face with a Boojum!

But that, of course, was quite an untenable theory. Arthur Augustus obviously had not dissolved into the atmosphere; he was somewhere. But where was he?

"It's simply beyond explanation," said Harry Wharton, at last. "If he had been walking in his sleep—he was talking about sleep-walking last night—even then he would be in the house somewhere."

"Even if he's fallen down somewhere, and—and— Well, whatever happened, he'd have been seen before this," said Nugent.

"Of course! It's not that!"

"It couldn't be a lark," said Bob.

"D'Arcy's not ass enough to hide himself somewhere, just to jape us."

"Impossible."

"There's a lot of unoccupied rooms in this big place," said Johnny Bull. "But Thomas says he has searched."

"I—I suppose—" Bob paused. He coloured a little. "I—I suppose poor old D'Arcy can't have gone out of his mind, or anything? A lunatic might have wandered into some attic, and shut himself up there."

"That's rot, old chap!"

"I know it is; but if it isn't that, where is he? He must be keeping out of the way of his own accord, I suppose."

"I—I suppose so," said Harry dubiously.

Johnny Bull granted.

"He isn't!" he said.

"Then what's happened, Johnny, as you seem so jolly positive?" said Bob, a little impatiently.

"Foul play, of some kind," answered Johnny Bull.

"But what—how?"

"I don't know, only that's it. Look at it," said Johnny Bull, in his slow, deliberate way. "D'Arcy's in his right mind, and he's not the fellow to play an idiotic jape to startle people. He went to bed, and turned out again for some reason and put on his dressing-gown. I remember hearing him say that very likely he wouldn't be able to sleep with that bump on his napper. He went out of the room—"

"How do you know he did?" demanded Bob. "He might have put on his dressing-gown to sit and read. His 'Holiday Annual' is here, too."

"I know he did. He wasn't going to sit and read, for the simple reason that the light wasn't turned on," said Johnny Bull. "If D'Arcy had left it turned on, it would have been found turned on in the morning. It wasn't."

"Oh!"

"Good old Sherlock Holmes!" said Wharton, with a faint smile. "Go it, Johnny!"

"He went out of the room, most likely, to take a turn in the corridor, as he

couldn't sleep," said Johnny Bull. "Something happened to prevent him from coming back to his room."

"But what?"

"That's what I want to know," said Johnny, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He may have run into a burglar—"

"The burglar wouldn't burgle Gussy, and nothing else, would he?" said Bob, with a grin.

"I say he may have, not that he did," answered Johnny Bull stolidly. "If D'Arcy came on a burglar, it's easier to believe that the burglar collared him than that he vanished up a chimney like a ghost."

"Easier, perhaps, but jolly thick, all the same."

"The thickfulness is terrific!"

"But it's pretty clear, so far, that D'Arcy seems to have walked out of the room in his dressing-gown of his own accord," said Wharton. "Starting from that, we've got to find out what happened next. Let's hunt for sign—we haven't been Scouts for nothing."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

The Greyfriars juniors left D'Arcy's room, and proceeded to hunt for "sign" in the corridors.

They found none.

The search was extended; and the Famous Five, with the help of Thomas and the other footmen, rooted through the great house, leaving not a single

apartment unexplored, to the utmost attic above and the coal cellars below.

Only one remote quarter was denied them—the wine-cellar. Access to the wine-cellar was impossible. Thomas supposed that Walsingham must have taken the key with him when he left; but the juniors knew that it was in the possession of Billy Bunter. In either case, it did not seem to matter, as they could not surmise that D'Arcy had passed through a locked oaken door. Wharton even went so far as to try the upper door; but he found it securely locked and passed on.

By lunch-time, every corner, excepting one, of the vast building had been thoroughly explored, and not a sign had been discovered of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Had his clothes been gone, the obvious explanation would have been that, for mysterious reasons known only to himself, the swell of St. Jim's had "flitted" during the night, leaving by way of a bed-room window. That would have been amazing enough, but not so amazing as matters now stood.

For that could not be the explanation—since D'Arcy had gone without his clothes. Wharton was able to discern that some of the servants, at least, surmised that the swell of St. Jim's had gone out of his mind, and that he would

(Continued on page 16.)



The estate-agent, mistaking Walsingham for Bunter, closed with him furiously. Smack! Thud! Each under the impression that he was dealing with Bunter, pommelled one another with terrific vim. "Bal Jove!" Arthur Augustus felt quite dazed. "Oh, deah! Keep off, you sliky-asses!" (See Chapter 7.)

THE GREYERIARS HERALD

Supplement No. 236.

HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week Ending August 22nd, 1925.



"DR. BIRCHEMALL rekwests the plezzure of Master Jack Jolly's company at a **BIG BUST-UP**—or, as the vulgar would say, a bankwett—to be held on the Head's lawn at four this afternoon (whether and funds permitting). This first-rate feed, stunning spread, and tip-top tuck-in, is to sellybrate the Head's ninety-ninth birthday. Master Jolly is permitted to bring as many of his pals as he likes.—R.S.V.P."

Jack Jolly of the Fourth, fairly beamed as he read that invitashun allowed to his chums.

It wasn't very often that the lordly and diggnified Headmaster of St. Sam's kondessed to invite Fourth-Formers to a sellybration. Being rather a snob at hart, the Head usually looked down from a great height upon the St. Sam's juniors, like the giant Gulliver looked down upon the teeny-weeny Lily Putians.

But on this occasion the Head had suddenly become aware of the juniors' eggssistence, and he had actually invited them to a tip-top tuck-in on his lawn.

"Awfully decent of the old buffer!" remarked Jack Jolly.

"Rather!" said Merry and Bright. "You'll take us along, Jack, of course?"

"Natcherally!"

"And you'll take me?" pleaded Tubby Barrell.

"And little us?" entreated Leene and Hungery, the wasters of the Fourth.

"Certainly!" said Jack Jolly jollily. He could afford to be jennerus at the Head's eggspense.

"Wonder what 'R.S.V.P.' means?" mused Merry.

"'Really Stunning Veal Pies.' I egg-spect," said Tubby Barrell.

"Ass!" said Jack Jolly. "That's Spannish. It means 'Reply-sivvoo-play.' I'll send a pally note along to the Head, thanking him for his invitashun, and formerly axcepting it."

Jack Jolly did so; and he and his chums looked forward eagerly to four o'clock. They "cut" dinner, so as to leave plenty of room for the good things which the Head would provide.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 915.

Long before the appointed time, the Head's guests changed into their Sunday best, as a mark of respect for the old fogey.

At last the great moment arrived, and Jack Jolly and his fellow-guests trooped on to the Head's lawn.

It was trooly a tip-top feed which had been spread out on the grass. The juniors' eyes watered at the sight of it, and a sparkle came into their mouths.

The Head, attired in plus fours, was squatting on the turf. He was singing softly to himself:

"I'm the Banderillo
King, with the sword for pillow."

But Jack Jolly & Co. were not interested in the Head's warblings. They could hear the kettle singing a short distance away; and that was the only musick which fassinated them.

Very politely, the juniors lifted their toppers.

"Merry Christmas, sir!" said Jack Jolly. "I—I mean many happy days of the return—that is to say—"

"Cut it short, Jolly!" said the Head jenially. "Squat down, my infants, and make yourselves comfortable."

The juniors seated themselves on the grass. They were told to "pile in," but they found it rather difficult to comply with this rekwest. Jack Jolly was about to pass round a dish of assorted pastries, when he caught sight of a card on it, bearing the words:

"THIS DISH IS RESERVED FOR
THE HEAD."

A similar card appeared on all the other dishes, with the eggseption of a dish of very stale buns, which were as

hard as brix, and quite unfit for human consumption.

"Oh, what a giddy sell!" gasped Jack Jolly. "The Head has reserved all the good things for himself, the greedy old gormandiser!"

"Now, boys," said the Head briskly, "look after your host! Don't sit there looking like graven images! Pass the jolly old doe-nutts! Pour me out a cup of tea, somebody!"

The juniors found themselves rushing here, there, and everywhere, instead of taking their ease and enjoying a feast of the gods. They were compelled to wait on the Head hand and foot; and the Head enjoyed it no end. But the waiters didn't!

Tubby Barrell tried to sneak one of the fancy pastries, when he thought the Head wasn't looking. But Dr. Birchmall seemed to have eyes in the back of his head.

"Barrell!" he thundered. "Take your grubby paws off that dish! Can't you see it's specially reserved for your host?"

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Tubby. "Isn't there anything reserved for the guests, sir?"

"There is a dish of holesome, new-trishus buns," said the Head.

"But—but they're as hard as bullets, sir! I tried to eat one just now, and it broke my front teeth!"

"Astonishing!" murmured the Head. "And I specially saved those buns from last Good Friday! They ought to be in fine condition by now."

The Head seemed to think that buns improved with age, like port wine.

Jack Jolly & Co. spent a thoroughly mizzerable afternoon, acting as surfs and benchmen to the head, and watching the old buffer enjoy himself.

The Head's capassity was marvellus. His appetite seemed to have grown keener with the years, instead of feebler. Being in his second childhood, however, he had doubtless recovered the appetite of childhood. He tucked in as if for a wager, and the dishes were rapidly cleared. As for Jack Jolly & Co., they shared the fate of Mother Hubbard's dog in the nursery rhyme.

But they had their revenge next day. The Head had to pay a bitter price for his birthday excesses.

Jack Jolly & Co. were quite hartless and unsimperthetic—in fact, they fairly gloated with glee—when they saw the following announsement on the school notiss-board:

"The Head is confined to his bed with a bilious attack, and is not eggsspected to recover for a week. All messages of simperthy, bunches of grapes, etc., are to be conveyed personally to the Head's bedside. Meanwhile, the school will be in charge of Mr. Justiss."

"Serve the old buffer right for his meanness!" was Jack Jolly's comment.

**MIND YOU GET
THE FOUR FREE GIFTS
GIVEN AWAY
WITH THIS PAPER
NEXT WEEK!**



BILLY BUNTER:

I've had so many fine feeds in the course of my career that I find it jolly hard to say which was the finest. A long time ago, when I suddenly and unexpectedly came into a fortune—which was afterwards confiscated by the jellous orthoribles—I was let loose in the school tuckshop with a fiver to spend. Ah, blissful memmery! I stuffed and stuffed to my heart's contempt, starting with rabbit-pie, and finishing with strawberry ices. The next day saw me in the sanny, suffering from a Billysaw attack. "After the feast comes the reckoning," you know. But it didn't take long to recover my normal appetite—or my abnormal one, as my school-fellows choose to call it! On another occasion I found myself locked up for the night in the school tuckshop. Oh, what a paradise of a prison! I had the time of my life, and I only wish Dame Mimble would lock me in again by mistake! But she always makes a tour of inspection now before she puts up the shutters. More's the pity!

ALONZO TODD:

I am not a mighty feeder. If I were to consume a tithe of what Bunter consumes, I

should now be in a little wooden box underneath the daisies. There have been occasions, however, when I have fairly let myself go, and eaten to reckless and wanton excess. I once devoured no less than two doughnuts in rapid succession. I was obliged to lie down for an hour after that tremendous orgy. On another occasion I ate an entire bar of chocolate-cream without stopping to count the cost or the number of mouthfuls. But I am careful not to commit such indiscretions nowadays. I content myself with the merest nibble at mealtimes. That explains why I am so strong and vigorous, whilst my schoolfellows are puny weaklings!

HAROLD SKINNER:

My finest feed was when I shifted no less than two hundred bananas. "Impossible!" you will cry, aghast. But it's a fact. I shifted them in a crate from the school gates to the tuckshop! On another occasion I filled myself with good intentions, went into my study, "bolted" the door, and "devoured" the complete works of Shakespeare! I also "swallowed" a tall story of Bolsover major's, then "scoffed" at it, and was then made to eat my words!

The Study Guest, he looked distressed,
"I'm broke myself," quoth he;
"That's why I speed to join the feed,
For hunger racketh me!"

"I fear thee, portly Bunter bird,
I fear thy flabby hand!
No time to waste, I fain would haste
To join yon merry band."

"Fear not, fear not, O Study Guest,
I will not work thee wrong;
A stunning feed is what I need,
And so I'll come along!"

"O Study Guest, this soul hath been
In hunger all the week;
Six meals a day have come my way—
Mere mouthfuls, so to speak."

"O sweeter than the tea in hall,
'Tis sweeter far to me
To walk together to the feed
In such goodly company!"

"Let's haste away! And this I say
To thee, O Study Guest,
He feedeth well who loveth well
Tarts, buns, and all the rest."

"He feedeth best who loveth best
Jam sponges, great and small,
And goodly cakes that Mimble
makes—
I mean to scoff them all!"

The Study Guest, he beat his breast,
And promptly turned to flee;
And the Bunter bird pursueth him
To Study Number Three.

Then one within, amid the din,
Picks up a loaf of bread
And hurls it forth with deadly vim—
It smiteth Bunter's head!

He went like one that hath been
stunned
And is of sense forlorn.
"No feed!" he moans. "No feast!" he
groans,
I wish I'd ne'er been born!"

HURREE SINGH:

The finest spreadful feed that I ever eatfully consumed was in my native Bhanpur. I partook of six dishful portions of peppery curry, in the making of which my fellow-countrymen are hot stuff. Then I stripfully removed the jackets of half a dozen luscious and delicious bananas, and polished them off shiftfully. The internal painfulness I experienced afterwards was terrific! "After the feast comes the long lane that has no silver lining," as your English proverb has it.

WILLIAM GOSLING:

Wot I says is this 'ere—ow can a man enjoy the good things of the table if 'e ain't got a sound tooth in 'is 'ead? It wouldn't be no use trottin' me off to the tuckshop, an' saying, "Wot are you goin' to 'ave, Gossey—doughnuts or jam-tarts?" I couldn't tackle neither of them. Pity a pore old porter wot 'as to take all 'is meals in lliquid form! Still, I s'pose I ought not to grumble. I drank a very good supper last night, an' if I gets plenty of tips from the young gents to-day, I shall 'ope to drink another good supper this evenin', as ever was!

THE HEAD:

Not being in the habit of partaking in disgusting orgies, I decline to give any information on this subject. I heard Bunter of the Remove say the other day that he would love to change places with the Head, who can eat and drink whatever and whenever he likes. Does Bunter imagine for one moment that I sit at my desk sucking bullseyes, or that I run out to the school shop every hour or so to fortify myself with sticky and indigestible compounds? If so, he imagines a vain thing!

THE STUDY SPREAD!

("The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner"
brought up to date.)

By DICK PENFOLD.

IT is the portly Bunter bird,
And he stoppeth one of three;
"By thy fat, round face and thy
goggling eyes
Now, wherefore stopp'st thou me?"

"My study door is open wide,
My comrades wait within;
The guests are met, the feast is set;
Mayst hear the merry din."

He holds him with his flabby hand,
"I say, old chap," quoth he.
"Hold off! Unhand me, porpoise
plump!"
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye;
The Study Guest stands still.
And listeneth like a little lamb;
The porpoise hath his will.

The Study Guest sits on the stair,
For the story must be heard;
And thus spoke on the podgy one,
The portly Bunter bird.

"I say, old chap, I'm simply broke!
I fall on stony ground;
So lend me, pray, for just one day,
A fiver—or a pound."

The Study Guest, he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on the podgy one,
To whom he lent his ear.

"Advance me, kid, a humble quid,"
Begged he, with tearful sob;
"A dollar or two would see me
through—
In fact, a modest bob!"

EDITORIAL!

By Harry Wharton.

CELEBRATIONS are joyous things. Whether it's a birthday you are celebrating, or a cricket victory, or a wonderful stroke of luck, you are fairly in your element playing the part of host or guest. Personally, I prefer being a guest. The host has rather too much running about and responsibility!

The usual form of celebration is a study spread. Mr. Frank Richards is a past-master at describing such happy functions. In a few cheery sentences he gives you just the right "atmosphere" of a study feast. "A cheerful fire sputtered and crackled in the grate," "The table groaned beneath the weight of the goodly viands," "Plump, sugary doughnuts," etc. You picture the scene so vividly that you almost imagine you are present at the proceedings. In your mind's eye you see a circle of glowing faces grouped around the table; and presently you see the door stealthily open, inch by inch, and a fat face, adorned by a pair of enormous spectacles, peers into the study. Then the voice of the porpoise is heard in the land, so to speak.

"I say, you fellows! Make room for a chap! I've had nothing to eat since dinner, and I was only allowed six helpings then—"

But William George Bunter is unlucky. Cushions go whizzing through the air, and the manner of Bunter's going out is quicker than the manner of his coming in.

Schoolboy celebrations, in tuckshop or study, or by candlelight in the dormitory, go to make life worth living. I'm not a tuck-worshipper like Bunter. I don't spend the whole of the morning wondering what's for dinner, and the whole of the afternoon wondering how I can beg, borrow, or steal a tea. At the same time, I enjoy a study spread or a midnight feast as much as anybody, as much on account of the merry atmosphere as the grub itself. In cheery, friendly company I could be happy with a humble bun and a glass of ginger-pop. I don't require the whole of the fleshpots of Egypt to put me in a happy humour.

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(Continued from page 13.)

be found later wandering about some where in pyjamas and dressing-gown.

He could scarcely blame them for so surmising; but he was quite assured that nothing of the kind was the case.

But when it came to offering an alternate explanation, Harry Wharton found himself all at sea. There was simply no explanation to be offered.

D'Arcy had vanished; and how, where, and why he had vanished remained a bewildering problem. That was the state of affairs when Billy Bunter—having finished his breakfast—came down to lunch.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Explains!

BILLY BUNTER nodded and grinned cheerily to the Famous Five as he met them. He had seen some of them earlier that morning; but he seemed to have forgotten the irritating incident of being awakened at the unearthly hour of half-past ten. He was fat and shiny and good-humoured now; though a close observer might have noticed a suspicious and watchful look in his little round eyes behind his big glasses.

"I say, you fellows, don't you worry about Gussy," said Bunter, by way of greeting.

"I don't know that we're exactly worrying," said Harry. "I don't see that anything can have happened to hurt him. But it's jolly odd, Bunter, and it's up to us to find out what's happened."

"That's all right, old man."

"Is it?" said Bob Cherry. "I can't see that, unless you happen to know what's become of D'Arcy, Bunter."

"Well, I do, you see."

"You do!" exclaimed the Famous Five in chorus.

Bunter nodded cheerily.

By this time Bunter had been able to think out an explanation of the sudden and startling disappearance of his noble guest. Having his explanation all ready, he was prepared to pass it on to the Greyfriars juniors, and he overlooked the trifling circumstance that it was coming rather late. Really it would have been judicious on Bunter's part to turn out of bed early for once and explain D'Arcy's disappearance before he was missed. The yarn he had now invented was hopelessly out of date, so to speak.

"Yes, it's all right," said Bunter cheerily. "Sorry Gussy's been called away suddenly like this. Can't be helped, though. Let's get in to lunch—I've told Thomas to have it served."

"Never mind lunch for a minute," said Bob, staring at the fat junior in a blank sort of way. "Where's D'Arcy?"

"Gone home."

"Gone home?" repeated Bob. "But when I woke you up this morning you said you didn't know where he was or what had become of him."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, you did!" exclaimed Bob impatiently. "These fellows were at your door, and they heard you."

"Yes, rather," said Nugent. "The heartfulness was terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"Look here, Bunter, what are you driving at?" exclaimed Harry Wharton abruptly. "D'Arcy wouldn't have gone home at night, without saying good-bye to any of us."

"He asked me to say good-bye for him," said Bunter, by way of an after-thought. "He said he was awfully sorry not to be able to say good-bye before he went, and begged me to make his apologies and all that."

"My only hat!" said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked quite blank.

They did not need telling that Bunter was lying. But why he was lying was an amazing puzzle—so far.

"Are you telling us this to relieve our minds, because you think we're worrying about D'Arcy?" asked Frank Nugent at last.

"Exactly, old fellow," said Bunter.

"Let's get in to lunch, shall we?"

"But it won't do, you duffer," said Frank, half laughing. "We're not infants to be put off with a soothing tale, I suppose."

"Hardly!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"D'Arcy's got to be found," said Wharton. "Something must have happened to him, and we've got to find out what it is. If he doesn't turn up soon, we shall be driven to believe that he's had some accident."

Bunter blinked at the captain of the Remove.

"I'll tell you exactly what happened," he said.

"You don't know what's happened!" exclaimed Harry. "You'd have told us this morning if you knew, when Bob called you."

"Well, I—I was sleepy, you know," said Bunter. "I can't stand being woke up early. Why shouldn't a fellow have his sleep out, in his own house? You know I hate fellows butting into my room waking me up. I'm sorry D'Arcy's gone home, if you miss his company. Still, he was rather a rotter—"

"What?" roared Bob.

"Well, turning a fellow down, after I've entertained him like a prince!" said Bunter warmly. "Refusing to stand by a chap—as if it mattered a rap about Pilkins and Walsingham! Not his business, I suppose!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Pilkins?"

"Walsingham!"

"What on earth—"

"I—I—I mean—that is to say—I—I mean—I—I wonder what made me mention Pilkins and Walsingham!" gasped Bunter. "I meant—I mean, I never meant—that is— Look here, let's go and have lunch. I'm hungry, you know, and I make it a rule never to be late for meals."

"Bother lunch!" Wharton fixed his eyes on the Owl of the Remove. "You say that D'Arcy has left, Bunter?"

"Yes. Let's—"

"When did he leave?"

"Last night."

"After going to bed?"

"He got up again, of course. The fact is, his father's ill—Lord Eastwood, you know. There was a sudden telegram—"

"A telegram after he went to bed last night?"

"Yes; that's it."

"I don't know why you're spinning us this yarn, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove quietly. "But the matter's too serious for funning. Thomas would know if the house had been knocked up last night by a late telegram coming

for D'Arcy, and he certainly knows nothing about it."

"I—I mean, it—it was a telephone call—"

"Oh! It was a telephone call, was it?" said Bob Cherry. "D'Arcy got a telephone message from home that Lord Eastwood was ill, did he?"

"Just so, old fellow. Now about lunch—"

"There's no telephone in D'Arcy's room. If the bell rang downstairs, one of the servants would get up—if anybody. D'Arcy certainly wouldn't, even if he heard it," said Harry.

"How jolly-particular you are, Wharton," said Bunter peevishly. "It was the telephone in my room, of course. Lord Eastwood telephoned me and asked me to send Gussy home at once, without delay. So I got up and called Gussy, see?"

"You said that D'Arcy got the telephone-call?"

"Well, so he did when I passed it on to him."

"Oh! And Lord Eastwood is so ill that his son has to bolt home all of a sudden in the middle of the night?"

"That's it, old chap! I felt awfully sympathetic, of course. He's rather an old man, you know, and it's awful to be kept to bed with a terrible attack of gout and—appendicitis—"

"Gout and appendicitis?"

"Yes; and a touch of scarlet fever," said Bunter. "A very complicated case, and—and Gussy had to go home instantly, see?"

"My only hat! Lord Eastwood had gout, appendicitis, and scarlet fever, all at once, and yet he was able to telephone?"

"I—I mean, his butler telephoned for him! That was what I meant to say. Look here, let's talk about it after lunch!"

"We'll talk about it now, Bunter. Where is D'Arcy?"

Bunter blinked at the captain of the Remove. He realised that—for some reason inexplicable to him—his explanation had not carried conviction.

"Don't I keep on telling you he's gone home, because his father's laid up with lumbago—I mean rheumatism—that is, appendicitis?"

"And he went home without his clothes?"

"His—his what?"

"Clothes! Everything of D'Arcy's is in his room, except his pyjamas and his dressing gown. Did he start from Kent to Hampshire in his pyjamas?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove realised that he had overlooked a rather important detail. He blinked at the Famous Five quite helplessly for a moment. Even his facile gift of fabrication failed him momentarily.

"Well?" said Wharton grimly. "Get on with it. You know what's become of D'Arcy, or you wouldn't be spinning us these idiotic yarns to account for his absence. Where is he?"

"Let a fellow speak!" gasped Bunter.

"You—you see, D'Arcy came to my room to take the telephone-call, and—and he was in a fearful hurry—awfully cut up, you know, and I lent him some clothes to—to save time."

"You lent D'Arcy some of your clothes?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"That's it, old fellow. Now, look here, lunch will be getting cold—"

"Let it get cold!" said Harry. "We want to know what silly trick you've been playing on D'Arcy that you're trying to keep dark by telling us these fatheaded whoppers."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"D'Arcy couldn't wear your clothes—the bags would be about a foot short for him, for one thing, and the waistcoat a hundred sizes too large. And I'm quite sure that he wouldn't be found dead in your clothes," said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"And he walked, when he went?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically. "He walked off in the middle of the night, when the railway-station was closed and he couldn't get a train before morning?"

"Exactly!" gasped Bunter.
"Oh, don't be such a howling ass!" roared Bob. "If D'Arcy did leave suddenly last night, why did he leave? Do you mean you had a row?"
"Yes," stuttered Bunter, grasping at a straw, as it were. "That—that's exactly what happened. We had some words, and he cleared off. Just walked out of the house."

"And locked the door behind him, with the key inside?" asked Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm.

"Yes—I mean, no! I—I saw him off and locked up after him."

"And he forgot to dress himself before he went?"

"That's it! You—you know what an absent-minded chap he is!" gasped Bunter. "A—a regular footling ass, you know!"

"And he's gone home to Eastwood House?" asked Harry, with his eyes fixed grimly on the Owl of the Remove.

"That's right!"

"Then if we ring up Eastwood House on the telephone—"

"Eh?"

"They'll tell us he's there, and it will be all right, what?"

Bunter gasped helplessly. He was learning once more that old lesson, of what a tangled web we weave when we practise to deceive.

"He—he won't be home yet, I—I think," he stuttered. "It—it's no good ringing up Eastwood House. Besides, now I come to think of it, he wasn't going home. He—he was going on a visit."

"Going on a visit?" howled Johnny Bull.

"Yes; to an—an uncle."

"In the middle of the night, in slippers and dressing-gown and pyjamas?"

"Oh! I—I forgot—I mean, yes—that is, I told you I lent him some clothes! I say, you fellows, it looks to me as if you're doubting my word!" exclaimed Bunter warmly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"If you fellows, guests under my ancestral roof, can't take my word, this discussion had better cease," said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Look here, Bunter—"

The Owl of the Remove waved a fat hand.

"I decline to continue the discussion!" he said loftily. And he rolled away, heading for the dining-room and lunch.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another blankly.

"What on earth does it all mean?" asked Bob.

"Is that fat idiot potty?" inquired Johnny Bull.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I can't make it out," he said. "But one thing's clear—the thing that Bunter's trying to keep dark with that stack of lies. He knows what has become of D'Arcy."

"That's clear enough," assented Nugent.

"The clearfulness is terrific! But I suppose that Bunter has not knocked the esteemed D'Arcy on his venerable head and buried him under the floor?" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"He mentioned Pilkins and Walsingham," said Harry. "That estate agent, Pilkins, cleared off in a queer way, and his man Parker thinks there has been some kind of foul play. Walsingham vanished all of a sudden, and Bunter said he had been sent to London on business. Nothing has been heard of him since. Now D'Arcy's disappeared, and it's plain that Bunter knows where he is and won't tell. It's getting altogether too thick. This seems to be a place for mysterious disappearances, and we may disappear ourselves next, at this rate."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bunter knows, and Bunter's got to tell," said Harry. "D'Arcy's in the house somewhere, and—and—"

"And what?"

"Well, now we know that much, and adding it to what Parker suspects, I begin to think that Pilkins and Walsingham may be nearer than we believed. Is it possible—"

Wharton paused.

"What, old man?"

The captain of the Remove hesitated. The thought that had come into his mind was a natural one, in the strange circumstances; yet it seemed so wild a theory that he hesitated to put it into words.

"Give it a name, old chap," said Johnny Bull. "I fancy I know what's in your mind, too."

"Well," said Harry, "D'Arcy's disappeared, and Bunter knows all about it

and is trying to keep it a secret. He mentioned Pilkins and Walsingham in connection with D'Arcy. Is it possible that—he paused again—"that Bunter has done something with those two, as Parker thinks, and that D'Arcy found out something last night—"

"And Bunter did something with him, too?"

"I know it sounds thick," said Harry. "But something happened to D'Arcy last night, and Bunter knows and is keeping it secret. He's fool enough for anything, too."

"No doubt about that."

"But"—Bob Cherry rubbed his nose—"even if Bunter was ass enough, and idiot enough, and dummy enough, to shut a fellow up somewhere in the house because he had found out something by accident, where—"

"We've been over the whole show," said Nugent. "D'Arcy couldn't be locked in a room. Besides, he would shout—"

"Why is Bunter keeping the key of the wine-cellar?" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

The Famous Five gave one another startled looks. Wharton's words were like a flash of illumination in the darkness. And they knew—knew as well as if Bunter had told them—how matters stood. All that had puzzled them, all that had mystified them during that



"I say, you fellows, you're late!" said Bunter. "Sit down—" "Bunter!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "Hand over the key of the wine-cellar." Bunter's jaw dropped. His fork, well laden and half way to his capacious mouth, stopped in transit. "Chuck the key over!" growled Johnny Bull. "We know where D'Arcy is now!" (See Chapter 11.)

extraordinary vacation at Bunter Court, became suddenly clear. It was as if a veil had suddenly fallen from their eyes.

"So that's it," gasped Bob Cherry.

"That's it."

"Is Bunter mad?"

"Mad as a hatter, I should think! Anyhow, that's it."

"Come on," said Harry Wharton abruptly.

And the chums of the Remove followed Bunter—but not to lunch. Lunch was not on the programme just then. More important matters had to be attended to—though, in Bunter's opinion, there was no more important matter in existence, unless it was dinner.

Bunter was already going strong when the chums joined him. He had not waited for his guests. Thomas was ministering to his many needs. The Owl of the Remove blinked peevishly at the juniors. In his amazing fatuousness he seemed to be under the impression that the affair of D'Arcy was now closed. Bunter had declined to discuss it further, and that was an end of it!

"I say, you fellows, you're late!" he said. "Sit down."

"Bunter—"

"It's a jolly good lunch!"

"Hand over the key of the wine-cellar, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove quietly.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Chopper Comes Down!

BILLY BUNTER'S jaw dropped. His fork, well-laden and half-way to his capacious mouth, stopped in transit.

He stared blankly at the captain of the Remove.

Even Thomas allowed his well-trained and usually expressionless visage to display a faint glimmering of surprise. But the juniors did not heed Thomas. Their eyes were fixed on Bunter's startled face.

"Wha-a-a?" ejaculated Bunter, at last, finding his voice.

"The key of the wine-cellar."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Chuck it over, Bunter, and not so much jaw!" growled Johnny Bull.

"We know the whole game now—see?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"The game's up, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, very quietly. "I dare say we were rather fatheaded not to guess something before. But who'd have thought of such a thing as this? But we know now—we're pretty certain, at any rate. Will you give me the key of the wine-cellar?"

Bunter gasped.

"Certainly not!"

"Will you unlock the cellar and let us look in them?"

"No!" gasped Bunter.

"Why not?"

Bunter recovered himself a little. His fork clattered into his plate, and he blinked angrily and indignantly at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows, this is too thick, you know! Do you always behave like this when you're on a visit?"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Asking a gentleman for the key of his own wine-cellar?" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "Check, if you like!"

Wharton compressed his lips.

The situation really was an awkward one, for Billy Bunter, in whatsoever mysterious and tricky way he had become possessed of Combermere Lodge,

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was, after all, in possession of the house, and the Grefyriars fellows were his guests there.

That consideration, however, could not deter the juniors, in the circumstances. Guests or not, they could not allow Bunter to lock up their fellow-guest in the wine-cellar and leave him there. And that, amazing and incredible as it seemed, was fairly obviously what Bunter had done. Now that the Famous Five guessed the astonishing truth, they did not doubt it; they only wondered that they had not guessed it before.

Bluff would not serve Bunter's turn now; it was a chicken that would no longer fight.

"Bunter—" began Wharton again. Billy Bunter interrupted him with a wave of a fat hand.

"That's enough, Wharton!"

"I tell you—"

"Sit down to lunch, and don't give me any more check!" said Bunter. "Some fellows would turn you out of the house for this. I can tell you. I'm an easy-going chap. But—"

"You fat idiot!" roared Bob Cherry. "Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Do you think we shall stop here a day longer, you fathead?" exclaimed Harry Wharton angrily. "Do you think we should have come if we'd had the faintest idea of the potty tricks you were playing? We're going to-day—this very afternoon!"

"Eh?"

"But before we go we shall release D'Arcy, and anybody else who is along with him," said Harry. "Do you understand now, you born dummy?"

"D'Arcy!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, ass!"

"I told you he'd gone home."

"Which is sufficient evidence that he hasn't!" remarked Frank.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"We know where he is, Bunter," said Harry Wharton.

"He isn't," said Bunter promptly.

"What?"

"If you think he's locked up anywhere you're making a mistake," said Bunter. "Nothing of the kind! I shouldn't be likely to lock up an old pal like Gussy, I hope! Now sit down and have your lunch, and don't give me any more check, or really, you know, I shall have to ask you to bring your visit here to a close."

"Will you give me the key?" roared Wharton.

"No fear!"

"We know that D'Arcy is locked up in the wine-cellar!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Serve him jolly well right!" said Bunter. "If the silly ass hadn't butted in—"

"Then you admit it?"

"No, I don't! He's not there."

"Well, if Bunter doesn't take the whole jolly old bun!" said Bob Cherry, in wonder. "Jever hear of a brain like that before outside Colney Hatch?"

"He's gone home—I mean, he's gone on a visit to his uncle," said Billy Bunter, blinking at the juniors seriously. "As for Pilkins, my belief is that he has bunked with the enormous cheque my pater handed to him for the rent of this house. Walsingham has probably been run over in London. You know how dangerous those motor-buses are! I'm surprised at you fellows accusing me of things like this after all I've done for you! As for D'Arcy, he asked for it—fairly begged for it. Besides, I haven't done anything with him. He's miles and miles away now. Yarooooh!" roared Bunter as Bob Cherry grasped him by his fat

shoulders and jerked him out of his chair.

Bump!

William George Bunter sat on the floor and spluttered.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! Oooch! Beast! Wow!"

"Now will you open up the wine-cellar and let us get D'Arcy out?" roared Bob.

"No," howled Bunter, "I jolly well won't! Thomas!"

"Sir!" gasped the astounded Thomas. Thomas, after what he had heard, had entirely given up even the attempt to keep his clean-shaven face in its customary well-trained state. He was simply gaping with astonishment.

"Turn those rotters out, Thomas!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Pitch them out of the house, the lot of them!" shouted Bunter. "I'm done with them! Fed-up with them! They sha'n't stay in my house another minute! Chuck them out!"

"Oh!" gasped Thomas.

"Call up the other footmen and chuck the whole gang out!" roared Bunter. "A low lot—turning on me like this after sticking me for a holiday! Turn them out at once. Do you hear?"

Thomas only gaped at Bunter. After what he had heard he was not likely to attempt to carry out that sweeping order. Thomas was not, perhaps, quick on the uptake; but he realised by this time quite clearly that the lord of Bunter Court had no right whatever within that magnificent mansion—that he was, in fact, a "bilk," and not merely a common or garden bilk, so to speak, but an extraordinary and astonishing bilk, whose bilking was on whole-sale lines unheard-of before in the history of bilking.

So Thomas only gaped, and the Famous Five surrounded Bunter with grim looks.

"Are you handing over that key?" snorted Johnny Bull.

"No, you beast!"

"Then we'll jolly well take it!"

"Yaroooo! Help!"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton; and Johnny Bull's grasping hand drew back from Bunter. "Hold on! Bunter's master here, though it's pretty clear by this time that it's all a swindle, and he will get the law on his trail as soon as the facts become known."

"Ow!"

"But as matters stand he's master here. Our business is to walk down to the police-station and tell them what we think has happened here. A constable can come up and deal with Bunter."

"Yarooooh!"

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "We can telephone to the police-station. I'll cut off and ring them up—"

"Ow! Stop!" yelled Bunter.

"Rats!"

"I say, you fellows, hold on!" yelled Bunter. "Don't you bring any beastly policemen round my house! I—I say, I—I'll let you have the key if you like. I will really! I—I wouldn't refuse anything, you know, to fellows I really like—as I do you chaps! Honest injun, you know."

"Give me the key, then," said Harry Wharton.

"I—I say, old chap, I—I—I—I—I've lost it!" Bunter gaped through his pockets. "I say, it's gone! Beastly awkward, isn't it? But there you are, the key's lost!"

"Then we'll telephone to the police-station—"

"Hold on! I've found it!" yelled Bunter. "Here it is, you rotters! Oh dear!"

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet, key in hand. He threw it dismally upon the table.

"I—I say, you fellows——"
"You needn't say anything more," said Bob Cherry. "You'd better get ready to have your features altered when D'Arcy gets near enough to hit you!"

Bunter jumped.
"I—I say, you fellows, do—do—do you think Gussy will be waxy?" he gasped.

"Oh, my hat! Just a trifle, I should think."

"Oh dear! I—I say, you'll explain to him that it—it was only a joke, won't you?" implored Bunter.

"You can explain that to him yourself," growled Bob Cherry.

And, with the key in Wharton's hand, the Famous Five hurried away to the rescue of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Billy Bunter groaned dismally.
The game was up now, with a vengeance.

It was not only that Arthur Augustus was to be released; he might possibly have placated the swell of St. Jim's somehow, and at all events D'Arcy was not likely to invoke the law. Bunter had been kicked before, and he could survive kicking. Kicks had, as it were, punctuated his fat career as long as he could remember. The worst he had to expect from the St. Jim's junior was a kicking. But Pilkins and Walsingham, the bilked estate agent and the "diddled" butler—what were they likely to do?

Bunter shuddered.
On his great system of never meeting troubles half-way, and never meeting them at all if he could help it, Bunter had simply dismissed from his fat mind the consequences of his extraordinary proceedings.

Now the consequences could be no longer dismissed. The sword of Damocles had descended at last!

Bunter was face to face with the reckoning which came after the feast. And the prospect terrified him. His fat knees knocked together as he thought of it.

He forgot even his lunch. For the first time on record, Bunter left a meal unfinished; sure evidence of the fearful disturbance that raged in his fat mind.

He tottered away at last.

Thomas had hurried after the Famous Five. Billy Bunter headed for the staircase.

He realised that time was short.

It would not take the Famous Five long to reach the imprisoned three now that they had the key of the wine-cellar. Awful visions of an enraged estate agent giving him into custody for bilking floated before Bunter's terrified eyes. Already he felt the policeman's hand upon his fat shoulder.

He bolted for his room.

There was not a minute to be lost! There was not a second! The game was up. Bunter's house of cards had fallen around him, and only one thing remained—to go while the going was good!

"I've got an electric torch," said Bob. "Come on!"

Bob Cherry turned on his light, and the juniors descended the old oaken stairs that wound downwards to the deep wine-cellar.

Behind them came Thomas, the footman, still gaping. Thomas was in a state of amazement, from which he really looked as if he never would quite recover. Such happenings as these in Lord Combermere's magnificent country mansion quite overcame Thomas. The bare thought of what his lordship would think of it all almost made Thomas faint. Certainly Lord Combermere had never envisaged anything like this when he had handed over his house to Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, to let furnished.

"Here's another giddy door!" said Bob, as he reached the bottom of the stairs.

"The same key fits the lock, sir," said the voice of Thomas from behind.

"Oh, good!"

Harry Wharton put the key into the lock of the lower door and turned it. Bob shoved the oaken door open with a bang.

There was a bright light beyond. The electric light was burning in the wine-cellar.

Harry Wharton & Co. crowded in the doorway looking in. There was a shout from the depths.

"Bai Jovel! You fellows! Thank goodness!"

"D'Arcy, old man——"

Arthur Augustus rushed forward. Wharton was the first into the cellar, and the swell of St. Jim's almost hugged him in his delight at the sight of the rescuers.

"Huwway!" he gasped. "Gweat Scott, I was beginnin' to think I should neva be found heah, you know! Oh cwumbus!"

"The foundfulness is terrific, my esteemed, ludicrous D'Arcy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Pilkins! Walsingham! It's all wight now—wight as wain!"

Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham came forward. Their grubby, stubby faces looked almost ghastly in the electric light.



There was a clatter on the stairs, and Mr. Pilkins came down, with a red and furious face. He had a golf club in his hand and was evidently looking for Bunter. Apparently the golf club was for Bunter's benefit—when discovered! "Where is he?" roared Mr. Pilkins. "Echo answers where!" said Bob Cherry politely. (See Chapter 12.)

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Climax!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stopped at the vaulted door of the wine-cellar, and Wharton slid the key into the lock.

It clicked, and the captain of the Re move pushed the door open.

All was darkness beyond.

"Look after that door!" exclaimed Mr. Pilkins. "Don't let that young scoundrel nip down and shut it on you, as he did before!"

"Phew!"

"All right, Thomas is there!" said Harry Wharton. "Besides, I've taken out the key. You're all right!"

"Thank goodness!" said Mr. Pilkins. "I am extremely obliged to you young gentlemen!" said Walsingham in his best deferential butler manner, which contrasted oddly with his grubby face and stubby chin. "I have been through a very unpleasant experience, young gentlemen, and I cannot say how relieved I am."

"What about me?" hooted Mr. Pilkins. "I've been here longer than you—weeks, months, years, it seems like! I'll limb that young scoundrel! I'll have him locked up! I'll smash him! I'll prosecute him! I'll prosecute his father! I'll—I'll—I'll—" The Combermere estate agent spluttered for breath.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry, staring at the estate-agent. "Have you really been here ever since that day you called on Bunter about the house?"

"I have!" panted Mr. Pilkins. "I was tricked, sir—tricked! That young villain plays ventriloquial tricks—he made me believe Walsingham was in the wine-cellar, and brought me down to speak to him, and locked me in, sir. I—I—I'll have the law on him! It's false imprisonment—it's kidnapping—it's actionable. I'll make him sorry for himself."

"Hold on a minute," said Harry Wharton, as the estate-agent moved towards the door. "Look here, Mr. Pilkins—"

"I'll pulverise him into little bits!" roared Mr. Pilkins.

"Yaas, wathah! I shall personally give Buntah a fearful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I shall telephone to the police," said Walsingham. "The sooner the young rascal is taken into custody the better."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Hold on a moment!" said Wharton anxiously. "Lots of time for all that. Look here, as soon as we guessed that Bunter was keeping you shut up in the wine-cellar, we were bound to come and let you out."

"I should think so!" hooted Mr. Pilkins. "You escaped a charge of being accessories in the bilking. Bear that in mind."

"Oh, rats!" snapped Harry. "Listen to me. Bunter is a fool—he's not really a rogue—"

"The biggest rogue in the kingdom!" shouted Mr. Pilkins.

"He's a born fool, and he simply doesn't understand the seriousness of what he's been doing," said Harry. "I'm sure that he never even thought about the consequences at all. Look here, as we've released you, don't you think you ought to go as easy as possible with Bunter?"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway be reasonable, Mr. Pilkins. Weally, I think he can be let off with a fearful thwashin'."

Snort from Mr. Pilkins.

"I'll go easy with him!" he hooted. "I'll break every bone in his body, and then have him locked up and prosecuted. Weeks and weeks rent due on the house at forty guineas a week, and not a shilling paid; Lord Combermere may consider me responsible—"

"What the thump did you let him the house for, then?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Mr. Pilkins almost raved.

"I never let him the house! He got hold of it while I was in the nursing-home, after I'd shown him over it! When I returned to my office, and found that he had the house, I was knocked over—you young gentlemen were at my office that day, and saw me—"

"Yes; but you telephoned to Walsingham and said it was all right!" exclaimed Nugent.

Mr. Pilkins raved again.

"That young villain Bunter took the call, and imitated Walsingham's voice. I thought it was the butler speaking—and it was Bunter, pulling my leg! Then he cleared everybody out of the house the next day, got me here, and locked me in! I—I—I—" Mr. Pilkins fairly babbled with rage as he recited his wrongs.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "Bunter has been going it strong, and no mistake!"

"The go-fulness has been terrific."

"All the same, somebody's been jolly careless," said Harry Wharton. "Why did you let Bunter into the house at all, Walsingham, if Mr. Pilkins hadn't let it to him?"

"I believed that he had, sir; Mr. Pilkins telephoned to that effect. Only, on comparing notes with Mr. Pilkins, I find that it was not he who telephoned. Bunter must have imitated his voice—a very peculiar gift, sir, which I was naturally not looking out for."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And when the key of the wine-cellar was found, sir, by Master D'Arcy, and handed over to me, and I came down here, he followed me stealthily, sir, and locked me in along with Mr. Pilkins. With all due deference, sir, I am afraid I cannot go easily with Master Bunter. In fact, sir," said Walsingham, with a peculiar mixture of deference and venom—"in fact, sir, I am bound to say that it is my intention to prosecute him, sir, with the utmost rigour of the law, sir, if I may say so with respect, sir."

"Come on!" hooted Mr. Pilkins. "We've wasted enough time here—what's the good of talking? We've got to deal with that young scoundrel!"

"Very good, sir," said the butler, and he hurried after the estate-agent.

Mr. Pilkins, breathing wrath and vengeance, tramped furiously up the stairs, the portly butler following him more

sedately. Thomas, still in a gaping condition, followed on. Thomas' dreams of butlership were gone now; Walsingham was back at Combermere Lodge once more, and Thomas had immediately fallen from his high estate as butler prominent into his old rank of first footman. But if Thomas was disappointed, doubtless he realised that his chief, after all, could not have been kept permanently in the Combermere cellars.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Well, Bunter's for it!" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The ass!" said Harry Wharton. "The frightful ass! Who'd ever have thought that even Bunter would be such a howling ass as this? We knew that he is every kind of an idiot—but this is the giddy limit."

"He's for it now!" said Johnny Bull. "Serve him jolly well right! We've had a narrow escape of being taken for a gang of bilks along with him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove! Buntah is a fearful ass, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He has not twatted me with pwopah respect, and it weally looks to me as if he has bwokeen the law wight and left. I do not know vewy much about the law, but I am suah that Buntah has bwokeen it in several places. I shall nevah accept an invitation from Buntah again, in any circumstances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am speakin' quite seriously, dear boys. If Buntah should ask me again, I shall wefuse point-blank. Lockin' a fellow up in the wine-cellar is weally too thick, you know."

"It's not done in the best circles, I'm sure!" said Bob Cherry gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get out of this," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We've rescued the giddy prisoners, and I think we'd better be on the scene to keep them from finishing Bunter. Even Bunter mustn't be quite slaughtered."

The juniors ascended the stairs to the upper regions, Arthur Augustus drawing his dressing-gown about him. Really, he did not like to walk out into public view in the middle of the day in pyjamas and dressing-gown. But there was no help for it. A dozen curious servants blinked at the swell of St. Jim's, as, with a crimson face, he whisked up to his room to dress.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the hall when Thomas came up with a puzzled face.

"Have you seen Master Bunter?" he asked.

"Oh, my hat! Has he disappeared now?" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Hasn't Walsingham found him?"

"Mr. Walsingham is shaving, sir," said Thomas. "Mr. Walsingham is very particular about his appearance, sir, and he seemed very cross, sir, when he looked into a glass and saw his face, sir. Mr. Pilkins is searching for Master Bunter, sir, but cannot find him."

"I suppose he's hiding somewhere," said Harry. "Even Bunter's bright enough to know that Mr. Pilkins isn't a safe man to meet at present."

"The hidefulness is probably terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singhi.

There was a clatter on the stairs, and Mr. Pilkins came down with a red and furious face. He had a golf club in his hand, and was evidently looking for Bunter. Apparently the golf club was for Bunter's benefit, when discovered.

"Where is he?" roared Mr. Pilkins.

"Echo answers where?" said Bob Cherry politely. "Better look in the

(Continued on page 28.)

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The Clue of the Devil's Elbow!

"GUV'NOR! Guv'nor! It's I—Jack Drake! Speak to me, for mercy's sake!"

As if coming from an infinite distance, the low, quivering voice percolated at last into the slowly-awakening consciousness of the detective, and Jack Drake, his face white and strained and haggard, gave a quick sigh of fervent relief as he saw the detective's pallid lips slowly curving into the faintest suggestion of a smile.

"Thank heaven, he's alive still!" muttered the boy. "I was afraid that—that it was too late."

He forced something from a flask between Locke's still tightly-clenched teeth, watching the effect with renewed anxiety.

But at last a little colour began to creep back into the criminologist's marble cheeks, and his eyelids flickered uncertainly, and finally remained open.

"Hallo—old—bean!" he whispered weakly. "How—goes—it?"

"Oh, guv'nor! It's good to hear your voice again! I—I thought——"

Jack Drake's voice ended abruptly with something strongly suggestive of a choked sob, and for a moment he dropped his head into his hands.

The boy's grief was easily understandable, for in the past half-hour everything had seemed so black and hopeless.

Despite the most frenzied efforts on his part, he had been unable to find even the slightest sign of life in the detective, who had lain strangely, terribly still, his face the colour of marble, the beat of his heart so very faint as to be almost unnoticeable.

The bond of affection between Locke and Jack Drake was one of those big, lifelong things that are too vital to be talked about. In the ordinary way, there was little, if any, kind of demonstration between them. They so fully understood each other that there was really no need.

But in this instance, in this sudden frightful crisis, Jack had found his own usually well-controlled feelings gaining the upper hand.

His fear for his beloved "guv'nor's" life had taken possession of his whole mind, and the strain at last had been just a bit too much for him.

"All right, Jack boy," murmured Locke at last, as he struggled up on to his elbow and touched the other lightly on the shoulder. "All Sir Garnet, you know! Carry on with the good work! I'm O.K. now—fit as a fiddle, in fact!"

The detective's voice was stronger now, more like his old voice. Quickly Jack Drake pulled himself together, inwardly calling himself a

WHO'S WHO.

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective, who is engaged upon solving the mystery surrounding the tragic end of **SIR MERTON CARR**, a South African mining magnate, who has been murdered, uncle of

GERALD BRISTOW—alias Arthur the Dude—an escaped convict, who has made his way over to Johannesburg to seek the treasure of the Golden Pyramid.

GRIGGS, the footman at Sir Merton's house at Parktown, a suburb of Johannesburg.

STEPHEN JARRAD, the late baronet's private secretary, who has mysteriously disappeared, thereby leading the Johannesburg police to assume that he is guilty of the murder.

DAFT DAVE, a local half-wit, who appears to know something of the crime.

JACK DRAKE, Locke's capable boy assistant.

INSPECTOR PYCKROFT, a Scotland Yard detective.

INSPECTOR VANE, a member of the South African Police Force.

Jack Drake, sent out to trail Daft Dave, returns with the astonishing news that he has heard Sir Merton's voice. Now, as the baronet has been dead for days, this would appear ridiculous. Locke, however, knows more about that "mysterious voice" than he cares to say. In company with Drake he visits the house where the voice was heard, and hears the "voice" himself. Shortly afterwards he surprises the occupants of the house—Daft Dave and Gerald Bristow. A fight ensues, in which Bristow makes a successful get-away. Daft Dave, however, in his struggle for freedom, sets the place afire. Having rendered Dave unconscious, Locke rescues Drake, who has been overcome by the smoke-fumes, and returns to the burning house for Daft Dave. The detective just manages to drag the half-wit to a place of safety, when he collapses from exhaustion. (Now read on.)

"blab," and feeling suddenly contemptuous of his own lack of self-control.

He turned in a moment towards Locke, his lips now parted in a relieved smile.

"You're looking better now, guv'nor," he said hopefully. "But you went through a very dickens of an ordeal when——"

Locke nodded, and smiled grimly.

Then abruptly he dragged himself to his feet, waving Jack's swift offer of assistance aside with a smile.

As consciousness had gradually returned, memory had come with it. Also, Locke now heard a clangour going on some little distance away.

He swung round, to behold the house from which they had just come, one half of it a mass of seething flames, the other a smouldering, steaming, blackened ruin.

And all around, like a huge colony of black ants, moved swift, agile figures in brass helmets.

Away in the east, the great golden orb of the sun was just peeping over the horizon, and chasing the shadows of that dreadful night away. There was a freshening breeze in the air which acted now like sparkling wine on the detective's jaded and worn body.

Suddenly he swung round, his face consumed with anxiety.

"Where—where's Daft Dave?" he asked abruptly.

"In that shed over there," said Jack, pointing away to his left, where, some five hundred yards away, stood a large corrugated iron shed. "The five brigade turned up just now. Nobody's seen us as yet. I contrived to get you down as far as here, where there's a sort of running stream, from which I could get water to help bring you round. It being so dark, and the excitement of the fire taking their attention, the brigade men have apparently overlooked us altogether."

Locke nodded.

He wondered for a moment who had given the alarm, but dismissed the matter from his mind now, as he began to walk towards the corrugated iron shed, Jack following.

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"I'm afraid Dave's done for," muttered Jack as they hurried along. "I shoved him in that shed, intending to look after him later on; but I don't think there's much we can do—"

Locke's face was set and grim as he pushed open the door of the shed, and they passed within. The sun had now risen clear above the horizon in that sudden way peculiar to South Africa, and the light shafted through a grating high up in the shed, revealing the form of Daft Dave stretched out on the concrete floor. The shed itself was empty save for a collection of gardening tools stacked in orderly array in one corner.

Locke bent over the form of the cripple, studying it intently for some moments.

There was no sign whatever of life, but as Locke forced apart the man's badly burnt clothing, and sounded his heart, he caught the faintest beat and nodded his head.

"He's done done for, as you say, Jack," he said quietly; "but he's not quite dead yet. Now, if only—"

He broke off as a figure appeared in the doorway wearing a brass helmet. It was one of the firemen.

"Thought we saw somebody moving about, sir," he said. "So I was told off to come and investigate—"

Locke quickly explained the situation, while the fireman listened in grave silence.

"Yes, the house belong to Sir Thomas Maynard, the owner of the Zingaru Reef, Limited," he explained. "He's away with his family on a visit to the Old Country, so that we were astounded when we got the alarm of the outbreak of fire, seeing the place has been closed right up the past two months."

Locke nodded understandingly.

"I want to get a doctor for this poor fellow," he said quickly. "If you happen to know where the nearest man is to be found—"

"Matter of fact, Dr. Norris, who happened to be motoring home from a mid-night call, stopped here a few minutes ago; that's his car over there. He was wondering if his services might be needed. I'll call him at once!"

And the fireman rushed away, to return very quickly, accompanied by a middle-aged man, who bowed to Ferrers Locke, and at once gave his attention to the dying man.

While the doctor was so engaged, Locke turned to the fireman.

"You say your brigade got a call for this fire," he remarked. "As a matter of fact, I've been a bit mystified as to how you could have got to know about it, seeing that your station is at least five miles off. I suppose you don't know how or where that call originated?"

"As a matter of fact," returned the fireman, "I happened to be the fellow who answered it. It was a telephone call from a public box. Of course, I don't know who it was, but it was a man's voice—rather la-de-da sort of dude, you know."

Locke's eyes glistened for a moment.

"Something like this?" he asked, and forthwith gave a low-toned but amazingly lifelike imitation of Bristow's drawing tones.

"Jove! That's it to the life, air!" exclaimed the fireman in astonished admiration. "My word, you'll pardon me, but you really ought to go on the halls. I—"

Locke laughed lightly, and then turned away at a touch on his arm.

The doctor was standing beside him, his face very grave.

"The poor fellow's come round, and

apparently wants to make a statement. He's asking for a Mr. Locke—"

But Locke did not wait for more.

Almost unceremoniously he brushed past the mildly-surprised medico, and hurried to the side of Daft Dave, Jack Drake following closely behind him.

Daft Dave's eyes were open now, and they no longer rolled in that frenzy which had first told Locke that the man had gone mad. Apparently the ordeal through which he had passed had restored, temporarily, at any rate, his sanity.

He gazed up at Locke, and his heavy lips creased into a slow smile of recognition.

Locke's face was set in sad lines as he saw, at a glance, that Daft Dave was not much longer for this world.

"Mr. Locke"—the man's voice, strangely altered, was weak and feeble, and Locke had to drop on one knee to catch the words—"I'm handing in my checks—oh, yes, I am! I know the end when I see it. But—before I go, there's something important I'd like to say, something about—about—"

He broke off, coughing violently for some moments. Locke waited patiently, inwardly grieved that he could do nothing to assuage the poor fellow's suffering.

But at length the paroxysm passed, and Daft Dave became calm once more.

"It was you who—who saved my life," he muttered. "I know it must have been you. There was no one else, your assistant being already bowled out. And—and I want to try to make some amends before—before I go out."

He struggled, with astonishing strength for one in his condition, up on to his elbow. His deep-set eyes were alive now with a weird light as they were turned upon those of the detective.

"They—they call me Daft Dave," he muttered, "but—but I'm not quite so daft as they think. I—I know—who murdered Sir Merton Carr, and—and I can prove it! Listen, and I'll tell you!"

Again he stopped. Locke, watching him as he fought for breath, became tense with expectation.

"That—that voice you heard," went on the dying man—"Sir Merton's voice—hey? He, he, he. Jolly good, too, wasn't it? But—but nobody knows the secret because it's mine—"

"Don't worry about that," said Locke, almost impatient in his anxiety. "Tell me what you know about—about the murder."

"I—I'm coming to that," returned Daft Dave, with a touch of his old irritability. "But—but it's no good just telling you, you know. Give a dog a bad name, and I've got such a rotten one that nobody'd believe poor old Daft Dave! So—so what I'm going to give you, Mr. Locke, is proof—solid, unquestioning proof—see?"

His voice suddenly stopped, and he fell back.

In an agony of suspense, Locke hurriedly snatched the flask which Jack still held in his hand, and applied it to the man's lips.

After a little while he seemed to revive, but by now he was rapidly weakening, and no longer attempted to raise himself.

"Come nearer," he whispered. "My—my voice is giving out. And—and I must hurry, or—or it will be too—too late. The—the dead don't speak, do they? He, he, he! But Sir Merton spoke, only this night. And he's dead, isn't he? Dead as a doornail! He, he, he!"

There followed a spluttering cough. Locke clenched his hands in suspense.

Would the man never go on with his story? That he really had something of the most vital importance to say the detective was now positive.

"Listen carefully," Daft Dave was speaking again now, and his voice was more sane and serious. "The man who murdered Sir Merton was not who you think he was. And if you want proof of what I say, if you want to learn the real secret of it all, you—you must go to—to—"

His voice died out and he fell back, his eyes closed, his face suddenly ashen.

"Brandy—quick!" gasped Locke.

Three minutes dragged by—three minutes of agonising, terrible suspense.

Then at last the fellow's heavy lids flickered and his lips moved.

Locke bent so close that his face was almost touching that of the dying man, whose voice, wisplike, faint as the evening breeze, now came out of the sudden tense hush.

"Go to Devil's Elbow," breathed Daft Dave. "Under the kloof—the black box—the real murderer of Sir Merton Carr was—was—"

Silence.

Silence so deep, so final that there was no mistaking it this time.

Ferrers Locke rose slowly to his feet, and turned towards Jack Drake, who stood staring down at Daft Dave with eyes charged with the utmost mystification.

"He's dead!" muttered the detective slowly.

But Jack Drake scarcely heard.

For round and round in his brain three queer phrases were chasing each other in an endless race:

"Devil's Elbow! Under the kloof! The black box!"

What on earth did they mean?

The Secret of the Bogus Cheque!

FERRERS LOCKE crossed the shed to the door, just outside of which the doctor who had been called to attend Daft Dave was standing.

"The poor fellow's dead," said the detective; "but I'd like you to have a look at him."

The medico nodded and made his way within.

Locke signalled to Jack, and together they made their way out of the shed and across the field towards the now half-burnt-out house.

The fire brigade had worked like Trojans and had, fortunately, been able to save a good half of the house, though the other half was almost completely gutted.

Flames still rose from the ruins, but the fire was now well under control and had all but been extinguished.

Locke sought and found the brigade superintendent, with whom he had a few words, at the same time informing the officer of his identity.

"Yes, Mr. Locke," said the superintendent, "I think it would be fairly safe for you to have a look round now. One of my men shall go with you. I'm afraid, however, that you won't find much—the whole of the east wing has been practically gutted."

Locke thanked him, and a few moments later followed a fireman towards that part of the house in which the memorable fight with Daft Dave had taken place. Jack Drake was close behind, his face expressive of some mystification.

He was rather at a loss to know what the detective hoped to achieve by going over the ruins. To all outward appearances, the part of the house in which Locke was interested was now little



Ferrers Locke began to scout round amid the blackened debris. Finding the charred remains of a table leg, he made use of this to probe and pick about. (See this page.)

more than a cracked and blackened shell.

The fire having destroyed the ordinary means of entrance, Locke and Drake were compelled to make use of one of the fire brigade's ladders, and soon they were standing amid the ruins of the room in which the encounter had taken place and in which the fire itself had first started.

The brigade's hosepipes were still playing around them, sending up dense clouds of steam, which floated about like a thick London fog. But beyond a very occasional spurt of flame here and there, the fire had been put out in this particular part, and there was little if any danger.

Locke began at once to scout round amid the blackened debris. Finding the charred remains of a table leg, he made use of this to probe and pick about, turning the remnants of the furniture over and over in his search.

At length the detective stooped and picked up something. Jack, who stood near by, saw that it appeared to be a piece of heavy wood, evidently real ebony.

Locke scrutinised it closely for a moment, and then thrust it away into his pocket.

Some further probing brought to light a scattered collection of blackened and twisted metal, including some four or five tiny brass wheels and a couple of thin, steel needles, not unlike those used in the playing of an ordinary gramophone record. These, too, Locke put carefully away.

At length the detective seemed satisfied with his search, and, after thanking the fireman who had accompanied them, turned and made his way from the building.

"What's the next move, guv'nor?"

asked Jack as they strode away across the veldt.

"First, to telephone to Vane and Pycroft," said Locke. "Then get back as quickly as possible to Parktown. I want to work out a theory which I have just formulated."

"What I want to know," said Jack, "is, what on earth was the meaning of that voice — Sir Merton Carr's voice?"

"There's a whole heap of things we all want to know, my boy," returned Locke, with a quiet smile, "and if they were all as simple and straightforward to answer as that query of yours, everything in the garden would be simply glorious!"

Jack stared at him, open-mouthed.

To him the idea of the riddle of Sir Merton's voice being a matter capable of simple and straightforward explanation was astounding, to say the least of it.

But he realised that he would have to possess himself in patience. Locke was not in a very communicative mood just now, and Jack knew that if he attempted to question the detective he would gain little beyond an exasperating series of enigmatical answers.

They made their way in silence to the narrow cut where Locke had parked the car, and a few moments later they were moving at a good speed over the rough and rugged roads towards Johannesburg.

En route Locke sighted a public telephone-box, and stopped the car while he put through a call to Vane. Then the journey was resumed.

Out of the distance came the muffled roar and throb of the giant gold mines, beating like a mighty heart in the very bowels of the earth, and as they drew nearer, the great dredging trucks could

be seen traversing their cable lines to the accompaniment of a ceaseless clatter which was curiously rhythmic.

On every side the great white sand-dumps reared themselves like miniature mountains of snow, and the long, low-roofed, corrugated-iron sheds reverberated to the steady roar of the stamping-machines, whose thunderous weight seemed to cause even the very earth to tremble and shudder.

Presently the Golden City itself came in sight—a wonderful, inspiring panorama of gigantic yet beautiful buildings, many of them strangely like the skyscrapers of New York.

Locke slackened speed as they picked their way through the maze of streets, cutting clean across the heart of the city and emerging again on the other side, when the detective again increased the speed as they mounted the broad, grey-white hills towards Parktown.

And at last they came to a stop at Sir Merton's home, and Locke and Jack hastened within, to find Pycroft and Superintendent Vane awaiting them.

"Got your phone message O.K.," said Vane, coming forward. "I've sent my runner-up out to the scene of the fire—he should be there now. Gee, but you look as if you've been pushed through the business end of a gun, both of you!"

Ferrers Locke laughed, and looked down at his tattered clothes.

Both he and Jack had been so hard at it that the matter of their personal appearance had naturally escaped their attention till now.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Jack. "Meantersay we've motored through some of the principal streets of Jo'burg like this? The people will think there's a circus opening in their midst!"

They did indeed present a weird and wonderful sight.

Locke's clothes, thanks to his terrible experience in the fire, were torn and tattered and scorched to such an extent as to be almost unrecognisable.

Usually so immaculate in his appearance, he now looked like nothing on earth—unless it was a good-for-nothing tramp who had come rather badly through an encounter with a particularly spiteful dog.

Jack Drake was very little better, and he now surveyed himself ruefully, while both Vane and Pycroft stood before them roaring with laughter.

"This," said Locke, with mock gravity, "is no place for us, Jack. I think we would be well advised discreetly to disappear. The vulgar cachinnations of our erstwhile respected friends jar most painfully on my already sorely overtaxed nerves."

"Was thinking the same myself, guv'nor," murmured Jack, glaring balefully at Pycroft, who seemed to have gone off into a fit of convulsions. "Take me by the hand and lead me away before I forget the manners mother taught me! I'd be sorry to make a mess of Pycroft's plain but homely visage; but the atmosphere is growing distinctly feverish!"

An hour later, having bathed, changed, and breakfasted, Locke and Jack Drake reappeared, as immaculate and urbane as it was their normal business to be.

Vane and Pycroft, having recovered from their cachinnatory outburst, were now all agog with expectation.

"Yes," nodded Locke, in response to a tentative query from Pycroft, "I'll give you a brief outline of what's happened and some idea of the theory I've worked out. But, first of all, do either of you know the meaning of the words 'Devil's Elbow'?"

'Devil's Elbow?' echoed Pycroft, staring at Locke as if he had momentarily taken leave of his senses.

"That's what I said," nodded Locke.

"You're probably referring to a spot on the main Jo'burg-Pretoria road," said Vane, stepping forward. "There's a bit of a cliff, or kopje, jutting out almost over the road itself, and by its curious and grotesque shape it has earned for itself the name of the Devil's Elbow."

Locke turned and looked significantly at Jack Drake, whose eyes were now sparkling.

"Got it first time!" muttered the detective. "Now we sha'n't be long!"

"But what the thump—" began Vane.

"All right, Vane!" Locke held up a restraining hand. "I'll explain all about it when I know all about it. Savvy? At present I know no more than you do, save that I intend to pay a visit to the Devil's Elbow as soon as possible. But just at present both Jack and I are feeling rather washed-out, and, after we've assuaged your curiosity to the extent of a brief outline of our adventures and perhaps a word or two about the theory I've formulated we'd like to take a rest if you don't mind."

Vane nodded sympathetically and subsided into silence.

Both Locke and Jack certainly looked rather washed-out, for all their neat and dapper appearance.

Indeed, it was a matter of surprise even to Pycroft, who flattered himself that he was perhaps more closely acquainted with Locke's habits than most men, that the famous detective had not insisted on taking a long rest the instant he had come in.

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But apparently Locke had something on his mind, and until he had thrashed it out he would not rest.

The detective flung himself into a chair beside a table on which he had already arranged a weird collection of articles, which included a couple of fragments of shellac, the diary of Sir Merton Carr, the charred fragments of paper found in Sir Merton's library grate, the fragment of ebony, and the odd wheels which he had rescued from the debris of the fire, and finally the dagger which had caused Sir Merton's death.

"Where the thunder did you get that?" gasped Pycroft, as Locke laid it on the table, while Vane and Jack both stared from the weapon to Locke in blank astonishment.

"Found it on the body of Daft Dave," answered Locke promptly. "No, Jack, you did not see me go through the poor fellow's pockets, so you couldn't be expected to know. However, I'll explain all that presently."

Having arranged this queer assortment of objects on the table before him, Locke settled back in his chair, lighted a cigarette, and forthwith plunged into a brief, crisply-worded outline of his and Jack's adventures during the preceding night.

Vane and Pycroft listened in rapt attention till he had concluded.

"So Daft Dave was concerned in this blessed case, then?" said Pycroft at last.

"Unquestionably," nodded Locke.

Superintendent Vane leaned forward with an excited gesture.

"Has it struck you, Mr. Locke," he muttered, "that Daft Dave himself might reasonably be suspected of the murder of Sir Merton Carr?"

Ferrers Locke favoured the police-officer with one of his slow, shadowy smiles.

"And has it struck you, Vane," he retorted, "that the man Bristow was actually on the spot on the night of the murder; that his story to me has since been proved to be significantly weak in more than one respect?"

"Yes; but hang it all—" began Vane.

"And has it also struck you," went on Locke, "that our mysterious and highly nervous young friend Mr. Stephen Jarrad made a similarly suspicious statement when he was first questioned—a statement which he afterwards withdrew almost unconditionally, substituting another and infinitely more significant story?"

"Also that the very instant Mr. Jarrad realised that the finger of suspicion was directed towards him he conveniently and very promptly disappeared?"

"Also that he left a most incriminating letter behind him, and—most important of all—the actual weapon which was the means of killing Sir Merton was found carefully hidden under the floorboards in Jarrad's own bedroom?"

Superintendent Vane opened his mouth as if to make reply, but thought better of it.

Put crisply and clearly, as Locke had just put it, that series of amazing facts admittedly made his theory look rather silly—or, at least, subject to severe criticism.

He leaned back in his chair, shaking his head resignedly.

"You can get on with the chinwag, Mr. Locke," he said wearily; "I'm beat! This blessed case is about the absolute outside edge! Everything's all so darned tangled up, you no sooner get going on one theory than something else crops up and boggles up all your ideas!"

"There's a good deal in what you

say, Vane," responded Ferrers Locke. "This case is indeed one of the biggest puzzles I have ever been called upon to handle. And events have been moving so swiftly just lately that we are all of us in some danger of losing our perspective—"

"Didn't know we had a perspective to lose," grunted Pycroft irritably.

"More like a blinking mirage—"

But Locke shook his head.

"Don't you believe it, old son," he replied. "Every effect has its cause, and very often a whole group of effects can be and is produced from only one cause. It's precisely because we are all in some danger of losing sight of our main objective that I thought it wiser to give you a brief recapitulation and a few suggestions which may perhaps be of assistance to you—as they have already been to me."

He settled himself more comfortably in his chair and puffed reflectively at his cigarette for a few moments before continuing. A tense, expectant silence fell.

"I'm not going to bother you with a detailed synopsis of every factor in this case," said Locke at last. "The salient features are—first, the discovery by the late Sir Merton of the old biscuit-tin and its apparently absurd contents; secondly, the escape from Stonemoor of Gerald Bristow, Sir Merton's nephew; thirdly, the murder of Sir Merton and the subsequent series of happenings arising out of that crime."

"Out of the welter of facts and fancies consequent upon the murder, one important item seems to stand clear, especially just at this moment. I refer to Bristow's statement to me about having discovered Sir Merton after the crime."

"Bristow, as you know, said that Sir Merton was not dead—that he was rapidly sinking—and that as he caught sight of Bristow he denounced him as the author of the deed in a voice, so Bristow said, which must have been heard by others in the house."

"It was heard by Jarrad," put in Pycroft quietly.

"Yes, but even Jarrad could not catch the words," corrected Locke; "and that's a most important fact, believe me, always providing that we can accept Jarrad's story."

"And Bristow's, guv'nor!" put in Jack Drake shrewdly. "You're not forgetting what Dr. Montrose said about the time of death? According to the medical evidence, Sir Merton could not possibly have been alive at the time when Bristow and Jarrad heard—or say they heard—his voice!"

"That's precisely what I'm coming to, my boy!" said Locke, with a queer smile. "And don't you forget, too, your own little experience at the house we have just left, where you heard Sir Merton's voice, and that not a matter of hours but of days after the poor fellow's death!"

"Good lord, Locke, we seem to be blocked at every turn!" exclaimed Vane exasperatedly.

"On the contrary," smiled the Baker Street detective, "at least, the mystery of the dead man's voice is now as clear as crystal!"

He leaned forward and carefully picked out the pieces of shellac, the odd assortment of brass wheels, and the diary of the dead man, together with the charred fragments found in Sir Merton's library grate. The others now watched him spellbound.

"There is a reference in Sir Merton's diary to a mysterious invention," he went on after a pause, "and that reference is repeated in the burnt fragments of paper which I have here."

(Continued on page 25.)

ALL ABOUT THE

FOUR FAMOUS CRICKETERS

who form the subject of

This Week's Superb Free Stand-up Cut-out Photos.



F. E. WOOLLEY
(Kent).



P. MEAD
(Hants.).

KENT'S CRACK.

F. E. WOOLLEY both bowls and bats left-handed—and he made five centuries in five different matches on five different grounds last season!

He was invited to go to Australia during the last England tour; it was his third trip. His first innings in the first Test match resulted in a duck, but he made up for that with 123 runs in his second innings. He played in all the games, including the fourth, when England was victorious. Strange enough, Woolley was a member of the England team that last beat Australia; this was in 1921, when we won at the Oval.

No less than eight times he has accomplished the double feat of scoring 1,000 runs and taking 100 wickets in a single season. The first time he did this was in 1910, and the last time was in 1923, when he scored 2,091 runs and took 101 wickets. His best batting season, up to the present, was 1924, when he made 2,344 runs; his best bowling season was 1920, when he took 185 wickets.

Woolley is one of our best all-round cricketers. Quite apart from his fine performances with the willow and with the ball, he made no less than 37 catches in 1924—a fine tribute to his abilities in the field.

His best bowling feat was against Northants at Gravesend, when he took five wickets for fourteen runs; when Kent played Hampshire at Southampton, Woolley took three wickets in four balls.

Woolley played throughout the whole series of Test matches when the Australians were over here in 1921. The Aussies will be here again in 1926. Woolley's selection is almost a foregone conclusion—and it won't be his fault if we don't get the Ashes back.

A BRAINY BATSMAN.

DURING 1924, A. E. Dipper was, as always, the mainstay of Gloucestershire so far as batting is concerned, and he finished the season with an aggregate of 1,568 runs, four centuries being included in that total.

When occasion demands Dipper can slog with the best—he made 247 runs last year at Bristol against Oxford University. On

the other hand, he can play as cautiously as the most hardened stonewaller—he made two runs, both singles, in an hour and a half against Somerset at Bristol, although he finished his innings with a total of 79. For slow batting, those two runs are something like a record. The match was spoiled by rain, so the state of the wicket no doubt accounts for Dipper's caution.

His highest score was made in 1923, when he hit up 252 not out against Glamorgan at Cheltenham. This year produced his best batting aggregate—2,048 runs in fifty-seven innings.

Gloucestershire will always be associated with the famous W. G. Grace, who died barely ten years ago. During Grace's time Gloucestershire cricket was always sensational; last season Dipper participated in a match which carried out this tradition.

Gloucestershire were out for 31, but Parker, their famous bowler, did the hat-trick against Middlesex in both innings, and Gloucestershire pulled the game out of the

single match; this was against Sussex at Horsham.

With sixteen seasons behind him, Phil Mead can be regarded as a veteran in all but age. At the end of 1924 he stood sixth on the list of century scorers; but he will improve his position on the list, and be challenging the leaders—W. G. Grace and J. B. Hobbs—long before he is a veteran in years.

WILLY WHYSALL.

LAST year W. W. Whysall went out with the Test team to Australia, travelling as reserve wicket-keeper.

He played in three of the games, his best performance being 75 runs in the second innings of the third match.

Because Whysall is an exponent of the most modern methods of batting, some critics are inclined to decry his performances. Now, last season Whysall hit up three centuries in the same week, so that there cannot be very much the matter with his batting style.

He knocked up six centuries in first-class cricket during 1924, his biggest score being 151 against Kent at Nottingham. His total score for the season was 1,786 runs for an average of 48.27 runs each innings.

Whysall can be a very wily and cautious player when occasion demands. When Notts played Glamorgan at Nottingham, Whysall took an hour and three-quarters to score 10 runs, but he finished with a total innings score of 93. As a contrast to this slow scoring, he once made 102 out of a total of 145 runs which were put on the board for Notts in less than two hours.

Whysall was born at Woodborough thirty-eight years ago, and it was in 1906 that he joined the ground staff at Trent Bridge. He made 50 in his very first innings, although it was nearly five years before he began to play regularly for Notts.

Notts had secured his services because he was both a batsman and a wicket-keeper; it was these qualifications which made the M.C.C. invite him to go on the Australian tour last year—his first appearance in Test match cricket.

NEXT WEEK!

TATE (Sussex).
QUAIFE (Warwickshire).
DOUGLAS (Essex).
STRUDWICK (Surrey).

MIND YOU GET THEM, BOYS!

fire by 61 runs. Dipper had wretched luck, being caught in each innings for under ten runs.

Dipper invariably plays exceedingly careful cricket, seldom attempting to hit out until he is thoroughly set. He is now thirty-eight years of age.

HAMPSHIRE'S HITTER.

THIS is Phil Mead's sixteenth season of first-class cricket; he had—to the end of 1924—scored eighty centuries, and he looks like scoring a whole lot more. He is a left-handed batsman, with a cast-iron defence that makes even the best bowlers despair. He made the Australians groan when they came over here in 1921 because he knocked their bowling for 182 not out at the Oval, thus joining the select little band of eleven others who have made centuries against the Aussies in England.

The South Africans have cause to remember him, too. He hit up 102 at Johannesburg and 117 at Port Elizabeth in the England team's South African tour in 1913-14. Not satisfied with that, Mead went over again on the 1922-23 trip, and slogged them for 181 at Durban.

C. P. Mead is thirty-eight years old now, so he will be wielding the willow for many years to come. Up to the present, his best season was in 1921; he scored a total of 3,170 runs in fifty-two innings, which gave him an average of over 60 runs per innings. His highest score that year was 280 not out. In that season he scored 113 and 224 in a



A. E. DIPPER
(Gloucestershire).



W. W. WHYSALL
(Notts.).

THE VELDT TRAIL!

(Continued from page 24.)

"These pieces of shellac and these queer-looking ratchet wheels are an actual part of the invention itself. And the invention was responsible, and solely responsible, for Bristow's statement, for Jarrad's statement, and for Jack Drake's report about Sir Merton's voice!"

"But the doctor said—" began Vane irritably.

"Never mind about the doctor!" snapped Locke impatiently. "Listen to me. When Bristow and Jarrad said they heard Sir Merton's voice they spoke the truth. When Jack Drake came and reported having heard it in the house since visited by us both, he was likewise speaking the truth. To come right down to brass tacks, the 'voice' emanated from a small ebony box—here is a fragment, rescued from the fire. It had been reproduced from a record—these fragments of shellac are a part of such a record—and that record was part of the invention!"

"Jumpin' caterpillars!" gasped Jack. "A—a dictaphone!"

"More than that—a super-dictaphone, invented by no less a person than Daft Dave, who, incidentally, was not nearly so daft as he pretended to be," answered Locke.

"We know," he went on, "how Sir Merton was always interested in inventions; we know, too, how generous he always was towards others less fortunate than himself.

"His kindness towards Daft Dave is a case in point. Apparently Dave spoke to him about this invention, and an appointment was ultimately fixed—as you will see by the notes made in this diary—for the testing-out of the invention.

"That it was something right out of the ordinary can be gathered from Sir Merton's entry about the man Ryle—a club friend of his, to whom he had spoken of the invention, and who had promptly pooch-pooched the idea as being impossible.

"On the night of the murder it appears that Sir Merton duly tested the super-dictaphone, which Dave had brought and left with him. Indeed, he was probably in the act of testing it when he was attacked and killed.

"The angry words which he uttered when his murderer confronted him were doubtless recorded on the disc while the reproducer was still running, but the machine was apparently shut off, either by accident or design, during the course of the scene.

"Then, when Bristow happened on the scene—that is, if he did come after the murder was committed and did not commit the murder himself—what must have happened was this:

"In his startled surprise at finding Sir Merton lying there, Bristow probably sprang back, caught his arm against the dictaphone on the desk, and set it in motion, probably towards the end of the record, thus completing the deception which caused both Bristow and Jarrad to declare that they heard the dead man speaking at a time when we know for a fact he was already dead!"

"Ye gods!" gasped Pycroft. "What a revelation!"

"But the voice I heard at that country house," persisted Jack. "What about that? You also heard it, guv'nor—"

"Exactly," nodded Locke. "And, of course, it emanated from the same

source. You will remember, too, that Bristow showed great excitement, even terror, when that voice spoke.

"I'm not quite sure of my ground yet, but I should think it highly probable that Daft Dave was an unseen witness of the murder, or, at any rate, of Bristow's appearance on the scene—assuming, again, that Bristow is not the guilty party—and that he crept in afterwards,

49 PRIZEWINNERS

RESULT OF "WHAT IS IT?"
COMPETITION No. 4.

In this competition so many competitors qualified for the second and third grade of prizes that some little rearrangement of the prize-list has been necessary.

The THREE CAMERAS have been awarded to the following competitors, who sent in correct solutions:

STANLEY EVANS, 27, Elsworth Terrace, Armley, Leeds.
T. SOUTHEY, 32, Carleton Road, Tufnell Park, London, N. 7.
GEORGE W. STURGES, 133, Pear Tree Street, Derby.

POCKET-KNIVES have been awarded to the following forty-six competitors, who sent in solutions containing one error:

A. A. Aitken, Edinburgh.
W. Allen, Walworth, S.E. 17.
Mrs. A. E. Blackett, Darlington.
S. Blackmore, Dowla's, Glam.
Chester F. Bryan, Erdington, Birmingham.
J. Campbell, Cobbinshaw, Midlothian.
Ronald Coley, Halesowen.
Charles A. Culf, Heeley, Sheffield.
E. G. Cunningham, Tunbridge Wells.
Albert Davies, West Bromwich.
Norman L. Deaton, Bury.
A. W. Diver, South Hackney, London, E. 9.
Harry Doatson, Heaton Moor, Stockport.
William P. Dorgao, Clydach, Swansea.
Reginald Edwards, Lewisham, London, S.E. 13.
Hector Fell, Piccadilly, London, W.
Ivy Fountain, Hford, Essex.
A. C. Gazzard, Finsbury Park, London, N. 4.
E. T. Gough, Selly Park, Birmingham.
Robert D. Hall, Felling-on-Tyne, co. Durham.
A. H. P. Hamilton-Roberts, Redland, Bristol.
Miss L. J. Haynes, St. Albans, Herts.
William Heywood, Rochdale, Lancs.
William J. Jones, Llynwypia, Rhondda.
Walter Kay, Newcastle-on-Tyne.
Victor Kiefer, Dollis Hill, London, N.W. 10.
L. G. Looker, South Woodford, London, E. 18.
William McCoy jun., Cork City.
H. W. Mottram, Hunsdon, Herts.
Sidney Newton, Swinton, near Rotherham.
Samuel C. Paues, New Tredegar, Mon.
Herbert Pearson, Fulham, S.W. 6.
Ronald L. Punnett, Goodmayes, Essex.
W. J. Purcell jun., Walton, Liverpool.
Jack Robinson, Ferry Hill, co. Durham.
Douglas Rose, West Street, Rugby.
Frederick Sherborn, Richmond, Surrey.
E. A. Skinner, South Street, Kent.
L. P. Sly, Eaton Place, Brighton.
Archie E. Smith, Forest Gate, London, E. 7.
Gilbert Smith, Barnsley.
Alex. Stewart, City Street, Belfast.
R. T. Wells, New Southgate, London, N. 11.
D. Williamson, Gainsborough, Lincs.
Fred. E. Wood, Balham, London, S.W.
E. Worstead, South Woodford, Essex.

The Correct Solution was as follows:

1. Clouds. 2. Aerial. 3. Aeroplane. 4. Swallow. 5. Box Kite. 6. Moth. 7. Leaves. 8. Storm.

took back the dictaphone—which was enclosed in that queer ebony box, of which a fragment only remains—and afterwards made use of his diabolical invention for the purpose of blackmailing Bristow.

There was a tense silence following upon Locke's words.

It was, as Pycroft had said, an amazing revelation, an almost incredible

explanation of one of the greatest and most baffling mysteries of the case on which they were engaged.

But at least it was plausible.

Locke had turned his attention now to the cheque for £500,000 which Sir Merton had found, together with the weirdly-worded letter, in the old biscuit-tin at Devil's Spruit.

"Just one more little riddle remains to be revealed," he said, with a smile.

"In odd moments I have been busily engaged in trying to solve the mystery of this apparently worthless cheque, and also of the childishly-written letter which you have already read. As to the latter, I'm afraid I've not so far made much progress, but this cheque—"

He broke off, rising to his feet and crossing nearer to the window, through which the sun was now shining brilliantly.

"If you'll just come over here," he said, "you may be able to get a glimpse of something really interesting."

Wonderingly, the others closed round him as the detective held the cheque up to the light.

"Just look at it closely through this magnifying-glass," he said, holding the lens first of all to Jack Drake, "and tell me what you can see."

Locke was holding the cheque up with its back towards them, and now Jack began to study it closely through the lens.

"Jingo. I see it!" he exclaimed. "The sunlight falling on it just at this angle shows up a—a sort of series of tiny holes—"

Pycroft and Vane each took a turn and nodded.

"That's right enough," said Pycroft. "Little punctures, made, probably, with a pin-point—eh, Locke? But what on earth do they signify?"

Locke smiled, and, turning, made his way back to the table.

Then, sealing himself, he drew forth his fountain-pen.

"The cheque-form, you will notice," he said, "is very closely watermarked with the full name of the bank, repeated again and again from top to bottom, with scarcely a space between the words. It is a well-known custom with many banks, and helps to prevent forgery. The full name of the bank, as you can see for yourself, is 'The National South African and Rhodesian Banking Corporation, Limited.'"

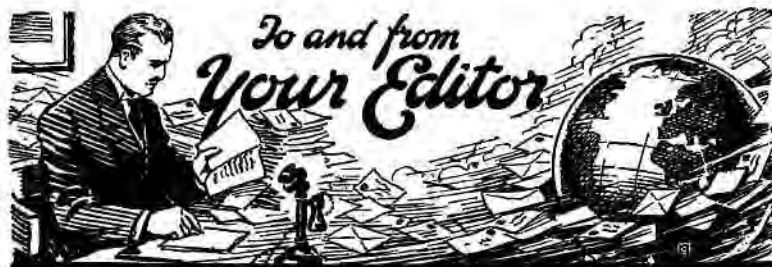
"Now, if you pick out each of these pin-pricks, you will see that they have been very carefully made, and that only certain of the letters, in a given order, in the bank's name, have been so pricked. Let's pick them out for ourselves!"

He propped the cheque up, so that the sunlight should shine full upon it. Then, drawing a sheet of paper towards him, he began to write down each letter through which the tiny perforation had been made.

One by one the letters were set down in neat block capitals, and, as the others grouped themselves round, they gave united exclamations of astonishment when the task was at last completed, and one significant, yet strangely mysterious, word had been spelt out by Locke's fountain-pen:

"ASBESTOS."

(What bearing has this latest clue upon the case? Will Ferrers Locke be able to make anything of it? See next week's instalment of this baffling mystery yarn.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply. Letters should be addressed "The Editor," THE MAGNET LIBRARY, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

FOUR MORE AGAIN NEXT WEEK!

THAT'S another good piece of news, isn't it, chums? It refers, of course, to our topping cut-out, stand-up photos of famous cricketers. Already you have been presented with eight of these wonderful Free Gifts—and there are more to come. Next week Magnetites will be able to add to their collection such notabilities in the cricket world as

TATE, DOUGLAS, QUAIFE, AND STRUDWICK!

Are they as good as their predecessors? Rather! The quality of these Free Gifts has been maintained from the start. You'll jump for joy when you see them, and your non-reader pals will be green with envy. Never, in the whole history of Free Gifts, has there been such a colossal presentation scheme to equal that now running in your favourite paper. I know that Magnetites appreciate this great venture, for my thousands of loyal chums have shown their appreciation and gratitude in the past for less wondrous schemes than this. That's the idea! You pull with me, boys, and between us we'll raise the roof! Get all the non-readers you can to try the finest boys' paper on the market. They'll thank you before they've read a couple of hundred words of Mr. Richards' work. That's your little bit. Do that, and leave the rest to me—you'll not regret it.

ORDER EARLY!

Some of you must be heartily sick of seeing these words, and yet in circumstances like the present they are necessary. There's bound to be an unparalleled rush to secure these Free Gifts; everyone will be eager for Monday to come round. See to it, then, that your Free Gifts are on the safe side of the counter. In other words, order a copy

of next week's MAGNET now. "Safety first" in rush times is a slogan worth remembering.

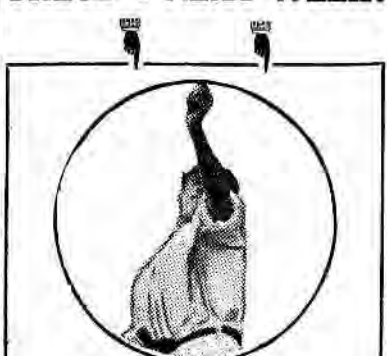
A TRIBUTE FROM CINEMA LAND!

A keen Magnetite sends me a really "posh" letter from the West, and he mentions that he would be glad to hear from readers who have collected all the stories by Frank Richards. My correspondent is Allan C. Cavey, 4218, South Menlo Avenue, Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. Many thanks for that cheery letter, chum!

THE IDEAL COMPANION ON HOLIDAY!

I was asked the other day by an old reader chum about the best sort of companion on a holiday jaunt. My querist hesitates whether he should ask a friend who thinks along the same lines as he does, or whether the choice should fall on another chum, who is always arguing the point. I think the latter. Flat

THESE 4 NEXT WEEK!



M. W. TATE (Sussex).

agreement on all occasions is apt to pall, to cramp one's style, as it were. A little verbal "dust up" on some subject or others clears the air, promotes ideas, and a greater respect for each other. Two fellows on a hike need variety of individuality. Time doesn't hang then, whatever the vagaries of the weather.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS WEEK'S FREE GIFTS!

First separate the two figures by cutting along the white lines dividing the green bases, then bend the cardboard back where it says "Fold here." It will at once be seen that a natural support is given to each photo, enabling them to stand up anywhere in an amazingly lifelike attitude.

THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!

Just a reminder that September 1st is drawing nearer. On that day, as every Magnetite knows, the new edition of the famous "Holiday Annual" will be published. Packed from cover to cover with stories to suit every taste, the new "H. A." is better value than ever. Start to put some of your pocket-money away, chums, in readiness for September 1st. Buy a copy of the "Annual," and you'll be treating yourself to the finest six shillingworth of fun and fiction that it is possible to get anywhere.

Next Week's Programme!

"BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT!"

By Frank Richards.

A topping story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, with Billy Bunter well to the fore. (A scream, from beginning to end!)

"THE VELDT TRAIL!"

Another gripping instalment of this baffling mystery yarn, featuring Ferrers Locke, the world-famous scientific investigator, and his clever boy assistant, Jack Drake.

"FORM-ROOM" SUPPLEMENT!

A cheery "Herald" supplement, dealing with life in the Greyfriars Form-room under all sorts of conditions, contributed by Harry Wharton & Co.

TATE, DOUGLAS, QUAIFE, AND STRUDWICK.

Informative articles on the brilliant careers of these famous cricketers whose cut-out portraits will be given away with every copy of this paper next Monday. Au revoir till next week, chums!

Your Editor.



W. G. QUAIFE (Warwickshire).

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